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## Plan to relocate hundreds of Rohingya to remote island must be dropped

### Bangladesh

The Bangladeshi authorities must abandon plans to relocate more than 100 Rohingya families to a remote island in the Bay of Bengal which has not yet been declared safe for human habitation by the United Nations and where many refugees are still reluctant to relocate, said Amnesty International.

According to local media reports, the Bangladeshi government has completed preparations to relocate 300 to 400 Rohingya refugees to the silt island of Bhashan Char this month on a “voluntary basis”. Rohingya refugees, interviewed by Amnesty International this month, said that government officials in charge of refugee camps in Cox’s Bazar have coerced them into registering for relocation.

Amnesty International has obtained a partial list of the Rohingya families identified for relocation to Bhashan Char, where more than 300 Rohingya refugees are already living in poor conditions.

“Aside from the fact that Bhashan Char has not been deemed safe for human habitation by the UN, there are serious questions over this relocation procedure. Many of the Rohingya we have spoken to have not given full and informed consent to being moved to an island they know nothing about,” said Omar Waraich, Head of South Asia at Amnesty International.

“Any decisions relating to the relocation of refugees must be transparent and involve the full participation of the Rohingya people. In the meantime, plans for any further relocations must be abandoned. The Bangladeshi authorities must let the UN carry out an assessment of Bhashan Char and immediately return the hundreds of Rohingya refugees currently on the island to their families in Cox’s Bazar.”

A Rohingya woman on the list told Amnesty International that she has registered to go to the island because her husband is there. As a single parent with a young child and without any relatives in the camp, she has been facing many problems. “It’s very difficult to live this refugee life. I don’t have any other option. It seems that the government will never allow my husband to get out of the island,” she said.

Two Rohingya families were put on the list for relocation after they reported partial damage of their shelters to the *majhi* - a Rohingya community leader, selected by the Bangladeshi authorities in most of the camps - and government officials in charge of the refugee camps. Instead of having their shelters repaired, they were told that they must relocate to Bhashan Char.

“I requested many times to the NGOs and CIC (camp authority) for support to fix my shelter. We are still having difficulty staying in the shelter. They are not helping me to relocate within the camp or to other camps,” said the head of one Rohingya family. The head *majhi* in his camp told him that debts he had incurred to feed his family and pay for his wife’s medical treatment would be cleared if he relocated. “I decided to register for the relocation as I have no other option,” he said.

One member of a family said that he registered to relocate to the island in 2019, after being deprived of relief support by the *majhi* in his camp. “I wanted to relocate to the island at that time to escape from a society where some powerful people were discriminating against the poor. The *majhis* were abusing their power on me. But the problem is resolved now,” said the 33-year-old head of a five-member family who believes that the government will not forcibly relocate anyone to the island. He is, however, on the list prepared this month by the government official in charge of the refugee camp.

A head *majhi* told Amnesty International that government officials in charge of camps put pressure on them to provide lists of refugees to be relocated.

“Based on the experiences of those that Amnesty International has spoken to, many of the Rohingya who have signed up to relocate to Bhashan Char are doing so out of compulsion rather than choice,” said Omar Waraich.

“Bangladesh has demonstrated commendable generosity in hosting nearly a million Rohingya refugees. Rather than hasty relocations that leave both Bangladesh and the Rohingya in further limbo, this protracted situation requires the local, international and Rohingya community to work together to find a sustainable solution.”

Amnesty International is also calling for unfettered access to Bhashan Char for rights and humanitarian organizations to carry out independent assessments.

## Background

Amnesty International interviewed five family members who represent 23 refugees on the list for relocation.

In September 2020, Amnesty International released the briefing [‘Let Us Speak for our Rights’](#), which outlines how exclusion from decision-making is impacting the human rights of Rohingya refugees. The briefing includes a section on the [conditions for Rohingya in Bhashan Char](#).

A United Nations technical and protection assessment, which has been pending since November 2019, seeks to determine the “safety and sustainability” of the island, “safety and security” of the humanitarian staff, “protection” of human rights of refugees, “sustainable livelihood” opportunities and “logistics & accessibility” with regards to food and supplies.