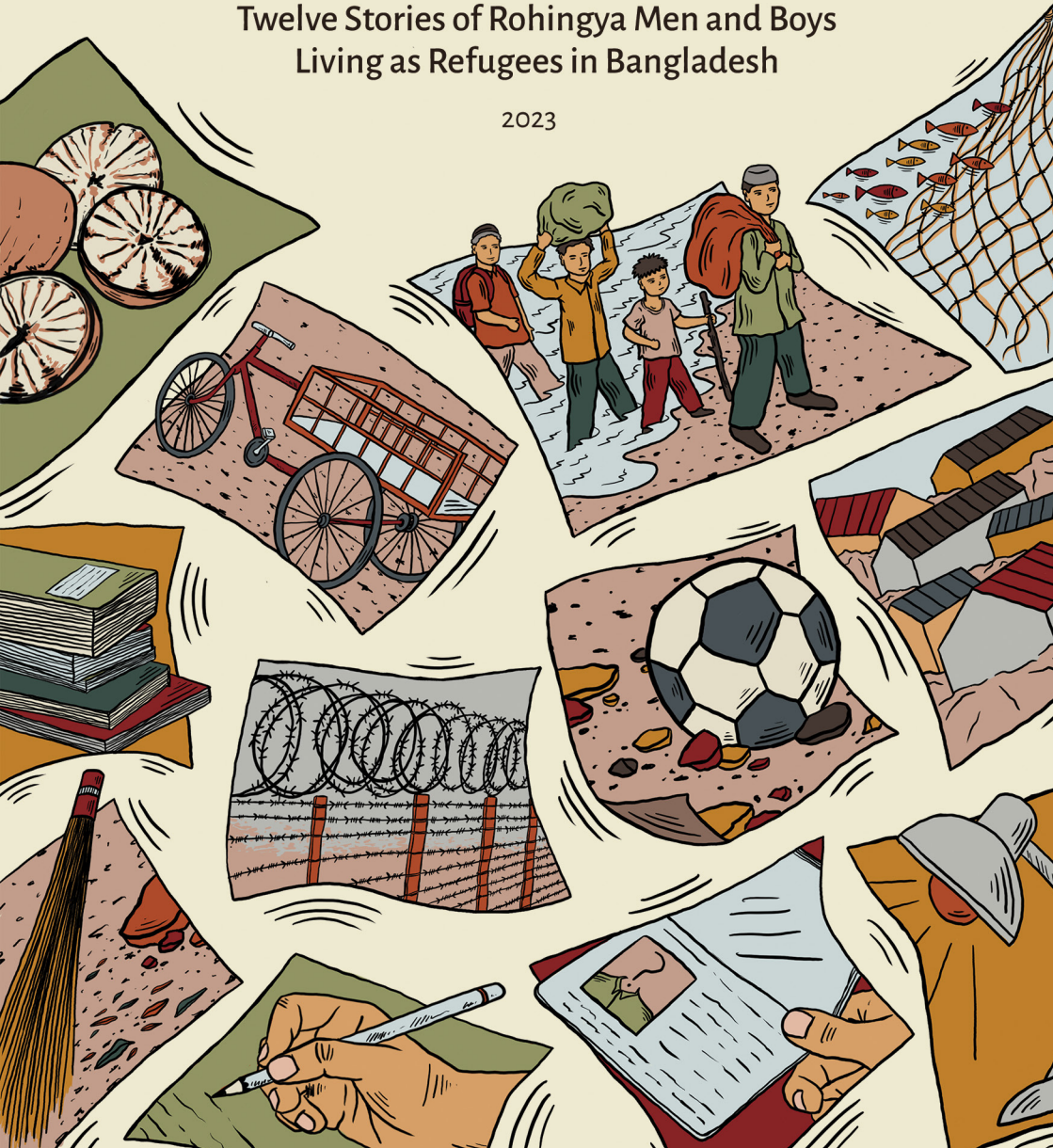


A PLACE TO BELONG, A LONGING FOR HOME

Twelve Stories of Rohingya Men and Boys
Living as Refugees in Bangladesh

2023



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Asia Justice and Rights
and
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Introduction

Article 15 – UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR)

1. Everyone has the right to a nationality.
2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.



Background

The United Nations (UN) and international media have referred to the Rohingya as ‘the most persecuted ethnic minority in the world.’¹ Human rights violations against ethnic minority groups, including the Rohingya, have been committed systematically in Myanmar over a long period of time. When Myanmar became an independent country in January 1948, the country’s Constitution included the Rohingya as one of Myanmar’s many ethnic groups.² But following the 1962 military coup, successive waves of violence began to be perpetrated against the Rohingya. Stigmatization, hatred, and acts of violence became widespread.³ Myanmar’s Constitution, which was amended in 1982, removed the Rohingya from the list of ethnic groups recognized as citizens of Myanmar.⁴ The rise in Buddhist extremism has further isolated the predominantly Muslim Rohingya. The brutal violence by the military over different periods forced the Rohingya out of Rakhine State and over the border into Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is the nearest neighbour in which hundreds of thousands of Rohingya have sought refuge. Rohingya refugees arrived in multiple waves. Between 1974-78, it was estimated that around 200,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh.⁵ Between 1991-1992, another wave brought around 250,000 refugees.⁶ Consequently, between 2012-2015, approximately 125,000 people fled⁷, then another 69,000 by 2016.⁸ The largest wave occurred after the attacks against the Rohingya in August 2017, leading to the exodus of more than 750,000⁹ refugees arriving in the Cox's Bazar region of Bangladesh.

