

# Rohingya Refugees Escaping from Genocide in Myanmar



## Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

Most of the world has forgotten the genocide being perpetrated against the Rohingya in Arakan State in Myanmar (Burma).

The Rohingya are a Muslim minority in Myanmar. Though they have resided in Arakan State for many generations, they have frequently been oppressed and persecuted by both the Buddhist majority government and the local Arakan Army, which is also in conflict with the central government. The most recent wave of violence began in 2017 with organized destruction of Rohingya homes and razing of entire villages. Thousands of Rohingya were killed, and many of their bodies were buried in mass graves. This horrendous crackdown has been described as a war crime and genocide. In the eight years since this violence began, there has been a massive exodus of Rohingya fleeing the country. There are more than one and a half million Rohingya struggling to survive in crowded refugee camps in Bangladesh.

Conditions in these camps, the largest in the world, are, to say the least, inadequate, and, with recent reductions in funding from the United Nations, largely due to President Trump's suspension of USAID, the situation has become dire. The suspension of U.S. support has had an outsized and immediate impact, threatening both emergency relief and longer-term prospects for stability. In addition, other countries, including the United Kingdom and Germany have announced their own cuts. Al Jazeera has reported that, since the beginning of this year, food rations have been cut from \$12 a month to \$8 a month to \$6 a month, basically half, and that, at that level, since they can't afford any fish or chicken, they are surviving on just pulses and rice.

Recent aid cuts have forced health clinics to suspend all non-emergency medical services and to reduce support for mental health care, GBV prevention, and services for people with disabilities. It is estimated that more than 300,000 people have been affected by the loss of medical services. Patients with chronic illnesses, in need of prenatal care, or suffering from any non-life-threatening conditions have to seek treatment and to obtain prescriptions, if they can afford it, outside the camps. Plans to provide Hepatitis C treatment to 7,000 people through the World Health Organization have reportedly been put on hold due to the aid freeze.

Of course, educational programs are also in jeopardy. All of the schools set up by the refugees themselves are in dire need of funds to maintain their buildings, to provide books and supplies to the students, and to offer snacks or meals to allow them to continue their studies.



## Sri Lanka

There are two groups of Rohingya refugees in Sri Lanka. The first group of Rohingya, rescued by the Sri Lankan Navy several years ago, have been granted temporary asylum and are staying in Panadura, south of Colombo. The second group, rescued by the Navy in December 2024, are still being held in an Air Force base in Mullaitivu, near Trincomalee. The fate of this group has not yet been decided, and there have been several rallies urging the Sri Lankan Government not to deport them back to Myanmar, where they would be certain to suffer further persecution.

Those in Panadura had, until this year, been receiving a stipend from UNHCR, but, with the closure of the office in Colombo, that stipend was cancelled, and they are struggling. Without legal residence, they cannot find adequate employment, and the children are not eligible to attend public school. Furthermore, they face discrimination in housing arrangements. They are barely subsisting, primarily on private donations. Given our long relationship with Burma (Myanmar), as well as our involvement with refugees, both Indochinese and Burmese, Buddhist Relief Mission would like to help both the refugees in Sri Lanka and those in the camps in Bangladesh.

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