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EXAMINING THE PRESENT SITUATION OF ROHINGYA PEOPLE

ROHİNGYA HALKININ MEVCUT DURUMUNUN İNCELENMESİ

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ÖZET

Myanmar'ın Rohingya halkı, ata yurtları Myanmar'ın Rakhine Eyaleti olan, dünyanın en çok zulüm gören halklarından biri olarak kabul ediliyor. Myanmar hükümeti onlara yıllardır zulmediyor. Hükümet 1982 yılında onların vatandaşlıklarını iptal etti. Mevcut Rohingya krizinin 2017'de başlamasının ardından Myanmar güvenlik güçleri, diğer insanların da belgelediği gibi, onlara karşı insanlığa karşı suçlar ve soykırım işledi. Sonuç olarak Myanmar, Uluslararası Adalet Divanı'nda (UAD) Gambiya tarafından açılan bir soykırım davasıyla karşı karşıya. Daha sonra 2022 yılında ABD, Myanmar'ın Rohingya'lara yönelik zulmünü soykırım olarak resmen tanıdı. Şu anda Myanmar'dan kaçan çok sayıda Rohingya Bangladeş'te yaşamaktadır. Bazıları da Myanmar'da yaşamaktadır. İkincil verilere dayanan bu çalışma, Bangladeş ve Myanmar'da yaşayan Rohingya halkının mevcut durumunu incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma, Rohingya halkının şimdiye kadar farklı zorluklara karşı karşıya olduğunu göstermektedir. Yaşamları daha az korunmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Rohingya, Rohingya krizi, Bangladeş, Myanmar, mevcut durum

ABSTRACT

The Rohingya people of Myanmar are considered one of the most persecuted people on earth, whose ancestral home is Rakhine State, Myanmar. The Myanmar government has been persecuting them for years. In 1982, the government revoked their citizenship. Following the beginning of the current Rohingya crisis in 2017, Myanmar's security forces have engaged in crimes against humanity and genocide against them, as other people have documented. As a result, Myanmar is facing a genocide case in the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which the Gambia has filed. Later, in 2022, the US officially recognized Myanmar's persecution of Rohingya as genocide. Now, a large number of Rohingya people who fled Myanmar are living in Bangladesh. Some are living in Myanmar. This study, based on secondary data, aims to examine the present situation of Rohingya people living in Bangladesh and Myanmar. The study shows that, till now, Rohingya people are facing different challenges. Their lives are less protected.

Keywords: Rohingya, Rohingya crisis, Bangladesh, Myanmar, present situation

1. Introduction

The Rohingya people of Myanmar are considered one of the most persecuted people on earth (Islam, 2020: 01). For years, they have been oppressed systematically by the Myanmar government continuously. After independence, the military government of General Ne Win adopted discriminatory policies against Rohingya. For example, the government made joining the civil service difficult for Rohingya. Besides, Rohingya were disqualified for military service (Alam, 2018: 08). In 1978, Myanmar authorities conducted an operation named Nagamin operation to determine the citizenship of the people. Immigration officials and soldiers carried out the brutal operation. As a result of the operation, more than 200,000 Rohingya people fled Rakhine state to Bangladesh (Lee, 2021: 69, 70). During the initial eight months of the exodus, an estimated 10,000 Rohingya people died (Wade, 2019: 92). In 1982, the government enacted the Burma Citizenship Law (1982), which deprived the Rohingya of their civil, political, and economic rights (Lee, 2021: 72). During the official censuses in 1973 and 1983, they were not enumerated. In 2014, during the census, because of the threat of Buddhist nationalists, the government denied Rohingya people being identified as Rohingya. As a result, they stayed out of the enumeration (Alam, 2019: 03). In 2015, Buddhist nationalists protested against President Thein Sein's administration's plan to allow holders of temporary identity cards to cast ballots in the constitutional referendum. In the face of considerable pressure, the authority decided to revoke the temporary identity cards in February 2015, which caused the annulment of the Rohingya Muslims' voting rights (Kipgen, 2019: 3).

