Appendix I: Letter from Bangladesh Ambassador to the United States Mohammad Ziauddin

December 8, 2020

RE: Bangladesh: Halt Rohingya Relocations to Remote Island

Dear Sirs,

Human Rights Watch’s recent article, “Bangladesh: Halt Rohingya Relocations to Remote Island,” mischaracterizes the relocation of Rohingya refugees to Bhasan Char and distorts the facts regarding the relocation process.

Contrary to Human Rights Watch’s assertion, the Government of Bangladesh has planned and carried out the relocation process in a fully transparent manner. The Government made clear from the beginning that any relocation would be entirely voluntary. Accordingly, a number of Rohingya representatives undertook a “go and see” visit to Bhasan Char to survey the facilities and make an independent and informed choice. Some NGOs and journalists also visited the island. All of them expressed their high satisfaction at the available facilities on Bhasan Char. Moreover, the relocation was preceded by adequate preparations and consultations with stakeholders. Several rounds of discussions, based on the queries of the United Nations, were also arranged and we hope that the international community and the United Nations, as per its mandate, will be involved in the process soon.

Simply put, no Rohingya refugee was “forced” to relocate to Bhasan Char. In a recent interview with The Associated Press, Syed Alam, a 32-year-old refugee, said, “I have seen a video of the island. I have seen concrete buildings there... I think my family will have a better accommodation there.”

Mr. Alam is correct. The Government of Bangladesh has worked hard to ensure that all modern amenities are provided to Rohingya on Bhasan Char, including healthcare. The 13,000-acre island has year-round fresh water, an uninterrupted supply of electricity, agricultural plots, cyclone shelters, two hospitals, four community clinics, mosques, warehouses, telecommunication services, a police station, recreation and learning centers, playgrounds and more.

The Government of Bangladesh has ensured adequate supply of food along with proper sanitation and medical facilities for Rohingyas on Bhasan Char. Proper hospitals with highly qualified health professionals, adequate COVID testing and treatment facilities are in place. In addition to Government agencies, about 22 NGOs are there to extend all possible support to the
relocated Rohingyas. Adequate security has been provided on the island by deployment of police personnel. The area is fully covered with CCTV cameras.

Bhasan Char also provides significant protection against natural disasters. The accommodations on Bhasan Char are strongly built with concrete foundations, which can withstand natural disasters such as cyclones and tidal waves. Super Cyclone AMPHAN proved the strength of the structures of Bhasan Char. Bhasan Char stood firm against the massive storm. Despite the tidal wave, all the 1,440 houses and 120 shelter stations on the island remained unharmed.

When the persecuted Rohingyas from Myanmar were fleeing from genocide, Bangladesh opened its borders and saved nearly a million of precious lives. The generous people of Bangladesh offered all forms of assistance to these persecuted Myanmar nationals before any international humanitarian agency stepped in.

The Rohingyas are Myanmar nationals and they must return to Myanmar. The Government of Bangladesh is doing its best to offer them safety and security. The international community including the United Nations should fulfill their responsibilities and engage with Myanmar to commence repatriation, which is the only durable solution to this crisis.

Mohammad Ziauddin
Bangladesh Ambassador to the U.S.
Washington, D.C.

This material is distributed by BGR Government Affairs, LLC on behalf of the Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, Embassy. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.