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Statelessness and the Rohingya Crisis

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“Nowhere is the link between statelessness and displacement more evident than for the Rohingya community of Myanmar, for whom denial of citizenship is a key aspect of the entrenched discrimination and exclusion that have shaped their plight for decades. Resolving their displacement in Myanmar, Bangladesh and elsewhere in the region will require an end to violence, but also a two-track approach to address the root causes of their flight: by resolving issues related to citizenship and rights, and through inclusive development that addresses the entrenched poverty affecting all communities in Rakhine State.”

Filippo Grandi
UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER
FOR REFUGEES
October 2017

Stateless in Myanmar

Approximately 1 million stateless people resided in Rakhine State prior to 25 August 2017, almost all of whom were Muslims who self-identified as Rohingya. They were born and raised in Myanmar for multiple generations, and know no other place to call home.

The Rohingya are stateless due to the restrictive provisions and application of the Myanmar citizenship law which primarily confers citizenship on the basis of race.

As a direct result of their statelessness, the Rohingya suffer serious limitations on their enjoyment of basic human rights. There is an inextricable link between the serious discrimination, marginalization, denial of a wide range of basic rights, and the deprivation of citizenship.

Establishing the conditions that would allow Rohingya refugees to return sustainably to Myanmar ultimately requires addressing their statelessness, as recommended by the Rakhine Advisory Commission.⁽¹⁾

⁽¹⁾ Final Report of Advisory Committee on Rakhine State, *Towards a Peaceful, Fair and Prosperous Future for the People of Rakhine*, August 2017, available at: http://www.rakhinecommission.org/app/uploads/2017/08/FinalReport_Eng.pdf

A Rohingya child walks through mud in Unchiprang makeshift camp in south-east Bangladesh where some 40,000 stateless refugees are living, having fled from Myanmar in October 2017.

Refugee Emergency in Bangladesh

As of October 2017, there are some 1 million Rohingya refugees in South-East and South Asia, the vast majority of whom are in Bangladesh.

On 25 August 2017, violence broke out in Myanmar's Rakhine State. Since then, over 600,000 Rohingya are estimated to have fled violence and serious human rights violations. They have also fled a situation of statelessness, which has successively deprived them of a normal life and hope for the future. As refugees, they must be protected from being returned against their will to the country they had to flee.

UNHCR is working with the Government of Bangladesh and partners to respond to the massive humanitarian needs faced by these stateless refugees – including improving sanitation conditions, shelter, providing food and water. Important protection activities also include registration to ensure that aid is targeted to those who need it most and that basic information can be captured and recorded, as it will be needed when the refugees choose to return home. They also include community-based work in which refugees themselves take ownership of the decisions that affect their lives.

For more information about what UNHCR and partners are doing to respond to the Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh and what you can do to help, please see: <http://www.unhcr.org/rohingya-emergency.html>