The UN Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar (FFM), created by the UN Human Rights Council on 24 March 2017, was tasked with investigating human rights violations perpetrated since 2011, conducting 875 interviews with victims and witnesses, holding more than 250 consultations with other stakeholders, and reviewing satellite imagery, documents, photos, and videos.¹⁰ The FFM concluded that several serious crimes under international law have been committed, including acts of genocide in Rakhine State, and crimes against humanity and war crimes in Rakhine State, Kachin State and Shan State. It also reports that from August 2017, sexual violence was committed on a large scale during a violent 'clearance operation', documenting "large-scale gang rapes by Myanmar's Tatmadaw soldiers" in at least ten villages.¹¹

Presently, the Kutupalong refugee camp, in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, where most of the Rohingya refugees live, has become the world's largest refugee encampment. The refugees live in a large, ever-growing area, in makeshift shelters made of bamboo and plastic, or in fringe settlements in the surrounding countryside outside of the main camp. Most of those who are living arrived in 2017-18, though, as mentioned, many have been there since or even before the 1990s.

In the midst of various uncertainties, the Rohingya in Cox's Bazar live their lives facing numerous challenges and struggles. Family life goes on, including

getting married and having children, with the next generation of Rohingya being born and growing up in the crowded camp. The number of Rohingya refugees born in Bangladesh is significant. UNICEF reported in May 2018, around nine months following the August 2017 influx that over 60 Rohingya babies were being born every day.¹² As a result, from the end of August 2017 to mid-May 2018, more than 16,000 Rohingya babies were born in the camp. The actual number is likely to be even greater.

Learning as Survival

This book captures a glimpse of the lives of twelve Rohingya men: six who were born and raised in the refugee camp, ranging from 7 to 30 years of age; another six arrived as boys or young men more recently. The narrators were all participants of a human rights education program aimed at Rohingya men and boys that ran between 2021-2022. The program was conducted by Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR), a regional NGO working to strengthen accountability and human rights in the Asia-Pacific region, and the Dhaka-based Liberation War Museum (LWM), a civil society initiative that works to capture Bangladesh's 1971 Liberation War history, with community collaboration at its heart.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the learning program was carried out remotely, involving 32 Rohingya facilitators who in turn engaged more than 120 other participants. Facilitators first attended a series of remote learning workshops between February and September 2021. These covered topics such as adult education, non-violent approaches to teaching and learning, basic principles of human rights, women's rights, refugee rights, the role of human rights defenders, international mechanisms working on human rights, human trafficking, child marriage, self-care, and ethical guidance for working with victims of human rights violence. After participating in the workshops, the facilitators then shared their new knowledge to their learning circle of four participants each.

This book is divided into two chapters. **Chapter One** presents the life stories of six Rohingya refugees born and raised in the Bangladesh refugee camps

between 1992 and 2015. The six Rohingya who share their life stories have at least one thing in common: they were born into and know no life other than that of living in a refugee camp. While each of their life experiences have much in common, they are also unique, each with their own identity and perspective. **Chapter Two** presents the stories of six young men, who were born in Rakhine, Myanmar, but had to flee to Bangladesh after 2017.

This book complements another AJAR-LWM publication, “A Life Once Had, A Dream of Hope: Rohingya Women’s Voices from the Camps” which documents the life stories of 100 Rohingya women. Considering the total number of Rohingya refugees born and raised in the camp, and those who have arrived more recently, the stories of twelve Rohingya men and boys may seem like a very small drop of water in the ocean. But each and every life experience presents a unique voice of resilience.

They invite you to hear their stories, and hope that they will touch your heart.

We would like to thank all of the Rohingya survivors who shared their stories and dedicate this book to all ethnic minority groups facing persecution inside Myanmar.

CHAPTER 1: A Place to Belong





Afero: *A Place to Play with My Friends*



My name is Afero, I am seven years old. I heard from my parents that they ran from Myanmar to Bangladesh to save their lives. I was born in the camp in Bangladesh. But my parents are from Tombazar, Buthidaung in Myanmar.

I like to play traditional Rohingya games with other children in the camp. One of the traditional games is called *gila* in the Rohingya language.

Only the children play it, not the grown-ups. We also play games called *shollong* and *sika-sika*, which are played with marbles. This is a good game to play in the camp as it does not need a lot of space.

We also like to play volleyball and football when we get the chance, but we no longer have a large playground where we can play. There used to be a playground right next to our camp, but that's been closed down. A police quarters is being built there now. So, we can't play there anymore. We don't really have anywhere to play games, so we play where we can, in front of mosques, the toilet blocks, or in the camp streets.

I do not think that the situation is fair. As the camp is very crowded, I do not have enough space to explore my sports talent, which is frustrating. Nowadays, there is conflict between families in this crowded place. We also want to study as well as play games. But we don't have much access to education either.

If we get our playgrounds back, then we will be very happy as we can go there to play our favourite games every day. It would be great to get some equipment so that we can play different games. If the children were given enough space, it would be easier for us to grow up well.

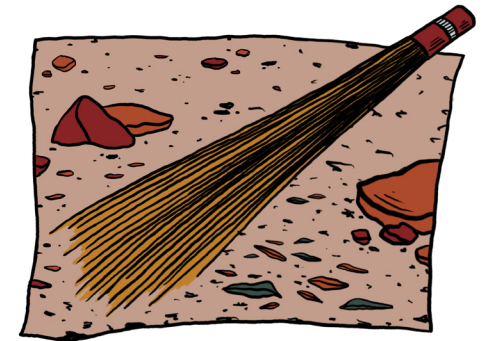
Md. Abduh:
***With return and citizenship,
my troubles will end***



My Name is Md. Abduh, and I was born in Bangladesh. My parents used to live in Maungdaw, Myanmar. They fled from Myanmar and arrived here in Bangladesh in 1992. I live with my wife and four children in the camp. My parents cannot live with us as we do not have enough space in the shelter to accommodate them. They live in another shelter nearby my house, and I buy food for them. My mother is 65 years old, and my father is 70 years old. Sometimes, I am terrified that I cannot take care of them as an eldest son because of the lack of space. I feel it is pitiful that I cannot look after them properly.

