

5 September 2019

Bangladesh: End Policies Preventing Communication for Rohingya

London, UK -- The Burma Human Rights Network is calling on Bangladesh to rescind policies that would stop Rohingya refugees from purchasing sim cards. The Rohingya depend on sim cards to communicate their plight to the world and to contact friends and family living outside the camps. The sale of sim cards to refugees was already been regulated to prevent sales to anyone without a National Identity Card, but Bangladesh has now taken the extraordinary steps this week of working with private telecommunications companies to achieve both of the following outcomes. First, to shut off access to areas within the refugee camps during evenings and second enforcing the blocking of sales of sim cards to refugees.

There have been recent incidents of violence in the camps, the origin of which is at times unclear; in some cases, Bangladesh suggests it was the fault of the Rohingya. In other cases evidence suggests that the violence resulted from unprovoked attacks against them by Bangladesh natives. However, there is speculation that the crackdown on sim cards may be in response to a rally held by the Rohingya on August 25th. That rally was organised to recognize 2 years since the Burmese army began a genocidal campaign against the civilian population in 2017. The rally drew over 200, 000 refugees who were well organized and by all accounts it was a peaceful event.

“Access to sim cards has been a vital service for the Rohingya for years and they have utilized them extremely effectively to raise awareness of their plight to the world. By blocking access to communication for the Rohingya, Bangladesh will effectively isolate them from the world and prevent them from engaging in basic communications they have depended on to make sure the world hears their concerns. The misdeeds or violence in the camps should be addressed by security services fairly and proportionately by addressing those who engage in such activities. There is no reason to punish the rest of the refugee population by further cutting them off from the world,” Said BHRN’s Executive Director, Kyaw Win.

Violence is a serious issue in the camps and neighbouring towns. It is important that those responsible are held to account. It is unclear what the motivation is of those individual and/or groups who provoke violence, but it remains the responsibility of Bangladesh to address these issues directly. Telecommunication companies should not be asked to support a policy that isolates some of the most vulnerable groups in the region.

Bangladesh and the UN must focus on security issues in the camps in a fair, non-discriminatory manner. That could then facilitate a security presence capable of developing and maintaining positive relationships with the refugee community; denying them access to the world beyond their camp damages those prospects.

Background on the Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN)

Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN) is based in London and operates across Burma/Myanmar works for human rights, minority rights and religious freedom in Burma. BHRN has played a crucial role advocating for human rights and religious freedom with politicians and world leaders.

Media Enquiries

Please contact:

Kyaw Win

Executive Director

Burma Human Rights Network

E: kyawwin78@gmail.com

M: +44(0) 740 345 2378

W: <http://www.bhrn.org.uk>