



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
2 September 2019

English only

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## Human Rights Council

Forty-second session

9–27 September 2019

Agenda item 4

Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

### **Written statement\* submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[21 August 2019]

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\* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



## **Genocide of the Muslim Rohingya in Myanmar began on August 25, 2017 – return only possible when safety and dignity are guaranteed**

Two years after the mass exodus of 750,000 Rohingya from Myanmar, the refugees are still left with nothing – as Myanmar persistently refuses to grant them civil rights and to acknowledge their fundamental human rights. Bangladesh and other host countries are not willing to offer them permanent protection either, and the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) can be manipulated in questions regarding a voluntary return of refugees.

The record of the escalation of violence in Myanmar is absolutely dreadful. Since August 25, 2017, the security forces killed around 24,000 Rohingya. More than 34,000 Rohingya were set on fire, and more than 114,000 others were beaten and mistreated. Around 18,000 Rohingya women and girls were raped by Myanmar's army and police forces. Over 113,000 Rohingya houses were destroyed. According to the United Nations, Myanmar's armed forces are responsible for mass rape, killings of infants and children, as well as brutal beatings and disappearances. The world community is apparently not prepared to show solidarity with women who were raped. The United Nations stated that the expulsion and murder of so many Rohingya meets the criteria of intentional genocide.

Now, we are deeply concerned about the planned repatriation of Rohingya people from Bangladesh on August 22, 2019. On August 16, 2019, Myanmar's government spokesman, Zaw Htay, had announced the return of 3540 Rohingya. In our opinion, this initiative by Myanmar is to be seen as deceptive and unethical. So far, Myanmar has failed to offer the Rohingya community a transparent and strategic plan for the return of approximately one million Rohingya who survived the genocide.

From the viewpoint of the STP and the European Rohingya Council (ERC), a return is unreasonable as long as the Rohingya still have to fear genocidal persecution in the state of Rakhine, and as long as there are still restrictions on their freedom of movement and freedom of expression. More than 125,000 Rohingya are still being held in camps as internally displaced people (IDPs) in Sittwe, Myanmar. It is scandalous that the return process is supposed to begin in neighboring Bangladesh, without consulting those who are actually affected. The Rohingya human rights organizations agree that no Rohingya will return voluntarily before their civil rights of 1982 are restored.

We believe that the Government of Bangladesh, but also the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), as well as all other stakeholders, can only agree to plans for a voluntary and sustainable return in safety and dignity. Refugees and displaced persons must be able to trust that they will not be forcibly relocated or pressurized to live in places where their safety, freedom, or health is at risk. The return process should start off by dissolving the IDP camps in Myanmar, allowing the Rohingya to return to their home villages and towns, by lifting all the discriminatory restrictions against the Rohingya, in particular with regard to their freedom of movement. In addition, it must be ensured that the Rohingya living in Rakhine state have equal access to health and education, and, generally, equal life chances. They must be granted full citizenship (amendment of the Citizenship Act of 1982), to the effect that every citizen is entitled to citizenship, regardless of ethnic origin, skin color, gender, language, or religion. This principle must be put in practice. At the same time, refugees and internally displaced persons, and especially women, must be fully involved in the planning and implementation of their return, resettlement, and reintegration.

It is necessary to focus on the funding and implementation of programs to provide care for victims of rape – including psychological support and advice, comprehensive counselling with regard to sexuality and reproduction, and maternal healthcare offers for survivors of sexual violence among the Rohingya refugees.

The situation of the internally displaced people, but also of the refugees in neighboring Bangladesh, is more than alarming. We acknowledge the commitment of the Government

of Bangladesh to help the refugees at the Cox's Bazaar Refugee Camp – but cannot accept their forced relocation to Myanmar (or to Bashan Char Island) under any circumstances. It would be a scandal if the United Nations were to agree to such plans.

Therefore, the STP would like to ask the UN Human Rights Council

- to ensure that the return initiative is stopped immediately.
- in the name of the Rohingya whose relatives have already been selected for resettlement, to discontinue the selection process and to work out another solution, together with the United Nations and the institutions of the international community. The health and safety situation in Myanmar and in Cox's Bazaar is worrying already. The forced relocation and the limited access to education and healthcare will make the situation a lot worse, especially for the women and children.
- to initiate (and we consider this a priority or, respectively, a prerequisite for the envisaged return) investigations against senior military officials and other alleged perpetrators, in order to prosecute those who are responsible for the exodus of more than 723,000 Rohingya Muslims and other minorities to Bangladesh, for the subsequent depopulation of the north of Rakhine state, the crimes against humanity, the war crimes, and the crimes of genocide.

We expect the United Nations to remain true to its fundamental principles of taking responsibility for the vulnerable and, in particular, of protecting and strengthening minority rights.

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