I currently run two shops in the camp to earn a living for my family. At first, I started selling betel nuts (which people use for chewing), with a small amount of money from my father. Then I made enough money to open a clothes shop. My family depends on these shops to survive. Recently, my income has dropped due to various circumstances.

I love keeping my surroundings clean, so I sweep the streets. I need to sweep the streets because people lack awareness about the negative effect of dirt and rubbish on the environment, as well as laziness. I believe when people see me cleaning the streets, they will also be inspired to keep their surroundings clean. I do not feel good if I see my block is dirty. If there were bins on every street in the camp, the roads would not get so dirty in my opinion.



Like every other person, I wish to live a beautiful and peaceful life in the future. Life in the camp is full of uncertainty. We do not have any access to information or freedom of movement. I fear for my future and my

children's future. I wish to see a future where my family and community can live peacefully and without violence. I also want to become a prominent businessman.

I have grown up in the camp, observing people's misery. That's why I always love to help others. People often get lost so I quickly help them get to where they need to go. I also encourage others to educate themselves.

I dream of becoming a social activist. I get my inspiration from The Qur'an, which says that if you help any creation of Allah, Allah will help you in return. If I can get training to become a social activist, I will be able to pursue my dream. Our people are unaware of their rights, so I want to become a social activist for the sake of my community. I do not think about my future anymore as nothing has changed over the last 30 years.

I believe that if I return to Myanmar and get my citizenship, all my troubles will end. However, it is not a good time to go there as Myanmar is not safe yet. I love my country and want to return there, but the Myanmar government still does not recognize us as citizens. I am also not happy in this camp. I think that only the UN can help us return to Myanmar or help us to resettle in a third country.

My children are young now and do not have any idea about Myanmar. It will be challenging to settle in Myanmar when they grow up. Therefore, it would be best if we could get back to Myanmar as soon as possible.

CLEAN THE WORLD

By Gajanan Mishra

Let us clean our world,
We are living here,
More than heaven for us.
The world is giving us free,
Water, air, light.
Let us realize.
Wherever you are, my dear,
Keep clean yourself,
your homes, neighbourhood
and your localities, being the greatest and
highest creature here. Clean your own world.



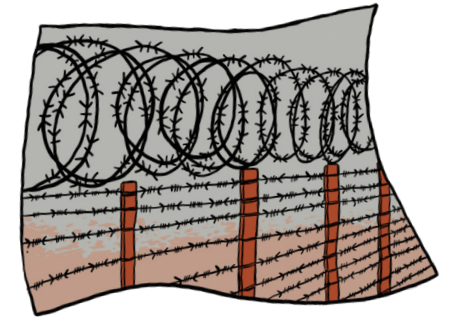
Md. Ichsan: Living like prisoners in a cage



My name is Md. Ichsan and I live with my parents, my three brothers, my wife and our child. My parents are from Haatbha Township in Myanmar, but I was born here in Bangladesh.

My parents fled from Myanmar in 1992 when they were young. The military forced them to leave the country. In Myanmar, my parents were unable to attend school, but they led their life happily before they came to Bangladesh. Many Rohingya fled with them and took shelter near Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, where they were issued with a refugee identity card. They want to go back to Myanmar, but 30 years later there is still no safe way for them to return.

I am involved with BRAC (a Bangladesh-based NGO that focuses on empowerment) as a volunteer. It is pretty hard to feed my family on very little income. My father cannot work due to his old age, and I am the only member of my family who is earning an income. Our living area is very small, and our family is growing. We live in very cramped conditions, and we sleep together at night in a small place. In the camp, I have to look after every aspect of my family, such as security, education and food. I have to divide my income for every necessity, which is very difficult to maintain while living in the camp.



I want to thank Allah for the life I am currently leading. But I am also aware of how camp life is at the moment. We feel like we are living as prisoners in a cage. I see no hope for the future, for a better life, for our liberty.

If I get the opportunity to present my words before the international community, I will put forward a lot of issues. For example, the camp environment is not suitable for children and youth to grow up healthily. We have spent almost three decades in the camp without hope, without a future.

The longer we live away from our country, the more we lose our culture, education, medical facilities, freedom, proper treatment and our dignity.

We have been suffering since our birth. I was born in this camp. Each and every moment of my life in this camp I am deprived of so many rights and cannot move freely. Income from the World Food Programme (WFP) here is not enough. I need to be able to leave the camp and earn money, but I cannot do so. I cannot take one step outside of the barbed wire fence without permission. Camp life is completely suffocating for me and others as well.

Another thing is education. There is no formal education in the camp. Due to the lack of formal education, most young people are uneducated, which impacts negatively on our community. As for healthcare, we have limited medical facilities. If someone gets affected by a severe disease, they will not get proper treatment.

Since 2017, due to the Rohingya refugee influx, our life has become even worse. Nowadays, due to overpopulation and illiteracy among the people in the camp, there is an increase in criminal activity. Many serious crimes are happening in the camp, such as carrying and taking drugs like *yaba* (a kind of methamphetamine) and heroin. Sometimes police catch the criminals and find weapons on them. These crimes are committed by youth who are uneducated and people who are going through financial crises.

I want a peaceful country where I can get all of our rights. If I get the opportunity to go back to Myanmar with safety, I, along with my family and parents, will grab the chance.

