

Yearning for Our Rights and Longing for Our Homeland: Rohingya Youth Respond to Atrocities

Volume 2



Yearning for Our Rights and Longing for Our Homeland: Rohingya Youth Respond to Atrocities (Volume 2)

Hello, Assalamualaikum.

This picture book is based on participatory discussions conducted by AJAR and SAVE in 2023-2024.

We want to share our key findings with you.

We want to hear what you think about these issues.

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Rohingya Male Facilitators: MU, HB, PS, CE, NS, WM, SY, EZ, WK, PR, DI, NA.

Rohingya Female Facilitators: TV, ML, TG, RM, TC, BH, BR, GM, MP, QS, YF, HD, SK.

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Photo: Nasrin Akter, Dewie Anggraini, Faisal Bustamam, Rohingya facilitators, and Sametkoprubasi (page 3).

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Background



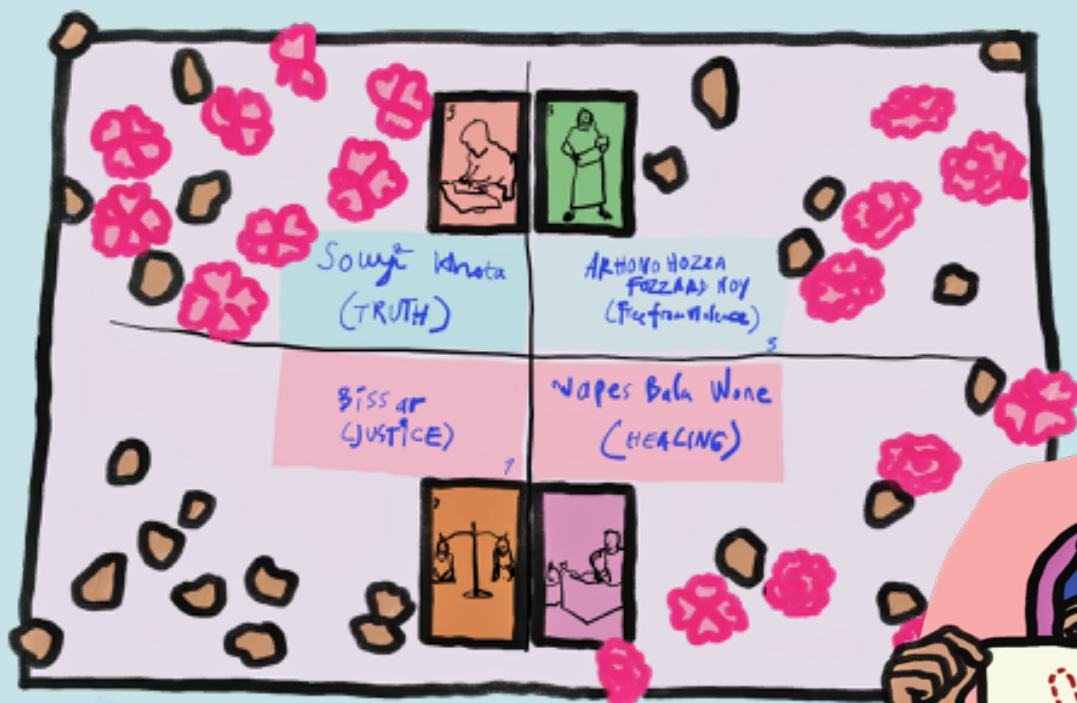
Background

On 25 August 2017, more than 700,000 Rohingya fled from Rakhine State, Myanmar, crossing the Naf River into Bangladesh. The United Nations (UN) said this is a “textbook example of ethnic cleansing.” (UN Human Rights High Commissioner)

Cox’s Bazaar in Bangladesh has become the largest refugee settlement in the world.

Since early 2019, Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR) has been working with the Liberation War Museum (LWM) and SAVE to engage the Rohingya community in a dialogue on human rights and justice using participatory tools.

Our participatory tools and framework



Our participatory tools and framework

AJAR uses participatory tools developed with communities in conflict and those coming out of conflict.

These tools have been adapted to the realities of young people living in refugee camps.

The approach was informed by the Transitional Justice framework: a holistic model and approach to justice in contexts of repeated, systemic mass human rights violations and impunity.

It is made up of four pillars:

- Truth
- Justice
- Reparations
- Never Again

Our process



RESEARCH REPORT

Yearning for Our Rights and Longing for Our Homeland

Rohingya Youth Respond to Atrocities

Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR) and Liberation War Museum (LWM)



Our process

From May to September 2023, AJAR and LWM facilitated participatory discussions with Rohingya youth. The discussions were led by 25 young facilitators who met with approximately 69 of their peers (35 male, 34 female), organising dialogue and documenting emerging themes.

