



Rohingya Human Rights Initiative

ROHRIngya

Date: 10 September 2024
Letter No A007R4R_2024 (1/2)

Indefinite Detention and Desperation: Myanmar Refugees on Hunger Strike in Assam, India Cry for Justice

Rohingya Human Rights Initiative (R4R) is deeply anguished by the heart-wrenching plight of Myanmar refugees, including Rohingya and Chin, who have been driven to the extreme measure of a hunger strike in the *Matia Detention Centre* in Assam, India. This desperate act of protest reflects their unbearable struggle against indefinite detention, where their fundamental human rights have been systematically denied.

Many of these refugees, including **women and children**, hold valid refugee cards issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in India. Yet, they have languished in **detention for years**—some for over **a decade**—without due process, justice, or hope. Their detention starkly violates both national and international human rights standards and India's obligations under international law. On Monday, September 9, 2024, these refugees, out of desperation, began a hunger strike in an urgent plea for justice and humanity¹.

The Matia Detention Centre alone holds over **100 individuals**, including **children** as young as **six years old**. Of these, **40** possess refugee cards issued by UNHCR, India. Across India, the situation is no less grim, with nearly **1,000 Rohingya refugees**, including **200 children**, separated from their families and held in detention. These individuals have already served the sentences handed down under India's Foreigners Act of 1946, yet they continue to be imprisoned, facing arbitrary and prolonged detention.

This cruel and inhumane treatment is inflicted on people who have already endured unimaginable suffering. The Rohingya, one of the most persecuted communities in the world, have been subjected to brutal atrocities by the Myanmar military and extremist groups, including war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and systematic persecution. The exodus of **770,000 Rohingya** from Myanmar in 2017 was a direct consequence of these horrific crimes, forcing them to flee to neighbouring countries, including India, where they sought refuge. Tragically, instead of safety, many Rohingya have found themselves trapped in detention, their lives in limbo, and their hopes shattered.

¹ <https://scroll.in/latest/1073108/myanmar-refugees-hold-hunger-strike-seek-transfer-from-assam-detention-centre>



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The ongoing conflict between the Arakan Army (AA) and Myanmar's Junta military only deepens the Rohingya's suffering as war crimes continue to ravage their homeland. In recognition of this, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) is currently trying Myanmar's military for potential genocide against the Rohingya. The international community, including the UNHCR, has granted the Rohingya prima facie refugee status, recognising their legitimate claims for protection under international law.

R4R Founder & Director Sabre Kyaw Min expresses profound sorrow: "In Assam, more than 100 Rohingya refugees, including children as young as six, are being unjustly detained. Despite holding UNHCR-issued refugee cards, they continue to face appalling conditions—poor healthcare, lack of water, and inhumane treatment. These centres violate the UN Nelson Mandela Rules, which outline minimum standards for the treatment of prisoners. Our people fled genocide and persecution, only to be imprisoned in a country where they sought refuge. The Rohingya have suffered enough. Their indefinite detention in India is yet another chapter in the long history of cruelty against them."

The Rohingya Human Rights Initiative calls upon the Indian government and the State of Assam to immediately release these refugees and allow them access to the protection afforded by UNHCR and other international agencies. Under the principle of *non-refoulement*, enshrined in international law and the Indian Constitution, India is obligated not to return refugees to a place where they face threats to their lives or freedom. The continued detention of these refugees violates India's moral and legal obligations.

We urgently appeal to the Government of India, the judiciary, and the international community to act now. The release of these refugees is not only a matter of legal obligation—it is a matter of humanity. We also urge international agencies, including UNHCR, to coordinate efforts with the Indian government to find durable solutions, including third-country resettlement for these refugees, who have already suffered too much.

We appeal to international human rights bodies, the UN, and the global community to intervene in this humanitarian crisis. Every day that passes without action deepens the scars of injustice on the lives of innocent people who sought only safety. The world must not disregard their suffering.

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