

Sheikh Hasina Wazed
Prime Minister
Old Sangsad Bhaban
Tejagaon, Dhaka-1215
Bangladesh

November 12, 2019

Re: Plans to Move Rohingya Refugees to Bhasan Char Island

Dear Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina,

We, the 39 undersigned organizations, welcome the recent announcement on November 3 by the Bangladesh Minister of Disaster Management and Relief Enamur Rahman to put on hold plans to relocate Rohingya refugees to Bhasan Char island and that any relocations would be voluntary.

We urge your administration to meaningfully consult Rohingya refugees on all potential solutions and plans affecting their situation and ensure relocations proceed only with their free, prior, and informed consent. We welcome [the announcement](#) by the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief Senior Secretary Md Shah Kamal allowing the United Nations (U.N.) to conduct a technical assessment of Bhasan Char island from November 17 to 19. We urge your administration to ensure that the assessment is made publicly available.

We recognize your leadership in providing humanitarian assistance and emergency shelter to more than one million Rohingya refugees who fled brutal attacks by Myanmar authorities in 2016 and 2017 as well as Bangladesh's role in providing protracted shelter and support to hundreds of thousands of Rohingya who previously fled persecution in Myanmar.

While we respect your government's commitment to identify alternative durable solutions for Rohingya refugees, we are concerned with the plan to relocate more than 100,000 Rohingya refugees from the camps in Cox's Bazar District to Bhasan Char island.

In particular, we are concerned that the relocations may proceed without informed consent or consultation with the affected refugee community. Bangladeshi authorities [included](#) several Rohingya refugee families on a list, identifying those slated for relocation to Bhasan Char without their knowledge and willingness to relocate to the island. Many Rohingya refugees living in the camps in Cox's Bazar have expressed fear and opposition to the Bhasan Char relocation plans.

In January 2019, U.N. Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar Yanghee Lee [warned](#), "Ill-planned relocation, and relocations without the consent of the refugees concerned, have the potential to create a new crisis." Similarly, a statement by U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in March 2019 said, "The UN considers that any relocation to Bhasan Char must be on a voluntary basis and that refugees should have the relevant, accurate, and timely

information on the project from the Government, so they can make free and informed decisions.”

We join these international experts in calling on your government to ensure relocations take place only with informed, voluntary consent by Rohingya refugees.

As noted above, it’s important the government will allow an independent assessment by the U.N. to ensure the arrangements on Bhasan Char meet international standards. Such an assessment should prioritize consideration of protection concerns for Rohingya refugees as well as the feasibility, safety, and sustainability of the arrangements. We also call upon the government to make the assessments public and available to Rohingya refugees in the camps.

With regard to developments on Bhasan Char, we understand that the Bangladesh government has overseen construction projects to accommodate Rohingya refugees on the island, including building multi-family concrete housing structures, cyclone shelters, prefab food and storage warehouses, roads, and a solar power grid. However, reflections about the accommodations by human rights and refugee experts following visits to the island remain inconclusive. For example, in January 2019, Yanghee Lee [said](#), “There are a number of things that remain unknown to me even following my visit, chief among them being whether the island is truly habitable.”

Lastly, mobile communications and the internet provide a critical means for refugees to obtain information on issues that affect their daily lives and to make plans for their future, including information related to developments on Bhasan Char. However, access to the internet remains restricted in the refugee camps since September. Furthermore, Rohingya refugees report that Bangladesh authorities have prohibited the use of mobile phones in the camps and are increasingly confiscating mobile phones from Rohingya refugees. To ensure Rohingya refugees have access to information, including necessary information on the situation in Bhasan Char, we urge your government to immediately lift restrictions on mobile and internet communications and allow Rohingya refugees be allowed to use mobile phones and SIM cards.

We thank you for your attention to these matters, and we welcome the opportunity to assist and support your administration to ensure the protection of Rohingya refugees.

Signed

1. ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights
2. Amnesty International
3. Article 19
4. Beyond Borders Malaysia
5. Burma Human Rights Network
6. Burma Task Force
7. Burmese Rohingya Association in Japan
8. Burmese Rohingya Community in Australia

9. Burmese Rohingya Community in Denmark
10. Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK
11. Canadian Burmese Rohingya Organization
12. Canadian Rohingya Development Initiative
13. Canadians in Support of Refugees in Dire Need
14. Christian Solidarity Worldwide
15. European Rohingya Council
16. FIDH - International Federation for Human Rights
17. Fortify Rights
18. Human Rights Research and Education Centre, University of Ottawa
19. Human Rights Watch
20. Humanity Auxilium
21. International Campaign for the Rohingya
22. International Human Rights Clinic, Harvard Law School
23. Justice For All
24. Kaladan Press Network
25. Physicians for Human Rights
26. Refugees International
27. Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights
28. Rohingya Action Ireland
29. Rohingya Association of Canada
30. Rohingya Human Rights Network
31. Rohingya Peace Network Thailand
32. Rohingya Post
33. Rohingya Refugee Network
34. Rohingya Today
35. Rohingya Vision
36. Rohingya Women Development Network
37. Save Rohingya World-Wide
38. Smile Education and Development Foundation
39. Society for Threatened Peoples Germany

cc:

Minister of Disaster Management and Relief Enamur Rahman
Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner Mahbub Alam Talukder
U.N. Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar Yanghee Lee
U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grande