As a follow-up, further participatory discussions were held from October 2023 to April 2024 by SAVE and AJAR.

This book outlines the four key lessons and selected quotes from the 70 young men and 34 young women in two camps in Cox's Bazar.

Finding 1: Unresolved trauma is made worse by life in the camp – uncertainty, unrest and a lack of opportunities for young people.



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“I still vividly remember how awful the August 2017 conflict was. People were screaming and running to avoid the danger. Houses were being set on fire, and our people were dying.” (Female, 33)

“At the age of 14, our home and everything we owned were destroyed by the Myanmar military. Our entire village was also destroyed. Our family members were subjected to brutal beatings and torture by the Myanmar military. We were forcibly displaced from our homeland and forced to seek refuge in Bangladesh.” (Male, 21)

These traumatic experiences have left deep wounds and have caused long-term mental health impacts for young people.



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“I am trying to deal with the difficulties of living in a refugee camp while also processing the trauma of the atrocities that forced me to leave my home. I am still strong. I hope the future will be better for me and my family.” (Female, 25)

“Even though I am living safely in the camp, the memories of the violence in Myanmar continue to haunt me.” (Female, 36)



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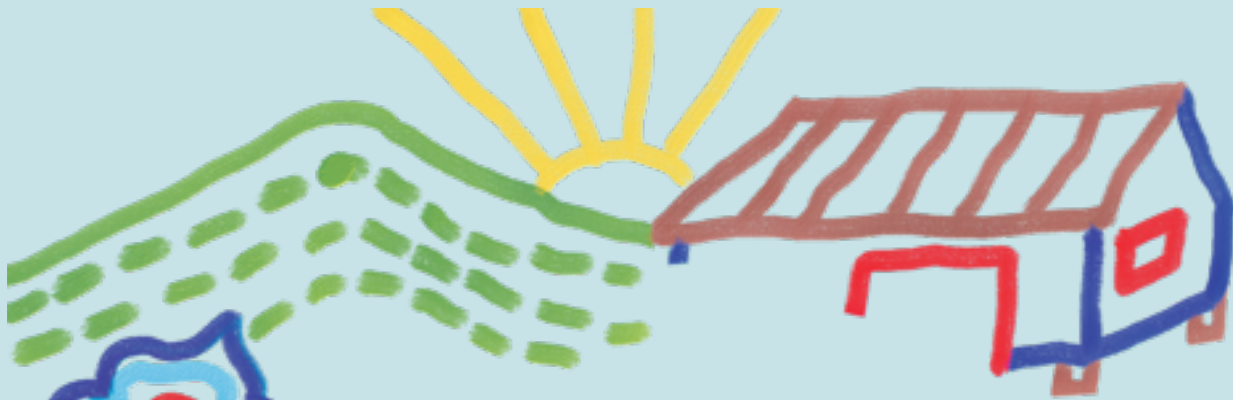
“I am feeling insecure with my life because I am unable to obtain the basic rights that every human being deserves. As a result, I find myself living in a constant state of frustration.”

(Male, 38)

“I worry about something every day. The camp’s current condition is not favourable. Every day, there are murders, shootings, and fire incidents. It is becoming quite common.”

(Female, 27)

“Every day in this camp of refugees, my worries about my child’s future are growing.” (Female, 24)



Finding 2: For many young people, the right to justice and healing means they can return to Myanmar with their full rights as citizens.

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Participants spoke about their lives in Myanmar before the genocide. There was a deep sense of longing, and amidst the traumatic memories were positive accounts of the past.

“I am thinking about when I can go back to our golden Arakan. We want to be able to go home with our rights, justice, and citizenship. We do not want to be refugees. We want our home country.” (Male, 21)

“If Myanmar were to grant us citizenship, it would provide us with a sense of security. The citizenship card system has put us in a position of servitude, as we are denied ownership rights and burdened with taxes that were not imposed on other ethnic groups, specifically the Rohingya. The Citizenship Law (1982) was enacted with the intention of abolishing citizenship, but its repeal would reinstate our citizenship rights.” (Female, 28)

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Recalling their homeland, Rohingya youth hold memories of discrimination and segregation – including as children.

“Throughout our childhood, we faced discrimination during our time in primary school. Although we were aware that being a teenager can be a joyful experience, our belonging to the Rohingya community and lack of freedom of movement prevented us from fully enjoying it.” (Male, 19)

“I came to the realisation as a teenager that we were not permitted to pursue higher education and could not move around. I realised that there was no freedom of movement, no universal human rights, and no hospital or medical access for the Rohingya.” (Male, 33)

Young people hope for returning home. But this return must also mark the end of discrimination against the Rohingya and equality for all ethnic groups in Myanmar.



