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PRESS RELEASE: ROHINGYA DENIED ACCESS TO EDUCATION IN MYANMAR AND BANGLADESH.

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A whole generation of Rohingya children are being denied the opportunity to shape their own future as they face extremely limited access to education in both Myanmar and in refugee camps in Bangladesh, the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK (BROUK) said today in a new report based on field research among Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

“If You Want to Harm a Community, Just Don't Let Them Study” details how a system of segregation building up to genocide in Myanmar, and onerous restrictions imposed by Bangladeshi authorities, mean that quality schooling is off limits to hundreds of thousands of Rohingya children on both sides of the border.

“The Rohingya are suffering from an ongoing genocide, with Myanmar authorities' intent on wiping us out as a people. Now more than ever, we need educated Rohingya who can act as leaders for the community, but as long as education remains severely restricted this will be impossible. We are facing the prospect of a lost generation,” said Tun Khin, President of BROUK.

“Schooling is vital to allowing people to lift themselves and their families out of poverty and to improve their lives. This human right, however, is denied to Rohingya children – this situation must not be allowed to continue.”

Genocide in Myanmar

In Rakhine State, Rohingya have faced serious restrictions on their access to education since 2012, when Myanmar authorities imposed a system of segregation following a campaign of state-organized violence against the Rohingya.

Rohingya children are often unable to attend mixed Rakhine-Rohingya schools but are instead kept in separate education facilities where the quality of teaching is extremely poor. Government teachers often refuse to work in Rohingya schools, or when they do subject students to humiliation and neglect. More than 73% of Rohingya in Rakhine State self-identify as illiterate today.

Mohammad, a Rohingya refugee in Bangladesh, described how conditions in Rakhine State changed for him in 2012: “After that, the teacher kept us in separate classes.

One for Rohingya, one for Rakhine. They gave them all the attention - all the resources. The teacher would call us ‘Kalar’ [a pejorative term for Rohingya] and would no longer want to teach us.”

There are also reports that since 2017, Myanmar authorities have been targeting teachers and other educated Rohingya - further aggravating the collective capacity for education.

Restrictions in Bangladeshi refugee camps

In August 2017, the Myanmar security forces launched a “clearance operation” in Rakhine State, killing thousands of Rohingya, torching hundreds of villages and committing acts of sexual violence. More than 700,000 Rohingya fled into neighboring Bangladesh to escape the military’s crimes against humanity, joining hundreds of thousands of other longer-term Rohingya refugees in Cox’s Bazar.

These close to one million Rohingya refugees are now largely housed in dozens of refugee camps in Bangladesh, including the so-called “mega camp” of Kutupalong, one of the largest refugee camps in the world.

The Bangladeshi authorities have imposed restrictions on the type of education that can be provided to refugees, including by banning education in Bangla as well as any formal education that can lead to accreditation. This is apparently because Bangladeshi authorities do not want to create a “pull factor” or incentives for refugees to remain in the country longer term – although it is having a harmful effect on the ability of Rohingya children to access quality education.

Instead, education in the camps is being provided by a range of international and Bangladeshi NGOs as well as community-based Organisations. Rohingya are often taught in informal “temporary learning centers” where the quality of education and curriculum can vary significantly depending on the NGO involved.

“The Bangladeshi government has generously opened its borders and allowed hundreds of thousands of Rohingya fleeing for their lives to enter the country. We now urge Dhaka to lift restrictions in the refugee camps – on both residents and aid groups – so that Rohingya children can access schooling unhindered,” said Tun Khin.

“Conditions are nowhere safe enough for Rohingya to return to Myanmar, and refugees are likely to remain in Bangladesh for the long-term. Only by being able to access education and the job market can Rohingya build a future for themselves and contribute to Bangladeshi society.”

Through interviews with Rohingya refugees, international and national aid workers, and other stakeholders, BROUK identified a number of pressing issues around education delivery in the camps.

Classrooms are often severely overcrowded and badly resourced, and recruiting teachers – in particular women – remains a serious challenge. While aid groups have performed heroic efforts in responding to the crisis, there is a lack of long-term planning around education. There's a shortage of education opportunities for 15-18-year olds, since the emergency context of the refugee response means that primary education has been prioritised over secondary. Some 150,000 children in the camps are still without access to any learning centers altogether.

What must be done?

In Bangladesh, BROUK calls on the government to remove all barriers imposed on the Rohingya refugees' access to education. Furthermore, it is crucial that aid groups and authorities work together to ensure that Rohingya community leaders are involved in decision making around aid and development, and that the provision of education is treated as a long-term issue.

BROUK stresses, however, that the only long-term and viable solution to the crisis lies inside Myanmar. The Myanmar authorities must immediately remove all restrictions on the human rights of Rohingya (including on access to education and freedom of movement), and grant Rohingya citizenship under national law.

“At the heart of the Rohingyas' lack of access to education are the Myanmar authorities' genocidal policies. Only when this ends will our community be able to live fulfilled life in peace where we can enjoy our human rights. It is no exaggeration to say that the Rohingya face the real prospect of extinction in Myanmar – the international community must ensure that this does not happen,” said Tun Khin.