In August 2017, to avoid large-scale persecution by the military, a mass exodus of Rohingya into Bangladesh occurred. The United Nations described the situation as "one of the world's worst humanitarian and human rights crises" (Vu & Lynn, 2020:

01). The 2018 report by the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM), commissioned by the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC), determined that Myanmar is responsible for committing acts of genocide against the Rohingya population. The report also demanded the arrest and legal prosecution of several high-ranking generals (Islam, 2020: 02). The UN investigators blamed Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's de facto civilian leader, for failing to use her position and "moral authority" to protect Rohingya civilians. They accused her civilian government of blocking independent investigations and destroying crime sites and evidence (UNHRC, 2018: 388).

2. Research Aim and Method

This article aims to examine the present situation of Rohingya people living in Bangladesh and Myanmar following the start of the Rohingya crisis in 2017. To do this, it discusses the living conditions in the Rohingya camps and other challenges faced by Rohingya people in their daily lives. The article also sheds light on the attitudes of the Bangladesh and Myanmar governments toward Rohingya people. Secondary data was used to conduct this research. The author has examined existing reports from the United Nations, non-governmental organizations, and the news media. Additionally, he has examined articles, scholarly publications, and academic studies.

3. Literature Review

Kudrat-E-Khuda (2020) discussed the effects and difficulties faced by Bangladesh as a result of providing shelter to the Rohingya refugees after the Rohingya crisis of 2017. Talukder (2022) examined the economic impact of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh since the exodus in 2017. Arslan, Islam, Nahar, and Cansu (2022) evaluated Türkiye's role as a humanitarian actor in supporting Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and Myanmar. Joarder, Sutradhar, Hasan, and Bulbul (2020) reviewed the work concerning the health condition of the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. Islam (2022) discussed the political interests of the political parties in Bangladesh, especially those in power, in their decision to either welcome or not host Rohingya refugees. Alam (2019) studied the present Rohingya crisis from a historical perspective. MacLean (2019) analyzed Myanmar's policies and strategies to wipe out Rohingya people from their ancestral land. Haque and Islam (2023) examined Bangladesh's Rohingya repatriation efforts and the obstacles it faced in doing so. Anwary (2022) researched the application of sexual assault against women as a tool in the Rohingya genocide in Myanmar. This research discusses the present situation of the Rohingya people.

4. Identity of Rohingya

Rohingya usually use the phrase 'from time immemorial' to refer to the prolonged presence of their predecessors in the present Rakhine state (Lee, 2021: 13). Here it is worth mentioning that, before 1974, Rakhine state was known as Arakan state (Islam, 2020: 01). Based on the existing evidence, it is indicated that a group of

people who spoke an Indo-Aryan language came from northern India to Arakan approximately in 3000 BC. The modern-day Rohingyas can be associated with this group, and by 1000 AD, they had predominantly embraced Islam, and their language had assimilated many influences from their trade activities across the Bay of Bengal, resulting in significant divergence from its original form (Ibrahim, 2019).

Rohingya people are the followers of the Sunni tradition of Islam. They take pride in their Muslim roots (Ahmed & Mohiuddin, 2019: 11). The advent of Islam has occurred in Arakan in different phases. In the eighth century, Arab traders came to Arakan after their ship was wrecked on the bank of the Rumbee River. They were the first Muslims to come to the area. Then, in 1430, another group of Muslims arrived in Arakan when the ousted Arakanese King Mun Shaw Moon, also known as Normikhla, reclaimed his throne by defeating the Burmese king with the assistance of 30,000 Mughal soldiers, who were mostly Muslims. More than 200 years after that incident, in 1660, Mughal prince Shah Suja and his followers took shelter in Arakan. Later, he was killed due to the conspiracy of the Arakanese King. However, his soldiers, who were Muslims, were permitted to live in Arakan. They married locals, and their successors are Muslims (Uddin, 2019: 1578, 1579).

When it comes to traditions and customs, Rohingya Muslims are distinct from those of other Rakhine ethnic groups. As Muslims, their practices bear resemblance to those practiced in mainly Muslim nations. Men primarily fulfill the role of providing financial support for the family, and women manage household affairs. Following marriage, women depart their paternal residences and are regarded as members of their husbands' family. The food practices of Rohingya include rice, fresh and dried fish, potatoes, vegetables, rice noodles, chicken, milk, and chillies. During the religious festivals, they also eat meat. As Muslims, they stay away from haram foods like pork. Both men and women of the Rohingya community wear a sarong, also known as a longyi. It is a sizable piece of fabric that is typically wrapped around the waist. Women also put on burqas and hijabs (Ahmed & Mohiuddin, 2019: 14, 15).

