

## Honoring Refugees and Host Communities for Building a Better Tomorrow

### Border security & the armed forces must be urgently strengthened for dignified repatriation

**Background:** Bangladesh is currently hosting approximately 1,197,411 Rohingya people (as of 31 May 2026), the majority of whom are living in 33 camps located in Ukhiya and Teknaf of Cox's Bazar district, as well as on Bhasanchar. Although the Rohingya began crossing into Bangladesh in the 1990s, the largest and most internationally recognized influx occurred in August 2017, when widespread and systematic violence by the Myanmar military in Rakhine State forced hundreds of thousands of Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh. Despite widespread international condemnation, the crisis remains unresolved. In 2025 alone, approximately 150,000 new Rohingya arrivals entered Bangladesh. Such influxes continue due to the Myanmar government's unwillingness to recognize the rights of the Rohingya people and the ongoing persecution they face. The United Nations has described the violence against the Rohingya as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing" and has characterized it as genocide. Bangladesh is not a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol. Consequently, the Government of Bangladesh does not formally recognize the Rohingya as 'refugees. Instead, they are officially referred to as "Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals" (FDMNs).

**The influx of Rohingyas into Bangladesh is not stopping:** According to the UNHCR, from 1 January to 31 December, 141,532 newly arrived individuals (37,244 families) have been identified through the joint Biometric Identification Exercise (BIE) and issued family cards granting access to assistance, though not individual refugee identity documents. The UN's refugee agency, UNHCR, documented over 42,000 births in the camps in the first 10 months of 2024.

According to Joint Government of Bangladesh (GoB) and UNHCR population factsheet, the total Population in January 2025 was 1,005,675 and the total Population in January 2026 is 1,182,755. So, total number of Rohingya increased in last year is 177,080. Out of the total increase, the total new Rohingya arrival in Bangladesh is 141,532 from January to December 2025 and newborn babies are 35,548 in the last year as per the calculation. In the last nine years, no Rohingya have been repatriated, but new Rohingya are constantly entering.

**No progress on repatriation:** With no progress toward sustainable repatriation, these new arrivals have further intensified pressure on the already overcrowded camps

and the host communities. At the same time, humanitarian agencies have been forced to reduce assistance due to shrinking funding and resource constraints. Rohingya communities are losing hope as no meaningful progress has been made toward their safe and voluntary repatriation. What is the timeline and strategy for achieving a durable solution to the Rohingya crisis?

**Vision of Humanitarian Reset Roadmap:** A humanitarian system that is locally led and globally supported, rooted in communities and driven by greatest need. The humanitarian agencies will uphold the principles, defend humanitarian space, and put protection-especially of women and girls- at the center. By reducing duplication and bureaucracy, ending turf wars, and transitioning to locally led response, we will deliver faster, fairer, and more accountable humanitarian action. Some actions of the humanitarian reset are:

- HC (Humanitarian Coordination) and HCT (Humanitarian Country Team) will ensure the context-specific coordination models built around the needs, priorities and capacities of communities with leadership by local actors where possible.
- UN and INGOs will develop more equitable partnerships with local and national actors, based on trust and recognition.
- Operationalize the Reset principle of "**as local as possible, as international as necessary**" by embedding local leadership, representation, financing, and measurable localization targets across all levels of humanitarian action.
- Significantly increase funding to country pooled funds, with ERC aspiration of **70% of pooled funding channeled to local actors**. Strengthen the pooled funds to deliver at a more ambitious level. As per Humanitarian reset actions, we have seen the absence of implementations in most of the actions committed. The examples are given below:

