



Press Release: Bangladesh-Burma Plan for Rohingya Refugees Risks Forced Repatriation to Indefinite Detention

18 January 2018, London, UK -- The Burma Human Rights Network is concerned that plans announced Tuesday, January 16th, by Burma and Bangladesh to repatriate Rohingya who fled from Burma to Bangladesh due to a campaign of ethnic cleansing may be subject to refoulement to camps where they will be held indefinitely with no prospect of enjoying even the most fundamental of human rights. The announcement stated that the two countries planned to repatriate hundreds of thousands of refugees over two years, with the process beginning next Tuesday. These plans were made without input from any UN agency or the Rohingya themselves, who largely oppose any repatriation until their security and human rights can be assured.

“Bangladesh and Burma are moving forward with a dangerous plan to repatriate hundreds of thousands of people, seemingly against their will, and with no concern for their most basic human rights. The failure of Burma and Bangladesh to consult with the UNHCR or the Rohingya community itself before going forward is a very troubling indicator of how little regard they have for the people who will be affected by these decisions. It is vital that the international community use all leverage it has now to ensure that any repatriation plan be done in coordination with the UNHCR and directly addresses concerns and grievances of Rohingya who have legitimate reasons to fear returning to Burma,” said Kyaw Win, Executive Director of BHRN.

The current plan involves seven camps that would facilitate the transfer of returnees, five on the Bangladesh side and two on the Burmese side. Burma currently says they will build a transfer camp that can house 30,000 Rohingya. These plans are reminiscent of previous refoulement efforts by Bangladesh and Burma in the 1990s which saw countless human rights violations in the process. The utilization of camps for returnees mirrors the situation of Rohingya who were displaced in the 2012 riots who are still living in squalid IDP camps 6 years later with no prospect of returning to their own villages or being able to work or move freely.

As part of this plan Burma has also given a list of 1,000 names of Rohingya they claim are connected to or members of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), the militant group who attacked nearly 30 police outposts on August 25th 2017, triggering the military campaign that displaced nearly half the Rohingya population from the country. Burma has frequently used accusations that individuals are affiliated with ARSA to harass elders, religious leaders, community leaders and wealthy individuals even if there is little or no evidence against them. Burma has also admitted to extrajudicial executions against individuals they believed to be members of ARSA. Worse yet, villagers in the area the men were killed have disputed if those killed actually belonged to ARSA, saying they were arbitrarily arrested before they were killed.

Burma Human Rights Network insists that Burma and Bangladesh halt any plans to repatriate Rohingya displaced in Bangladesh until consulting with and cooperating with the UNHCR and adequately

developing a plan which addresses the concerns and grievances of the affected Rohingya. We call on the international community to insist the two nations do not move forward with refoulement plans, which are also violations of International Law. Any moves forward on plans to forcibly repatriate Rohingya should be dealt with for the egregious behaviors they are, resulting in appropriate targeted sanctions and withdrawal of cooperative initiatives with the international community.

Editors' note

On August 25th an insurgent group called the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army attacked 30 police posts and killed 12 security officers and one soldier. In response the Burmese Authorities unleashed a brutal campaign against the civilian population, which has caused more than half of the Rohingya population in Rakhine State to flee. Plans to repatriate the Rohingya have been discussed by Burma and Bangladesh since the fall of 2017, with the first plan officially announced by the two nations in late November. Since then NGOs and various states have criticized these plans for their failures to adequately address any concerns of the people they would directly affect and their lack of actionable plans to protect and ensure their rights.

Background on the Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN)

Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN) is based in London, operate across Burma and works for human rights, minority rights and religious freedom in Burma. BHRN has played a crucial role advocating for human rights and religious freedom with politicians and world leaders.

Media Enquiries

Please contact:

Kyaw Win

Executive Director of the Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN)

E:kyawwin78@gmail.com

T: +44(0) 740 345 2378