5. Background of the Rohingya Crisis of 2017

The latest Rohingya crisis started in August of 2017. In the early hours of 25 August 2017, a Rohingya insurgent group named Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) launched coordinated attacks on 30 police posts and an army base in the north of Myanmar's Rakhine state, in the townships of Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Rathedaung. The insurgents used hand-held explosive devices, machetes, and a few small arms to carry out attacks. They killed ten police officers, a soldier, and an immigration official. Besides, 77 insurgents were also killed and one captured (International Crisis Group, 2017: 01). After the attacks, the government officially designated ARSA as a "terrorist group," and the president permitted the Myanmar military to label certain areas of northern Rakhine State as a "military operations area." Then, the military conducted operations (Amnesty International, 2018: 141). They committed widespread crimes against the Rohingya people, as documented by international organizations. These atrocities included murder, torture, rape, and the

deliberate damage of property, among other offenses. Within a short period, more than 700,000 Rohingyas sought refuge in Bangladesh (Vu & Lynn, 2020: 03).

According to an estimation by Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), over 6,700 Rohingya Muslims, including a minimum of 730 children under the age of five, were killed within the month following the start of the military crackdown. Among the killed, 69% were murdered by shooting, while others were burned and beaten to death. (McPherson, 2017: 01-04). United Nations human rights chief Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein called the persecution by the Myanmar military of Rohingya Muslims "a textbook example of ethnic cleansing" (Gowen, 2017: 01). In a report, the human rights organization Amnesty International wrote that the crimes committed by the Myanmar security forces against Rohingya people amounted to crimes against humanity. It appears that high-ranking military officers were actively involved in the supervision of the operations in northern Rakhine State that were marked by crimes against humanity. Several senior officers, including Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services, visited Rakhine State from mid-August to late September 2017 to be briefed or to supervise operations (Amnesty International, 2018: 14, 140). In this context, in November 2019, the Gambia filed a Rohingya genocide case against Myanmar in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) (Dagba & Nyadera, 2022: 330). On March 21, 2022, the U.S. declared that Myanmar had committed genocide against the Rohingya people (Borger, 2022: 01).

6. Present Situation of the Rohingya People

The situation the Rohingya people have gone through in the past and the situation they are going through now is not appropriate. They are suffering inside and outside of their homeland. Their basic needs are not met appropriately. Their lives are less secure when it comes to the security of life. In the following discussion, the present situation of the Rohingya people will be discussed.

6.1 Unsecured Sheltering in Refugee Camps

In Bangladesh-Myanmar border refugee camps, about a million Rohingya refugees live in dangerous conditions. Their shelters are weakly built; inside, they feel intense heat and no ventilation. Most refugees reside in densely populated temporary shelters located in Cox's Bazar and Bandarban. (Karin, Chowdhury, Hasnat, & Tarin, 2020: 02). Arson and fire are common incidents in refugee camps. Since 2019, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has been recording fire incidents affecting Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar. From April to November 2019, 35 fires affected over 80 shelters of Rohingya people. Over the same period in 2020, 47 fires harmed 3146 individuals from 700 shelters. Fortify Rights reported 86 fires in January–April 2021 (Quiroz, Walls, Chamberlain, Tan, & Milke, 2023: 02). According to a report published by the Bangladesh government in February 2023, the Rohingya camps witnessed 222 fire incidents, including 60 cases of arson, between January 2021 and December 2022 (Ratcliffe, 2023: 06).

The fire incident on 22 March 2021 is notable among these fire incidents. That day, fire engulfed the Rohingya refugee camp of Balukhali in Cox's Bazar district. At least 15 Rohingya died, and hundreds went missing because of the fire (Graham-Harrison, 2021: 01). Besides, UNHCR reported that more than 550 people were injured and about 45,000 were displaced. At least 10,000 makeshift shelters were destroyed ("Rohingya Refugee Camp," 2021: 06). Due to the barbed wire fence in the refugee camp, the number of lives lost by Rohingya refugees increased in this fire incident (Graham-Harrison, 2021: 02). Two years later, on 5 March 2023, again fire broke out in the Rohingya refugee camp in Cox's Bazar. There were no casualties. However, the fire destroyed some 2,800 shelters and made 15,000 Rohingya refugees homeless. Government investigators said the fire was planned (Ng, 2023: 02).