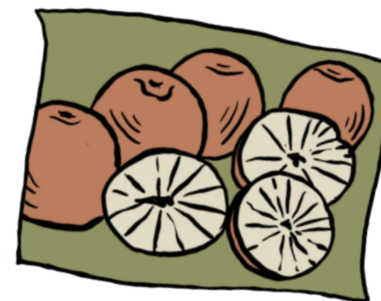
Now, I wish to educate the people of my ethnic group so that they become aware of their rights and can work to improve their lives. There is a methodology to help them know about their rights, which is organizing an awareness seminar. If I can gather some of the leading figures in our community to make them aware of their rights, they will know about their rights. After that, they will let others know about their rights.



Md. Kareem: *Selling betel nut mix for my family*



My name is Md. Kareem, I am 13 years old and I was born in Bangladesh. I live with my family including my parents, five sisters, and three brothers. All my sisters are already married, and my brothers work as day laborers.



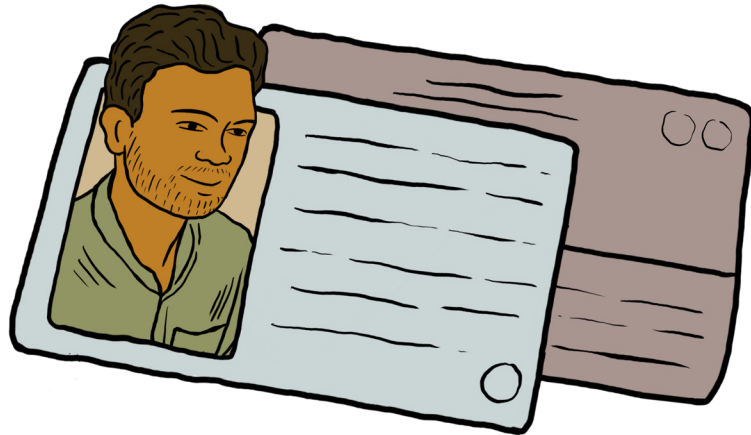
My father is also a day labourer. His income is not sufficient to feed our family. That's why, after completing my education to level three in primary school, I had to decide that I needed to contribute to my family income. So, I stopped going to school and started selling betel nut mix as I am still very young and cannot do any other jobs.

Every day, I start working at around 7:30 am in the morning. Then, I work for about 8-10 hours a day. I buy betel from the wholesale market situated in the Kutupalong camp. I think that betel nut is the favorite snack for almost everyone in the camp. However, I have learned from my mother that *jorda* (a kind of tobacco mix) is harmful to people.

People of all ages, young or old, buy my betel nut. Almost all the married women inside the camp also consume betel. I decided to sell betel because I believe it is suitable work for a child to earn money. No-one taught me how to sell betel, but I have learned it by watching others. I know all the ingredients and the ways to combine them.

I would love to go to school. But my family situation says otherwise. I do not think that the situation is fair to me. I want to return to school without any pressure to earn an income. But the lack of money is making my life difficult. Maybe if we get more facilities, we may be able to go back to school. I want someone or some organizations to help our community get higher education. Although I was born in Bangladesh, I would like to go back to Myanmar if we get our rights back.

Tabrani: *A crisis in identity*



I am Tabrani. I was born in 1999 in the Kutupalong camp in Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, where I still live today. Nobody wants to be a refugee, and I am no exception. My parents fled to Bangladesh in 1992 and took refuge in the Kutupalong camp. From the day I was born in the camp, this is where I was raised, this is where I live. It is pitiful that I was born without any nationality or identity.

When I was a child, I did not understand the value of having an identity and a safe and good environment. When I was seven years old, I thought that every human lived like us, with just a shelter for a home. I did not understand the meaning of citizenship. One of the most crucial challenges that I have faced is getting an education, which is a fundamental right.

When I was eleven years old, I discovered that I have no identity and that I have been living as a refugee in a camp. I realized that I am one of the most deprived people in the world when I was refused admission to a local school. I felt utterly hopeless and vulnerable because I had failed to get into school.

Another issue is that our freedom of movement is very restricted. There is a barbed wire fence around the camp. If anyone needs to go outside for emergency medical treatment, for example, they need to get permission from the Camp in Charge (CIC). Living here is like living in an open prison, and the camp is not a safe environment for children to grow up in. Sometimes, I feel mental trauma when I look at the world and compare myself with others. I am deprived of all facilities as a Rohingya refugee. Every day I am fighting against myself and the rules and restrictions that we face.

Another frustrating challenge is the lack of living space. When I was a child, I could stay with my parents. But it has become impossible to sleep with them at night because I am an adult now, and we do not have sufficient space to make another room for me. So, it is very hard to maintain privacy in this small space.

And the most harrowing and confusing trauma that I face: who am I? What is my nationality? On the one hand, I was born in the camp, which is situated in Bangladesh, but on the other hand, my parents are from Myanmar—a country that has not recognized Rohingya citizenship for the last few decades. So, I am neither a citizen of Bangladesh nor of Myanmar. I am experiencing a serious identity crisis. There is a mental health center in the camp, and sometimes I need to go there and see the consultants to receive treatment to help heal the trauma of living in this camp without an identity.

