

**Hybrid workshop on an alternative
strategy for Rohingya refugees**

**Convened by United Against Inhumanity (UAI)
with UNA-UK and the UCL Diplomacy Society
and the generous support of London UNA Trust**

**London and online
3 Whitehall Court, London, SW1A 2EL
13.00 – 17.30 UK time
Friday 5 September 2025**

INFORMATION NOTE

Resolving the Rohingya crisis

In November 2024, the UN General Assembly agreed “to hold a high-level conference, “at the earliest possible time in 2025, on the situation of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar, inviting relevant stakeholders, including Member States, international and regional organizations, specialized agencies and civil society, to review the overall crisis and share perspectives on the situation on the ground in order to propose a comprehensive, innovative, concrete and time-bound plan for a sustainable resolution of the crisis.” [<https://docs.un.org/en/A/C.3/79/L.46/Rev.1>]

While considerable uncertainty remains about the format and intended outcomes of the conference, which is scheduled for 30 September 2025 in New York, the event provides an important opportunity for the international community to reconsider current approaches to the situation of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and other host countries.

Hybrid workshop

The purpose of the hybrid workshop, to be held in London and online on the afternoon (UK time) of Friday 5 September 2025, is to provide relevant input for the high-level conference, focusing primarily but not exclusively on the situation of the one million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

It will be organized by United Against Inhumanity (UAI), an independent advocacy organization established by a group of former and senior UN and NGO officials, and which, in 2023, established a Myanmar Task Team. In February 2025, the Task Team held an in-person meeting in London to discuss its input to the conference, followed by several virtual meetings on the same issue, involving a wider group of people with expertise and experience in the situation of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. [<https://www.against-inhumanity.org/about-uai/>]

Rohingya refugees

The Rohingya are a Moslem minority group who are not recognized as citizens of Myanmar and who have been subjected to systematic persecution and mass expulsions throughout the past six decades.

Since 2017, when around 700,000 Rohingya refugees fled from a genocidal assault by the Myanmar army, the international response to the emergency has been based on a strategy of providing the refugees with humanitarian relief, pending their speedy repatriation to Myanmar. As explained in this article published by UAI, this strategy has not proven to be a viable one.

[<https://www.against-inhumanity.org/2025/03/20/rohingya-refugees-in-bangladesh-restoring-hope-and-humanity-by-jeff-crisp/>]

In 2021, A repressive military junta seized power in Myanmar, triggering a nationwide armed conflict with a variety of ethnic armies. Large parts of Rakhine State, the home of the Rohingya, have come under the control of the rebel Arakan Army, which has itself been accused of committing widespread abuses against the Rohingya.

The armed conflict in Rakhine State has severely restricted the delivery of much needed humanitarian assistance to the area. Socio-economic conditions have deteriorated, notably for the reported 300,000 internally displaced Rohingya across the state. Proposals for a cross-border 'humanitarian corridor' from Bangladesh to Myanmar have come to nought.

These developments have further called into question the prospect of repeating the previous large-scale Rohingya refugee repatriations that took place in 1979 and 1992-3, and which were not, as explained in this article, voluntary in nature.

[<https://odihpn.org/publication/primitive-people-the-untold-story-of-unhcrs-historical-engagement-with-rohingya-refugees/>]

The international community has maintained an effective relief operation for the one million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh since 2017. However, the downturn in global funding makes the existing camp-based assistance model unsustainable. Living and security conditions in the camps to which the refugees are confined have progressively deteriorated. Ration reductions prompted by major cuts to the aid budgets of the USA and other donor states have left the refugee population with the very real prospect of malnutrition and starvation.

As explained in this article, sufficient funds are no longer available for a long-term assistance programme managed largely by UN agencies and international NGOs. [<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2025/06/10/funding-cuts-worlds-largest-refugee-camp-rohingya-bangladesh-myanmar>]

In addition to the refugees in Bangladesh, a substantial number of Rohingya are found in other Asian countries, including India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. While they are not living in camps, they generally have a precarious legal status, are obliged to work in low-paid jobs in the informal sector and may be at risk of detention and deportation. Rohingya refugees attempting to reach such countries by boat often find themselves adrift at sea after being refused permission to disembark.

Beyond repatriation and relief

The international conference scheduled for September 2025, coupled with the August 2024 establishment of a new and interim government in Bangladesh, provides an important opportunity for the ‘repatriation and relief’ approach to the Rohingya refugee situation to be reconsidered and revised.

The urgency of this task has been substantially reinforced by the strains imposed on the international humanitarian and development systems by funding cuts and simultaneous emergencies in places such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gaza, Sudan and Ukraine.

