

**PRESS RELEASE**

**Threats of Repatriation Again Loom Over Rohingya Refugees**

BANGKOK, 20 August 2019: On 16 August 2019, the Bangladesh government announced their preparations to imminently repatriate 3,450 Rohingya refugees from Cox's Bazar to Myanmar. The scheduled date of this repatriation is 22 August 2019. This worrying news comes as Rohingya refugees are making preparations to commemorate the second anniversary of the mass exodus of Rohingya from Myanmar due to military violence. The repatriation announcement challenges numerous assurances by the Bangladeshi authorities that any repatriation would be done in safety, with dignity, and on a voluntary basis.

APRRN is deeply concerned that there will be insufficient time to determine the voluntariness of any refugee return, given the phenomenally truncated timeline. APRRN is worried that any refugee that returns, may not in fact be guaranteed safe, dignified, and sustainable living conditions in Rakhine State. Furthermore, neither the Government of Bangladesh nor the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have access to monitor the conditions for returnees. The Deputy Chair of APRRN's Rohingya Working Group, Chris Lewa, notes that "We have simply seen zero evidence of conditions inside Myanmar having improved. Any return of refugees at this point in time would pose a tremendous risk to personal safety and would breach the internationally agreed norm of *non-refoulement*."

Based on UNHCR guidelines, the core components of repatriation and reintegration are physical, legal and material safety. A sustainable repatriation plan should address these components to ensure that returnees are protected by national legal systems and institutions. The Government of Myanmar must address the lack of fundamental rights for Rohingya who are presently living in Myanmar and implement the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission led by late Kofi Annan before repatriation of refugees can be considered.

In July 2019, a [report](#) published by the Australia Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) found that at least 58 Rohingya settlements in Myanmar were subject to demolition in 2018. Additional demolitions in other settlements were also recorded in 2019. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), between January and July 2019, there have been [1,051 new arrivals](#) of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar. In April 2019, Refugees International published a [report](#) that further detailed accounts of ongoing human rights abuses and restrictions to freedom-of-movement for Rohingya in Myanmar. These reports, in addition to the ongoing conflict with the Arakan Army, provide clear evidence that it is not conducive for Rohingya refugees to return to Myanmar at this stage.

APRRN calls on the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh to ensure that meaningful consultations with Rohingya refugees be conducted as part of any repatriation plan. The Rohingya community has been unanimous in expressing their demand for citizenship, freedom of movement, and equal rights as pre-conditions for voluntary return. Without meeting these requirements, and addressing ongoing persecution, there is no guarantee that the decades-old cycle of displacement will be broken.

APRRN Chair, and former refugee, Arash Bordbar notes that “Refugees are too often forced to live precarious lives, not knowing what their future may look like. Whilst we appreciate the Bangladesh government’s support up until now, we do hope they can continue to provide security and protection for this incredibly marginalised and persecuted population.”

**The Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN)** is a network of 400 civil society organisations and individuals from 28 countries committed to advancing the rights of refugees in the Asia Pacific region. APRRN aims to advance the rights of refugees and other people in need of protection through joint advocacy, capacity strengthening, resource sharing and outreach.

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