



Proceedings



**Roundtable Discussion on
International Response to the
Rohingya Crisis: In Quest
of Justice for Genocide and the
Responsibility to Protect (R2P)**

Wednesday, 12 March 2025 from 1100 to 1300 hrs

Organised by
Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS)

Roundtable Discussion on International Response to Rohingya Crisis: In Quest of Justice for Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P)

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) organised a Roundtable Discussion titled 'International Response to Rohingya Crisis: In Quest of Justice for Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P)' on Wednesday, 12 March 2025 at the BIISS Auditorium. H E Dr Mamadou Tangara, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Gambians Abroad, Republic of the Gambia graced the seminar as the Chief Guest. Dr Khalilur Rahman, High Representative of the Hon'ble Chief Advisor on Rohingya Problem and Priority Issues, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh were present as the Guest of Honour in the Seminar. Professor A S M Ali Ashraf, Director, Centre for Genocide Studies and Chairman, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka presented the Keynote paper to set the tone of the Roundtable Discussion. Dr Md Nazrul Islam, Secretary (East), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh presented special remarks on the Rohingya issue. Ambassador A F M Gousal Azam Sarker, Chairman of BIISS, moderated the Roundtable Discussion as the session chair. The Discussion started with the welcome address of the Director General of BIISS, Major General Iftekhar Anis, BSP, awc, awfc, psc, PEng. Senior officials from different ministries, ambassadors, former diplomats, senior military officials, researchers, academics, and students from various universities, representatives from different think tanks, international organisations, participated in the Roundtable and enriched it by presenting their valuable opinions, comments, suggestions, and observations during the open discussion session.



Welcome Address



**Major General Iftekhhar Anis, BSP, awc, afwc, psc, Peng
Director General, BIISS**

Major General Iftekhhar Anis, BSP, awc, afwc, psc, PEng, Director General of the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS), extended a warm welcome to all participants at the roundtable titled "International Response to the Rohingya Crisis: In Quest of Justice for Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P)." Speaking on behalf of BIISS, he expressed profound gratitude to the Chief Guest and the Guest of Honour for their esteemed presence at the event.

In his address, Major General Iftekhhar Anis highlighted that the Rohingya crisis remains an enduring humanitarian catastrophe and a stark reminder of the consequences of impunity. Bangladesh, having provided shelter to over one million displaced individuals since the mass exodus of Rohingyas in 2017, has shouldered an immense humanitarian burden. Despite numerous calls for international action, tangible progress in securing a durable solution and ensuring justice remains elusive.

He emphasised that the principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), adopted by the United Nations in 2005 to prevent genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity, forms the foundation of the day's discussions. However, he noted that the fundamental challenge lies not in articulating commitments but in executing them, as demonstrated by the Rohingya crisis. He underscored the continued distress and uncertainty faced by the Rohingya people due to Myanmar's persistent resistance to accountability, diplomatic endeavours, and the absence of international consensus.

Despite these challenges, Major General Iftekhhar Anis acknowledged that there have been significant legal and diplomatic advancements. He particularly highlighted The Gambia's initiative to bring Myanmar before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for genocide, describing it as a groundbreaking case that underscores the importance of legal recourse against atrocity crimes and the universality of human rights. He noted that this initiative marked a watershed moment in the crisis. The ICJ had previously invoked the 1948 Genocide Convention only twice—concerning the Balkan wars—wherein Bosnia

v. Serbia in 2007 successfully determined that a country had violated the Convention. The Gambia v. Myanmar is the first case in ICJ history to consider an accusation of genocide committed outside Europe, the first formal application of the Genocide Convention involving state parties from the Global South, and the first instance where the initiating party is not directly involved in the alleged atrocities.

Major General Iftekhar Anis further elaborated that The Gambia had instituted proceedings against Myanmar on 11 November 2019, alleging that Myanmar's treatment of the Rohingya minority constituted violations of the Genocide Convention. He pointed out that the ICJ had issued provisional measures on 23 January 2020, ordering Myanmar to ensure compliance with the Genocide Convention, preserve evidence related to allegations of genocide, and provide regular reports to the ICJ on its adherence to the order. He commended the unwavering commitment of The Gambia to promoting human rights and the remarkable leadership of H.E. Dr Mamadou Tangara, whose efforts at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Gambia have been instrumental in successfully coordinating the case and recently overturning all objections from Myanmar.

Major General Iftekhar Anis underscored that Bangladesh has demonstrated remarkable resilience and generosity in hosting the Rohingya people. He asserted that a collective international effort is necessary to ensure justice and facilitate sustainable repatriation. He urged for enhanced diplomatic engagement, stressing the need for significant global and regional actors to exert consistent pressure on Myanmar to guarantee accountability. He also advocated for the strengthening of legal mechanisms to ensure that The Gambia's case at the ICJ results in tangible consequences for those responsible for crimes against the Rohingya. Simultaneously, he emphasised the necessity for international donors and organisations to continue providing essential humanitarian aid to the Rohingya, thereby preventing them from being perpetually displaced.

He reiterated that the discussions at the roundtable were not merely an academic exercise or diplomatic rhetoric but rather an effort to translate a shared commitment into tangible solutions. He stated that the Rohingya crisis serves as a test of the global community's resolve to uphold justice, emphasising that failure is not an option.

In conclusion, Major General Iftekhar Anis expressed his sincere appreciation to the Honourable Chief Guest and Guest of Honour for their presence at the event. He also extended his gratitude to the distinguished panellists and esteemed participants for their engagement and support. He conveyed his optimism that through collective efforts, a future could be secured in which the Rohingya people could return to their homeland with dignity and security. He looked forward to a thought-provoking discussion ahead and thanked everyone for their participation.

Key Note Presentation



**Dr A S M Ali Ashraf,
Professor & Chairman,
Department of International Relations,
University of Dhaka**

Professor Dr Ashraf began the presentation by stating his focus on four aspects. He first provided a brief discussion on the influx, crisis, and context of genocide. He then discussed the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) concept and its relevance to the ongoing pursuit of justice in the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the International Criminal Court (ICC), and other related institutions. Finally, he posed several questions for discussion.

The discourse on ensuring justice for the Rohingyas is very recent. It began with systematic efforts to prosecute Myanmar in the ICC and the ICJ following the 2017 influx. However, historical evidence indicates Myanmar's genocidal intent and activities persisted for decades. This is evident in at least five separate waves of Rohingya influx into Bangladesh. The first wave occurred in 1978, when 200,000 Rohingyas arrived in the country. The second wave began in 1991, with 250,000 Rohingyas. The third involved 125,000 individuals. The most significant wave was the 2017 influx, during which more than 700,00 Rohingyas arrived in Bangladesh within approximately four months.

Dr Ashraf presented figures demonstrating evidence of genocide. In 2017 alone, 25,000 people were killed. A total of 20,000 women and children were victims of gang rape. There were 120,000 victims of torture. A total of 40,000 people were burnt. To date, more than 750,000 people have been forcibly displaced from Rakhine state. Nonetheless, genocidal activities have not ceased. Since the military coup in 2021, there has been a recurrence of such activities. The conflict between the Arakan Army (AA) and Myanmar state forces worsened the situation. Dr Ashraf asked what tools and strategies were available for the international community to stop these severe human rights violations, war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. Since the 1990s and the end of the Cold War, the international community had been searching for an answer to whether sovereignty, as understood in the traditional Westphalian framework, could protect a country from external intervention. He provided context for the development of the R2P. This concept emerged from the publication of a report titled *The Responsibility to Protect* by the International Commission on State Sovereignty in 2001; this commission was sponsored by the Canadian government. The report introduced the concept of the R2P.

