

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 5, 2021

Honorable Abul Kalam Abdul Momen  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Segunbagicha, Dhaka 1000, Bangladesh

Dear Minister Momen,

We are grateful to the people and Government of Bangladesh for providing more than 900,000 Rohingya refugees with relative safety, security, and sustenance after fleeing horrific violence in Burma. The Government of Bangladesh – with support from international donors led by the United States, humanitarian agencies, and Rohingya and Bangladeshis in Cox’s Bazar – has admirably managed many aspects of the crisis, including limiting the spread of infectious disease and minimizing loss of life to natural disasters. We welcome especially your efforts to vaccinate over 35,000 Rohingya against COVID-19. Without taking away from these laudable efforts, we write to you to discuss concerns about humanitarian access, education and livelihood opportunities, and relocations to Bhasan Char.

We understand from discussions with numerous stakeholders that limitations on the movements of humanitarian workers and Rohingya volunteers have impeded the delivery of important social services in Cox’s Bazar. While we acknowledge the need for caution and some restrictions due to the COVID pandemic and we understand that Bangladesh has recently relaxed some of those restrictions, we want to stress that it remains critical that humanitarian actors and Rohingya volunteers have ongoing access to the camps to ensure that refugees continue to receive basic social services and protections. We are particularly concerned about the protection environment given the broader feelings of insecurity that refugees, especially women, are expressing as a result of criminal and militant groups operating in the camps and recent fires. We also note with great sadness the murder of Mohib Ullah in Cox’s Bazar and urge the government to work in a transparent manner to bring the perpetrators of this crime to justice as well as to redouble efforts to ensure that criminal groups are not able to operate with impunity in the camps. More broadly, we call upon the Government of Bangladesh to allow consistent, unimpeded access to the camps for humanitarian actors and volunteers and a full resumption of protection activities.

We are also concerned with limitations on some programming, including educational and livelihood opportunities. We welcome the Government's steps toward providing Rohingya children with an education in the camps, a sacrosanct right per the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. We urge you to work with UNICEF to revive and expand the pilot of the Myanmar curriculum across all ages and grades to enable UN humanitarian agencies and NGOs, funded by international donors, to provide Rohingya children with formal, accredited education in the camps. We are supportive of the broad education goals identified in the 2021 Joint Response Plan, and ask you to work in partnership with the UN, donors, and NGOs to offer improved, accredited education to Rohingya youth.

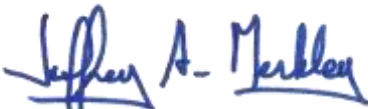
In the face of these challenges, we understand that Rohingya frustration is increasing. We note the Government of Bangladesh’s significant investments to develop Bhasan Char and welcome the recent announcement that your government has concluded a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. It is imperative that your government take all steps to implement this MOU, including provisions allowing for freedom of movement for Rohingya Refugees on Bhasan Char. Nonetheless, we are troubled by

recent reports that some Rohingya that have attempted to escape from Bhasan Char were detained and returned to the island, and that others were relocated to Bhasan Char against their will, which would go against your Government's stated commitments to a voluntary process in which refugees are able to give fully informed consent. We urge the Government to demonstrate its commitments to voluntary and fully informed relocations by allowing Rohingya to return to the mainland if they so choose while also allowing independent monitoring of the relocation process. We encourage you to allow the UN to conduct a comprehensive technical assessment of Bhasan Char's habitability. We do not support the forced relocation of Rohingya to Bhasan Char and have prohibited the use of funds to support such a policy.

Until Rohingya can safely return home, Bangladesh will unfortunately carry an outsized responsibility to ensure their protection. As elected officials in the United States, we are prepared to do our part to help Bangladesh attain sufficient international support and resources to help both Rohingya and affected Bangladeshi communities in Cox's Bazar; encouraging meaningful consideration of third country resettlement options; holding Burma accountable for addressing the root causes of the crisis in Rakhine and for atrocities committed against the Rohingya; and continuing to urge the international community, including our own country, to respond strongly to the coup in Burma.

We extend our deepest gratitude for everything Bangladesh has done for the Rohingya since 2017 and, indeed, since the 1970s. As elected representatives of the United States, the largest donor to the humanitarian response in Cox's Bazar, we look forward to continuing to work with you to find durable solutions to this crisis.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Marco Rubio  
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator



Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator



Richard Durbin  
United States Senator



Roger Wicker  
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



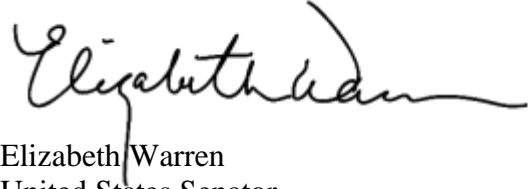
Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator