

# Will Cox’s Bazar alone be able to bear the burden of Rohingya Refugees? We Demand Full Government Control, Localization and Accountability in Rohingya Relief Works

*Cox’s Bazar district is one of the districts of Bangladesh clearly lagged behind in many socio-economic indicators. Some local and national NGOs have been working to improve the socio-economic situations of this district. These NGOs are always fast responders to any disaster or humanitarian crises in Cox’s Bazar. As usual, in response to the recent Rohingya crisis in Cox’s Bazar, these NGOs and CSOs have come first with fast humanitarian supports. As the CSOs and NGOs working in Cox’s bazar consider the current Rohingya refugee problem as an extreme, complex and transitory problem for the people of this district, and they feel that a strong coordination is needed among the humanitarian responders, they have formed the Cox’s Bazar CSOs-NGOs Forum. The forum placed their position from a press conference held in Cox’s Bazar on 19th October, and then they also organized another press conference in Dhaka on 09th November.*

**This position paper was placed in that press conference.**

## A. Cox’s Bazar CSOs-NGOs Forum



We the NGOs i.e. CSOs working in Cox’s Bazar have formed this forum from 5 meetings since last September. Our basic objectives are: 1) To ensure coordination among us, 2) To strengthen such a Civil Society in Cox’s Bazar that

will ensure a society in here responsive human rights, gender sensitivity and refugee rights, and 3) Uphold the localization and accountability. We consider the current Rohingya refugee problem as an extreme and complex problem for the people of this district. For that reason, we are arranging this press conference. Hopefully everyone, including the government, United Nations agencies and the NGOs, can understand the importance of the proposal we are presenting.

## B. Demographic balance is under threat, Rohingya refugees should be relocated to other part of the country ensuring their basic needs

Cox’s Bazar district has a population of about 27 lakh (Civil Surgeon Office, Cox’s Bazar). The population of Ukhiya and Teknaf is around 4,71,768, (Population of Ukhiya: 207,379 and of Teknaf: 264,389, [source: Bangladesh Statistical Bureau 2013]). Meanwhile, the number of Rohingya refugees has reached more than 6 lakh. Thus, the number of population in the district

has increased by 26% to 33 lakh. It is estimated that the number of Rohingya refugees is going to be 10 lakh by the end of December 2017. That means the population of the district will be approximately 37 lakhs, which is 61.6% more than the previous population, and thus it will become the most densely populated district of Bangladesh. See an analysis table on this:

Population (Year Wise)	Bangladesh		Cox’s Bazar	
	Total Population	Density Per Sqm	Total Population	Density Per Sqm
2011	14,97,72,364	1015	22,89,990	919
2017	17,00,00,000	1152	37,00,000	1485
Population Growth rate from 2011 to 2017	13.50%		61.61%	

In 2011 the population density was 1016 per square kilometer. Besides, Cox’s Bazar population was 22,89,990 in 2011, 919 people used to live in every square kilometer.

In 2017, the total population of Bangladesh will be around 17 crore, 1152 will live in every square Kilometer. (Population and Housing 2011). In 2017, Cox’s Bazar population will be around 37 lakh, and 1485 people will live in every square kilometer. It is relatively evident that at this time, the population



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of Bangladesh is increased by 13.5% per square kilometer, but in Cox's Bazar the population would increase to 61.6%. (<http://populationof2017.com/population-of-bangladesh-2017.html>)

In the meantime, Rohingya refugees have spread to the cities of Cox's Bazar including both the Two sides of the Marine Drive and other upazilas of the district. The Mayor of the city said that the number of Rohingya people in the city might be 50-70 thousand. According to the Inter Sectoral Coordination Group (ISCG), about 100,000 Rohingya refugees have taken shelter outside the camps. That does not seem to be real case. It is a threat to the people of Cox's Bazar and Marine Drive tourism. So, our proposals are as follows:

1. Fulfilling their basic needs, the Rohingya Refugees have to move to other districts of Bangladesh.
2. Immediately, Rohingya refugees living on the sides of the marine drive, inside the city, especially in the hilly spaces, must be identified and they have to be returned to the camps.
3. Considering safety and balance issues Rohingya refugees must be kept in 5/6 camps instead of 2/3 camps.

4. Temporary Structure Based Shelters must be built since the present Tent Based Shelters have risk of health and high temperature. The type of tents they currently have is a threat during rain and storms. It should be noted that last year Cox's Bazar experienced the second highest rainfall.

