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Physicians for
Human Rights

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To: Secretary-General António Manuel de Oliveira Guterres
Executive Office of the United Nations Secretary-General
760 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017
CC: Chef de Cabinet Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti

November 14, 2018

Dear Secretary-General Guterres,

I write to you on behalf of Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) to urge you to speak out publicly against the imminent planned repatriation of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh back to Myanmar. There are [disturbing reports](#) from Cox's Bazaar that Bangladesh authorities have compiled lists of at least 4,355 Rohingya refugees who will be among the first group repatriated to Myanmar starting as early as [November 15](#). We note with concern that there has been no indication that those Rohingya individuals have been adequately consulted by the authorities nor that they provided necessary informed consent regarding the potentially deadly risks of repatriation.

PHR urges you to demand the [immediate, indefinite suspension](#) of the planned repatriation until there are actionable guarantees and sustainable conditions for a safe, dignified, and voluntary return for the Rohingya, overseen by international human rights monitors based within Rakhine state, Myanmar, with full and unfettered access. Any attempt to hastily repatriate the population from Bangladesh, without adequate measures, could result in more violence.

PHR's fears of violence against Rohingya repatriated to Myanmar are well-founded. To date, Myanmar authorities have failed to conduct a full and independent investigation into the violence perpetrated against the Rohingya in August 2017 and have not fully cooperated with others seeking to do so. In June 2018, the Myanmar government announced the creation of an independent commission of inquiry to investigate further allegations of human rights abuses in Rakhine state. However, given Myanmar's limited past efforts on justice and accountability, there are reasonable grounds for concern about whether these investigations will be carried out effectively.

The nearly 800,000 Rohingya who have fled to Bangladesh in search of safety from depredations by Myanmar security forces and their agents are a deeply traumatized population who require the compassion and assistance of the international community, rather than repatriation back to Myanmar where they may be vulnerable to violent reprisals from security forces. The UN's Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar [concluded](#) in September that "the horrors inflicted on Rohingya men, women and children" constituted war crimes and crimes against humanity and indicated possible "genocidal intent."

PHR's findings from [on-the-ground research](#) in Bangladesh in late 2017 and early 2018, drawn from surveys of leaders from 604 Rohingya hamlets in Myanmar's Rakhine state encompassing more than 916,000 people, and in-depth interviews and forensic medical examinations of Rohingya survivors, point to a widespread and systematic pattern of targeted violence. Ninety-four percent of hamlets surveyed experienced destruction, including burnt or damaged fields and farms, homes, and mosques. Injuries sustained by 85 Rohingya survivors, ranging from



three to 74 years of age, who consented to forensic medical examinations by PHR doctors, included:

- gunshot wounds (56 percent);
- injuries from explosives or fragmented projectiles (23 percent);
- blunt force trauma, including kicking and beating (13 percent);
- and penetrating injuries such as stabbings and mutilations (nine percent);
- Almost a quarter of those survivors now have a permanent disability and screened positive for post-traumatic stress disorder.

We note that UN High Commissioner for Human Rights [Michelle Bachelet](#), and UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Myanmar [Yanghee Lee](#), have both publicly urged the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar to halt the repatriations citing “serious risk.” Your own spokesman, Stephane Dujarric, [last week revealed](#) that neither the Myanmar nor Bangladesh governments had consulted the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) about its repatriation plans and additional [reports](#) suggest that the UNHCR, who has [stated](#) unequivocally that “conditions in Myanmar are not yet conducive for a voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return” will only provide support to Rohingya refugees in “resettlement sites and model villages” in Rakhine state “located in places of refugees’ origin or choice.” It added that it will not provide humanitarian assistance to Rohingya if they are interned in camps.

We call on you to defend the safety of this traumatized population and to speak out publicly in the strongest of terms against imminent moves by the Myanmar and Bangladesh governments to repatriate any Rohingya. In the absence of any transparent and predictable consultation and informed consent process that makes the safety and security of the Rohingya a top priority, the Rohingya should be allowed to continue to seek refuge in Bangladesh, or any other place of their choosing, with the full support of the United Nations and other international organizations.

Ultimately, successful voluntary repatriation of the Rohingya hinges on guarantees of their security. This is impossible until there is [accountability](#) for the crimes committed against them. Accountability must include prosecution of those who ordered or carried out attacks on Rohingya in Rakhine state. Without justice and accountability, sustainable peace – and a safe repatriation of Rohingya back to Myanmar – is simply not possible.

Thank you for your consideration. PHR will be happy to provide you with any additional information you or relevant UN agencies or officials might require to ensure the health and safety of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

Sincerely,

Donna McKay
Executive Director, Physicians for Human Rights