



Lemkin Institute Statement on Rohingya Refugee Repatriation

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As the current crisis between the Myanmar junta and its political opposition continues, the state of Bangladesh, which neighbors Myanmar, has plans to repatriate refugees on its territory, especially members of Myanmar's Rohingya minority. While the Lemkin Institute understands the pressures faced by Bangladesh as host to hundreds of thousands of refugees, we nonetheless wholeheartedly oppose this plan as inconsistent with moral values, the right of refugees to seek protection, and international law.

Ever since Myanmar's independence from British and Japanese control, the Rohingya have been targeted by the state of Myanmar, both under military and civilian governments, and have faced extreme prejudice from the majority Burmese population. They have been deprived of rights, opportunities, citizenship, and identity. Since 2017, the situation has worsened significantly, with the government moving from a policy of apartheid to a policy of genocide. The majority of the Rohingya now live outside of Myanmar and are dependent on the goodwill of the neighboring governments and the international community for their survival. They cannot return to Myanmar, as they still face the threat of massacre by the Tatmadaw.

In recent months, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government in Dhaka has been trying a pilot plan to convince refugees to return to their home region of Rakhine state in Myanmar. There are 960,539 Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh alone, a country with a population density of 3020 people per square mile (the 7th highest population density in the world). The initial phase of the repatriation plan involved the removal of 1000 people from refugee camps in Bangladesh to the Myanmar side of the border with the consent of Myanmar's military regime. According to some reports, refugees were forced to go or offered bribes.

Other countries in the region are also threatening Rohingya refugees with repatriation., India's government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been actively deporting Rohingya refugees who took refuge in Kashmir based on [the claim that they are engaged in terrorist activity](#). These efforts are part of [rising hostility and violence towards Muslims](#) in India now, due to the ruling party's support for Hindutva, an ideology that promotes Hindu supremacy and Islamophobia. Similar to Bangladesh, India's authorities have reportedly [used excessive force](#) to push Rohingyas back to Myanmar. In India, the [governing party's rhetoric](#) towards the Rohingya has reached the level of hate speech. Some local politicians have referred to

Rohingya with terms like “[parasite](#),” for example.

As catastrophes mount across the world, it is imperative that the Rohingya not be forgotten. Until their security can be guaranteed in Myanmar, there is no choice but to support the Rohingya where they are. This means improving the often horrific conditions of the refugee camps. It also means addressing particular needs of genocide survivors. In particular, humanitarian organizations and host governments must emphasize efforts to help refugees from genocide to reweave the social fabric and material realities that sustain their identities. Such efforts must include attention to family-based trauma counseling, education in native languages, and support for the continuation of institutions of collective life while in displacement.

Wealthy nations in the world must step up to their aid to refugees in Bangladesh, which is shouldering the lion's share of the burden caused by the massive flight of Rohingya from genocide. Improving the daily living conditions of Rohingya in Cox's Bazar, and especially offering the Rohingya ways to strengthen communal bonds while there, will help pave the way for eventual repatriation under more auspicious conditions. Given the [Rohingya's historical relationship to Rakhine state](#), eventual repatriation clearly will be necessary to adequately sustain their identity.

The international community should also invest heavily in improving the lives of Bangladeshis through grants for state projects that do not need to be paid back, since Bangladeshis are being asked to be patient and generous when they themselves have so little and when the wealthy countries in the West are turning their backs on refugees.

The Lemkin Institute is heartened by the support shown by Myanmar's opposition National Unity Government's for Rohingya citizenship within a new Myanmar. Recognizing the Rohingya as fellow citizens will remove one of the primary historical vectors of genocidal violence against the Rohingya. We advise the NUG to engage in genocide prevention training among its members and fighting forces. Given that the Tatmadaw is a genocidal institution, the rest of the world should be supporting the NUG in its efforts to restore democracy and security in the country.

Only under significantly changed conditions can the Rohingya's security in their native homeland be ensured.

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