Dr Ashraf summarised this concept in one sentence: if the government of a country fails to protect its population, the international community has a responsibility to protect them. R2P is increasingly becoming a global norm, i.e., an accepted standard in addressing human rights violations.

While the R2P concept was initially introduced in 2001, it has been reinforced through subsequent UN efforts. The 2005 UN World Summit codified R2P in the UN General Assembly; multiple UN resolutions and statements by the UN Secretary-General further clarified its scope and application. Over the past two decades, R2P became more clearly defined, with two primary conceptual approaches and three distinct pillars. Those pillars are: Pillar One—Prevention, Pillar Two—Reaction, and Pillar Three—Rebuilding. This was the initial framework presented in the R2P report by the International Commission on State Sovereignty. The core principle is, the government of a country holds the primary responsibility for preventing human rights violations. If it fails to do so, the international community assumes responsibility for prevention. If prevention fails, the international community is obligated to react, followed by rebuilding efforts. However, subsequent interpretations of R2P placed increased emphasis on not only prevention, but also on assisting the host government in managing humanitarian crises before taking further action. The most recent interpretations of R2P, particularly in relation to genocide and the case of the Rohingya, focus on coordinated international responses when there is clear evidence of human rights violations, war crimes, and genocide. Under this framework, Pillar One underscores the state's responsibility to protect its own population, Pillar Two establishes the international community's duty to assist the state, and Pillar Three allows for appropriate international action when a state fails to fulfill its obligations. Dr Ashraf discussed the optimism and pessimism surrounding R2P's effectiveness in safeguarding vulnerable populations from genocide and crimes against humanity. Optimists regard R2P as the most effective mechanism for protecting at-risk individuals, as was extensively debated during the 2018 UN General Assembly discussions. While R2P originated from an independent international commission in 2001, the UN has since embraced it as an established norm, further fuelling global discourse. Moreover, the Rohingya crisis and the Myanmar genocide have been among the most critically examined and debated topics within the UN since 2018. Dr Ashraf acknowledged perspectives of pessimists, citing Gareth Evans, one of the principal architects of R2P. Evans has argued that while there have been successful applications of R2P, there have been even more failures, with Rwanda being one of the worst cases, followed by Myanmar. In the Myanmar case, Evans observed that while the Rohingyas were initially the primary targets of systematic persecution, subsequent developments expanded the repression to include other civilian groups.

Dr Ashraf then concentrated on an analysis of potential R2P applications to the Rohingya crisis, drawing on Gareth Evans' extensive research. Evans identified at least five different strategies through which R2P could be applied. While many advocate for humanitarian military intervention, Evans highlighted three major obstacles to such an approach. First, there is the issue of a potential veto in the United Nations Security Council. Great power politics, particularly the likelihood of China and Russia exercising their veto powers, make authorising the use of force against Myanmar highly improbable. Second, there is no alternative mechanism for bypassing the Security Council to create a coalition of willing states for military intervention. No country has demonstrated the political will to lead such an operation, making this approach unrealistic. Third, a strategy involving systematic military pressure on Myanmar's military leadership would likely provoke strong resistance and result in a prolonged conflict. The risk of escalation and sustained instability renders military action under R2P an unfeasible option. He noted that these constraints have led many international experts

to consider military intervention in Myanmar as an impractical solution under the R2P framework.

The second possible strategy under R2P would be to create a moral panic by naming and shaming Myanmar in international fora. This could be done through diplomatic pressure from Myanmar's regional neighbours, particularly ASEAN, which could impose boycotts, suspend Myanmar's membership, and publicly condemn perpetrators of human rights violations. While ASEAN has taken some steps in this regard, its consensus-based decision-making process prevented it from adopting a more forceful approach. The third strategy would involve imposing an arms embargo, restricting transfer of sensitive surveillance and intelligence technologies to Myanmar's military. These tools have been used by the junta to suppress civilians and opposition groups. Even so, a lack of coordinated and comprehensive international enforcement limited the impact of such measures. A fourth R2P strategy would focus on targeted economic sanctions against Myanmar's military leadership and extensive economic networks they control. While the US and the UK imposed sanctions on military-run enterprises, these efforts had not been fully effective due to Myanmar's geopolitical alignments, support from regional and global patrons. The fifth and arguably the most viable option Dr Ashraf suggested, was judicial action—holding Myanmar accountable in international courts. This would include proceedings at the ICC and the ICJ. Enforcement of any judicial ruling remains a challenge due to the lack of UN Security Council action, particularly given China and Russia's veto power.

When discussing international responses, the focus often leans heavily on judicial mechanisms. It is essential to recognise the quest for justice is broader and should also include immediate humanitarian measures. Bangladesh, as the primary host country for over one million Rohingyas, faces significant challenges in sustaining support for this population. The Joint Response Plan (JRP) relies on international funding, but donor commitments have consistently fallen short. Over the past eight years, the expected international funding has been approximately \$1 billion annually, yet actual contributions rarely exceeded \$600 million. The US been the largest donor, followed by the EU, Australia, UK, South Korea, and Japan. But shifting global political dynamics, particularly with the possibility of a second Trump administration and its unilateralist foreign policy, could further threaten funding stability. The Rohingya response effort spans multiple critical sectors, including humanitarian protection, food security, healthcare, shelter, and gender-based violence prevention. Ensuring sustained international support remains imperative for addressing both the short-term and long-term needs of the Rohingya population. Dr. Ashraf's argument centred on the notion that the discourse surrounding the quest for justice begins with the protection of the Rohingya in their host country. This issue requires sustained attention. The most narrowly defined approach to justice is holding Myanmar accountable in international courts. In this regard, four key mechanisms were identified.

The first mechanism is the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM), established by the UNHRC in 2018. This initiative collects and analyses evidence of serious international crimes, including genocide and mass killings. Documentation and evidence gathered by the IIMM could serve as reference materials for prosecuting Myanmar's military leadership and civilian perpetrators of genocide. The second mechanism involved the ICC. In November 2024, the ICC Prosecutor filed an arrest warrant for Myanmar General Min Aung Hlaing before Pre-Trial Chamber I. Sadly, little progress had been observed regarding this warrant. The ICC's approach does not only target top military leaders, but extends also to the armed forces, police, border security forces, and non-Rohingya civilians implicated in crimes against the Rohingya. The third and most high-profile attempt to hold Myanmar accountable is the case between The

Gambia and Myanmar at the ICJ, initiated in 2019. By December 2024, Myanmar was required to submit its second memorial, essentially a formal response to the case. Although it is assumed that Myanmar complied, no official confirmation exists, as the document is classified. There has been increasing international support for this case, with various stakeholders advocating Myanmar be held responsible. For clarity, the ICJ prosecutes states, whereas the ICC prosecutes individuals.

Regarding legal proceedings, the ICJ case also involves discussions on Article 9 of the Genocide Convention, which determines the court's jurisdiction over Myanmar. Furthermore, Article 3 outlines offences like genocide, conspiracy to commit genocide, direct and public incitement to commit genocide, attempted genocide, and complicity in genocide. Although provisional measures directed Myanmar to prevent acts covered under Article 2—such as mass killings and infliction of serious mental harm, Myanmar has not complied with these directives. Consequently, provisional measures have failed to deter further atrocities. Proponents of international legal and judicial activism remain optimistic about the impact of international judicial procedures on Myanmar. Notwithstanding, this optimism has not translated into tangible changes. The critical question remains: what is the actual effect of these judicial processes? There are two primary perspectives on this issue. First, from an international standpoint, institutions such as the IIMM and other UN mechanisms argue: actions like the ICC arrest warrant or ICJ provisional measures signal to perpetrators of genocide and human rights violations that impunity is not guaranteed. At the very least, these measures serve as a deterrent.

