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### **Written statement\* submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[25 May 2018]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

## **Current Situation of the Rohingya and the Sexual Violence against Rohingya Women and Young Girls**

The ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya people is one of the most pressing problem in world politics. The Rohingya are described as ‘the world’s most persecuted community’ by the United Nations. Despite the fact that the Rohingya’s homeland is Myanmar, the Myanmar government denies this. Hence, within Myanmar whose mainstream religion is Buddhism, they are politically, socially, and religiously considered as illegal immigrants, referred to as ‘Bengalis’. There has always been a severe discrimination and persecution toward the Rohingya in Myanmar. However, on 25<sup>th</sup> August of last year, when the outbreak of military crackdown took place, the extent of human rights violation was exceedingly grave. As a result, around 6,700 people have died alone in the first month after the crackdown and the Rohingya fled to neighboring countries such as Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, and Malaysia.

Since last August, more than 800,000 Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh to avoid military attacks and human rights violation by the Myanmar government in order to protect themselves. Tragically, however, it was just another crisis within the crisis. First, in response to a huge number of arriving Rohingya, the Bangladesh government has been pushing ahead an initiative to relocate 100,000 Rohingya to an island named Bhashan Char. This initiative poses serious problems; the island is isolated and is extremely vulnerable to environmental conditions. The Rohingya would be left totally dependent on outside aid. Moreover, an agreement between Myanmar and Bangladesh to repatriate the Rohingya to Myanmar has too little impact. The Myanmar government will accept only 1,500 Rohingya within two years. This is mainly because the Myanmar authorities require proof of past residence in Myanmar which most of the Rohingya do not possess. Moreover, even if they go back to the country, they are the least welcome by both citizens and the government. Their safety is not guaranteed nor do their legal status is ensured, leaving the Rohingya all the same in great peril.

However, the most severe human rights violation lies in the sexual violence against the Rohingya women by soldiers and local people. Sexual trafficking is prevalent in Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh. Most perpetrators work in secret but well-organized groups of network in order not get caught. Girls from 12 to 17 years become the main targets. Women are either kidnapped, threatened, or deceived by the offer from local people to do domestic work that is unpaid. According to the BBC news, main methods traffickers use to trade for sex were the so-called dark web on the internet and offline network of brokers, transporters, and pimps concentrated in Cox’s Bazar. Most of the girls are lost and cannot be found afterwards. Rohingya girls were taken not only within Bangladesh but also to Kathmandu in Nepal and Kolkata in India. The biggest tragedy lies in the fact that no one, including the police, is either willing or able to help them, since the Rohingya are de-facto stateless. 720,000 Rohingya children in Bangladesh and Myanmar are left in dire need of humanitarian assistance and protection.

Furthermore, rape by soldiers takes place uncontrollably in refugee camps. More than half of the refugees are women and children in the refugee camps. This makes it even more likely for women and young girls to become a target for sexual violence and rape. According to the organization Doctors without Borders, 2.6 percent of women and girls died from sexual violence only between 25 August and 24 September 2017. Plus, according to the UNICEF, 16,000 babies were born in the

camps since last September. This is the result of 60 babies being born every day in refugee camps in Bangladesh. With the current trend, 48,000 women are expected to give birth only in the refugee camps in Bangladesh this year. Most of the mothers hide their pregnancy either due to the shame or fear that the baby will be abandoned after they are born or die due to lack of healthcare.

Both the mothers and babies are greatly exposed to health risks after giving birth, because of the poor situation in refugee camps. The mothers give births mostly in secret and without proper medical care on the unsanitary floors of bamboo shacks. In addition, newborn babies have no legal identification. This is a grave problem. With no birth registration and legal status, they will have trouble accessing the vital basic services they are entitled to, e.g. the exclusion from health care, social security, and education. This also indicates that they will be restricted from free movement, and excluded from repatriation to Myanmar, unless the Myanmar government amends the law. Also children with no legal identification face extreme difficulties in reuniting with their parents when they are lost or separated from their parents. This accelerates vicious cycle of the current nightmare. The majority of the Rohingya have no legal identification or supporting document from the Myanmar government. They are disowned by their motherland and the Myanmar authorities even excluded people with no identification from its repatriation plan. In such a situation, newborns are another extension of the Rohingya crisis.

Newborn refugee children by mothers who were raped are living proof of crimes against humanity perpetrated on a mass scale. Atrocities by Myanmar military have been proven clearly now.

Therefore, **Society for Threatened Peoples** calls on the Human Rights Council to urgently ask the Myanmar government and all departments concerned to pause the repatriation process at a time when still 70 to 120 Rohingya flee from their home country to the neighboring states and to only continue with the repatriation plan if and **when the following conditions are met:**

- The involvement of the UNHCR in the whole process of repatriation must be guaranteed.
- Repatriation must be completely voluntary and the physical safety of returnees has to be guaranteed.
- The Myanmar government needs to recognize the Rohingya as one of the official ethnicities in Myanmar and grant them full citizenship ensuring them the ensuing rights and freedom without further discrimination and oppression as well as abolish the Myanmar Citizenship Law of 1982.
- The Rohingya need to be allowed to have representatives who are going to be involved in the repatriation process.
- The state of Myanmar must create demilitarized UN safe zones in the Rakhine State to ensure safety and dignity for the returnees.
- The Myanmar government must compensate all material losses of the Rohingya which were caused by the military attacks, all lands, and properties have to be given back to them as well as there needs to be clear confirmation from the Myanmar government to rebuild the villages destroyed.
- The Myanmar government has to provide unhindered access for humanitarian aid agencies to all parts of the Rakhine State.
- The Myanmar government must give full access to any of the investigation requested upon the third party or state.

**Furthermore, Society of the Threatened People also calls on the Human Rights Council:**

- To urge the Myanmar government to resume its cooperation with the UN and its special rapporteur Yanghee Lee.
  - To press the Myanmar government to release the journalists Wa Lone and KyawSoe Oo.
  - To encourage political and economic sanctions by its member states to raise the pressure on the Myanmar government.
  - To engage in a full criminal prosecution of the human rights violations in Myanmar.
  - To embark on a thorough investigation into sexual violence and rape taking place in Rohingya refugee camps.
  - To support the victims in a multi-dimensional level which includes psychological treatment, medical support, and social support.
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