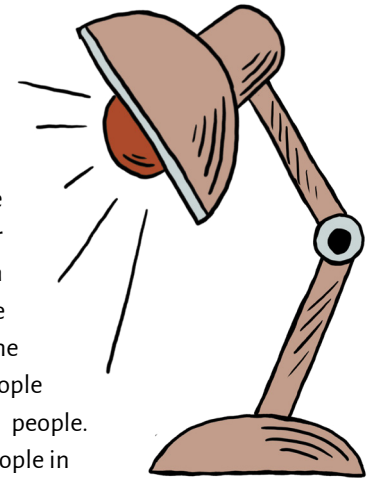
My dream is that my people have access to high school and higher education. I want to be a change-maker for my community. I believe that if we educate the youth, we can bring about changes for my community. I am hoping that the international community will make sure that I will get back my citizenship and identity as a human being. I also hope that we will have access to all our rights, especially all human rights.

Zulkarnaen: *I have never tasted freedom*



My name is Zulkarnaen and I was born in Bangladesh. I am 19 years old. My family comes from Maungdaw, Myanmar.

At present, I do not think that the overall situation is fair for us. We do not have any facilities for getting higher education. Since the day I was born, I have never tasted freedom. I believe that the Myanmar government is making our lives more difficult. We have been facing this problem since the time of our grandparents. I learnt that the Burmese army used to take 20-30 people from the villages, primarily young people. But if there were not many young people in that village, they would take older adults too. For example, they took my grandfather from our village. Then the army would throw their Rohingya captives off a cliff edge in the high mountains.



The Myanmar government has tortured the Rohingya people for a long time and forced us to leave Myanmar and come to Bangladesh. That's why, we do not have any freedom or any independence.

As human beings, we should get justice and get our rights back. We do not want to face this trouble anymore. For this reason, I would like to request the international community take steps to ensure justice through legal means and help us in getting our rights back. Otherwise, we would like to go to a third country where our children can experience freedom and independence.

I have been actively engaged as a facilitator in AJAR and LWM's learning program since 2019. Through this, I have also shared what I learned with other Rohingya youths. In the participatory learning process, I have learned a lot and gathered much experience to help me in the future. This process has also inspired me to contribute to improving our Rohingya community.

My thoughts, mind, and behaviour have changed for the better since I joined this program. I am now considering working as a human rights defender and humanitarian worker. As I have already trained eight Rohingya youths, they can now go on to train other people in our community in the future. I consider it to be an important achievement in my life.

I think this is an excellent program for building tolerance and peace in society. We should not stop this process as it is how our community can improve and develop. I have already shared the lessons with my family, friends, colleagues, and neighbours. They realize that it is beneficial for them. If I get the opportunity, I would like to share how to build tolerance and bring peace to more people. In fact, people want me to share similar themes more often. Their words have inspired me a lot, and I am looking forward to working more vigorously.

CHAPTER 2: A Longing for Home



AB. ASIS: *My dream is to study*



I live with my family in the camp, we are a family of six. I was born in Myanmar and used to live in the Eastern part of Rakhine in Myanmar. I used to study at a school there, without any worries and tension. My friends and I would travel to school together happily.

I wanted to get an education and become a successful person in life. However, one day all my dreams were taken away from me. Because of the genocide that took place in Rakhine in 2017, I had to flee from my native home. I fled to Bangladesh with my family in order to survive.

When I first arrived in Bangladesh, I had to face unbearable troubles and difficulties. Gradually, I was able to adapt. As I come from a poor family, it was necessary for me to work in order to feed my family. I started my first job when I was 12, collecting bottles and broken items. I used to go door to door and exchange snacks for bottles. I would then sell them to earn a few Taka (currency of Bangladesh).

As I grew a bit older, I started to feel embarrassed about collecting bottles, so I stopped and set up a small stall selling vegetables. Now, I am actually earning a lot more. I do not think that I am old enough to run a shop like that, but I have no choice as I need to feed my family. I sometimes worry about how I would be able to go to school and receive an education like other kids if I am working in the shop.

Currently, I do not go to school, but I do wish to continue my studies. After coming to Bangladesh in 2017, only rich families are able to afford to study in school and enrol in private coaching centers. However, poor families are unable to send their children to study. They must take low-paying jobs to feed their family.



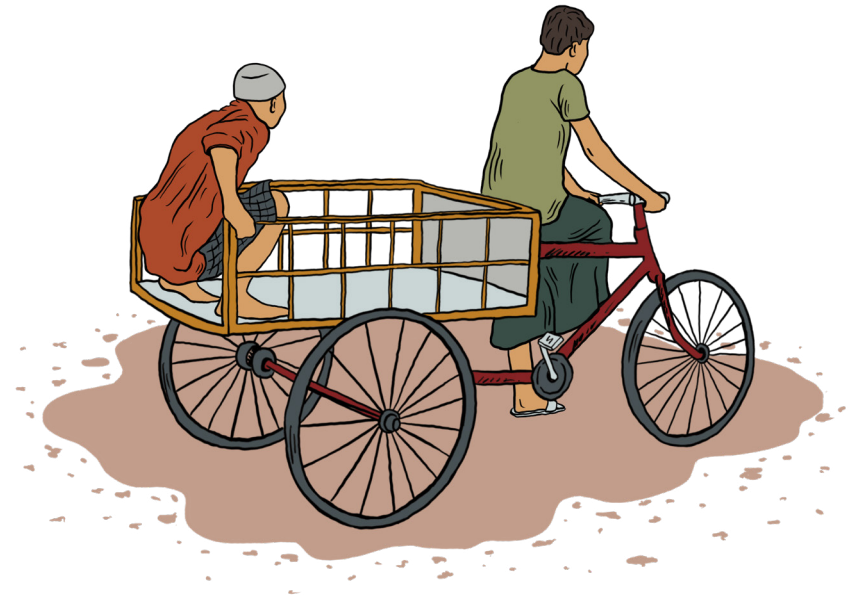
Although I dream of continuing my studies and improving my future, I am not able to due to my family's situation. Instead, I am sending my brother to study at a school as I want him to become an educated person.

