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## “I DON'T KNOW HOW MY FUTURE WILL BE WITHOUT EDUCATION”

### BANGLADESH

*By **Mohammad Zubair, a Rohingya youth activist**, who shares how access to education can empower his community to speak up for their rights.*

Mohammad Zubair, 18, is a Rohingya youth activist and humanitarian worker who lives in the Balukhali refugee camp in Ukhiya with 10 family members. He was studying in grade 10 at the Maung Daw Aley Than Kyaw high school in Myanmar's Northern Rakhine state when violence broke out in August 2017. Zubair's three brothers and four sisters were also all going to school in Myanmar. On 1 September 2017, he arrived in Bangladesh with his family on a boat.

It is difficult for 10 people to live in a shelter of 140 square feet that is equivalent to the size of one room in a house. The only thing that has been consistent in the life of Zubair and his family since they arrived in the refugee camp has been living in a permanent state of crisis and uncertainty whether that is with respect to – food, space, or education.

“When I was in Myanmar, at least I was able to study, but in Bangladesh, I have lost that opportunity,” says Zubair. With each passing day, Zubair feels that his life is pushed deeper into uncertainty. Humanitarian organizations have created about 3,200 “learning centres” where about 315,000 Rohingya children have access to basic and informal education but there is no proper curriculum. According to UNICEF, there are more than 400,000 school-age Rohingya children between 3 to 18 years old in the refugee camp.

In January 2020, Bangladesh announced that Rohingya children would have an opportunity to study the Myanmar curriculum, initially between grades 6 and 9 as they transition from the existing informal education program. According to UNICEF, the initial program was scheduled to be piloted with 10,000 children in the first half of the year, with provision to scale up and expand to more children across other grades.

However, the emergence of COVID-19 and restriction on activities to only “critical services” in the camps have not only shut down existing learning facilities but delayed implementation of the Myanmar curriculum.

Zubair would have been due to finish his matriculation in April 2018. He said, the discrimination against Rohingyas in Myanmar is such that they would not receive high scores in examinations, and therefore would not be able to go to college or university, and on the

rare occasion that some of them complete their graduation, they would [struggle](#) to find a job. “The [Myanmar] government wanted us to stay uneducated. Denying our rights was a strategy of the government...But I didn't give up,” says Zubair.

He loves English literature but chose biology in class 9 so that he could become a doctor. “There is no opportunity for Rohingya people to go to a hospital for treatment in Myanmar. I aspire to become a doctor so that I can treat the people of my community. I don't know how my future will be without education.”

Zubair is among more than 740,000 Rohingyas who arrived in the refugee camps three years ago. Since then he has lost three academic years.

“Without education, we have no hold on our lives. Education can prevent bad decisions, develop our community and let us speak for our rights. Please don't hate us. We don't want to be a burden. Allow us to study and work, so that we do not have to beg,” says Zubair.

Bangladesh's government must ensure that COVID-19 does not become a reason to further deprive the Rohingya children of their right to access education. The international community must support the Bangladeshi authorities with funds and resources to implement the Myanmar curriculum of education.

*This article was originally published in September 2020 in the briefing “[Let us speak for our rights](#)”.*