6.2 Victims of Disasters

Rohingya refugees are victims of disasters like floods and landslides. In 2021, in the last week of July, heavy monsoon rains began and lasted for days. As a result, flash flooding and landslides damaged the fragile shelters of Rohingya refugees living in Cox's Bazar. At least 21,000 refugees were displaced in refugee camps (Ahmed, 2021: 03). In one incident, on July 27, 2021, heavy monsoon rains caused landslides and flooding in Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, killing six Rohingya refugees, including children (Paul & McPherson, 2021: 01). After this, about 10,000 refugees were relocated to safe places ("Bangladesh Evacuates," 2021: 01). About two years later, in March 2023, three Rohingya workers were killed in a landslide while cutting a mountain at lower wages in Cox's Bazar. They were employed by two men who were engaged in selling soil and sand by illegally cutting hills ("3 Rohingyas Killed," 2023: 2). In the same year, two and a half months later, powerful Cyclone Mocha stroked the coastlines of Bangladesh and Myanmar. (Vaidyanathan, 2023: 01). At that time, there were no cyclone centers at Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar to take shelter (Antara, 2023: 02). The cyclone destroyed hundreds of makeshift shelters for refugees (Vaidyanathan, 2023: 02).

6.3 Food Scarcity

Rohingya people living in Bangladesh do not get enough food to survive. The majority of the Rohingya families rely on donated food (Faisal, M. M., & Ahmed, 2022: 20). Their food allowance was cut, phase by phase. In May 2023, Olivier De Schutter, a U.N. special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, paid a 12-day trip to Bangladesh and visited Rohingya refugees. After his visit, in a news conference in Dhaka, he said UN agencies are in a fund crisis to provide food for Rohingya refugees. He said only 17% of the \$876 million needed to support Rohingyas for a year has been pledged. Schutter termed it "scandalous" that donors pledged such a small amount of money. He said the World Food Program was forced in May 2023 to reduce Rohingya refugees' food allowance from \$12 to \$10. He also declared it would be reduced further to \$8 on June 1, 2023 ("UN Agencies Face," 2023: 01-05). While commenting on the consequences of the food allowance cut,

Schutter said, “The rates of malnutrition will increase. The rates of stunting will increase. The development of the child in that context will be endangered” (“UN Agencies Face,” 2023: 06).

6.4 Extrajudicial Killing and Abuses Faced by Rohingya

In 2020, Amnesty International reported that, in Bangladesh, over a hundred Rohingya refugees were subjected to extrajudicial killings between August 2017 and July 2020. That time police said that from March 4, 2018, to July 31, 2020, 104 Rohingya were killed in alleged crossfire incidents. By comparison, Amnesty International’s tally matches the government’s tally. The difference is that Amnesty International’s tally covers longer than the government’s (Chowdhury & Barua, 2020: 01, 11).

Among the cases of extrajudicial killings, one incident in 2019 is noteworthy. On August 23, 2019, a local leader of Bangladesh’s ruling party was shot dead, allegedly by a group of Rohingya men. After this, at least seven Rohingya men were killed in “gunfights” with police. All of them were suspects in the murder of the ruling party leader (Kamruzzaman, 2019: 07-09). One month later, in September 2019, a Rohingya couple was killed in a “gunfight” with police at a Rohingya refugee camp. Police have accused the victims of having links to robbery (“Rohingya Couple”, 2019: 01, 02). In July 2020, a young Rohingya named Rashid Ullah was killed by police. The police accused him of being an armed thief. However, the victim’s family denied the accusation (Chowdhury & Barua, 2020: 21, 22).

Rohingya refugees are facing abuses by law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh. In January 2023, Human Rights Watch released a report titled “Bangladesh: Rampant Police Abuse of Rohingya Refugees”. The report accused the police of committing extortion, arbitrary arrests, and harassment of Rohingya refugees. For this report, Human Rights Watch interviewed more than 40 Rohingya refugees and reviewed police reports, documenting more than 16 cases of severe abuse by police officers (Human Rights Watch, 2023: 01, 04).

