

January 26, 2018

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.,
Prime Minister of Canada
Prime Minister's Office
80 Wellington St
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Subject: Rohingyas must not be forced back into the hands of their oppressors.

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

We, the undersigned Canadian organizations, are alarmed by the repatriation crisis. Last month, the Government of Bangladesh announced that it has submitted the names of 100,000 Rohingya refugees to be returned to Myanmar. While we are temporarily relieved that Bangladesh has halted any immediate repatriation, however, we remain concerned that the process could begin again without warning and without consulting Rohingya refugees.

As signatory to both the 1951 [United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees](#) and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, Canada has always upheld the principle of Non-refoulement. Forcing the Rohingya back into Burma before their safety can be guaranteed fits the very definition of Refoulement, thus it is illegal under international law. Canada is bound to support the objective and purpose of the treaty and oppose such forced resettlement. According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, "conditions in Myanmar's Rakhine state are not in place to enable safe and sustainable returns. Refugees are still fleeing, and many have suffered violence, rape, and deep psychological harm".¹ The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has also warned against the repatriation of Rohingya refugees without "sustained human rights monitoring on the ground".²

Many of the refugees that have fled to Cox's Bazaar are women and girls that have been subjected to sexual violence and rape at the hands of the Burmese military and nationalist mobs. How can the international community allow these survivors back into hands of their rapists?³ Human Rights Watch has asked that governments oppose any repatriation efforts "given the lack of protection for returnees, the absence of engagement with the UN refugee agency, and the possibility of new internment-like camps in northern Rakhine"⁴. Amnesty

¹ <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=58152#.WmKKN5M-cnU>

² <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22488&LangID=E>

³ <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/11/16/all-my-body-was-pain/sexual-violence-against-rohingya-women-and-girls-burma>

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<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/mr-trudeau-strong-words-and-money-will-not-save-the-rohingya-its-time-for-canada-to-act/article37657299/>

International has called the return a "terrifying prospect" and reminded that the memories of rape, killing and torture are still fresh in the minds of the refugees, making any plans for repatriation "alarmingly premature"⁵. Burma Task Force Canada has called it "unconscionable" to place the refugees in danger again.⁶ UK's International Development Committee warned that "there are previous episodes of displacement and return of the Rohingya and other ethnic minorities in Burma over the last 20 years which do not inspire confidence."⁷

The expert opinions mentioned above have also been confirmed by Canadian volunteers on the ground at the refugee camps in Bangladesh. Almost every refugee spoken to has expressed fears of being sent back. "How can the world send us back to the same people who committed genocide on us? Is that the law of this world?" said Mohd. Usman, a school teacher from a village near Buthidaung, who saw his neighbour's daughter gang raped. "My brother, we didn't come here to eat food... I had a lot of cattle and land, all were taken away from me... I don't want food, you may starve me, we will all die happily of starvation; just don't send us back my brother" said Zainul Abidin from a village near Maungdaw, after recounting how he saw his son shot dead in front of him while they were escaping the massacre.

Myanmar's government admits that it is seizing the lands and properties of displaced Rohingya.⁸ Under Burmese law, such land becomes the property of the state. The leadership in Myanmar has spoken about isolating returnees in "model villages", a form of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Camp rather than return them to their homes.⁹ Such camps constructed in the past have been qualified by numerous human rights organizations as "modern day concentration camps"¹⁰

We are therefore requesting you to:

- Support PM Hasina's proposal to create a UN-monitored safe zone, with a mandate to defend and protect, inside Myanmar that will oversee the safe return of the Rohingya to Myanmar.
- Call on PM Hasina to continue the moratorium on repatriation until the Rohingya have full citizenship rights in Myanmar and can be returned to their ancestral land, not

⁵ <http://www.cbc.ca/news/thenational/the-national-today-rohingya-trump-fake-news-funeral-mixup-1.4490905>

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<http://www.burmataskforce.ca/rohingya-refugees-must-not-be-forced-back-to-burma-without-security-and-citizenship.html>

⁷ <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/bangladesh-and-burma-rohingya-crisis>

⁸ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-rohingya-repatriation-exclusive/exclusive-returning-rohingya-may-lose-land-crops-under-myanmar-plans-idUSKBN1CR0AS>

⁹ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-rohingya/bangladesh-says-agreed-with-myanmar-for-unhcr-to-assist-rohingyas-return-idUSKBN1DP05N>

¹⁰ <http://time.com/2888864/rohingya-myanmar-burma-camps-sittwe/>

“camps.” It is only after these conditions are met that voluntary repatriation can take place.

- Hold an emergency session on the forced repatriation of the Rohingya and the responsibility of Canada to support international law in opposing refoulement.

The Rohingya fled to Bangladesh to escape Myanmar’s genocidal regime. While the Bangladeshi Government has temporarily delayed the repatriation process, the urgency of the situation cannot be ignored. The repatriation process is imminent. Therefore, Canada has international obligations to oppose this repatriation, and we urge you to do all that it takes to prevent this from happening.

Sincerely,

CC Minister of Foreign Affairs The Honourable Chrystia Freeland

Undersigned

1. Burma Task Force
2. Burmese Muslim Association
3. Calgary Immigrant Support Society
4. Canadian Council of Muslim Women
5. Canadian Muslim Alliance
6. Canadians in Support of Refugees in Dire Need (CSRDN)
7. Canadian Rohingya Development Initiative
8. Citizens Forum British Columbia Canada
9. Dar Al-Tawheed Islamic Centre
10. DawaNet
11. Hon. David Kilgour, former Secretary of State (Asia-Pacific)
12. Human Rights Research and Education Centre, University of Ottawa
13. Imani Community Centre
14. Immigration Matters in Canada Coalition
15. Muslim Student Association (MSA) - University du Quebec
16. Muslim Student Association (MSA) - University of Montreal
17. Muslim Student Association (MSA) - York University
18. Institute for Research of Genocide Canada (IGC)
19. Inter Pares
20. Murray Thomson, O.C. (Co-Founder, Canadian Friends of Burma)
21. Noor Cultural Centre

22. Paul Copeland, C.M.
23. Peace Initiative Canada
24. Rohingya Association of Canada
25. Rohinyga Human Rights Network Canada
26. STAND Canada
27. Studio 89