### **C. Government has to take full control. The post of Relief Commissioner, Office and Manpower have to be upgraded.**

The problems of the previous 30-40 thousand refugees and current refugees are not the same. Social direction, political perspective, national security and humanitarian aid basically prove its direction. At present, the Relief Commissioner office the Deputy Commissioner and the army are trying hard to control the situation by working day and night. The refugee administration must be separated from the district administration. Government must take full responsibility and control of coordination, quality of humanitarian assistance, statistics. In this regard, our proposals include:

5. All the activities related to the refugees will be



Press conference of the Cox's Bazar CSOs-NGOs Forum, held in Dhaka on 9th November, from that press conference this Position Paper was placed.

separated from the Deputy Commissioner's office to the Relief Commissioner's office.

6. The appointment of "Secretary" level officers in the position of the Relief Commissioner will best facilitate the quality control and coordination.
7. The Relief Commissioner's office will have to add a section called information, monitoring and coordination. So that they do not have to rely on anyone for these tasks. In order to bring this situation under control, army should be deployed immediately in this section.
8. All NGOs and IGOs (International Government Organizations) involved in relief activities will have to be reportable to the office of the Relief Commissioner.

### **D. Local usual livings are under threat : We demand recovery of nature, economy and environment. Investment is must for the host community**

Already the price of essential items in Cox's Bazar city, including Ukhiya and Teknaf, has increased. The water level has dropped to more down. About 4000 acres of forest has become depleted. According to the Parliamentary Standing Committee, environmental damage is so far approximately 150 crore taka, in actual term it can be about 400 crore taka. The Rohingya communities are denied health and education in the last four decades. Their children did not get any vaccinations. Their health behavior is not adequate. The number of AIDS sufferers in Myanmar is very high, it is 8 in every thousand. Since deforestation is interrupting the roads recognized for elephants, the elephants have already started killing people. Our proposals for government and UN organizations who are engaged in relief works:

9. Quick research has to be done to identify the short term and long term loss of the natural resources, economics, health and tourism of Cox's Bazar. Based on the research findings, a long-term plan should be announced, so that people of Cox's Bazar are assured before the announcement of the next year budget.
10. The Rohingya refugees will have to be taken to other places from the place of elephant movements immediately.
11. The standard of the government hospitals in Ukhiya, Teknaf and Cox's Bazar Sadar will have to be upgraded.

12. For every project UN and non-governmental organizations must allocate minimum 20% of their aid budget for host community.
13. There were some restriction for NGOs in taking development projects in Cox's Bazar due to the issue of Refugees and others, these restrictions must be relaxed. It is to be noted that Cox's Bazar district is lagging behind compared to many other districts on various development indicators. Development organizations work with the issue of human rights, social justice and gender equality, have to be provided opportunity to work.
14. HIV / AIDS patients should get separate medical treatment. Extensive awareness should be made about this.
15. Instead of using ground water, emphasized should be given on using surface water. Water reservoir should be constructed in those areas.
16. To recover the damage caused to the environment in that area, an "Environmental Recovery Fund" should be formed with a % of fund used for development and relief activities.
17. Almost all products are being purchased from outside Cox's Bazar for the refugee assistance program. But in Cox's Bazar there are wholesalers of almost all goods; these items should be purchased from them.
18. Currently, traffic to the Naf river has been stopped due to security, so tourism in St. Martin island is also closed. For that reason, the launches of the Naf River, hotels in St. Martin, and Teknaf are closed. The extra day staying in Cox's Bazar for St. Martin tourism is also closed. As a result, the amount of damage to the economy and business is much more. Unemployment is increased. The government should revive St. Martin's tourism with adequate security.



### **E. Incomparability, complexity, and ambiguity in coordination and control: UNHCR must be given the Leadership**

Government and non-government organizations involved with the Rohingya refugee program, has to report to ISCG (Inter Sectoral Coordination Group) which is mainly lead by IOM, where local NGOs and international non-governmental organizations have to report in the name of coordination and also to be accountable to the district administration. In ISCG, local NGOs have to communicate in English. This is a kind of obstacle to the participation of local NGOs! ISCG leadership of all the Committees are leaded either foreigners or foreign officials of UN or INGOs.