For Bangladeshi diplomats, the primary policy focus remains the repatriation of Rohingyas. Legal and judicial mechanisms are seen as leverage to pressure Myanmar into agreeing to repatriation, particularly through the influence of international legal rulings. However, the effectiveness of this strategy remains uncertain.

As part of the roundtable discussion, Dr. Ashraf posed several questions for further deliberation:

1. Have ICC and ICJ proceedings had a meaningful impact on altering Myanmar's policies toward the Rohingya crisis?
2. How do The Gambia's internal political dynamics and external policies shape its engagement with the ICJ case? Given the presence of the honourable Minister, insights on this issue would be valuable.
3. How do evolving situations in Myanmar, particularly the conflict between the AA and Myanmar military, affect the Rohingya crisis? While legal proceedings focus on crimes committed during the 2017 exodus, more recent genocidal acts must also be addressed.
4. Are there enforcement mechanisms for ICC and ICJ rulings if top Myanmar generals are prosecuted for genocide and crimes against humanity? Sceptics argue that without robust enforcement measures, legal rulings may lack tangible consequences.

He concluded by emphasising the importance of continued discussion and collaboration to ensure accountability and justice for the Rohingyas.

Open Discussion Session



**Col. Z R M Ashraf Uddin, psc, G,
Former Research Director,
Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies**

Cornell Ashraf, the former RD-1 of BIIS, began by expressing his gratitude to the chair. Introducing himself, he congratulated Professor Ali Ashraf for presenting a thought-provoking paper. He then referenced a famous saying by Noam Chomsky, stating that rights are usually not granted but rather violated. Since rights must be gained, people must fight for them, which often involves some form of force. However, he chose not to focus on that aspect.

Instead, he raised a critical question about whether aggressive diplomacy could be pursued in addressing the Rohingya crisis. He emphasized the fundamental importance of home, homeland, and connection, drawing a parallel with the ongoing Gaza conflict. He pointed out that, despite 75 years of efforts, the Gaza issue remained unresolved because the native people had been displaced and denied the right to return.

Highlighting the urgency of the Rohingya situation, he stressed the need to make the international community aware that neglecting the crisis could lead to a major global issue in the next 50–60 years. He argued that the Rohingya people were deeply connected to their land, as they were the true sons of the soil.

He then discussed recent developments, mentioning that the Arakan Army had gained control over 13 out of 17 townships and had extended its presence up to the Bangladesh

border. Given this situation, he questioned whether Bangladesh could explore multiple levels of engagement with the Arakan Army, which now dominated the Rakhine State. He also suggested fostering diplomatic ties with China, maintaining relations with Myanmar, and even facilitating a US presence in the Bay of Bengal to exert pressure on Myanmar. Additionally, he proposed strengthening cooperation with the people of Arakan by supporting their education and economic development. He believed that the government of Bangladesh should adopt a combination of long-term, mid-term, and short-term strategies to address the crisis effectively.

In conclusion, he emphasized the importance of showing gratitude to the Gambian state for its contributions. He argued that Bangladesh should work toward strengthening its relationship with the Muslim Ummah, clarifying that the concept of Ummah was not a threatening slogan but rather a symbol of unity and togetherness. Finally, he expressed his appreciation to the audience.



**Ambassador Ashraf-ud-Doula,
Former Diplomat and Freedom Fighter**

Ambassador Ashraf-ud-Doula, speaking as both a former diplomat and a freedom fighter, addressed the Rohingya refugee crisis, describing it as a decades-long issue dating back to the 1970s. He questioned what the Rohingya themselves had done to improve their situation, arguing that they had remained dependent on international aid for nearly 50 years without taking proactive steps for their own rights. Citing Mao Zedong, he stated that no one fights another's war and expressed concern that the Rohingya continued to rely on external assistance while seeking refuge in Bangladesh, a country already burdened by high population density. He highlighted the environmental and economic strain Bangladesh had suffered due to the crisis and criticized the slow progress in resolving it. He pointed out that discussions often happened behind closed doors while global powers prioritized their economic interests in Rakhine State.

Skeptical of meaningful change, he asserted that regardless of ICJ or UN statements, the situation on the ground remained unchanged.

Ambassador Doula acknowledged Dr. Khalilur Rahman's diplomatic efforts and the significance of the UN Secretary-General's upcoming visit to Rohingya refugee camps. However, he questioned whether such symbolic gestures had led to tangible results. He raised concerns over the lack of a clear roadmap for the Rohingya's future, asking where they would ultimately settle and how their long-term prospects would be secured. He called for a paradigm shift in diplomatic approaches, urging innovative solutions rather than continued reliance on conventional discussions. Drawing historical parallels, he cited Bangladesh's liberation struggle, East Timor, South Sudan, and Palestine, emphasizing that despite immense hardships, these peoples had not abandoned their fight to reclaim their homeland.

While appreciating Gambia's efforts in taking the Rohingya case to the ICJ, he questioned how a potential ruling in their favor would be enforced. Without a concrete plan for implementation, he doubted its impact. Reflecting on his own experiences as a young freedom fighter, he questioned whether the Rohingya shared the same commitment to their cause, expressing concerns about rising social crimes linked to the crisis. He concluded by thanking the audience for their attention.



Rear Admiral A.S.M.A. Awal(G), ndc, MDS, psc
Bangladesh Navy Rear Admiral and former Assistant Chief of Naval Staff (Personnel).

Rear Admiral Awal criticized the international response to the Rohingya crisis as severely inadequate. He expressed deep gratitude to the Honorable Minister from Gambia for the

country's efforts in holding Myanmar accountable—an initiative absent until 2019. Despite Bangladesh and Myanmar being directly involved, it was Gambia, a nation over 11,000 kilometers away, that took the critical step to bring Myanmar before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), ensuring accountability.

Addressing Professor Ashraf, Rear Admiral Awal referred to the evolving situation in Myanmar, particularly the rise of the Arakan Army. While its activities had been described, he raised concerns about the ICJ's provisional measures, which required Myanmar to cease genocidal actions, preserve evidence, and submit reports every six months. He noted the lack of clarity on the effectiveness of these reports and questioned their impact, considering the long timeline of such cases. Comparing it to the Bosnia and Herzegovina case, which took 14 years, he pointed out that the current case was only at its halfway mark.

He further highlighted the challenge posed by the Arakan Army's control over most of Rakhine State, particularly areas where Rohingya atrocities occurred. He warned that Myanmar might exploit this as an excuse, claiming it no longer controlled the affected territory, while the Arakan Army—equally or more hostile than the junta—continued its brutal actions. In this context, he questioned the implications of this shift in control.

Finally, addressing the Honorable Minister from Gambia, he acknowledged the lengthy and uncertain legal process. Instead of posing a direct question, he sought insight into the internal dynamics of navigating such a prolonged case and inquired about the level of international support Gambia was receiving to sustain its commitment.



**Ambassador Mohammad Sufiur Rahman,
Senior Research Fellow, SIPG**

Ambassador Mohammad Sufiur Rahman is a retired Bangladeshi diplomat and senior research fellow at the South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance.