6.5 Law and Order Situation in Rohingya Camps

The law and order situation in Rohingya camps in Bangladesh has deteriorated. Around 14 armed groups are active in Rohingya camps. These groups often fight each other for dominance. According to official data, 115 Rohingyas have been killed from the 2017 Rohingya influx until August 2022. Besides, 2,441 cases, including murder and rape cases, have been registered (Sadi, 2022: 02). Only from July 2022 to October 2022, at least 20 Rohingya refugees were murdered (“Two More,” 2022: 02). In this context, in the last week of October 2022, police conducted a special operation called “Operation Root Out” in Rohingya refugee camps. They arrested at least 41 Rohingyas, including six murder accused (Rashid, 2022: 02).

The number of murders has increased in the refugee camps. In January 2023, two Rohingya leaders were killed at a refugee camp within eight hours (“Two Rohingya,” 2023: 01). Two months later, in the first ten days of March again, two Rohingyas

leaders named Nur Habib and Syed Hossain were murdered (“Rohingya Leader”, 2023: 01-06). On 15 March 2023, a Rohingya volunteer was killed (“Rohingya Volunteer,” 2023: 01). Then, on May 7, 2023, around 20 to 25 armed Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) members fired in a Rohingya refugee camp. Refugees managed to capture one of the attackers and beat him to death (Aziz, 2023a: 03-05). Three days later, on May 10, 2023, police arrested a top commander of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (Aziz, 2023b: 01).

6.6 Restriction on Movements in Bangladesh

Movement of Rohingya refugees is restricted in refugee camps in Bangladesh. According to research, approximately two-thirds of Rohingya respondents have opined that moving around in Bangladesh’s refugee camps is more difficult than what they encountered in Myanmar. The research was conducted by the Youth Congress Rohingya (YCR), an advocacy organization led by refugees. The research revealed that ninety-nine percent of Rohingya participants in the survey reported the existence of restrictions on freedom of movement in the refugee camps. Besides, ninety-four percent reported that these restrictions affect their everyday lives (Youth Congress Rohingya, 2023: 08, 09). Here, it is worth mentioning an incident regarding restrictions on the movement of Rohingya. In December 2022, at least 39 Rohingya youths were detained and fined for playing football in a playground outside Rohingya camps in the Ukhia area of Cox’s Bazar district (“39 Rohingya Youths,” 2022: 01).

6.7 Bangladesh’s Diplomatic Responses Regarding Rohingya Crisis

Following the start of the 2017 Rohingya crisis, in November 2017, Bangladesh and Myanmar reached a Rohingya repatriation agreement (Chowdury, 2018:150). In January 2018, both countries reached a further agreement to ensure the repatriation of all Rohingya refugees within two years (Zaman, 2021: 04). In November 2018, Bangladesh tried to send back some Rohingya refugees (Ellis-Petersen, Rahman, & Safi, 2018: 02). About one year later, in August 2019, again Bangladesh attempted to repatriate more than 3000 Rohingya refugees (Ellis-Petersen & Rahman, 2019: 02). Both attempts did not work because refugees were unwilling to return to Myanmar until their safety was assured (Anik, 2022: 06).

On 28 February 2019, Bangladesh told the UN it could not accept any more refugees from Myanmar (Ellis-Petersen, 2019: 01). By saying this, Bangladesh pressured the international community to solve the crisis. During the first week of August 2022, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi paid a visit to Bangladesh. To facilitate the Rohingya repatriation, Bangladesh requested China’s assistance during his visit (Rai, 2022: 01-04). On September 21, 2023, in a side event at the UN, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, called on the international community to employ existing legal and multilateral mechanisms to hold those responsible for the systematic crimes against the Rohingya people accountable (“Root of the Rohingya,” 2023: 01).

