

Signatories:
Amnesty International
UK Parliamentarians for Human Rights
Article 19
Beyond Borders Malaysia
Burma Human Rights Network
Burma Task Force
Burmese Rohingya Association in Japan
Burmese Rohingya Community in Australia
Burmese Rohingya Community in Denmark
Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK
Canadian Burmese Rohingya Organization
Canadian Rohingya Development Initiative
Coalition in Support of Refugees in Dire Need
Christian Solidarity Worldwide
European Rohingya Council
International Federation for Human Rights
Fortify Rights
Human Rights Education Centre, University of Ottawa
Human Rights Watch
Humanity Auxilium
International Campaign for the Rohingya
Human Rights Clinic, Harvard Law School
Justice For All
Kaladan Press Network
Physicians for Human Rights
Refugees International
Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights
Rohingya Action Ireland
Rohingya Association of Canada
Rohingya Human Rights Network
Rohingya Peace Network Thailand
Rohingya Post
Rohingya Refugee Network

November 12,

2019

joint letter:

**Re: Plans to
Move Rohingya
Refugees to
Bhasan Char
Island**

joint letter

To: Sheikh Hasina Wazed
Prime Minister
Old Sangsad Bhaban
Tejagaon, Dhaka-1215
Bangladesh

Sheikh Hasina Wazed

Prime Minister
Old Sangsad Bhaban
Tejagaon, Dhaka-1215
Bangladesh

Re: Plans to Move Rohingya Refugees to Bhasan Char Island

November 12, 2019

CC:

Minister of Disaster Management and Relief Enamur Rahman
Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner Mahbub Alam Talukder
U.N. Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar Yanghee Lee
U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi

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Christian Solidarity Worldwide
European Rohingya Council
FIDH - International Federation for Human Rights

Dear Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wazed,

We, the 39 undersigned organizations, welcome the recent announcement on November 3 by the Bangladesh Minister of Disaster Management and Relief Enamur Rahman to put on hold plans to relocate Rohingya refugees to Bhasan Char island and that any relocations would be voluntary.

We urge your administration to meaningfully consult Rohingya refugees on all potential solutions and plans affecting their situation and ensure relocations proceed only with their free, prior, and informed consent. We welcome the **announcement** by the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief Senior Secretary Md Shah Kamal allowing the United Nations (U.N.) to conduct a technical assessment of Bhasan Char island from November 17 to 19. We urge your administration to ensure that the assessment is made publicly available.

We recognize your leadership in providing humanitarian assistance and emergency shelter to more than one million Rohingya refugees who fled brutal attacks by Myanmar authorities in 2016 and 2017 as well as Bangladesh's role in providing protracted shelter and support to hundreds of thousands of Rohingya who previously fled persecution in Myanmar.

While we respect your government's commitment to identify alternative durable solutions for Rohingya refugees, we are concerned with the plan to relocate more than 100,000 Rohingya refugees from the camps in Cox's Bazar District to Bhasan Char island.

In particular, we are concerned that the relocations may proceed without informed consent or consultation with the affected refugee community. Bangladeshi authorities included several Rohingya refugee families on a list identifying those slated for relocation to Bhasan Char **without their knowledge** and willingness to relocate to the island. Many Rohingya refugees living in the camps in Cox's Bazar have expressed fear and opposition to the Bhasan Char relocation plans.

In January 2019, U.N. Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar Yanghee Lee **warned**, "Ill-planned relocation, and relocations without the consent of the refugees concerned, have the potential to create a new crisis." Similarly, a statement by U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees

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Rohingya Refugee Network

Rohingya Today

Rohingya Vision

Rohingya Women Development Network

Save Rohingya World-Wide

Smile Education and Development
Foundation

Society for Threatened Peoples
Germany

(UNHCR) in March 2019 [said](#), “The UN considers that any relocation to Bhasan Char must be on a voluntary basis and that refugees should have the relevant, accurate, and timely information on the project from the Government, so they can make free and informed decisions.”

We join these international experts in calling on your government to ensure relocations take place only with informed, voluntary consent by Rohingya refugees.

As noted above, it’s important the government will allow an independent assessment by the U.N. to ensure the arrangements on Bhasan Char meet international standards. Such an assessment should prioritize consideration of protection concerns for Rohingya refugees as well as the feasibility, safety, and sustainability of the arrangements. We also call upon the government to make the assessments public and available to Rohingya refugees in the camps.

With regard to developments on Bhasan Char, we understand that the Bangladesh government has overseen construction projects to accommodate Rohingya refugees on the island, including building multi-family concrete housing structures, cyclone shelters, prefab food and storage warehouses, roads, and a solar power grid. However, reflections about the accommodations by human rights and refugee experts following visits to the island remain inconclusive. For example, in January 2019, Yanghee Lee [said](#), “There are a number of things that remain unknown to me even following my visit, chief among them being whether the island is truly habitable.”

Lastly, mobile communications and the internet provide a critical means for refugees to obtain information on issues that affect their daily lives and to make plans for their future, including information related to developments on Bhasan Char. However, access to the internet remains restricted in the refugee camps since September. Furthermore, [Rohingya refugees report](#) that Bangladesh authorities have prohibited the use of mobile phones in the camps and are increasingly confiscating mobile phones from Rohingya refugees. To ensure Rohingya refugees have access to information, including necessary information on the situation in Bhasan Char, we urge your government to immediately lift restrictions on mobile and internet communications and allow Rohingya refugees be allowed to use mobile phones and SIM cards.

We thank you for your attention to these matters, and we welcome the opportunity to assist and support your administration to ensure the protection of Rohingya refugees.