Ambassador Mohammad Sufiur Rahman emphasized the need for balance in addressing the Rohingya crisis, arguing that while legal accountability is crucial, it must be complemented by restorative justice. He noted that Myanmar's landscape, particularly in Rakhine State, was undergoing significant changes, with the Arakan Army emerging as a new authority. In its rise to power, the Arakan Army had committed serious crimes that could qualify as crimes against humanity. With Myanmar having missed its deadline for submitting a rejoinder to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the case was now moving into its substantive phase. While Myanmar's perpetrators and their Rakhine collaborators had been well-documented, particularly through the work of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM), argued that justice should go beyond retribution. Punishing the perpetrators alone would not restore the Rohingya's rights, and the process must address their long-term well-being.

He called for a comprehensive approach that includes restitution, rehabilitation, and compensation. Rohingya land rights, businesses, education, and healthcare must be restored, and trauma care and job support provided. Compensation, often overlooked, was critical to ensuring they could rebuild their lives upon returning to Rakhine. He cited a 2019 estimate of a \$6 billion compensation package, though this was criticized as undervalued, and urged the international community to mobilize or extract funds from Myanmar, similar to reparations imposed on Iraq after the 1991 Gulf War. He noted that discussions often focused on four key demands: safety and security upon return, freedom of movement, access to livelihoods, and a pathway to citizenship. While essential, he stressed that restitution, rehabilitation, and compensation must also be prioritized.

Beyond financial and legal measures, he highlighted the importance of symbolic gestures, such as official apologies, memorials, and preferential treatment in employment, healthcare, and education. While ambitious, he argued that these steps were necessary for true justice. He also called for greater international commitment, particularly from countries that had joined the ICJ case, urging them to mobilize resources for the Rohingya. Justice, he asserted, could not be achieved through punishment alone. Lastly, he stressed that solutions must focus on Rakhine, not Bangladesh. While the Rohingya had suffered the most, other ethnic communities had also faced violence, necessitating a truth-seeking mechanism for reconciliation. Reconciliation, he warned, could no longer be delayed.

With the UN Secretary-General's upcoming visit to Bangladesh and an international conference approaching, he urged that these critical aspects of justice be incorporated into the global response. He expressed confidence that both Gambian and Bangladeshi representatives would take serious note of these points, as they were essential for achieving meaningful and lasting justice for the Rohingya.



Lieutenant General Mahfuz

Everyone was thanked by Lieutenant General Mahfuz before the discussion was initiated. It was emphasized that an understanding of the key actors involved in this situation was necessary. The Tatmadaw, recognized as an institution older than the Myanmar state itself, has been established as the strongest entity in the country. The decisions regarding national affairs have consistently been dictated by this institution.

At the border, the Arakan Army has been observed following the same strategic patterns as the Tatmadaw. It has been in existence longer than its political wing, the United League of Arakan (ULA). Over time, it is expected that this organization will be transformed into a meritocratic institution, one that will surpass the strength of Arakan itself. These shifting dynamics must be properly understood.

Regarding the enforcement of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), a few key considerations were highlighted. The presence of military force in such a situation has been recognized as highly sensitive, and any engagement is expected to be met with significant resistance. The military culture of the Tatmadaw, along with that of the Arakan Army, must be carefully analyzed. A question was raised regarding whether a credible deterrence should be developed within this military environment.

It was further emphasized that this crisis is no longer considered a bilateral issue between Bangladesh and Myanmar. Instead, it has evolved into a geopolitical matter. Attention was drawn to the involvement of various regional and global powers, whose interests must be carefully examined. It has been noted that Myanmar's military, the Tatmadaw, has been predominantly supplied with armaments by Russia (49%), China (29%), and India (14%). Meanwhile, disparities in humanitarian assistance for the Rohingya people have been observed—Russia has provided \$2 million, while China, despite its position as the world's second-largest economy, has contributed only \$400,000. No financial assistance has been given by India. In contrast, the United States

has allocated \$161 million, the United Kingdom 41 crore, and the European Union 26 crore. These contributions reflect the varying levels of engagement from global actors, whose motives must be taken into account while addressing the crisis.

Finally, an important concern was raised regarding the ongoing genocidal activities undertaken by the Arakan Army. As a non-state actor, it has been identified as a serious threat. The need for a strategic approach to restrain such actions was underscored.



Ambassador Shahed Akhtar

Ambassador Shahed Akhtar first expressed gratitude before recognizing the distinguished personalities present on the podium. It was stated that a detailed discussion on what had already been mentioned by the predecessors would not be undertaken. Instead, attention was drawn to key aspects of the issue.

It was emphasized that a solution to the Rohingya crisis remains the primary concern. The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) framework was acknowledged for its detailed analysis of the situation, and appreciation was extended to the presenter for providing a comprehensive overview of ongoing developments. The influence of the J & ICC was recognized, with reference being made to former Philippine President Duterte, who had once boarded an aircraft to attend proceedings that had been initiated by the current Philippine President, Junior Marcos. Such developments were cited as examples of the impact that international legal bodies can have.

However, it was pointed out that the Myanmar authorities have not yet reached the stage where such international mechanisms could be enforced upon them, as Myanmar remains a non-signatory to these bodies. Meanwhile, Bangladesh and the international community have continued to exert pressure on Myanmar. It was suggested that rather than focusing extensively on the nuances of R2P, efforts should be directed toward addressing this pressing issue in a more immediate and pragmatic manner.

It was further highlighted that as high-ranking UN officials, including the Secretary-General, are expected to visit, urgent solutions must be sought. Bangladesh's suffering due to the ongoing crisis was underscored, and recognition of this burden was urged. The role of the high representative, who has dedicated his entire career to this issue and has been diligently following its developments, was acknowledged. Optimism was expressed regarding an outcome being reached soon.

Attention was drawn to discussions held under the Chatham House Rule in another forum, where a reputed authority had suggested that a resolution process was underway. The importance of involving other international players was emphasized, with specific reference to China's role as a friend to both Bangladesh and Myanmar. It was suggested that ASEAN, Russia, the European Union, and the United Nations could collectively exert sufficient pressure on Myanmar, forcing it to recognize its obligations.

Reference was also made to past instances where compensation was arranged for Bangladesh in the aftermath of the Gulf War. Gratitude was expressed towards those who played a role in securing this assistance, highlighting the feasibility of similar action in the present context. It was asserted that Myanmar must be held responsible, as failure to do so would allow impunity to persist. The prolonged suffering of Bangladesh was reiterated, and the necessity of an immediate resolution was stressed.

The speech was then concluded with an acknowledgment that while much remains to be said on the subject, the urgency of finding a solution must remain the primary focus.



**Dr Amena Mohsin,
Professor,
Department of International Relations
University of Dhaka**

Dr Amena Mohsin thanked the Chairman and promised to keep her remarks brief, focusing on three key points. She noted that during Ashraf's presentation, she reflected on Bangladesh's own experience as a victim of genocide. She expressed concern that discussions of genocide often focus solely on statistics, such as the number of rapes and deaths, rather than the emotional and mental trauma endured by survivors. Drawing from her and her colleague Rosanna Ashraf's long-term work with the Rohingya, she suggested that a more comprehensive definition of genocide should be developed, one that accounts for the lifelong trauma carried by survivors, a point she said Ambassador Dola had also raised in his intervention.

For her second point, she agreed with previous remarks and emphasized that, given the changing situation in Myanmar, Bangladesh should seriously consider engaging in various levels of diplomacy with the different forces currently active in Myanmar.