6.8 Relocation of Rohingya to Bhasan Char Island

In May 2020, during the coronavirus pandemic, 29 Rohingya refugees stranded at sea for weeks were sent to the Bhasan Char island project for quarantine (Wright & Saeed, 2020: 02). Bangladesh has spent almost \$350 million on this project. According to official data, the 40-square-kilometer island has 120 cluster villages (Kamruzzaman, 2020a: 13). The government gave each Rohingya family a 12-by-14-foot bunkbed-equipped unit (Regan & Wright, 2020: 18). In December 2020, Bangladesh officially began relocating hundreds of Rohingya refugees from Cox's Bazar to Bhasan Char island (Nguyen & Lewis, 2022). In the first batch, 1,642 Rohingya were relocated to the island (Kamruzzaman, 2020a: 07). Till October 2022, the total number of Rohingya population at the island reached 30,079 ("963 more Rohingyas," 2022: 02).

In the early days, human rights organizations opposed the Bhasan Char Island project. In a statement, Human Rights Watch accused the government of Bangladesh of providing limited information to Rohingya refugees about the actual conditions on the island. Ismail Wolff, regional director of the human rights organization Fortify Rights, termed the Bhasan Char as an "isolated" and "flood-prone" island (Kamruzzaman, 2020b: 13). In addition, the United Nations stated that it had no involvement in the Rohingya relocation (Regan and Wright, 2020: 12). However, the government of Bangladesh defended its position on the Bhasan Char island project (Kamruzzaman, 2020b: 25).

Over time, the situation has changed. Now, 56 local and international NGOs, including the United Nations, are active in Bhasan Char island in various fields (Molla, 2022: 09). Diplomats from different countries and organizations also visited Bhasan Char Island. In May 2021, two senior UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) officials visited the island (Kamruzzaman, 2021: 01). In 2022, from February 13 to 18, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees Kelly T. Clements and UNHCR Director for Asia and the Pacific Indrika Ratwatte visited Rohingya refugees living in Cox's Bazar as well as on the Bhasan Char island. (Sakib, 2022: 02). In March 2022, a group of diplomats based in Dhaka visited the island to see the facilities there ("Diplomats Visit Bhasan", 2022: 01).

6.9 Situation of Rohingya in Myanmar

Human Rights Watch describes 600,000 Rohingya people living in Myanmar as facing crimes against humanity of apartheid, persecution, and deprivation of liberty. Now, they undergo severe movement restrictions and are prevented from accessing livelihoods or basic services such as education and healthcare. Since the 2021 coup, the military has arrested some 2,000 Rohingya people, including hundreds of children, for "unauthorized travel." Daily life in Myanmar for Rohingya people is very difficult (Ratcliffe, 2022: 04, 07).

In May 2019, a United Nations investigator named Christopher Sidoti compared the living conditions of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar to those of concentration camps

in Nazi-occupied Europe. At a conference on the Rohingya crisis at University College London, he accused that what happened in Myanmar since 2017 has strengthened the genocidal intent of the Myanmar government. He mentioned the sufferings of the Rohingya people in his discussion (McVeigh and Ellis-Petersen, 2019: 01-06).

In the Rakhine state, rivalry existed between the military and the pro-Rakhine armed group named the Arakan Army. The Rohingya are stuck between them. The Arakan Army fought the military in 2019 and 2020 and controls large parts of Rakhine state. Many Rohingya say they must pay taxes to both (Ratcliffe, 2022: 11, 12). On July 2, 2019, the UN's special envoy on Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, told the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in great detail how, in Rakhine State, both the Myanmar army and the Arakan Army had taken civilians hostage and tortured them. She accused both parties of violating international humanitarian law and feared that war crimes had been committed (McVeigh & Ellis-Petersen, 2019: 12.13).

In Myanmar, during natural disasters, the government deprives the Rohingya people of aid. In May 2023, following Cyclone Mocha, residents of Rakhine state's capital estimated that 90% of the homes of Rohingya people had been destroyed and over 100 people had been killed. However the Myanmar government did not allow the UN to provide aid to the Rohingya people (Ahmed, 2023: 01, 02). That time, in a statement, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said that access in Rakhine and the northwest remains severely restricted (Regan, 2023: 32).