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“The necessary institutional changes in Myanmar should include the modification of Myanmar citizenship law, ensuring safety and security, and protecting our rights. It is important to consider the inclusion of Rohingya people in Rakhine. It is also important for the government to ensure equal rights and freedom to us.” (Male, 23)

“I believe that it is important to provide Rohingya individuals with justice and the chance to reside in their own country. It is crucial to ensure that we are granted basic rights and are provided with the opportunity to live a fulfilling life.” (Female, 19)

“We want to go back home with our rights and justice. We want a better life with safety and protection if Myanmar does not take us back. We hope to be resettled in other countries if we cannot go back to our home country.” (Male, 21)



Finding 3: Rohingya youth hold deep reserves of optimism but need urgent support – ensuring education and gender equality.

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“Education is crucial for ensuring that our future generation does not become lost and illiterate. Despite the unfortunate loss of our nation, we must prioritise the education of our children.”

(Female, 28)

“Even though things are hard, I keep hoping for a better future. I think that getting educated and giving support to others are the best ways to end the cycle of poverty and injustice we are living in.” (Female, 33)

*Despite the daily suffering, she remains hopeful for the future among the Rohingya.
Of particular importance for the future is the right to education and gender justice.*



Despite the daily suffering, the remains hope for the future among the Rohingya. Of particular importance for the future is the right to education and gender justice.

“In 2017, due to the conflict, I had to leave my home and move to Bangladesh. Unfortunately, I faced religious restrictions that compelled my family to confine ourselves indoors here. Without further education, I often experience a sense of emptiness. I share the same sentiment towards individuals lacking education in the camp.” (Female, 18)

“As time passes, we are growing older in this refugee camp. Unfortunately, we do not have any access to develop our skills. We now feel confined and restricted, as if we are in a prison.” (Male, 28)



The level of optimism for the future varies.

With a lack of progress and a deteriorating situation in Myanmar, many young people feel that they are losing hope.

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“We do not believe that any repatriation is going to happen soon. We have a sense of uncertainty about what lies ahead. It is crucial that all ethnic groups are granted equal rights, with a focus on ensuring dignity, holding perpetrators accountable, and upholding human rights in Myanmar.” (Male, 42)

Finding 4: Rohingya youth are aware of international justice – but reactions are mixed, and progress is slow.



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There is information and awareness in the camps about various international justice reports and mechanisms.

“At present, the FFM is not in operation, and its findings have been transferred to the IIMM. The ICC and the ICJ are currently playing an active role in the process. My family is up to date on these developments, and my society is also well informed.”

(Female, 28)

“I am confident that there is a fair and just process in place for addressing our violations. I am aware that the Gambia has raised concerns about our alleged violations to the ICJ.” (Male, 18)



While there is relatively high awareness about international mechanisms, there are different levels of optimism or disillusionment. While some hold out hope, the lack of progress sows doubt whether international mechanisms will change the situation for the Rohingya.

“I have heard that there is a justice process for these violations, but from what I understand, we have been waiting for 6 years without any sign of justice being served. There are differing opinions in our society regarding the possibility of finding justice for our violations. Some remain hopeful, while others are hopeless due to the length of time we have been waiting. It is widely recognised that the Myanmar government has been involved in acts of genocide. It is my sincere hope that world leaders will respond with appropriate actions.” (Male, 22)

“We are pleased with the progress being made in the pursuit of justice, although we are also frustrated by the slow pace of this progress.” (Male, 18)

“I have a sense of uncertainty regarding our future, and I am disappointed with the actions taken by the ICC and ICJ. We urgently require security and support from the international community in light of the ongoing genocide perpetrated by the Myanmar government against our community and other ethnic groups.” (Male, 29)

Recommendations for and by Rohingya youth



Recommendations for and by Rohingya youth

- (i) Rohingya youth have a special role in advocating for justice and preventing the recurrence of atrocities. However, they cannot fulfil this role if their right to education remains unattainable. Many young Rohingya women and men do not have opportunities for continuing their education.
- (ii) More efforts have to be made to strengthen skills and training opportunities for meaningful work for Rohingya youth in anticipation of reconstruction and community re-building now and in the future.

Recommendations for and by Rohingya youth



Recommendations for and by Rohingya youth

- (iii) Support young people in developing innovative, youth-driven rehabilitation centres for the Rohingya as a mechanism to facilitate psychosocial healing and urgent support for the long journey to fulfil their rights.
- (iv) Support special programs to enable Rohingya youth to engage with justice mechanisms, such as the International Criminal Court (ICC), the International Court of Justice (ICJ), and the Independent Investigative Mechanisms for Myanmar (IIMM) to work efficiently and with as much transparency as possible.
- (v) Strengthen dialogue between Rohingya youth and CSOs working on pro-democracy efforts in Myanmar. Youth consistently voiced a desire to return to a truly democratic Myanmar, where they are recognised as citizens and their rights are fully respected.



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