Finally, she addressed the topic of restoration and rehabilitation, stressing the need to focus on the future. While acknowledging the importance of symbolic gestures in the long term, she argued that short- and mid-term efforts should prioritize the youth. She highlighted the importance of investing in children born in the camps and young boys who arrived as survivors in Cox's Bazar and have since grown up. She concluded by calling for support from both regional and extra-regional powers to invest in the future of these young people.



**Professor Mahbubur Rahman,
North South University**

Professor Mahbubur Rahman, a Professor of Political Science at North South University, introduced himself and shared two observations. He first addressed His Excellency Dr. Tangara, noting that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) process is lengthy and citing the adage "justice delayed, justice denied." He inquired about the options Gambia could employ to expedite the process, suggesting that such efforts might provide insight into how the situation could evolve in the future.

For his second observation, he turned to His Excellency Dr. Khalilur Rahman, pointing out that the upcoming United Nations Conference would be significant, particularly given the critical future scenario in Rakhine. He acknowledged that the Arakan Army has expressed a need for external assistance for its survival while also suggesting they should be held accountable for their actions. However, he raised concerns about their continued exclusion and marginalization of the Rohingya, similar to the Tatmadaw, and asked how compliance with an inclusive governance system—one that ensures the rights of the Rohingya and other ethnic minorities—could be guaranteed. He proposed that the conference might offer leverage for Bangladesh to act individually, expressing confidence that Dr. Khalilur Rahman had this on his agenda and indicating his eagerness to hear how this could be ensured. He further suggested that the UN might consider recognizing a non-state actor, given the circumstances, and that any legitimacy granted by the UN, Bangladesh, or neighboring countries should come with assurances from the Arakan Army that their future actions would protect Rohingya rights.

Lastly, he addressed his distinguished colleagues present, asking if they could shed light on the situation in Rakhine, particularly regarding civil society. He emphasized that the Arakan Army is not the sole entity in Rakhine and that the local population should exert internal pressure, receive incentives, or be offered assistance to become more accommodating. He highlighted the need to address the prevailing racism in the region,

explaining that Bangladesh's primary concern is the repatriation of the Rohingya. He stressed that this would only be feasible if an appropriate atmosphere is created in Rakhine, and he sought options Bangladesh could pursue to foster such conditions, noting that the Rohingya would only return willingly once this environment exists.



Major General Ashab Uddin

Ashab Uddin, ndc, psc is a retired major general of the Bangladesh Army. He has also served as Bangladesh's ambassador to Kuwait and Yemen.

Major General Ashab explained that he would share his experiences as the General Officer Commanding (GOC) (24 infantry division) of the greater Chittagong region, taking them back to 2012. He recounted that in June or July of that year, intelligence informed him that 700 to 800 Rohingyas were positioned at the zero line to intrude in Bangladesh. He instructed the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) to provide food to those people but to prevent any from entering the country. He also alerted his local brigade to stay alert and notified both the UN corridors and the Bangladesh government.

He mentioned that his actions were informed by foresight, recalling an interview he had given to the Dhaka Tribune in 2016, before the major Rohingya influx, where he predicted such an event. A year later, in 2017, his prediction came true as a massive wave of Rohingyas entered Bangladesh. Reflecting on 2012, he noted that the Myanmar chief, Lieutenant General Soe Win, and his team visited Bangladesh that same year and spent three days with him. They played golf and toured various places, though he found their intentions hard to decipher.

He described an exchange with his counterpart, General Nyo Twan Aung of Arakan State, who invited him to play golf in Maungdaw. In response, he told General Nyo Twan

Awng that he would indeed come to play golf but would not come alone. The message was that Myanmar should take back the Rohingyas, and within three days, the Myanmar authorities complied. However, he questioned why, in 2017, the Rohingya influx poured into Bangladesh like water, unstoppable and overwhelming.

He emphasized that the real issue lay in the difficulty of understanding the Myanmar people—their philosophy, behavior, and patterns. He described them as highly suspicious and recalled a seven-day visit to Myanmar in 2011 at the invitation of their army, where he found their facial expressions and motives nearly impossible to read. He lamented that seven years had been lost since then and warned that Bangladesh could not afford to lose two more decades waiting to repatriate the 1.2 million forcibly displaced Rohingyas.

He urged for a proactive approach, advocating very strong diplomacy alongside military readiness. He referenced General Mahfuz and others who suggested aligning with the current dynamics in Arakan, including the Arakan Army's role. As this was a closed-door roundtable discussion under Chatham House rules, he revealed that in 2012, it would have been possible for him to launch an attack and seize Arakan in just two days. But he also stated that war was not the solution. Instead, he argued that soft diplomacy alone would not suffice—Bangladesh needed both proactive military strategies and assertive diplomacy to seize the moment and address the crisis effectively. He concluded by thanking the audience.



**Professor Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir,
Department of Development Studies,
University of Dhaka**

The speaker thanked the Chair and began by making a brief point: the solution to the Rohingya crisis, he argued, lies in Myanmar. He questioned what this meant in light of

recent changes in the international community, such as shifts under the Trump administration and the complex dynamics between Myanmar's leadership—referring to the father and daughter relationship—and its representation at the UN, which he noted was not the military junta. He also highlighted the current shifting atmosphere, particularly with Malaysia's involvement and the appearance of Thaksin Shinawatra in the regional picture.

He then asked how Bangladesh envisioned addressing this at the next conference, specifically how to ensure a livable environment for the Rohingyas. He wondered whether the idea of a "Marshall Plan" for Rohingya citizens in Myanmar was under consideration, borrowing the term to suggest a large-scale rehabilitation effort. He observed that while some discussions were happening, he saw little beyond diplomatic steps being proposed or yielding results. However, he stated that credible deterrence should not be ignored. He explained that there were both necessary and sufficient conditions to address the crisis: the necessary condition being a livable Myanmar for Rohingya citizens. Yet, given the repeated trespassing into Bangladesh and other regions, he urged the audience to also consider credible deterrence as part of the strategy.



Special Remarks

Dr Md Nazrul Islam
Secretary (East), Ministry of Foreign
Affairs, Government of the People's
Republic of Bangladesh

Dr Md Nazrul Islam began by noting that more than seven years have passed since Bangladesh began hosting over 1.2 million forcibly displaced Rohingyas from Myanmar on humanitarian grounds. This protracted crisis has imposed significant social, economic, and environmental costs on Bangladesh, and poses increasing risks to both national and regional security, encompassing both traditional and non-traditional security dimensions.

Despite these challenges, Bangladesh remains firmly committed to supporting the forcibly displaced Rohingya population. Dr Islam emphasised the need for continued

international support—both in terms of humanitarian operations and for facilitating sustainable and dignified repatriation. Equally vital, he stressed, is the pursuit of justice for the grave human rights violations committed against the Rohingyas through ongoing accountability processes at the ICJ and ICC, and the judiciary of Argentina, which recently issued arrest warrants related to the case.

He paid tribute to the Government of The Gambia for its principled and leading role in initiating the case at the ICJ on behalf of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), aimed at holding those responsible for genocide and crimes against humanity accountable. Referring to the recent OIC Foreign Ministers' meeting held on 29 August in The Gambia, he mentioned the Vice-Ministerial Committee on Accountability for Human Rights Violations against the Rohingyas.