**All Strategic Leaderships by UN Agencies and Absence of Local NGO Co-Leadership:** The Rohingya Coordination Platform (RCP) is chaired by the UN Resident Coordinator (UNRC) and senior UN officials. Sector coordination across Food Security, Health, WASH, Protection, Education, Livelihoods, etc., is overwhelmingly led by UN agencies. In the Rohingya

response coordination platform, there are eight major sectors. Among these, all eight sectors are led by UN agencies, while only one sector includes an INGO (Save the Children) as a sector co-lead. No sector is led by a national or local NGO. The Education Sector is led by UNICEF, with an international NGO serving as co-lead. The Food Security Sector is led by WFP, while the Health Sector is coordinated by WHO. The Livelihood and Skills Development Sector, as well as the Nutrition Sector, are both led by UNICEF. The Protection Sector is led by UNHCR, including its sub-sectors such as Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Child Protection. Similarly, the WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) Sector and the Shelter/NFI Sector are also coordinated by UN agencies. This structure clearly demonstrates that the Rohingya response coordination mechanism remains under controlled and managed by UN agencies and international actors. Although localization and locally led response are repeatedly emphasized in global humanitarian commitments specially in **Humanitarian Reset**, there is still no sector led by local or national NGOs, not even in a co-lead capacity. This indicates a significant gap between the policy commitments of the Humanitarian Reset and the practical implementation of localization in the Rohingya response.

**UN OCHA Pooled Fund Allocation Is Not Consistent with the Commitments of the Humanitarian Reset:** Recently, UN OCHA allocated US\$150 million in funding from the United States Government through the UN pooled fund mechanism. Of this amount, 92% was allocated to UN agencies, while 8% was provided to international NGOs. Although OCHA has publicly committed to increasing direct funding to local NGOs, in practice no local organization received any portion of this funding. This allocation is not consistent with the Humanitarian Reset commitment, which aspires for 70% of pooled fund resources to be channeled to local actors, thereby strengthening locally led humanitarian action and localization efforts.

**Local NGO/Actor Contribution in Rohingya Refugee Response:** Local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Cox's Bazar play a critical and multifaceted role in the Rohingya humanitarian response since the influx and often acting as the indispensable role keeping social cohesion with the affected populations. COAST is a member of APRRN (Asia Pacific Refugee Right Network, [www.aprrn.org](http://www.aprrn.org)) for more than two decades, raising voice on refugee rights in the region. Immediately after the Rohingya refugee influx in 2017, COAST started life saving relief assistance in Ukhiya and Teknaf with our own funds especially in

providing hot meals, water, mother and child health care. Like some other UNHCR local partner, COAST has significant contribution in Cox's Bazar since 2018 especially in social cohesion. COAST formed CCNF (Cox's Bazar CSO NGO Forum, [www.cxb-cso-ngo.org](http://www.cxb-cso-ngo.org)) a coalition of local NGOs for making the district responsive to refugee rights. In the last eight years, without any donor funding, COAST and CCNF did a numerous of events for promoting the rights of Rohingya refugees, which is also uphold the UNHCR mandate. Not only that, COAST has been implementing continuous campaigns and voices on Rohingya refugee rights with media coverage both in Cox's Bazar, Dhaka and in Asia Pacific region.

#### **Affected Host Community target and allocation**

**reduced in JRP:** Host communities in Cox's Bazar have faced social, economic, and environmental pressure because of the long Rohingya crisis. In the JRP 2026, the plan prepared excluding the affected host community outside of the camps. The needs of the affected host communities living outside the camps, in Ukhiya and Teknaf, were completely ignored. The NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB) issued a circular on 15 July 2019 directing that 25 to 30 percent of foreign donations should be allocated to the local affected population. However, defying this policy, the current JRP allocates only 5% of funds for the host community. This plan fails to reflect that crucial commitment for affected host community.

**Declining Sympathy and Growing Challenges:** The wave of sympathy and solidarity that characterized the initial phase of the crisis has gradually diminished over time. Various indicators suggest that host communities are increasingly reluctant to accommodate additional refugee arrivals. Security concerns have also intensified, with incidents of abduction, extortion, ransom demands, and violence occurring almost every month within and around the camps.