More specifically, there is a need to explore the scope for a sustainable and medium-term strategy that would maintain voluntary repatriation as an ultimate objective for those refugees who wish to return, but which would also incorporate the following approaches:

- improving security and living conditions in the camps;

- lifting the current restrictions on refugee livelihoods, education and freedom of movement;
- extending the provision of cash assistance in place of food aid and other relief items;
- establishing infrastructural and development projects that would bring tangible benefits to both Rohingya refugees and local communities in Bangladesh;
- reducing the role of international humanitarian agencies and scaling up the activities undertaken by government and local organizations;
- renewing the effort to establish a humanitarian corridor between Bangladesh and Myanmar and to create conditions conducive to return and reintegration by linking the economies on both sides of the border; and,
- ensuring that the focus on Bangladesh is accompanied by efforts to protect the rights and find solutions for Rohingya refugees in other countries.

Needless to say, these are ambitious proposals, their feasibility challenged by a variety of different factors, including the ongoing armed conflict in Myanmar, the political transition in Bangladesh, limited funding for humanitarian and development activities and the international community's low level of interest in this situation.

But the established response to the plight of Rohingya refugees is no longer sustainable. Policy restrictions on livelihoods and employment have deepened poverty and impacted on both refugee and local households. Unless the challenge is addressed in alternative ways, more refugees will suffer and die. Conditions in and around the camps and local communities will continue to deteriorate, growing numbers of refugees can be expected to look for better opportunities elsewhere in the region or return to Myanmar before conditions are safe and enabling.

Local communities and Bangladesh as a whole will fail to derive any benefits that the refugees' presence could potentially bring to them through a more progressive approach. More generally, the international community will lose an opportunity to demonstrate that a protracted refugee situation can be addressed in a more cost effective, creative and compassionate manner.

Specific questions

In exploring the scope for the adoption of such an alternative approach, the proposed workshop would consider a number of questions, including, for example:

- What support could be provided that might encourage Bangladesh to adopt a

more progressive and long-term strategy towards the situation in Myanmar without compromising the prospects for the repatriation of the Rohingya ?

- How could the government of Bangladesh be incentivized to lift the severe policy restrictions currently placed on Rohingya lives and livelihoods, especially those relating to freedom of movement, access to education and training, and income-generating opportunities?
- How would the local people and authorities in refugee-populated areas of Bangladesh react to the alternative strategy proposed here, and what could be done to elicit their support for it?
- To what extent would it be feasible for Rohingya refugees to move out of the camps and to take up opportunities elsewhere in Bangladesh?
- What kind of investments, infrastructural development and trading opportunities are required to mitigate the impact of the Rohingya refugee population in Bangladesh and enhance the economic potential of areas where they are living?
- What are the prospects for opening a humanitarian cross border operation from Bangladesh to Rakhine State, and what measures, agreements and understandings would be required to make it a real possibility?
- Is concessionary financing available to support the sustainable and medium-term strategy of the type advocated by UAI, and who might provide such funding?
- What could be done to upgrade the camps in Bangladesh, with particular reference to issues such as sustainable housing, water and sanitation, waste disposal, environmental management, fire prevention and security?
- What role might organizations such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, UNDP, UNHCR and IOM play in the formulation and implementation of the approach proposed by UAI?
- How would the proposed strategy relate to the situation of those Rohingya refugees who have been relocated to Bhasan Char, an island in the Bay of Bengal with very limited development potential?
- How can the Rohingya refugee population and diaspora, as well as local Bangladeshis, be most effectively engaged in the discourse on the proposed

strategy?

Workshop arrangements

The in-person workshop will take place on the afternoon of Friday 5 September at the London headquarters of the United Nations Association of the United Kingdom (UNAUK), 3 Whitehall Court, London, SW1A 2EL. Invitations to the workshop will be issued by both UAI and UNAUK.

Workshop participants will include humanitarian and development experts, UN and NGO representatives, as well as members of the Rohingya diaspora. They will be asked to pre-register for both in-person and online participation and will generally meet their own travel costs.

UAI will prepare a paper for discussion at the workshop, based on this Information Note. UAI will also prepare a document for submission to the 30 September international conference in New York, drawing upon the proceedings of the workshop.

Agenda

12:30–13:00

Arrival and registration

13:00–13:15

Introduction to the workshop Florence Duchet – Convener, UAI Task Team

13:15–13:45

The situation in Rakhine State & prospects for repatriation Chair: Ian Martin

Speaker: TBD

Online respondent: Laetitia van den Assum

13:45 – 14:15

Improving conditions for refugees and local communities in Bangladesh Chair:

Mark Bowden

Speaker: Dr. Sultana Khanum

Online respondent: Lucky Karim

14:15 – 14:45 Break

14:45–16:15

Alternative & medium-term approaches to the Rohingya refugee situation

Chair: Ewen Macleod

Speakers: Shafiur Rahman, Tun Khin, Dr. Sanjeeb Hossain

16:15–17:00

Wrap-up and next steps Chair: Dr. Jeff Crisp

17:00-18:00

Reception