The meeting reiterated the OIC's unwavering support for the Rohingyas and renewed calls on Myanmar to guarantee their safety, security, and fundamental rights, including the right to citizenship. Acknowledging the limited time for the session, Dr Islam summarised some key points arising from the day's discussions. He observed that, given the current situation in Myanmar, especially in Rakhine State, it is essential to reinvigorate diplomatic efforts. He called for ASEAN, particularly its Special Envoy on Myanmar, to play a more proactive and effective role in resolving the crisis. He noted that the

ASEAN Special Envoy, Dato Erywan Pehin Yusof of Malaysia, had recently met with the Hon'ble Foreign Affairs Adviser of Bangladesh, reflecting the urgency of the matter. Dr Islam highlighted the need for countries with influence over Myanmar to take more responsibility. He further pointed out that Western countries, including some European nations and Canada, which have supported the ICJ case, should also contribute financially to the legal process, sharing some of the burden currently borne by The Gambia. Beyond financial support, these nations should increase pressure on Myanmar through economic and diplomatic measures. He stressed that moral principles such as the R2P must guide these efforts, urging all countries to be on the right side of history. He also acknowledged the commendable role of international institutions such as the International Independent Investigative

Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM), while noting that their efforts must be doubled to achieve meaningful accountability. Dr Islam then informed the audience that the UN Secretary-General would be visiting the next day and would meet with Rohingya refugees, a gesture symbolising his continued commitment to their cause. He added that the High Representative of the Chief Adviser has initiated several important steps, including the organisation of an upcoming international conference on language issues, which will address many related concerns.

He concluded by echoing Ambassador Sufiur Rahman's earlier remarks on the importance of restorative justice and reconciliation measures. Dr Islam expressed his hope that this kind of roundtable seminar would greatly contribute to shaping future responses to the Rohingya crisis. He extended his sincere thanks to the Government of The Gambia, the Honourable Foreign Minister Dr Tangara, the panellists, and the audience for their valuable participation.



Remarks by the Guest of Honour

**H. E. Dr. Khalilur Rahman,
High Representative to the Chief
Adviser on Rohingya Crisis and
Priority issues affairs,
Government of the People's
Republic of Bangladesh**

H. E. Dr. Khalilur Rahman started his speech by describing the case of The Gambia as ground-breaking in many aspects and expressed keen interest in its progress. He emphasised it would not only be unfortunate, but also tragic if the case were to be lost due to financial constraints in paying legal fees; all efforts would be made to secure necessary funds by reaching out to friendly nations to ensure the proceedings reach their conclusion.

Dr. Rahman asserted that peace is unattainable without accountability, highlighting the case's importance in restoring dignity to the Rohingya and facilitating their return to their homeland. Justice, he noted, is meant to provide fair treatment to individuals and groups within society, and this fundamental principle of fairness is essential in achieving closure in conflicts. Given the evolving circumstances, he believed the time had come to discuss closure and transitional justice beyond judicial process. He acknowledged the contributions of his colleague, Sophia Roman, in outlining key aspects of transitional justice, which must be considered for moving forward. When the interim government assumed office, the Rohingya issue was on the verge of disappearing from the international agenda. Recognising this, Professor Dr. Muhammad Yunus, Chief Adviser of Bangladesh, swiftly acted by calling for an international conference on the matter during his visit to New York for the UN General Assembly. Dr. Rahman, having attended numerous General Assembly sessions, was surprised by the swift approval of this international conference as early as November. Typically, such matters extend until final days of the session in December. Moreover, the resolution was adopted by consensus, with 106 countries co-sponsoring it, affirming the issue would remain alive and must be

advanced further. Upon assuming his responsibilities, Dr. Rahman observed fundamental changes unfolding in Rakhine. The AA progressively took control of territories, and he personally witnessed their flags being raised along the border. This signalled the emergence of a new neighbour. Under the Chatham House Rule, he shared insights in confidence, explaining immediate engagement with the AA was necessary, as Myanmar's central government was largely absent from the equation.

Before engaging the AA, the Secretary-General was consulted, and Julia Bishop, Citizens' Envoy on Myanmar, former Foreign Minister and acting Prime Minister of Australia, played a role in drafting a message. This message, addressed to the AA, clearly stated that as new authorities in the region, they were bound by international law, international humanitarian law, and human rights principles. It was crucial to establish this understanding at the outset of their governance. Since then, Bangladesh engaged the AA at multiple levels, though not all discussions were made public. Dr. Rahman revealed the AA unequivocally stated their principled position to facilitate voluntary repatriation of the Rohingyas with dignity and security. He stressed the need to go beyond verbal assurances to tangible actions. While some argue Bangladesh's only leverage lay in legal recourse against Myanmar, Dr. Rahman disagreed, asserting the current situation represented a new paradigm in which Myanmar's central government was no longer the primary actor in Rakhine. This shift would require a different strategic approach. He emphasised the need for a balanced approach in addressing the crisis, stating Bangladesh, with its population of 180 million, must consider the broader military, economic, and institutional equilibrium while dealing with the situation in Rakhine. However, at this moment, the most pressing concern is the dire humanitarian situation. According to reports from the UNDP, Rakhine is on the brink of famine, and there is no alternative route for humanitarian assistance to reach the region except through Bangladesh. Rather than viewing this as a form of leverage, he saw it as an opportunity. Arakan authorities explicitly acknowledged their dependence on Bangladesh for humanitarian aid, and this realisation presented an avenue for constructive engagement.

Bangladesh must carefully consider its long-term interests in fostering a peaceful and stable neighbour on the western frontier. Apart from its extensive border with India, this is its only other land border, making it imperative to adopt a strategic and prudent approach. While the AA speaks of building an inclusive society, he observed that their leadership remained largely non-representative of the Rohingya community. During Bangladesh's engagements with the AA, their leadership composition was strikingly homogeneous, with no Rohingya presence even in key governance bodies. Although Myanmar has a Rohingya minister in its central administration, there is no meaningful representation in the newly emerging authorities in Arakan. Bangladesh could not be expected to extend support to an administration that failed to include the Rohingya in leadership roles. The country would like to see genuine inclusivity reflected in governance structures and was awaiting tangible steps in this regard. On the international front, Dr. Rahman highlighted the progress made through diplomatic initiatives, particularly the upcoming international conference. Discussions were moving towards a consensus on three key pillars—reconciliation, repatriation, and resettlement, with repatriation now at the centre of diplomatic engagements. While Bangladesh remains committed to providing shelter to the Rohingyas, their voluntary and dignified return remains the ultimate goal. The only viable path forward would be to create conditions in Rakhine that would enable their safe and sustainable repatriation.