ISCG has created a demand for coordination through collecting information that does not seem to be timely for long-term and national security perspective. For this reason, we propose an Information, Monitoring and Coordination section under the office of the Relief Commission to ensure the control of the government. UNHCR is responsible for refugees according to the There is lack of coordination among the district administration, the relief commission and the ISCG for the meeting convening. Almost every day a meeting is convened at ISCG, district administration office. There is also a precedent to call for a meeting of two hours' notice. Because of this, especially the local NGOs are struggling, since they are not able to afford so many staff. Therefore, considering the above situation, our proposals are:

19. In all the meetings, Bangla must be introduced as a medium of communication for the local and foreign participants.
20. All the meetings of the Deputy Commissioners will be convened in advance with prior notice. For example, there may be meetings every Thursday. At the morning of that day, the Relief Commissioner/ district administration and at the afternoon ISCG can organize meetings.
21. UNHCR must be brought to the leadership for coordination among international organizations.
22. UNHCR should be connected immediately to biometrics registration. Otherwise, the international acceptance of this biometric registration will not be strong and it will not be helpful in negotiation with Myanmar.

### **F. Possible cases of militancy origin: Opportunities for campaign on Humanity and Liberalism has to be established**

At present, after 5:30 pm, all the outsiders including the development staff are banned in refugee camps. But still recently, police found six foreigners and 11 outsiders at the evening.

Apart from Muslim helpers from different countries of the world and from different places of the country, Muslim religious people have also come to the refugees to do other work, including cash assistance and it still continues, where the government does not seem to have too much control. Rohingya refugees also made many religious institutions such as Mosque and Maktab (Islam religious

learning center) from their own initiatives. These are currently run by the same refugee community.

Rohingya refugees are mostly religious. Because decades after decade, they have been deprived of education and other modern facilities. Apparently, they had no alternate option without resorting to religion alone. In the present insecurity and hopeless situation, their sincerity towards the religious ideology and the effort to protect 'social dignity' through them is natural.

But militant organizations can use them by capitalizing these weaknesses. Instabilities can be occurred in South and Southeast Asia, including Bangladesh. Along with the Government of Bangladesh, we strongly believe that the soil of Bangladesh will not be allowed to be used by any kind of extremism, militancy and terrorist groups. People with ill intention can harbor the refugees in the wrong way. Our recommendations in the light of the above analysis:

23. All the refugee camps must be equipped with electrical lights.
24. In the special case, to facilitate the entry of non-communal and liberal development workers, and to provide knowledge or awareness based on cultural/recreational (drama, song, poet song, folk music, palanquin, dance etc.) can be allowed after the evening. Cultural organizations can work on this through local NGOs.
25. In addition to religious books in mosques and maktabas, NGOs will be given the opportunity to teach primary level educational books on teaching English, Math, Science and Rakhine language. Mid-day-meal can be introduced for children in these center.
26. 'Majhi' and 'Imam' of Rohingya refugees are the main influencers of the community. They have to be trained on alternative liberalism. '
27. Establishment of FM Community Radio can be allowed to conduct awareness program on health and all other issues.
28. So far, for all IGOs (except UNICEF), are offering only hardware based development activities for children and adolescents for protection based projects. Considering the above issues, everyone should be given the opportunity of software or awareness based projects for the development.
29. Rohingya refugees must be provided moral education along with modern education.

**G. Localization and accountability must be ensured for all relief and development programs for refugees. UN Agencies, International and National NGOs must work with partnership with the local NGOs ensuring localization and accountability instead of being directly operational.**

During 2013-2016, the declaration of the World Humanitarian Summit on the development and human rights activities is to emphasize on localization and accountability. The discussion of the implementation of this policy has been started again. All UN agencies, international NGOs, National NGOs have given their commitment towards a process of localization and accountability named Grand Bargain. Accordingly, the activities of those organizations should be changed, in order to ensure that the sovereign, accountable and sustainable development of local civil society (NGOs) at the local level is ensured. We raised these issues to Mr. Mork Lowcock, Under Secretary General and UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, when he visited Cox's Bazar. We raised the issues of the host community. We are re-presenting our suggestions in this regard:

30. All UN agencies and international NGOs must work with the partnership with the local NGOs, they must not be operational at the field level.
31. We have learned that, following the earthquake in Nepal and after the Cyclone Hyan of the Philippines, the direct work of the INGOs were legally banned. Our demand is to make such laws so that they keep 5% of the money collected by them for their own operation, and the remaining money

will be compulsively spent with the partnership with the local NGOs. Because transaction cost of INGOs is very high. The same process should be made compulsory for UN Agencies.