International attention to the Rohingya crisis has significantly declined. Beyond Bangladesh, only a limited number of countries have demonstrated sustained commitment to achieving a durable solution or have constructively engaged with the Government of Myanmar on the issue.

The Rohingya camps are located approximately 34 kilometers from Cox's Bazar town, which the Government of Bangladesh is developing as an international tourism destination. Many Rohingya refugees travel to the town in search of low-paid informal employment and daily wage labor. Law

enforcement agencies frequently attribute urban crimes and security incidents to members of the Rohingya community, further contributing to tensions and negative perceptions.

### **The Need for Social Cohesion and Project-Based Interventions:**

Until a sustainable and comprehensive repatriation process is achieved, ensuring peaceful coexistence between Rohingya refugees and host communities in Ukhiya and Teknaf remains critically important. Social cohesion is essential for maintaining long-term stability, security, and harmonious community relations in the region.

### **COAST's Leadership in Advocating for a Solution to the Rohingya Crisis:**

Apart from the Government of Bangladesh and its diplomatic missions, relatively few institutions have consistently advocated for Rohingya rights and durable solutions to the crisis. Since 2018, COAST Foundation has played a leading role in raising awareness and promoting policy dialogue at regional and international levels.

COAST has organized annual seminars at the Regional Humanitarian Partnership Week (RHPW) in Bangkok, hosted by UN OCHA, ICVA, ADRRN, and CWSA, highlighting key issues related to the Rohingya response and localization. In addition, COAST participated in the 2025 European Humanitarian Forum (EHF) in Brussels and has organized several international webinars with the active participation of Rohingya diaspora representatives, humanitarian practitioners, and policy experts. Through these engagements, COAST continues to advocate for the protection of Rohingya rights, meaningful participation of affected communities, stronger localization of humanitarian action, and the pursuit of safe, voluntary, dignified, and sustainable repatriation to Myanmar.

Historically, the Cox's Bazar border region has remained unsecured. In 1784, following the influx of thousands of refugees fleeing the Arakan Kingdom of Burma, the British East India Company appointed Captain Hiram Cox to the present-day Cox's Bazar area (then known as Palongki) to oversee their rehabilitation. He initiated efforts to resolve conflicts between the Arakanese refugees and the local Rakhine community and facilitated the settlement of the displaced population.

There are many ethnic groups in Myanmar, many of which have maintained active political and armed movements seeking autonomy or independence. These groups have continued their struggles against Myanmar Janta, and various conflicts among ethnic armed organizations have persisted in the Arakan region. Within this context, the Arakan Army emerged as a

significant force and eventually gained control over much of the Arakan (Rakhine) State.

In contrast, the Rohingya people was not a significant participant in these armed or independence movements and was unable to establish a comparable military or political force. As a result, they became particularly vulnerable and were more easily subjected to forcibly displacement from Myanmar.

**Un-secure Border:** Historically, the Cox's Bazar border has remained relatively unsecured. Even during British rule, substantial military infrastructure was not established in the area. It is often argued that if Bangladesh had possessed a more advanced and capable air force, it might have been better positioned to prevent or deter large-scale Rohingya influxes. Similarly, some contend that stronger border security could have reduced the scale of the challenges currently faced by Bangladesh.

There are also allegations that elements within Myanmar's military establishment have been involved in the production and trafficking of narcotics, particularly Yaba tablets. According to these claims, revenues generated from the narcotics trade have been used to strengthen military capabilities and finance the procurement of weapons from foreign sources.

**Recommendations:** Our demands on World Refugee Day 2026 are following:

1. **Local NGO Definition:** The definition of local NGOs must be revised. In the context of the Rohingya response, local NGOs should be defined as organizations that originated in Cox's Bazar District and whose founders or chief of the organizations are from Cox's Bazar.
2. **NGOs operating from outside Cox's Bazar should gradually phase out their direct implementation roles in the camps.** International NGOs and UN agencies should prioritize local NGOs and implement all camp-based activities through equitable partnerships with them, ensuring meaningful local leadership and ownership of the response.
3. **Representatives of local government and elected Members of Parliament should be included in the Rohingya coordination structure.** The Joint Response Plan (JRP) development process should be made more inclusive by ensuring the active participation and decision-making role of local government representatives, the District Administration, and the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC). Local challenges cannot be effectively addressed by excluding locally elected representatives from the decision-making process.