Bangladesh also played a key role in supporting humanitarian aid to Rakhine, ensuring the assistance was channelled through UN-led mechanisms. However, for any meaningful progress to be made, Dr. Rahman emphasised the AA must cease hostilities. He expressed cautious optimism, stating there were indications Myanmar's central

authorities might also halt aerial bombings and other military operations. If this would lead up to a sustained ceasefire, he believed it could lay the groundwork for further discussions on the safe return of the Rohingyas. He acknowledged the complexity of the issue, stating there was no single solution or "magic wand" that could immediately resolve the crisis. What Bangladesh possesses, however, is the power of diplomacy. Yet, he cautioned that no diplomatic effort could succeed without a credible deterrent. Maintaining a strategic balance is crucial, and while Bangladesh is a nation of 180 million, it would not repeat the mistakes made by others in similar situations. Instead of seeking dominance, Bangladesh's approach is rooted in fostering long-term, peaceful, and mutually beneficial relations with the emerging authorities in Arakan. This should be within Arakan's borders, blending both major groups and smaller communities to create an inclusive society. Inclusivity would mean more than merely token representation; it should mean real authority. While communicating this to the AA, he made it clear the faces in leadership must not just be symbolic but should also hold genuine power to make important decisions. He highlighted that the international community had shown support for this approach, underlining Bangladesh was not seeking a few faces, but real decision-makers. He also noted encouraging steps taken by Bangladesh authorities, who were gradually involving local leadership structures in governance. While acknowledging the positive moves, Dr. Rahman was clear that mistreatment of the Rohingya must stop. Assistance could not be extended to those who would continue harmful practices. He recalled a conversation with Ambassador Dollar, remarking it was a misconception that people were comfortable in Bangladesh and they did not want to return to their homeland. He would frequently visit the refugee camps, meet the younger generation, and every time he speaks with them, they expressed a desire to go back. When asked about their nationality, they proudly identify as Arakanese. Dr. Rahman emphasised that no one wanted to live in the temporary conditions they now find themselves in.

He described the dire living situation, with the Rohingyas residing in overcrowded camps, their homes made of tarpaulin and plastic, leading a life of statelessness. These people do not want this life. In classrooms, children were being taught in foreign languages, but when asked where they were from, they would say "Arakan," showing their deep connection to their homeland. He shared an emotional experience from a Friday prayer, where he saw the pain and tears of stateless people longing for a return to their home. While the situation is complex, the mass displacement only occurred after the Tatmadaw initiated its genocidal actions and Buddhist extremists carried out atrocities. Conflicts have existed in the region for centuries, but it was this large-scale military action that forced people to flee. Population balance in the region was 55-60 per cent Rakhines and 40-45 per cent Rohingyas, which meant the conflicts were manageable until the Tatmadaw intervened. Although Bangladesh fought for its independence in 1971, with support from other nations, it does not seek to revisit those past conflicts but instead focuses on finding a balanced solution for the future. Dr. Rahman expressed cautious optimism for the future; if Bangladesh's economy could adequately address its people's needs, the country gained support and legitimacy of the international community, progress could be made. Legitimacy could not be obtained if people would continue to be treated poorly. As long as the military regime would remain in power in Myanmar, Arakan would remain disconnected from the rest of the country. The path forward for Myanmar would therefore, require legitimacy not only from its neighbours but from the international community as well. He concluded by reaffirming Bangladesh's position: Arakan must govern itself based on international standards and human rights principles. Bangladesh's diplomatic efforts would continue to push for justice and accountability, including support for the case being led at the ICJ. The government would leave no stone unturned in its efforts to ensure adequate resources for the legal battle and bring about a solution for the displaced Rohingyas.



Remarks by the Chief Guest

Dr Mamadou Tangura

**Minister for Foreign Affairs,
International Cooperation and
Gambians Abroad
Government of the Republic of The
Gambia**

Dr Mamadou Tangura began with his acknowledgment of the remarkable efforts of the Bangladeshi government, particularly the Honourable Chief Adviser, Professor Muhammad Yunus, for taking up the Rohingya case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) within just a few years of the mass exodus. He described the case as groundbreaking in multiple respects, one that he had followed closely. However, he cautioned that it would not only be unfortunate, but also a tragic situation if the case were to be lost due to a lack of funding for legal proceedings. He assured the audience that The Gambia would do everything in its power to mobilise resources, reaching out to friendly nations to ensure that financial constraints did not hinder justice.

Dr Tangura underscored that peace is unattainable without accountability, making this case particularly significant for ensuring justice and the dignified return of the Rohingya to their homeland. He noted that justice is rooted in the principle of fairness, which is essential for closure—whether at the end of a conflict or in its midst. Given the evolving circumstances, he believed that discussions around transitional justice must now move beyond the judicial process. He acknowledged the critical points raised by his colleague, Sophia Roman, on transitional justice, stressing that these considerations must guide future strategies.

Reflecting on recent developments, Dr Tangura remarked that when the interim government took office, the Rohingya crisis was on the verge of fading from the global agenda. Recognising this risk, Professor Yunus acted swiftly, calling for an international conference at the United Nations General Assembly to bring renewed attention to the issue. Dr Tangura recalled his own experiences at the General Assembly, expressing surprise at how quickly the proposal was approved—by November, rather than the usual prolonged deliberations until December. Notably, the resolution was adopted by

consensus, with 106 countries co-sponsoring it, demonstrating that the issue remained alive.

Turning to the rapidly changing dynamics in Rakhine, Dr Tangura noted that the Arakan Army had gained control over vast territories, with its flag now raised along the border. He revealed that Bangladesh had swiftly engaged with the new authorities in Arakan, recognising that Myanmar's central government was largely absent from the equation. Before initiating dialogue, Bangladesh ensured that the Arakan Army was formally reminded—through a message co-drafted with Julia Bishop, the Citizens' Envoy on Myanmar and a former Australian Foreign Minister—of its obligations under international law, international humanitarian law, and human rights principles. This early diplomatic move was crucial in holding the Arakan Army accountable from the outset.

While engagement with the Arakan Army has taken place at multiple levels, Dr Tangura emphasised that much of it remains outside the realm of public diplomacy. However, he disclosed that the Arakan Army had made a clear commitment to facilitating the voluntary, dignified, and secure return of the Rohingya. He cautioned, however, that words alone were insufficient. He noted that while some viewed legal recourse as Bangladesh's only leverage, he disagreed. Myanmar's absence from the current power dynamics meant that Bangladesh was operating in an entirely new paradigm.

Dr Tangura highlighted the importance of maintaining a balance of power, considering Bangladesh's population of 180 million in contrast to Rakhine's two million non-Rohingya inhabitants. He noted that beyond military and economic considerations, the immediate priority was the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Rakhine, where an impending famine had been reported by the UNDP. With no other conduits for humanitarian assistance to reach Arakan State except through Bangladesh, he viewed this not merely as leverage but as an opportunity. The Arakan Army, he noted, was acutely aware of its reliance on Bangladesh for humanitarian aid.

On the political front, Dr Tangura stressed that Bangladesh must take a long-term, strategic approach to its only other land border besides India. While the Arakan Army speaks of building an inclusive society, he pointed out that its leadership remains overwhelmingly non-representative of the Rohingya. Meetings with their representatives revealed a striking lack of Rohingya participation, even at governance levels. While Myanmar's central government has at least one Rohingya minister, there is no meaningful Rohingya representation in the newly emerging authorities in Arakan. He made it clear that Bangladesh could not be expected to extend support to an administration that fails to include the Rohingya in leadership roles. He reiterated that Bangladesh would like to see genuine inclusivity reflected in governance structures and was awaiting tangible steps in this regard.

At the international level, Dr Tangura reaffirmed that diplomatic efforts were progressing, particularly with the upcoming international conference. He revealed that discussions were moving towards a consensus on three key pillars—reconciliation, repatriation, and resettlement—with repatriation now at the centre of negotiations. He stressed that while Bangladesh remains committed to sheltering the Rohingya, the ultimate goal remains their safe, voluntary, and dignified return.

