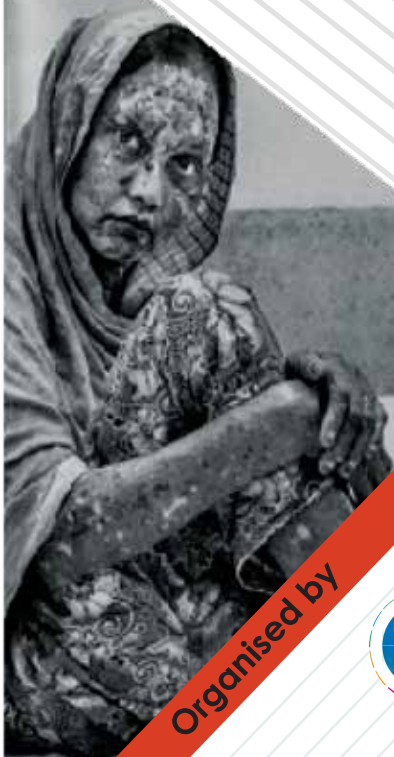


WEBINAR ON

Creating conditions for a sustainable return: Safety and compensation for Rohingya returnees

September 19, 2020

Time: 3:00 PM (Dhaka)



Organised by



It has been three years since the world watched horrific scenes of the Rohingya crisis unfold. Following attacks on Rohingya people in Myanmar in 2016 and 2017 that have been likened to ethnic cleansing, close to one million has taken refuge in Bangladesh with earlier arrivals. Bangladesh, not a signatory to the Refugee Convention, opened her border to save lives and since then has been endeavouring to feed and house the refugees and look after their health needs. Despite humanitarian assistance from the international community, Bangladesh continues to bear enormous economic, social, environmental and security related costs. Bangladesh and Myanmar concluded bilateral arrangements for Rohingya repatriation. However, lack of progress in restoring normalcy, basic services, freedom of movement and in articulating a clear pathway to citizenship led to two failed attempts on repatriation. This unresolved, protracted crisis may destabilise the region.

On the third anniversary of the crisis that killed an estimated 25,000, and saw destruction of over 100,000 homes, rape of over 20,000 women and 43,000 receive gunshot wounds, the Rohingya are now also facing a global pandemic- COVID. With inadequate hygiene facilities comprising communal washrooms, insufficient water, soap and masks, and the impossibility of social distancing in the cramped conditions, together with the toll on their health from the physical and emotional trauma, there is little hope of containing community transmission if the disease takes hold. Though infection and death rates so far are much less in comparison to the host community, there is always a risk of a catastrophic situation at the camps.

Myanmar has been using the pandemic as an excuse not to take concrete measures to create a conducive atmosphere for return and, as such, the pandemic has already dampened progress on repatriation. Additionally, the post-pandemic world, which is already experiencing greater authoritarian tendencies and an unmissable rise in nationalism, might suffer from the fatigue of unsuccessful repatriation attempts over the last two years and bilateral, regional and international diplomatic efforts may lose further momentum.

On the other hand, despite the atrocity crimes committed on the Rohingya being examined at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC), Myanmar shows no signs of respecting such international demands for accountability and meanwhile the situation of the Rohingya continues to deteriorate. While Rohingya returnees without exception ask for citizenship and recognition of their ethnicity, Myanmar shows no indication of considering such rights. A great majority

of the Rohingya in camps in Bangladesh will consider return only when their lives are safe and secure. They have very little trust in the assurances given by Myanmar authorities, who themselves were behind their persecution and deportation. As such, there is a clear imperative for external monitoring and independent mechanisms to ensure security for the returnees to Rakhine. In such a context, ideas like safe zones and external (civilian) monitoring have been broached. Myanmar has maintained total silence on these ideas too.

Similarly, some among the Rohingya have started articulating demand for compensation, beyond humanitarian assistance. This has been the focus of a recent study titled- **Rohingya mass exodus: Who should pay compensation and how much?** Compensation and reparation would also represent an incontrovertible acknowledgement of Myanmar's role in the violation of Rohingyas' human rights. If argued well, compensation might emerge as a deliverable for the international accountability process. While this will certainly help assuage hurt feelings of the Rohingya victims, the majority Rakhines and Buddhists in Myanmar are likely to have strong opposing views. As such, a discussion of compensation may further protract the Rohingya return.

This Webinar brings together experts on the Rohingya issue to explore these and other related aspects to maintain attention on the Rohingya crisis and the imperative for a conducive atmosphere for their repatriation. An international consortium of universities (Swinburne University of Technology, Australia & Laurentian University, Canada), Institution of Diploma Engineers Bangladesh (IDEB), ASA Philippines Foundation, research centres from Australia and Canada (Bangladesh Research Institute BRI, International Centre for Inter-Disciplinary Research in Law, Centre for Social Justice and Policy) and Ontario International Development Agency (OIDA) have joined to support this exploration.

The Webinar will be held on 19 September 2020 and will explore various viewpoints, including critical evaluation of the notions of: a) the safety, security and possible creation of safe zones for the returnees within Rakhine state; and b) entitlement to compensation and reparation for Rohingya victims for economic losses, injuries sustained, lost family members, and physiological trauma caused during the forced migration to Bangladesh in 2016- 2017.

We hope that you can join us for this collective reflection of major factors that could change the stalled process on repatriation and contribute towards a sustainable return for Rohingya in safety, security and dignity.