4. **We have observed a significant concentration of projects among a one/two organization.** One NGO is implementing 31 projects, while another is implementing more than 18 projects in Cox's Bazar. This reflects an imbalance in resource allocation and undermines the principle of equitable distribution. The practice of providing disproportionate funding to one or two organizations should be discontinued. The concentrated funding structure should be reformed, and resources should be distributed more equitably among other qualified local NGOs.
5. **Environmental Recovery Fund:** Sustainable natural resource management must be ensured for future generations in Cox's Bazar. To achieve this, an **"Environmental Recovery Fund"** should be established. Instead of relying primarily on groundwater extraction, water should be supplied through the treatment and distribution of water from the Naf River. At the same time, alternative water sources should be developed, including pond excavation and the promotion of surface water utilization. No waste should be left unmanaged, and effective waste management systems must be ensured. Additionally, the 300 acres of degraded land surrounding the camps should be rehabilitated and made suitable for cultivation.
6. **International NGOs and UN agencies should provide mandatory training on localization for their staff.** This will ensure that personnel understand and apply localization principles and adhere to a Code of Conduct that promotes respectful, equitable, and partnership-based engagement with local NGOs in line with recognized localization indicators and commitments.
7. As humanitarian funding declines, **local and national NGOs should be engaged** meaningfully to ensure a cost-effective and sustainable Rohingya response.
8. During his upcoming visits to Malaysia and China this June, Honorable Prime Minister Tarique Rahman should **strengthen diplomatic efforts with Malaysia, China, and ASEAN countries to advance Rohingya repatriation.**
9. As President of the 81st session of the UN General Assembly, Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr. Khalilur Rahman should leverage his **leadership and diplomacy at the international level to promote safe, voluntary, and dignified Rohingya repatriation.**
10. H.E. Mr. Hakan Fidan, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Turkey, visited Bangladesh and his press briefing on 6 June 2026 opened a new window for **foreign diplomacy on the repatriation of Rohingya.** Bangladesh should use such platforms for Rohingya Repatriation.
11. It's nearly a decade after the Rohingya exodus; there is a need for a **"Joint Repatriation Plan (JRP 2.0)"** with a clear roadmap for safe, voluntary, and dignified return.
12. We call on the Rohingya community to **promote peace, security, and well-being in the camps**, uphold the dignity of women and girls, and reject terrorism, drug trafficking, and arms dealing.
13. Rohingya youth should receive **skill development training**, allow them a **travel pass and having banking services** to engage them in income-generating activities.
14. The international community, including the United Nations and developed countries, should **increase diplomatic pressure and targeted sanctions on Myanmar.**
15. Countries maintaining arms trade and other business ties with Myanmar should reconsider these engagements, which undermine efforts toward Rohingya repatriation and **accountability of the Myanmar Junta.**
16. The **International Court of Justice should expedite its decision** on The Gambia's genocide case against Myanmar and ensure accountability for crimes committed against the Rohingya.
17. To prevent drug trafficking, ensure the protection of Bangladesh's maritime interests and Blue Economy resources, and strengthen security along the southeastern border in Cox's Bazar, it is essential to enhance the operational capacity of the **Bangladesh Army** and the **Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB).** Furthermore, the **Bangladesh Air Force** and the **Bangladesh Navy should be modernized and strengthened** to address emerging security challenges and safeguard national interests effectively. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) alone cannot provide a permanent political solution to a refugee crisis. Therefore, the Government of Bangladesh, together with the Rohingya community, should take proactive initiatives and assume greater responsibility in pursuing a sustainable and voluntary repatriation process.