I also want to go back to Myanmar. But I am not ready to go there alone. I do not feel that the situation there is fair for me. The situation within the camp is deteriorating day by day. Some of the people inside the camp are making our life difficult as well. They are organizing into groups in the name of solidarity. But in actuality, they are only oppressing the vulnerable people in the camp.

To overcome this situation, what we need is the opportunity to receive a proper education, the right to freedom of speech, freedom of movement and the reduced risk of child kidnappings. The government should also take action to maintain security and peace in the camp by arresting the terrorists. The process of repatriation to Myanmar should also be started as soon as possible.



ABDUL ROCHIM: *I cannot forget my teachers in Myanmar*



I was 11 years old and in level four when I left Myanmar. The school was very far from our home. Sometimes, I even had to come back halfway due to rain in the wet season. Now, I miss my school a lot. I cannot forget my old school as there were many friends who loved me. We used to play traditional games back then in our school's playground. There were many teachers as well. How could I forget them!

The teachers were pretty and full of wisdom. They used to provide lectures very clearly and even used to warn us about our future. The people in our school were very good. I do not have the words to compliment them enough.

In our school, there was a garden with many kinds of fruits. In the garden, I could eat the fruit and enjoy the fresh breeze. This is how my life was in Myanmar.

In Bangladesh, I repeatedly tried to continue studying but there were no schools. Instead, I had to study privately. After two years, I was finally able to attend a school and am very happy to have done so. In this school, they teach Burmese, English and Math in accordance with the Myanmar curriculum. The new school is private, and I have to pay 300 Taka per month. Because of this, I cannot afford private tuition. But I like to go to school as they are teaching using the Myanmar curriculum. I want to become an Engineer in the future.

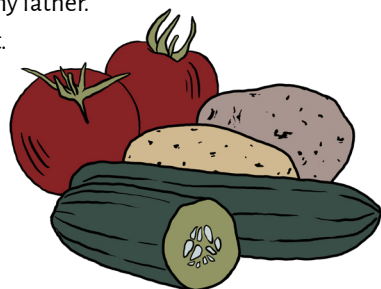
Whenever I get free time, I sell tomatoes, potatoes, cucumbers and eggplants. I am able to earn 200 Taka per day on average. I use this money for my family and my studies. My father has grown old, and I am required to do a lot of things to support my family. I sometimes work as a labourer, including *driving or pushing rickshaws or vans from Kutupalong market to inside the camps* to help out my father.

I wish to go back to our motherland as soon as possible as I miss my school, my relatives and all the things that I left behind in Myanmar. I want to study at university to become an engineer and work for the betterment of the Rohingya community. I want to become an engineer as they are necessary for the building of our country.

I do not find the situation to be fair. There are no proper educational facilities or treatment available for my father.

There is no freedom of movement.

Sometimes, when I sell things in a van, the police stop me to beat me up and take my money. Living as a refugee is what is making my life, and those of my community, so difficult.



MD. FASHA: *Returning with my rights ensured*



When I was living in Myanmar, I was still a student. I always focused on my education as my parents wanted me to become a teacher. After completing my education, I started working as a teacher at a primary school and also as a private tutor. However, the Myanmar government started to torture us, burn our houses, kill our children and rape our women.

People of other ethnicities also used to attack the Rohingya community. There was discrimination everywhere. In the school, Rohingya children and children from other ethnicities were segregated. After the violence spread,

the Bangladesh government and many NGOs helped and supported the Rohingya. After coming to the camp, I started working at Relief International, an NGO. I also started providing free tuition for the children of my block.

When we were preparing to flee from Myanmar and come to Bangladesh, the government of Myanmar snatched away our possessions. They stole gold, batteries, knives, money and mobiles. In the course of fleeing, many children got lost and were separated from their parents. We could not eat at that time. Some were chased and killed by people of other ethnicities and the Myanmar military. Some of the children also drowned while fleeing Myanmar.

I fear that my future is going to be wasted as I am not able to do anything within the camp. There are also no facilities for formal education and as a result, the Rohingya children do not have a good future. I wish to go back to Myanmar with all my rights ensured. I think it is important for us to be repatriated to Myanmar as it is our motherland. I want peace and justice to be ensured in Myanmar.

I run a private learning center where I provide education to the Rohingya children for free. I do not take money from the parents as they do not have any. Moreover, I see the hunger of parents to care for their children and provide them with an education. I started the learning center in 2018 on the suggestion of community leaders, parents and the Rohingya Majhi. Currently, I am teaching 20 students who are between three to 18 years old. They are being taught in the Myanmar curriculum which includes Burmese, English, Mathematics and Science.

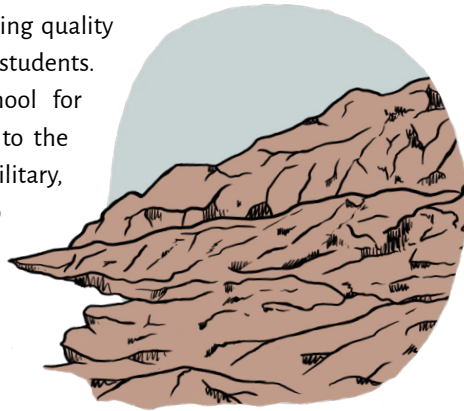
I think that the circumstances are not improving as the international community is failing to ensure our rights. It has been almost five years since we arrived in Bangladesh. In my learning center, I am facing difficulties as there are not enough books, pencils and pens along with lack of a spacious place to conduct classes. Food, education, clothes, and shelters are basic necessities for a human being, but I think that education is important as it can change the world. I am making the children aware so that they do not waste their future.

