



Press Release

Remembering The Rohingya Genocide, Listening to Voices from the Camp
— Book Launch, Talkshow, and Art Installation

Jakarta, Indonesia, 25 August 2022 – Exactly five years ago today, at least 750,000 Rohingya were forced to flee from their home and villages after the Myanmar military conducted ‘clearance operations’, marking the day as the ‘Rohingya Genocide Remembrance Day’. Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR) commemorated this important day by holding a ‘Quilting for Justice’ book launch, art installation slash performance, and talk show titled “Remembering the Rohingya Genocide”. The series of events was attended by our Rohingya facilitators from inside the camp through video call, Marzuki Darusman, an Indonesian lawyer who chaired the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, Aung Kyaw Moe, the human rights advisor for the National Unity Government of Myanmar through web conference, as well as Irwansyah Mukhlis from Indonesia's Foreign Ministry's ASEAN Directorate and Soraya Ramli from the National Commission on Violence Against Women.

AJAR, alongside Liberation War Museum Bangladesh, has been working with Rohingya refugees in Cox’s Bazar since 2019 through participatory action research, facilitating learning process for them to understand their rights and the various mechanisms that have been formed to facilitate their access to justice. This process is depicted in the book launched today, ‘Quilting for Justice: An Illustrated Guide to Understanding the International Justice Mechanisms’. The images accompanying the story were taken from quilts produced by the Rohingya women, depicting their real-life memories and hope – one of which is the possibility of repatriation to Myanmar as the living conditions in the camp continue to face heightened risks. Listening to voices from the camp through video call, the audience also hearing first hand how the limited means to earn livelihood, lack of access to education and public health services still haunts the Rohingyas amidst cases of child marriages, abuse, neglect separation from family, and physical abuse as well as sexual and gender based-violence that we documented throughout the research. Moreover, women and girls are disproportionately affected in the camp.

AJAR’s Executive Director, Galuh Wandita, highlighted that, “At the end of the day, what happened to the Rohingya continues to affect peace not only in ASEAN, but also globally. This cause calls for a multidimensional approach – looking at the refugee situation in Indonesia and in the Cox’s Bazar camps, the coup in Myanmar, and continued struggle by the ethnic groups.”

The Fact-finding Mission, as elaborated by Marzuki Darusman, found that the Myanmar military forces committed acts amounting to genocide against the Rohingya in Rakhine State. However, in their findings, military operation and systematic attack are also conducted against other ethnic groups in Kachin and Shan State of Myanmar. He further noted that the event is, "... An important event for us all, and us in Indonesia. The book 'Quilting for Justice' can help explain the justice paths as per the genocide."

For the Rohingyas, the root causes of the persecution can be found in the colonial rule where the British made the 'racial map' of the 132 recognized ethnic groups—excluding the Rohingya community from the list. The citizenship law in the then-independent Myanmar back in 1982 adopted this 'racial map' as the foundation, positioning the Rohingyas to suffer from systematic violence that leads to the genocide. However, this outdated idea of citizenship has been challenged by the government-in-exile, the National Unity Government (NUG) in a policy statement released back in 2021. The NUG, as affirmed by Aung Kyaw Moe, recognised the violence and gross human rights violations conducted against the Rohingyas by the military, and even promised to provide reparation for the victims. Unfortunately, with the military regime continue seizing power in Myanmar, there has been little progress in furthering Rohingya's cause for justice and accountability.

The situation of the Rohingya refugees in other countries outside of Bangladesh is not any better. Fleeing to ASEAN countries, the refugees' rights are not properly protected and upheld. Most ASEAN countries and the ASEAN itself are still reluctant to use the term 'refugee' for the Rohingya community, exempting them from the responsibility of providing for the Rohingya refugees by adhering to international law and norms. In Indonesia, as reported by SUAKA, the challenges also come from the label of Indonesia as the 'transit country', resulting in the government and community in Indonesia providing temporary support instead of long-term support.

The event ended on a high note where the invitees echoed that all of us should do more to ensure the protection of the rights of the Rohingya refugees and their dignity. With the oncoming chairmanship of Indonesia, the country needs to take a leading role in pushing ASEAN into a consensus to recognise the Rohingya community as 'refugee', ensuring their rights across the region. In the upcoming ASEAN summit, strengthening the member states' commitment to denounce human rights violations should also be a priority, the questionable membership of Myanmar military as the government also needs to be addressed. At the state level, the governments are encouraged to create policies and regulations for handling refugees influx with human rights perspective.

For more information:

Dewie Anggraini - danggraini@asia-ajar.org / +6281212121894