32. We have also noticed that though INGOs started working through the local NGOs of Cox's Bazar at the beginning of the current refugee problem, they are currently working directly on their own taking office in Cox's Bazar blaming the local NGOs of lack of capacity. It must be banned by the law.
33. Local NGO means who has been evolved locally, which leadership is from the local community.
34. The neutrality of the UN agencies and INGO staff over their own interests is questionable. We have example of many such incidents. To ensure humanitarian and dignity based behavior we demand code of conduct.
35. We demand Complaint Management Policy for all these organizations, refugees and all other people must be allowed to take the benefit of this policy.
36. UN agencies, INGO, NNGO and LNGO must publish the information about relief and development works, specially information about funds according to the IATA standard. So that local people and media can monitor and comment.
37. Inter Sector Coordination Group is mainly controlled by UN agencies and some iNGOs. In every cluster representation of local NGOs must be ensured. Many of their rules are not convincing with local conditions. In many cases, they are biased towards INGO and NGO.
38. UN agencies and INGO have to renounce their Monopolistic approach, and local NGOs must be given opportunity to work. It should be remembered that LNGOs were the first to come forward in this Relief Program and they represent the host community.
39. UN agencies and INGOs will have to hire local experts and staff rather than foreign experts.
40. At the field level local people must be employed who know local language i.e. language of Chittagong and Rohingya. We have observed that, due to lack of this type of staff communication with Rohingya people is hampered.
41. LNGOs employees cannot be tempted by INGO ad UN agencies. All those organizations and IFRC have to make Standard Price Policy. So that the local NGOs do not have to fall into uneven competition in all areas, including house rent, car and truck hiring.

## **H. Why we will take human rights help without the commitment of international political commitment? Advocacy must be strengthened to take the Myanmar government and Army to the International Court of Justice**

The problem of Rohingya refugees must not be the source of business with aid for the NGOs and INGOs. We will take as our partners only those support the demand of return of Rohingya according to the Annan Commission and the five points of our Prime Minister. The role of the ASEAN Alliance, especially in South Asia, where Myanmar is involved, is questioned.

Bangladesh is not responsible for this problem in any way. It is basically the problems imposed on Bangladesh due to the failure of international community leadership. International communities must take the responsibility of compensation. We consider the efforts of World Bank and Asian Development Bank to sell loan in the name of support for Rohingya Relief works is 'a vicious attempt to make money by capitalizing the crisis of humanity'.

We thank our Prime Minister. She has seen this problem as mainly a political and humanitarian problem since the beginning, played important role in the international level. Our foreign ministry has skilled diplomats; They have many successes so far. In this case, our demands are:

42. The government and civil society will have to take appropriate steps for research, documentation and propagation of ethnic cleansing in Myanmar. So that, the government of Myanmar and the army can be taken to the International Court. What was done in Rwanda and Czechoslovakia

in such case.

- 43. Relationship with INGOs and Countries which do not support Bangladesh on this political advocacy will have to be revised.
- 44. In order to strengthen the campaign and diplomacy, the new “cell” can be established, such kind of “cell” was set in the foreign ministry to determine the boundary of the sea economy.
- 45. It is a difficult challenge for the government and civil society of Bangladesh. Both sides will have to take long-term measures separately. Return of the Rohingya is not the only solution, It must be proved that Bangladesh takes stand against any ultra nationalism, militancy and genocide.

3/5 feet toilet, 4/6 feet banner has been stretched. Such exhibit competition has created a hostile attitude towards development organizations within the public. We would like to request all concerns to stop such “display competition” and to pay attention to the original work.

### J. Follow the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to ensure child care and their rehabilitation.

We are expressing our concern knowing various types of news that a separate house will be arranged for the children who have lost their parents. Our opinion, in this regard, children should be kept in touch with their families. In this case, we will request the government and all concerned to follow the Convention on the Rights of the Children.

### I. Stop the visibility or display competition and do the real work.

We have noticed that, some UN agencies, INGOs and NNGOs are involved in doing Self-propaganda of their work. From their clothes to the cars, there are plenty of banners in the workplace. It has been found that, for a

### We hope to make more changes and revisions in this position based on demands and opinion.



#### Cox's Bazar civil society and NGOs urged for enhanced UNHCR involvement in Rohingya crisis

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## Participating Organizations

PHALS, HELP Cox's Bazar, ACLAB, AGRAJATRA, JALABAD Foundation, POPI, ANANDO, BASTAB, NONGOR, MUKTI Cox's Bazar, YPSA, EXPEORUL, ISDI, Gono Shasthaya Kendro, ASA, COAST Trust.

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