Date : 23 February 2018

AID TO ROHINGYA IN "NO MAN'S LAND" MUST CONTINUE

On Tuesday, February 20th, Burmese Authorities told Bangladesh to cease and block aid to a vulnerable group living on the border between the two nations known as "No Man's Land." The group is composed of around 6,500 Rohingya who attempted to flee Burma and ended up stranded. Bangladesh has stated Burma should accept these displaced back and Burma has reportedly agreed. The displaced Rohingya, however, have stated that they do not wish to return to Burma until their safety and rights can be assured. Aid groups, through various channels, have managed to supply aid to the stranded, drawing anger from the Burmese authorities.

"The Rohingya stranded between Burma and Bangladesh are attempting to save their own lives. They have fled horrific violence followed by cruel and deadly cuts in aid. Any policy that would further deny them access to aid or refuge would be devastating and inhumane. While Bangladesh has offered a great deal of support to the Rohingya already, it is imperative that they not only allow access for aid groups to reach these people, but that they allow them to seek safety as well until safe return can be assured for them," said Kyaw Win, Executive Director of Burma Human Rights Network.

"The situation of the Rohingya in No Man's Land show us clearly that any efforts to repatriate the nearly 700,000 Rohingya who fled last year are premature, ill-advised, and ultimately doomed to fail unless several preconditions are met for a safe and equitable return. While Burma assures they can properly return mass numbers of refugees to safety and dignity, we are watching them fail to humanely treat even 6,5 00 of them. This should be an alarming red flag for the international community," Kyaw Win Said.

Burma has been in talks with Bangladesh since November regarding plans to repatriate the nearly 700,000 Rohingya who fled a military campaign against them last year. While these plans had setbacks, Bangladesh has just given a list of 8,000 Rohingya refugees to Burma for verification, signaling their return is anticipated in the near future. These plans are being carried out without input from the UN agencies on the ground, and disregard the safety or dignity of the refugees in question. It is urgent that the International Community pressure Bangladesh not to return these refugees until conditions for a safe return are met. The International Community must also assure Bangladesh that they will continue to support them as they host these refugees, not allowing them to suffer for their compassion. Finally, Burma must commit to a plan in coordination with the UNHCR and other agencies which will assure, through proper mechanisms, that those refugees returning can be assured they will have full rights and protections upon their return. Anything short of this will ultimately qualify as refoulement and would violate numerous human rights statutes in the process.

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Editors' note

Through the summer of 2017 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) 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.

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