6.10 Perceptions About Rohingya Changed in Myanmar

In 2017, when the Myanmar military oppressed the Rohingya people, many media outlets in Myanmar spread government narratives regarding the Rohingya oppression. Many citizens of the country also supported the government's stance. But, the situation changed after the military coup in 2021 (Mcpherson & Lone, 2022: 78, 79). Some Burmese regretted not supporting Rohingya more in 2017 (Ratcliffe, 2022: 14). On social media, many Burmese have apologized for neglecting the sorrow of minorities (Mcpherson & Lone, 2022: 79). A relevant incident should be mentioned here. On June 13, 2021, in Myanmar, anti-military government protesters showed solidarity for Rohingya on social media. They posted photos wearing black clothing and showed a three-finger salute, a symbol of resistance. Additionally, they used the hashtag “#Black4Rohingya” (“Myanmar's Pro-Rohingya,” 2021: 01-07). Besides, research on social media posts after the coup showed that views on minorities, including the Rohingya, had changed. According to the research, more people want an inclusive society than before (David, Myat, & Holliday, 2021: 95, 101). Another significant development is that on August 24, 2021, Myanmar's shadow government, known as the National Unity Government (NUG), promised justice for Rohingya (Strangio, 2021: 01).

6.11 Fleeing Rohingya People and the Crisis in the Sea

Rohingya people flee Bangladesh and Myanmar and take the risk of going abroad by sea. Some drown at sea while going abroad. They take risks in the hope of a better life. According to the UN, in 2022, over 3,500 Rohingya tried to cross the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea. This was a 360% rise from the previous year (Gelineau, 2023a: 13). A UNHCR spokesman called 2022 one of the worst years for dead and missing Rohingyas after 2013 and 2014. Additionally, he stated that the number of those attempting to escape had returned to pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels. Note that about 900 Rohingya died or went missing in the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal in 2013 and more than 700 in 2014 (“UN Says 2022 Among,” 2022: 06).

In December 2022, the Myanmar government arrested over 110 Rohingyas waiting for boats to start their journey bound for Malaysia. In January 2023, the government imprisoned these Rohingyas for attempting to escape refugee camps without legal documents (Root, 2023: 01, 02). In early January 2023, 185 Rohingya refugees reached Indonesia’s Aceh province by boat. Between November 2022 and January 2023, Aceh witnessed the arrival of three more boats carrying hundreds of refugees, with at least 20 dying at sea (Khin, 2023: 01-02). Again, on 27 March 2023, 184 Rohingya Muslims arrived in Aceh province (Teresia and Widiyanto, 2023: 01). On June 7, 2023, the Associated Press published a report on a missing refugee boat. The report says that on December 1, 2022, a boat carrying 180 Rohingya refugees left Bangladesh for Indonesia and disappeared. Based on dozens of interviews, audio recordings of calls, images, and videos, the Associated Press investigation revealed that the boat sank a week into its journey during a storm (Gelineau, 2023b: 01-02). In November 2023, more than 1,000 Rohingya people of Myanmar came to a province of Indonesia by boat, the biggest wave of Rohingya to reach Indonesia since 2015 (“Rohingya Refugees Reach,” 2023: 03).

7. Conclusion

At present, Rohingya refugees living in Bangladesh and Myanmar are facing different difficulties, including arson, landslides, and natural disasters. In both countries, their movements are restricted. Their lives are less protected. Bangladesh is trying to solve the Rohingya crisis through diplomacy. In a new move since 2020, it is relocating Rohingya refugees to an island named Bhasan Char island. To get a better future, some Rohingya people are fleeing from Bangladesh and Myanmar and trying to reach abroad by boat. Sometimes, this dangerous journey by boat results in the deaths of refugees in the middle of the sea. A positive development regarding the Rohingya crisis is that, after the military coup of 2021, Myanmar are changing their perception of the Rohingya people. Some citizens of Myanmar are apologizing for supporting the Rohingya genocide. The Rohingya people deserve a civilized life that is free of discrimination and persecution. To restore peace in Rakhine State, dealing with and solving the issue requires a political approach. To do this, the important thing that needs to be done is for the international community to pressure Myanmar to grant citizenship to all Rohingyas and take back the Rohingyas living as refugees to Rakhine State. The lives of Rohingya people have to be protected so

that they do not risk their lives crossing the sea illegally. Another important thing is to ensure justice for the Rohingya genocide to prevent the next genocide. A viable solution to the ongoing Rohingya crisis is possible if national, regional, and international efforts are coordinated.

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