

Good morning/Afternoon/Evening and assalamu alaikum.

My name is Salah Uddin and I am an active member of British Rohingya Community based in Bradford. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to say a few words here today.

Things are not going well for the Rohingyas. In fact, it has not been going well for us since 1962. To use an overused sentence "Rohingyas are the most persecuted ethnic minority in the world". Some people think under these adverse situations, by now we should have disappeared from the face of the earth but bad news for them, **WE STILL GO ON EXISTING AND WE STILL SEEK JUSTICE FOR OUR PEOPLE.**

The thing that keeps us going is HOPE and the caring and compassionate people like you all over the world. People who are not happy with the status quo but want to change things for a better world.

We are Rohingyas, we are from Burma, and we are stateless, disenfranchised, have no rights to education or healthcare. But it was not always like that. My father was a qualified doctor in Burma. He was a man of high standing, respected and loved. But by a stroke of a pen by the military leaders of Burma, he and all his family became stateless. He lost his right to practice medicine officially, we lost our land and farms and we became from a rich well-off family to destitute. Many of my extended family members have been killed, raped, beaten, tortured and their homes burnt down.

Rest is history..... My grandparents and my uncle died broken men. After very sustained and well-planned attacks by the military and Buddhist fundamentalist vigilantes, my parents were driven to seek refuge in Bangladesh to save their lives and those of their children. My father passed away after a day in the refugee camp with a heart attack. I was born in Bangladesh Kutupalong refugee camp and never knew my father.

I grew up in the refugee camp in BD. We are grateful to Bangladesh for giving us refuge in their country but the situation in the refugee camp was dire just surviving from one day to another. The first 15 years of my life was in this camp.

My life really changed when my mother came to the UK under UN's gateway protection programme for refugees. I had little education in the refugee camp, no knowledge of English. I came here and became a new person. First time in my life I started to believe that I was part of the human race. I can think freely, I can hope without fear, I can work as equal....I learnt English, got my education from Bradford college and now I am working to help my community in the UK and the refugees in Bangladeshi camps. I was fortunate to become a British citizen in 2017 and for the first time in my life feel that somewhere had finally recognised my existence in this world for the first time in 22 years.

I am also proud that the UK has welcomed me to this country and given me and my family citizenship. So, my 7-month old daughter Sarah has a place to call home, right to education and other services and free from persecution.

In Myanmar this is not the case for Rohingya Children, and indeed they will have to face persecution unless we and international community do something about it.

Many of my close family remain in the camp after all these years, my older brothers, my aunties and my nephews and nieces have been born there with little hope for the future at this time.

The atrocities suffered by Rohingya people Last year are a scar on the conscience of the world. Rohingya people have faced a ruthless campaign of military violence that has been systematic, targeted and deliberate. They have been raped, burned alive and murdered. More than 300 villages were razed to the ground and communities brutally uprooted from their homes.

More than 700 Rohingya refugees- over half of them are children- fled for their lives to neighbouring country Bangladesh. Many children arrived alone, severely traumatised, having seen their parents killed in front of them.

In 2009 and 2010 some of us around 400 came to UK as refugee under UN gateway protection programme. We are the largest Rohingya community in Europe. This was the first time in our entire life, we felt like human being. We are not invisible anymore. People just don't order us about but ask our opinion, discuss our needs and value what we say. In School in the UK, we were not made to sit at the back or just stand. We had desks and chairs and books. Council officers helped us not humiliate us or boss us like we faced in Burma. Many people came forward to help. People who we never met or even look like us. The Bangladeshis, the English people and the Pakistanis. They are the real stars.

We came from a hot and sunlit country to a cold country with no sun shine. We came in slippers and ordinary clothes.... But all these people helped us to settle down. Two local housing associations gave us places to live, our children got places in local schools, and we joined doctor's surgery. Our suffering ended.

We are making so many contributions to the UK. Our people are going to school and university and now in our community almost everyone works. We are doing well. Thanks to the UK and UN. In Bangladesh, we didn't have any good education or future. But now we can have a future in the UK and we can a dream to become someone like doctors, engineers or things like that. After coming to England, it's like a different world for us. Its safe here. But it doesn't make us delightful because our brothers and our sisters are suffering in the camp and the persecution continues.

Last year the BRC raised £32,000 and ten of us, at our own expense, went back to the Kutupalong Camp to distribute aid. This took a lot of planning and preparation. We bought supplies locally and obtained permission by the authorities to carry out our work. It had been 7 years since I left here and much had changed. The camp had 32,000 refugees when I left and was now massively overcrowded with over 700,000 people many of whom had arrived with nothing in the previous weeks and months.

We achieved our plans to distribute 6000 food packs and medical supplies, to pay for doctors to help the most in need of treatment, to show support to those in the camp and to raise awareness of the plight of the Rohingya people through, TV, radio and the press. I stayed in the camp with my brother and his family and found two of my aunties who we had disappeared a few months earlier in Burma.

One day, in the camp, I found a young boy who was in shock and traumatised. He just stood there with blank eyes and with nothing except the clothes he stood up in. I learnt that he had recently fled from Burma after seeing his family butchered by the army and Buddhist militants. He was 11 years old and had followed many others for many days through the jungle and over the border and into the camp. I brought him to my brother's house and since then he has stayed with and been looked after by them and also in the mosque. My family and an English friend now send funds to support him and to provide food, clothes and medicines for him. It is my ambition to get him to the UK to live with me here.

You may as well ask: what is the solution that we are working towards?

The Rohingya refugees need to be allowed to go back to Myanmar in safety and with dignity. The Rohingyas and the other ethnic minorities in Burma to be given full Burmese citizenship and equal rights.

Implement the recommendations of Rakhine State Advisory Commission headed by Kofi Anand immediately with adequate supervision and monitoring by an UN body. This commission was formed by the Burmese government.

Justice for the Rohingyas has become bogged down in geo-politics. Burma is rich in minerals including gas and petroleum. China is backing Burma to a large degree. Other members of the UN Security Council have spoken out but not that forcefully. Britain is leading in the UN Security Council trying to convince other members for a much more robust stand and to bring Burmese butchers to justice. We have had several meetings with civil servants from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, as well as Department for international development (DFID) and the Home Office and we recently had 45 minutes meeting with the UK's foreign secretary Jeremy Hunt. Details of our campaign is articulated in a short booklet. Please take a copy or copies and give out to your colleagues. I like to call upon you to affiliate to our campaign and donate whatever you can to help us.

Thank you.