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Foreign Minister Dr Momen calls for greater Commonwealth solidarity and action to support international justice and accountability for Rohingyas



“Ensuring international justice and accountability for the Rohingya people is the call and the cry of the hour under every possible global investigative and accountability mechanism, making the Rohingya crisis truly global”, said Foreign Minister Dr A. K. Abdul Momen, calling for greater Commonwealth solidarity and action to support international justice and accountability mechanisms.

The Foreign Minister was speaking as the chief guest at a virtual high-level event titled “Towards Sustainable Justice, Accountability and Returns: The Rohingya Crisis into its Fourth Year” at the Commonwealth Secretariat, co-hosted by high commissions of Bangladesh and Canada in the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth Secretary-General.

Bangladesh High Commissioner to the UK Saida Muna Tasneem, High Commissioner for Canada in the UK Janice Charette and Commonwealth Secretary-General Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC co-chaired the event.

The Foreign Minister in his speech cautioned the international community that if the emerging culture of defiance, impunity and geopolitical appeasement of Myanmar continues then there will be no sustainable solution to the Rohingya crisis in the near future.

Dr Momen called the United Kingdom as the Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth for providing advisory support to the ICJ’s ongoing proceedings.

British Minister of State for South Asia and the Commonwealth at the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon was the guest of honour at the event where Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen presented the key-note speech.

Lord Ahmed said the UK attaches top priority to resolve the Rohingya crisis; and the UK government is committed to continue its role in the UN Security Council to highlight the plight of the Rohingyas.

He praised Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for hosting over a million of Rohingyas in Cox's Bazar and reassured that the UK would continue to stand alongside both the Rohingya community and the government of Bangladesh.

In the keynote paper titled "Towards a sustainable return of Rohingyas", Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen highlighted the 13-point demands of the Rohingyas to the government of Myanmar, which remains the biggest challenge to their voluntary return to Myanmar. These include amendment to the 1982 citizenship act of Myanmar to give legal status to the Rohingyas as an ethnic minority of Myanmar; and their freedom and rights.

He called upon various international investigative and accountability mechanisms to ensure Myanmar's compliance with those decisions which mirror the Rohingya's 13-point demands.

The Foreign Secretary also called for adopting a separate declaration at the Kigali Summit on international justice and accountability for the Rohingyas towards finding a lasting solution to the protracted crisis.

In her opening remarks, High Commissioner Saida Muna Tasneem commended the UK's diplomatic leadership role at the UN Security Council as the penholder for Myanmar and as Chair-in-Office at the Commonwealth on questions of accountability and justice for the Rohingyas. The High Commissioner thanked the UK government for its generous support to the Rohingyas in Cox's Bazar.

Praising Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for her leadership in response to Rohingya crisis and showing her great humanity, Commonwealth Secretary-General said while Bangladesh has gone above and beyond in supporting Rohingyas, the responsibility is now on all of us to step up, to help address this prolonged crisis.

Canadian High Commissioner Janice Charette said her government would continue its work and engagement to address the root causes of the persecution of the Rohingyas to ensure their eventual voluntary, dignified, safe and sustainable return to Myanmar.

Hussein Thomasi, Special Adviser to the Justice Minister (State Minister), Ministry of Justice of the Gambia spoke as the special guest and briefed his government's position in the ICJ case on the Gambia vs Myanmar.

Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Rohingyas in the UK Parliament Rushanara Ali, M.P. also spoke in the panel discussion where she strongly advocated that the UK government should join with Canada and the Netherlands to intervene in the ICJ case between the Gambia vs Myanmar. She also commented that the European Union and its allies should not have prematurely withdrawn the embargos against Myanmar which has given rise to Myanmar government's defiance of international justice and accountability mechanisms.

The Netherlands Ambassador in the UK Karel Van Oosterom in a video message reassured his government's firm intention to intervene in the Gambia vs Myanmar case in the ICJ. The Netherlands and Canada are the two countries those expressed their intention to intervene in the case in the ICJ.

President of Burmese Rohingya Organization in the UK Maung Tun Khin, whose grandfather was a member of Myanmar parliament, gave a historic account on how civil, political and social rights were snatched by the military junta of Myanmar.

Tun Khin said he also voted for Aung San Suu Kyi in the hope that she would ensure justice for the Rohingyas but sadly found her on the opposite side.

At the event Hasina Begum, a group-rape victim Rohingya woman, gave a horrific account of violence and atrocities on her families and relatives.

A number of high-profile international legal and human rights experts on the Myanmar case, including Head of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) under the UN Human Rights Council Nicholas Koumjian, ICJ Counsel to the Gambia and ICJ Counsel to Bangladesh Professor Payam Akhavan, Executive Director, the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect Dr. Simon Adams, Former Special Rapporteur on Myanmar Professor Yanghee Lee and Former Investigator to the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar and Executive Director of Legal Action Worldwide Ms. Antonia Mulvey participated in the panel discussion.

Ambassadors and High Commissioners of different countries, representatives of leading thinktanks, civil-society groups and various international organisations, academics and eminent members of British-Bangladeshi diaspora joined the event.

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