

Myanmar: Agreement with UN for settling Rohingya Refugees Announced:

Submitted by asiaadmin2 on Sun, 06/03/2018 - 06:58

Paper No. 6384

Dated 3-June-2018

By Dr. S.Chandrasekharan

On 1st June, Myanmar announced that it had agreed to take steps to create conditions for the safe return of the Rohingya refugees. The agreement calls for a framework of cooperation that will lead to “voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable” repatriation of Rohingya refugees to their place of origin or of their choosing.

The Agreement:

The agreement is likely to be signed next week. Though the full details of the agreement are not yet known, some broad details are available. Much depends on the wording of the agreement and the actual role the UN is supposed to play in the repatriation of the refugees. It looks that the UN wants to have an all too “intrusive” role.

The UN Refugee Agency said soon after, that the conditions for voluntary return are not conducive yet for repatriation to begin immediately.

On the Memorandum of Understanding to be signed next week, the UNHCR said that this would be the first step to support the government’s efforts to change the situation and is also intended to support recovery and resilience-based development for the benefit of all communities in Rakhine State.

It may be recalled that Myanmar and Bangladesh had agreed for the return of the refugees last December and certain concrete steps were taken to accept the refugees and settle them in places designated for them.

That agreement became a non starter with the refugees in Bangladesh fully unionised by then had expressed concern for their safety. They

refused to return unless the process is monitored by international aid agencies. There were many other demands too.

The Agreement provides, most importantly access to two UN agencies- the UNHCR and UNDP to Western Rakhine State that was denied till now.

It is good that the UNHCR for human rights is not involved in this process as its chief- the Jordanian Prince Zeid bin Ra'ad Zeid al-Hussain had been exceeding his brief and his involvement would have created more suspicion on the neutrality of the Agency. The Prince would better be advised if he could focus on persistent violation of human rights in West Asia and particularly in Yemen!

One point that is to be noted is that Al Jazeera in reporting the agreement had put up a picture of a burnt refugee Rohingya camp in Bangladesh. Though it mentioned so in the title underneath, this was mischievous indeed as the topic relates to Rohingya's return to Myanmar and the picture was misleading as if it had happened in Myanmar.

Issues Involved:

Myanmar had said that they had made the agreement so that verified displaced people can return voluntarily in safety and dignity. The catch is in the word "verified" as many of the genuine refugees may not have the necessary papers or documentation for verification.

There are many other challenges that need to be resolved too.

* The refugees may have to go to a transit camp put up for them and then sent to designated settlements elsewhere. This may not be acceptable to the UN agencies leave alone the Refugees.

* The Returning refugees may demand a peace keeping force for their protection which Myanmar may not agree.

* The UN would like the refugees to have an identity and should be able to live as "normal" citizens. Also the Rohingya cannot be considered as 'stateless people' once repatriation is done-a key condition in the memorandum. What will happen will be a too intrusive UN involvement and this may not be acceptable to the Government or the Army

* The exact role of the two UN agencies- the UNHCR and UNDP are not known. This will be a key and a sensitive issue from the point of view of Myanmar. The UN Representative had said that Myanmar had allowed the UN agencies to assess the local situation, carry out protection activities, provide information to the refugees about conditions in their home area so that the refugees can better decide whether they want to return.

A Positive Step:

It should be said that despite the challenges and the misgivings of the refugees, the MOU involving the two UN agencies is a positive step in dealing with challenges relating to the Rohingya problem. Ever since the successful visit of UN Security Council representatives to Myanmar to study the problem, there had been discussions between the Myanmar government and the UN agencies and it was realised that the way forward is to get the UN involved in some form or other. It is said that Bangladesh expects that the repatriation could be completed within two years. This appears to be too optimistic.

Credit should go to the new President Win Myint, who was able to convince the Army too that they have no choice but come to an understanding with the UN. It is said that on the Rohingya crisis three War crimes judges of the International Criminal Court are to hold closed door talks on June 20. Myanmar is not a signatory and a member of Rome Statute that under pins the ICC. Myanmar is therefore not bound to accept their findings but yet there could be possible international pressure.

Conclusion:

It looks that Myanmar opted to get the UN involved on the Rohingya issue to release the international pressure that was building up. The return may not happen too soon but at least there are UN agencies who would be handling it!

Tags:

[Rohingya](#) [1]

[UNHCR and UNDP](#) [2]

[Myanmar Refugees](#) [3]

Category:

[Papers](#) [4]

Countries:

[Bangladesh](#) [5]

[Myanmar](#) [6]

Topics:

[Refugees](#) [7]

Political [8]

Copyright ©2012. All Rights are Reserved.

Source URL: <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/node/2305>

Links

- [1] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/1906>
- [2] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/1907>
- [3] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/1908>
- [4] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers>
- [5] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/bangladesh>
- [6] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/myanmar>
- [7] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/refugees>
- [8] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/political>