MD. HADAD: *A future where the Rohingya are educated and prosperous*



I am Md. Hadad. I used to live in the northern part of the Rakhine State in Myanmar. I passed my Matriculation exam (level ten) from the Basic Education High School Paung Daw Phin in Rakhine State and had the opportunity to study for a Bachelor of Science in Botany. However, due to a prohibition imposed by the military, I was not able to attend the program.

During that time, I was really going through tough times and was experiencing anxiety as I considered my future to be bleak. However, afterwards, I served as an assistant teacher in a Middle School called Mee Goung Zay, providing quality education to the Rohingya students. I taught at the Middle School for around five years. Later, due to the violence by the Myanmar military, the Rohingya people had to flee from Myanmar to Bangladesh.



When I started my journey to Bangladesh, I came across a lot of people who were trying to flee for the same reason as me. It was the rainy season. On this journey, I saw a lot of dead bodies, some were cut or had gunshot wounds. When I saw those dead bodies, I was scared. I had to climb many rocks in the valley which were wet and slippery. There were numerous difficulties due to the high and mighty mountains. At night, we did not have any safe places to sleep. Sometimes, we slept at the foothill, and sometimes, in the valleys. It took me around 16 days to reach Bangladesh.

When I reached Bangladesh, I saw many Bangladeshi people providing food, water and clothes to the Rohingya population. I appreciate the kind-hearted people of Bangladesh. When I reached the camp, there were no shelters nor any arrangements for sanitation. Three weeks after my arrival, I joined MSF (*Medecins Sans Frontieres*) - Operation Center Barcelona Athens (OCBA) that was providing medical support. I am still with MSF as a Community Health Worker.

There are two reasons which forced us to be in the largest refugee camp in the world. One is that we are here to save our lives, and the other is that the Myanmar military has deprived us of our fundamental rights. I am hoping that the international community will fight to ensure our rights from the

Myanmar government. I am very pleased and thankful to the government of Bangladesh and also the Bangladeshi people for showing us their unconditional love and kindness and also allowing me to stay temporarily on their land. I would also like to thank all the aid workers for their efforts.

When I think about the future, I feel that as long as we remain in this camp, it is not possible for our Rohingya community to become an educated and prosperous group. I think it would be for the best for our community to go back to Myanmar with all our citizenship and fundamental rights ensured.

I do not think that life at the moment is fair for me. There is no freedom of movement for us. Being a refugee is making my life difficult.



OMAR GHOFRAN: *Wishing my son to be educated*



I am an old man living with my wife and only son. Since 2017, I have been a resident of the camp. As I am over 60 years old, I cannot do much heavy work and as a result, I do not get many offers for jobs. I make fishing nets in order to earn money and reduce some of the difficulties of my family.



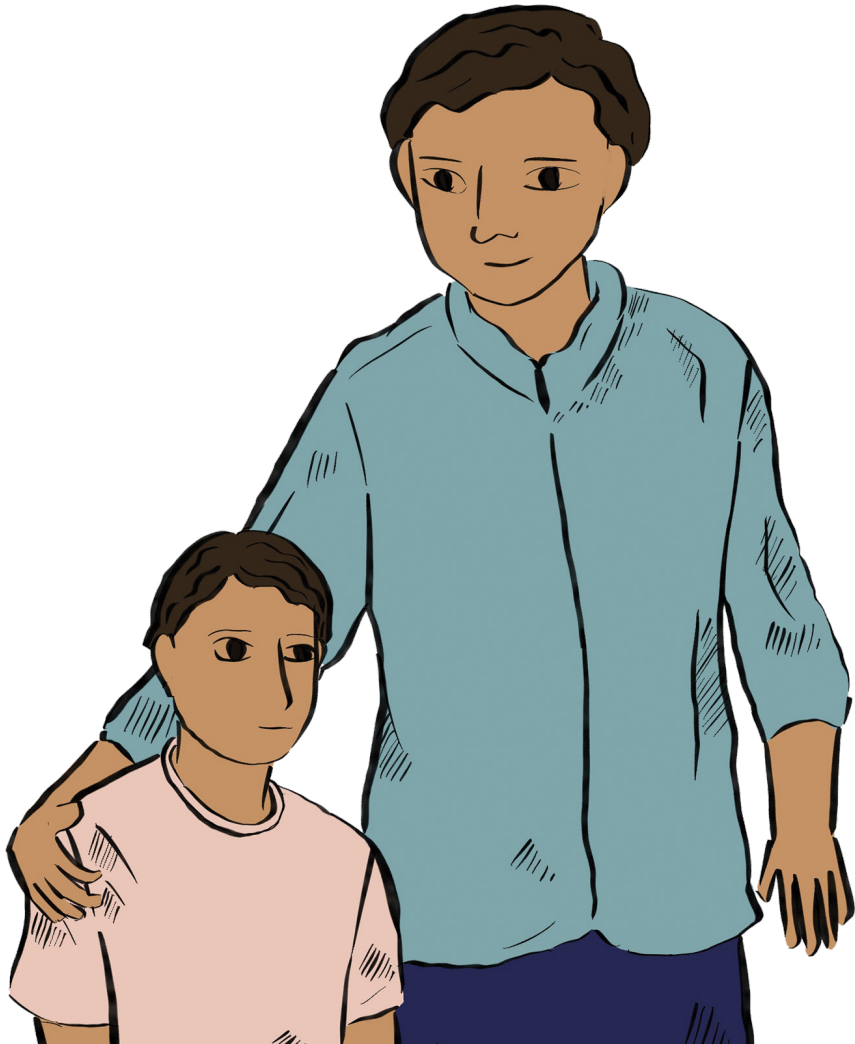
After coming to the camp, I realized that we were having a lot of trouble earning a living. One day, I thought that it was no use for me to remain jobless. With this thought in mind, I sold a portion of the rations we received in order to buy some materials to make fishing nets. I have been making and selling fishing nets since then to support my family.

