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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

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.

[11 February 2019]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

Situation of the Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar

A brutal crackdown of the Myanmar military against the Muslim Rohingya in Rakhine state forced more than 750,000 Rohingya to flee their homes to Bangladesh since August 2017. The extremely grave human right violations on the hands of the Myanmar military are not to be seen as occasional incidences, but as targeted persecution – as attempts to wipe out at least parts of the Rohingya community. Though the Muslim Rohingya community has lived in Myanmar for a long time, a 1982 citizen law stripped the Rohingya of their citizenship. Most Rohingya are stateless.

In 2018, the New York Times reported that Burma's army was using Facebook for a systematical hate campaign against the Rohingya. According to extensive research by the newspaper, the army had carried out a targeted campaign in which up to 700 personal accounts were used to spread prejudice and hatred against the minority among the 18 million Facebook users in the country. Further, the population was warned that the country was about to be taken over by Muslims. The army had opened hundreds of false accounts in order to promote the exclusion of the Rohingya and to incite attacks against them. In 2014/2015, scientists, IT experts, and human rights activists had already informed Facebook about the widespread misuse of the network in connection with hate messages against the Rohingya. However, the company had acted hesitantly and completely inadequately – ignoring the true extent of its abuse.

More than a year after the mass exodus, there is still a lack of perspective for a voluntary repatriation of the Rohingya to their homeland of Myanmar. The living conditions for Rohingya in the refugee camps in Bangladesh are extremely difficult. The refugee camps of Cox's Bazar are located right on the border with Myanmar. Most of the refugees came here with nothing after they had fled Northern Rakhine state.

Situation of Rohingya IDPs still living in Myanmar

There are still Rohingya IDPs living in Myanmar. Following clashes between Buddhist Rakhine and Muslim Rohingya in 2012, around 140,000 people were forced to leave their villages in Rakhine State. While the authorities sent back approximately 20,000 Rakhine to their settlements – promising comprehensive support for necessary reconstruction work – around 121,000 Rohingya are still living in camps in and around the city of Sittwe. There have not been any credible initiatives to repatriate the members of this persecuted Muslim minority. Their situation is steadily worsening. Conflicts between Rohingya in these camps are increasing at an alarming rate. During the year 2018, several violent incidents among Rohingya caused the death of 22 Rohingya inside the camps. The return to their homes right now is not a realistic option for Rohingya because they are justifiably afraid of further atrocities by the Myanmar army.

Bashan Char Island is not a human option for Rohingya refugees

We fear that the Bangladesh government is still planning to bring tens of thousands of Rohingya to the Island of Bashan Char. The island does not meet any preconditions for a human environment. The Forests Division of Bangladesh has confirmed that there is a high risk of natural hazards such as floods, cyclones or attacks by bandits. On Bashan Char Island, the tight space and low hygienic standards could cause epidemics. The refugees forced to live there would be completely isolated from the outside world. Their freedom of movement would be nonexistent, since the island is more than three hours away from the mainland. A relocation to Bashan Char would cause further traumatization of the Rohingya refugees.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the UN Human Rights Council to call on the government of Myanmar to:

- Immediately end the persecution against the Muslim Rohingya and reinstate their Myanmar citizenship.
- Make sure that any repatriation includes acknowledgement of the security concerns of refugees.
- Work together with the International Criminal Court and the IIIM in order to ensure that impunity for crimes against humanity and genocide ends. The perpetrators of these crimes must be brought to court.
- Release the Reuters journalists who had been investigating a massacre by Myanmar's army against the Rohingya from prison.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the UN Human Rights Council to call on the government of Bangladesh to:

- Stop its plans to relocate Rohingya refugees to Bashan Char Island.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the UN Human Rights Council to call on the international community to:

- Increase its support for the Bangladesh government in ensuring the well-being of Rohingya refugees.
 - Increase pressure on the Myanmar government in order to stop systematic crimes against the Muslim Rohingya.
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