

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



October 21, 2020

The Honorable Stephen Edward Biegun  
Deputy Secretary, Department of State  
Harry S. Truman Building  
2201 C Street NW, Room 7220  
Washington, D.C., 20520

The Honorable John D. Barsa  
Acting Administrator, U.S. Agency for International Development  
Ronald Regan Building  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C., 20523

**RE: Amnesty International Recommendations to State Department and USAID In Advance of  
October 22, 2020 Donor Conference**

Dear Deputy Secretary Biegun and Acting Administrator Barsa:

We are glad that the United States will be co-hosting this week's virtual donor conference alongside the United Kingdom, the European Union, and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and that you both will be attending and delivering remarks. As you may be aware, Amnesty International has been working on the Rohingya situation in Bangladesh for several years, particularly since the refugee influx from Myanmar in August 2017. The Rohingya people must have their human rights protected and respected, irrespective of where they are, so that they can take conscious and informed decisions about their lives and fully realize their human rights.

In advance of the conference, we wanted to provide you with some of our recent reports on the situation of the Rohingya refugees in both Bangladesh and Myanmar, including research our Amnesty International team put out earlier this year to mark the three year anniversary of the Myanmar military operations that saw 740,000 Rohingya people flee their homes in Rakhine State for Bangladesh, and our latest findings on the human rights situation of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh in a new briefing titled "[Let us speak for our rights](#)". This briefing looks specifically at the right to information, justice, healthcare, education as well as freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and movement for Rohingya refugees.

First, our Citizen Evidence Lab published [this post explaining how we verified the location](#) of some of the video footage Amnesty International has received and how it shows the extent to which [human rights abuses continue](#) against the Rohingya today. This evidence is based on firsthand testimony, photographs, and video obtained from inside Rakhine State, and analysis of satellite imagery as well as media reports and civil society sources. These videos show Rohingya deaths, corruption, and new administrative structures going up on land owned by Rohingya.

Given conditions on the ground in northern Rakhine State, it is clearer than ever that the Myanmar government does not want Rohingya refugees to return home. Those Rohingya people who did not flee across the border three years ago are a people under siege. They are under siege from their government, which has not dismantled the apartheid regime that governs every part of their lives. They are under siege from conflict, as the military fights the Arakan Army, an ethnic Rakhine armed group, in deadly battles,

leaving Rohingya men, women and children stuck in the crossfire. And they are under siege from the COVID-19 pandemic threat, in a state where they already face shamefully unequal medical services. All this at a time when Myanmar is supposed to be protecting the Rohingya following an order from the United Nation's International Court of Justice earlier this year.

Thus, for the foreseeable future, Rohingya refugees will remain in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar district. Our recently [released a briefing](#) updated on the human rights situation facing Rohingya refugees, especially as they contend with the COVID-19 pandemic. The briefing outlines how exclusion from decision-making is impacting the human rights of Rohingya refugees — from freedom of expression, assembly and movement to access to healthcare and education. The briefing also calls for a full and thorough investigation into allegations that Rohingya refugees have been subjected to extrajudicial executions. More than 100 Rohingya refugees in the camps in Cox's Bazar were victims of alleged extrajudicial executions between August 2017 and July 2020, according to the respected Bangladeshi human rights organization Odhikar. None of these cases have been investigated by the authorities, nor have the alleged perpetrators been brought to justice.

We are also concerned by the prolonged confinement of more than 300 Rohingya refugees on Bhashan Char, a remote silt island that has yet to be assessed for its habitability by the United Nations. Amnesty International spoke to several Rohingya refugees on the island, who expressed their concerns about the conditions there, including the quality of food, sanitation, healthcare and other amenities. They urged the Bangladeshi government to send them back to their families in Cox's Bazar. In two interviews, Rohingya refugees told Amnesty International that they heard accounts of sexual harassment or abuse at the hands of police and Navy officials on the island.

Access to healthcare in the refugee camps is constrained by language barriers, the disrespectful behavior by some medical staff, and the lack of access to information about availability of healthcare services within the camps. Very few Rohingya refugees volunteer to be tested for COVID-19 because of these experiences as well as fear of being coerced into isolation or separated from their families. We also note that the United Nations Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya humanitarian assistance aims to increase the capacity of COVID-19 tests from 500 tests per day to 1,000 tests per day. The current level of testing in the refugee camps, however, is less than one per cent of the population.

We welcome the Bangladesh government's decision to offer the predominantly young Rohingya refugee population access to education through the Myanmar curriculum. While the program, initially designed for 10,000 Rohingya children between classes six to nine, could not be implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we hope that the Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development, and the U.S. Government will work with Bangladesh's government to ensure that the pandemic does not become a reason to deprive them from education. Education can empower the Rohingya community to take conscious and informed decisions and claim their human rights.

Bangladesh's Foreign Secretary Mr. Masud Bin Momen stated in a webinar on August 24, 2020 that the Bangladeshi government will lift restrictions on high-speed internet in the Rohingya refugee camps. While we welcome the decision, Rohingya refugees told Amnesty International that the internet is still not widely available in the camps. The restriction on access to information means they are not able to find out information about the pandemic and how they can be protected, but they are also facing difficulties in staying in touch with relatives outside Bangladesh.

Rohingya women living in refugee camps shared accounts of human trafficking, sexual harassment and discrimination. In some camps, community leaders decided not to allow women to go to work during the pandemic. Women are severely underrepresented at community gatherings in the camps, where only one or two women are invited along with 50 men. This was evident in the composition of Rohingya refugees who

the Bangladeshi authorities took for a “go and see” visit to the Bhashan Char island in September, when only two Rohingya women accompanied 38 men.

To see Amnesty International USA’s top recommendations on Myanmar to the President and U.S. Government, [please see here](#). Finally, we also wanted to share [this resource from our Bangladesh team](#), published in June 2020, detailing a number of reports on conditions for Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar

**We urge the U.S Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development and U.S. Government to:**

- Work with Bangladesh’s government to develop rights-respecting policies that outline a framework of representation for Rohingya refugees, and that protects their human rights to education, healthcare, justice, freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and movement;
- Offer technical assistance and expertise in developing a policy that ensures refugee representation;
- Continue and increase international humanitarian aid, cooperation, and assistance, particularly in the areas of education, vocational training and livelihood for both Rohingya refugees and Bangladesh’s host community who has been affected by the influx of refugees;
- Ensure that any international aid, development projects or financial assistance in Rakhine State are explicitly and specifically contingent on non-discrimination, non-segregation and equality, and that Myanmar takes immediate action to cease ongoing human rights violations against the Rohingya community and other minorities across the country and prevents the destruction of evidence of those violations;
- Provide international cooperation, technical, and financial assistance to countries in the South and South East Asia regions for search and rescue operations and for the provision of immediate and longer-term needs of refugees and migrants in the region.

Our team is always willing to brief either of you or any member of your team on any of these issues. Thank you for your time and attention to our concerns of the human rights of the Rohingya people.

Sincerely,

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