

Hasina proposes 'safe zones' for Rohingya

Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called upon members states of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to take a united stand to resolve the Rohingya issue "before it is too late" and placed a set of proposals.

The proposals, placed at the OIC Contact Group at the United Nations headquarters on Tuesday, included a call for an immediate end to atrocities against Rohingya Muslims, the creation of 'safe zones' in Myanmar for the protection of civilians and an immediate and unconditional implementation of the recommendations put forward by the Kofi Annan Commission.

Stating that the crisis has its roots in Myanmar and hence its solution also has to be found in Myanmar, she said, "We want to see an end to the 'ethnic cleansing'."

"It's an unbearable human catastrophe. I myself have visited them and listened to the stories of their grave sufferings, particularly of women and children... We have continued our diplomatic efforts to return all the Rohingya to their homeland, but Myanmar is not responding," she said.

She also criticised Myanmar for labelling Rohingya as "illegal migrants" and "Bengalis from Bangladesh". She said historical records clearly suggest that the Rohingya have been living in Rakhine for centuries.

"Myanmar is forcibly driving out the Rohingya Muslims through a planned and organised process. First, they were excluded from the list of recognised ethnic groups of Myanmar. Then in 1982, they were denied their right to citizenship. Later, they were sent to IDP camps in their own country," she said.

Referring to her recent visit to the Cox's Bazar refugee camps, she said it was reminiscent of 1971. "When the Pakistani forces burned down our houses and killed our people, around 10 million people crossed the border into India. Now they (Rohingya) are in danger and we definitely need to give them shelter."

Also, Bangladesh's ruling 14-party alliance rejected the speech of Myanmar leader Aung Sang Suu Kyi. The alliance's spokesperson Mohammad Nasim said on Wednesday that it was unfortunate that Ms. Suu Kyi did not even mention the word 'Rohingya' in her speech.

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