



Let Rohingya Learn— The Future of Half a Million Children in Peril

Compiled by:

Sadia Masroor, Campaigns Manager

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Introduction: Perpetual Persecution of Rohingya

Burma's ethnic Rohingya community, aptly described by the [United Nations](#) (UN) as the world's most persecuted people, continues to face challenges both in their Indigenous homeland (Burma/Myanmar) and in the countries where they take refuge.

For decades, Burma's government has perpetrated a cycle of persecution and systemic discrimination against Rohingya Muslims through [restrictions](#) on marriage, family planning, employment, education, religious practices, and [freedom of movement](#). Rohingya couples in the northern towns of Maungdaw and Buthidaung are only [allowed to have two children](#).

Rohingya must seek government approval to marry, change houses, or travel outside their townships. Thousands of Rohingya children and youth are denied access to education in their villages and towns in Burma, where there are no schools or universities for them to attend. Even in host countries, Rohingya children face barriers to schooling due to government policies of deliberate education deprivation to prevent the refugees from integrating.

Background: Bangladesh Depriving Refugee Children of Education

- In August 2017, Burma's military carried out a [systematic, targeted campaign of terror](#), rape, and murder against the Rohingya population
- According to UN investigators, as many as 10,000 Rohingya—a Muslim minority in this Buddhist-majority nation—were killed
- Over 730,000 Rohingya fled the massacre for Bangladesh, joining 300,000 Rohingya refugees who had previously fled oppression in Burma
- An estimated one million Rohingya refugees live in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, out of which more than 55% are children
- Approximately 500,000 children are under the age of 18, and 300,000 are aged 3 to 14
- In its 2018 [report](#), the UN estimated that 97 percent of adolescents and youths aged 15 to 24 do not receive any education in the refugee camps

Rohingya refugees are prohibited from attending public schools or learning the curriculum in Bangladesh. Rohingya children are only allowed to learn at the elementary level in Burma's curriculum, but without being able to continue secondary education, college-level studies, or any other forms of higher education.

Bangladesh's Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission, Chief Abul Kalam, [advised](#) headmasters "to monitor strictly so that no Rohingya children can take education outside the camps or elsewhere in Bangladesh."

Even if they are born on Bangladeshi soil, Rohingya children's education rights are flatly rejected, despite Bangladesh having ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child ([1990](#)).

"Education is a basic human right. But today, why do we not have this right? Are we not human?"

This painful question was raised by young Sawyeddollah, a 16-year-old Rohingya refugee in Bangladesh. His question sums up the sentiments of thousands of Rohingya youth, who watch the world pace forward while they are forced to stand still.

In July 2021, at a meeting with the World Bank and UN officials, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen stated that Rohingya repatriation is Bangladesh's only goal. "We cannot allow freedom of movement or other privileges, including education and job, like those enjoyed by the Bangladeshis," Momen [revealed](#).

When the World Bank sought consultations on a global Refugee Policy Review Framework, Bangladesh's government made it clear that it did not want any measures promoting the integration of the Rohingyas into local society.

Impact: Absence of Education

The consequence of measures that deprive refugee children of higher education prospects will result in a generation pushed into a cycle of destitution.

As a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Bangladesh is obligated to restore the educational rights of child refugees. This will only be possible once Bangladesh lifts all restrictions on education in refugee camps. Providing certified and culturally relevant education, language, and curriculum training are necessary to empower Rohingya children and promote their capacity to pursue their dreams. This is also crucial in building an inclusive future in any society they live in.

The UN and many aid-delivering nations continue to respond to Bangladesh's Rohingya refugee crisis with humanitarian relief. In 2018, Canada committed \$300-million in international assistance over three years to address four key objectives based on Special envoy Bob Rae's report:

- Alleviating the humanitarian crisis
- Encouraging positive political developments in Burma

- Ensuring accountability for the crimes committed
- Enhancing international cooperation

However, there has been no effort made to protect the most fundamental right of children: the right to education.

In line with the UN's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of empowering children and youth worldwide, [Burma Task Force](#) urges the Canadian government to lead the facilitation of education for Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, the world's largest refugee camp in Bangladesh.

Canada should no longer remain passive to children's rights violations by including education as one of its key objectives in its humanitarian response to Rohingya refugees. See: Burma Task Force's [report](#) analyzing the pitfalls of missing education for Rohingya children and adolescents.

Brief Human Rights Requests:

1. Allow Rohingya children to study beyond a third-grade level
2. Lift all limitations on levels of instruction, choice of language, curriculum, and medium of instruction
3. Provide certifications for all levels of education to allow pathways to higher education
4. Facilitate distance learning by allowing full internet access on mobile phones
5. Form partnerships with both Rohingya adult and youth leaders in the camps to facilitate discussions on education, and to empower Rohingya boys and girls
6. Allow donor funds to flow into Rohingya-run schools, not just limited to Learning Centers run by NGOs

Brief Recommendations for Action:

1. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau must personally advocate for Rohingya education to Prime Minister Shaikh Hasina
2. The Government of Bangladesh must fulfil the fundamental human right of children's education, and they must comply with their international legal obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child
3. The Canadian government should make Rohingya children's education a precondition to future aid to Bangladesh for Rohingya refugees
4. Urging the Honourable Bob Rae, Leslie E. Norton, and Stephen de Boer (Canadian Ambassadors to the UN) to work with international allies and advocate the Bangladeshi government to make education accessible to Rohingya children and youth