My son is currently studying at a learning center. I wish for my son to become an educated person. I also wish to live the rest of my life in peace and as a healthy person. In addition, I want to return to Myanmar, my homeland. But I must return only with my dignity and rights ensured as a citizen. I also want my rights to freedom of speech, movement and expression to be ensured.

I do not think that the situation within the camp is fair to me. The camp does not seem safe and it is not a satisfactory environment to live in. I feel like I am back to the situation I was in in Myanmar.

I believe that the international community, who are unwilling to resolve this issue, bear a large responsibility in making our lives more difficult. In my opinion, it is just a matter of words for them to resolve this issue and start the repatriation process.

MR. SHADIQ USAIN: *We cannot dream about a future*



I have five siblings including four brothers and one sister. I have faced many difficulties in my life due to the death of my father. My father passed away when I was only seven years old. We were a very poor family as well. All of my brothers were married. They had given a small portion of their shelter in Myanmar for me and my mother to reside in.

I had to sell vegetables and other things in order to earn money. Every evening, I used to buy a small amount of rice for my mother with the money earned from selling vegetables. Then we used to have our dinner. Sometimes, when I went to school, my mother would sell vegetables.

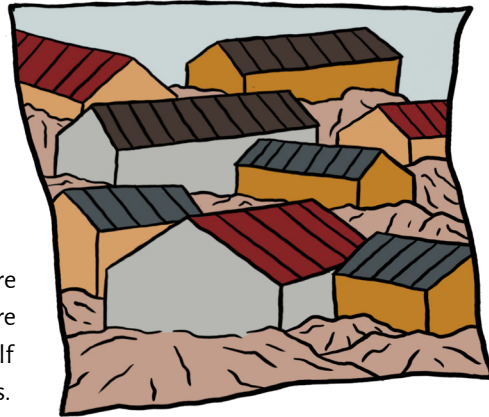
We did not want to leave our homeland, but the Myanmar military came to our village and tortured us. They threatened that if we did not leave the village, they would kill all of us. They also burned our houses. Our family of 10 people, along with the whole village consisting of over 5000 families, had to leave.

We entered the mountain range without any food or spare clothes. We had to walk approximately three days to get to Bangladesh. In those three days, we faced many hardships including a lack of food and medical support. We also witnessed the Myanmar military firing at innocent Rohingya. After three days of hardship, we arrived at the bank of Naf River to cross into Bangladesh. It was very dangerous for us to cross the Naf River.

I studied until level seven in Myanmar. From level three to five, I only had two pairs of trousers and one shirt to wear. When I was in level five, one of my uncles provided me with a school uniform and shoes. I can never forget my school life.

When I was 22 years old, Alhamdulillah, I got married. I spent my own money on the marriage. I also worked as a bamboo seller in Myanmar. I used to buy bamboo from the *Chakma* people who reside in the forest. I would collect bamboo for the whole month and carry it to trucks to sell in Buthidaung town. I used to earn approximately 100,000 Kyat (currency of Myanmar) per month.

Sometimes, I think about why all these tragedies took place in my life. I feel sad about not being able to complete my studies. I used to dream of becoming a teacher or doctor as there were no doctors or teachers in our village. Many people suffered from all kinds of diseases without any treatment. From Yangon, many teachers came to our village to teach the children, but the students were not able to understand the language of these teachers clearly.



I really miss the place where I used to study and where I made a life for myself despite the many difficulties. I miss the place where my parents are buried. I wish to go back to Myanmar, my motherland, as soon as possible. Now, I have grown older and here I am inflicted with various diseases, yet there is no proper treatment in the camp. This camp in Bangladesh is not appropriate for me as here I do not have the opportunity to do any business, we have no shelter of our own and everything is temporary for us.

In the camp, there are no facilities to get proper education. Approximately 70 to 80 percent of the people in the camp are uneducated, many crimes and violence are also taking place. The government of Bangladesh has also announced many restrictions, yet we are not able to go back to Myanmar. The crimes include child marriage, human trafficking and violence committed by the rebel groups. One year ago, inside the camp, one of my sons was kidnapped by some unknown people. I had to pay 50,000 Taka as ransom to get him back.

In the camp, fires are taking place very frequently. Many of the houses in the camp are crammed together under one joint roof. As a result, if one house

catches fire then it spreads to the other houses very fast. Many houses are destroyed, and many people are seriously hurt in the aftermath of such incidents. Children and the elderly are the ones who easily become victims of these fires. In 2020, there was a huge fire at the Balukhali camp of Cox's Bazar wherein thousands of shelters were burnt. Many pregnant women, old people and children passed away in this incident, it has stayed in my mind, and I remember it repeatedly.

We, the parents, are doing our best to take care of our children and fulfill their wants as much as possible. Many of the NGOs are providing sessions on raising awareness and informing about legal rights. Despite that, the children have limited facilities and rights in the camp.

I think that we should be allowed to go back to our motherland. Our rights, which were snatched away by the Myanmar government, should be given back to us. I am requesting Bangladesh and the international community to take measures to ensure this.

We are losing everything in the camp. All our hopes and dreams are being destroyed. In fact, most people do not even know what dreams are and what their future holds. All of these are happening because we do not have our rights, freedom, skills and income. If we were in our motherland and have citizenship, then all our problems and difficulties would be resolved. But we do not have them in the camp.



ENDNOTES

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