Humanitarian aid to Rakhine, Dr Tangura noted, has been a crucial component of Bangladesh's engagement, ensuring that assistance is channelled through UN-led mechanisms. However, for meaningful progress to be made, he emphasised that the Arakan Army must cease hostilities. He expressed cautious optimism, stating that indications suggested Myanmar's central authorities might also halt aerial bombings and

other military operations. If this results in a sustained ceasefire, he believes it could pave the way for discussions on the safe return of the Rohingya. Dr Tangura acknowledged the complexity of the issue, stating that no single solution or “magic wand” could immediately resolve the crisis. However, he stressed that Bangladesh possesses a powerful tool: diplomacy. At the same time, he warned that no diplomatic effort can succeed without a credible deterrent. Maintaining a strategic balance is crucial, and while Bangladesh is a country of 180 million, he assured that it would not repeat the mistakes of others in similar situations. Bangladesh’s approach, he asserted, is not about dominance but about fostering long-term, peaceful, and mutually beneficial relations with the emerging authorities in Arakan.

He continued by emphasising that any solution must be rooted within Arakan itself, ensuring true inclusivity by integrating both major and smaller ethnic groups into its governance structures. He recounted his message to the Arakan Army, where he insisted on seeing Rohingya representation with real authority, not merely symbolic figures. The British High Commissioner, Toby, had also reinforced this position, ensuring that international support was directed towards an approach that genuinely empowered all communities rather than offering mere token representation. Dr Tangura expressed cautious optimism, noting that some local authorities in Arakan were gradually incorporating Rohingya individuals into leadership structures. However, he stressed that mistreatment persisted, and without an end to such injustices, no meaningful progress could be made. He warned that continued misdeeds could not coexist with expectations of international assistance, as support cannot be extended to those who perpetuate harm. Dr Tangura then referred to a suggestion made by Ambassador Dollar, an esteemed colleague whom he was pleased to see after a long time. He rejected the misconception that the Rohingya in Bangladesh were reluctant to return home. Drawing from his personal visits to the refugee camps, he shared that younger generations overwhelmingly expressed their desire to return to Arakan. When asked about their nationality, they identified as belonging to Arakan, not Bangladesh. He emphasised that no one wished to remain in a confined and stateless existence. He painted a stark picture of the contrast between their former lives, where they owned vast tracts of land, and their current conditions—crammed into makeshift shelters of tarpaulin and plastic. He recalled visiting classrooms where Rohingya children, despite their uncertain futures, still identified themselves as being from their homeland, further proving their deep-rooted connection to Arakan. He described a moment during a Friday prayer, where he witnessed stateless refugees weeping, deeply moved by their yearning to return home.

Addressing the historical context, Dr Tangura noted that conflicts between ethnic groups have existed for centuries, just as they have in other parts of the world. Previously, displaced persons would return in small numbers, but the large-scale, systematic violence by the Tatmadaw had resulted in an unprecedented mass exodus. He acknowledged that Buddhist extremists also played a role in the atrocities but pointed out that the demographic balance in Arakan remained fairly even, with approximately 55–60 per cent Rakhine and 40–45 per cent Rohingya. In smaller conflicts, both groups had managed to coexist, but when a military force as powerful as the Tatmadaw decided to expel an entire community, there were no viable options for the Rohingya but to flee.

He then reflected on Bangladesh’s own history of displacement and struggle during the 1971 Liberation War, noting that unlike the Rohingya, Bangladeshis were able to establish a provisional government in exile and receive external assistance. He questioned whether the Rohingya should be expected to take a similar path and suggested that such an approach was neither necessary nor viable. Instead, he urged all stakeholders to focus on the present power dynamics, highlighting Bangladesh’s

population of 180 million compared to the mere two million non-Rohingya residents of Arakan.

Offering an assessment of the future, Dr Tangura rated his optimism at four out of ten. However, he expressed hope that circumstances could improve in the months ahead. He noted that if the Arakan Army sought to sustain itself, feed its people, and gain international recognition, it would need to change its treatment of the Rohingya. He stated unequivocally that legitimacy could not be achieved as long as human rights abuses continued. Furthermore, he suggested that as long as the military regime in Naypyidaw remained in power, Arakan would continue to be functionally detached from Myanmar. As a result, it would need to engage with the international community independently, establishing institutions that adhered to global governance standards.

Dr Tangura concluded by reiterating that from the very beginning, Bangladesh had insisted that any governing body in Arakan must abide by international laws, human rights principles, and global norms. He expressed gratitude to his colleagues and assured them that The Gambia would remain unwavering in its commitment to securing sufficient resources to support the legal case at the ICJ. He concluded with his reaffirmation that his government would leave no stone unturned in ensuring that justice for the Rohingya remained a priority.

Concluding Remarks



**Ambassador AFM Gousal Azam Sarker
Chairman, BIISS**

Ambassador AFM Gousal Azam Sarker, Chairman of the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS), delivered the concluding remarks at the roundtable on *“International Response to the Rohingya Crisis: In Quest of Justice for Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P).”* He began by acknowledging that the

discussion had reached its scheduled conclusion and, therefore, he would keep his remarks brief.

Expressing his profound gratitude, Ambassador Sarker extended his heartfelt thanks to the Honourable Guest and the Chief Guest for their valuable presence at this significant roundtable. He particularly commended them for their unwavering solidarity with Bangladesh and their steadfast commitment to the pursuit of justice and accountability. He underscored the crucial role played by The Gambia in leading the case against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), not only on behalf of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) but also for the international community at large. He expressed appreciation for their principled stance in advancing justice for the Rohingya people.

He took the opportunity to extend special thanks to the distinguished delegation from The Gambia, whose presence added immense value to the discussion. In this regard, he acknowledged His Excellency Mr Mustapha Jawara, the Non-Resident High Commissioner of The Gambia to Bangladesh, for his engagement in the roundtable. He also recognised the contributions of Mr Sheick Omar Bittaye, Director of Asia and Oceanic Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Gambians Abroad, and Ms Adama Cabality Sallah, First Secretary and Desk Officer for Bangladesh in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Gambia. Their participation, he noted, reflected The Gambia's firm commitment to justice and accountability for the Rohingya people.

Ambassador Sarker expressed his deep appreciation to the Honourable High Representative, who, despite his demanding schedule, made the time to attend the roundtable and offer words of encouragement. He noted that the High Representative's presence and thoughtful remarks had served as a source of hope and motivation in the collective efforts to address the crisis.

He also extended particular gratitude to Professor Dr ASM Ali Ashraf for delivering a highly insightful and important presentation. He acknowledged the academic depth and policy relevance of the discussion, which had enriched the deliberations on the Rohingya issue. Furthermore, he thanked Dr Nazrul Islam, Secretary (East) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh, for representing the Ministry and for his valuable contributions to the discussion.

Recognising the active engagement of the participants, Ambassador Sarker expressed his appreciation to all those who had contributed through their interventions. He highlighted the presence of distinguished guests whose keen interest in the issue, along with their expectations for meaningful solutions, reaffirmed the urgency of finding a sustainable resolution to the crisis. He noted that the discussion had reinforced the collective determination to secure the safe, dignified, and voluntary repatriation of the displaced Rohingya population to their homeland in Myanmar.

In conclusion, Ambassador Sarker extended his sincere gratitude to BIIS and his colleagues and staff for their meticulous efforts in organising the seminar. He

commended their dedication to ensuring that the event was conducted smoothly and effectively. He reiterated that BIIS remains committed to facilitating such critical discussions and contributing to policy dialogues on pressing regional and international issues.

Ambassador Sarker ended his remarks by once again thanking all attendees for their participation and for their commitment to justice, accountability, and the resolution of the Rohingya crisis. He expressed hope that the discussions held during the roundtable would translate into concrete actions towards achieving a lasting solution for the displaced Rohingya community.

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