



## IMPACT STORY



# YOUNG WOMEN LEAD PEACEBUILDING EFFORTS IN THE ROHINGYA COMMUNITY IN COX'S BAZAR

Photo: UN Women/Mahmudul Karim

“When I look around me, I see that women and girls in the Rohingya community are treated as less than men and are not given the same rights and opportunities,” said Rima Sultana Rimu (pictured above), an 18-year-old Bangladeshi peace activist and member of the Young Women Leaders (YWL) Network in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh. “Their culture is very traditional; they have endured conflict, violence and displacement. When girls and women are not treated as equals, there can be no real chance of achieving a strong and peaceful society.”

Rimu knows education is power. As a young activist living in Cox’s Bazar, which hosts one of the world’s largest refugee settlements, she’s made literacy of Rohingya women and girls her mission. As part of the YWL Network, Rimu conducts literacy and numeracy classes for women aged 17 and above who did not receive formal education. She also runs workshops on women and youth participation in peacebuilding and educates young women about their rights using theatre and radio broadcasts. “On a daily basis, girls in the camps face many problems: child marriage, street harassment and sexual violence,” explained Rimu. “I feel I have a duty to try and make life easier for the refugee women and girls, and to create a more peaceful and equal society.”

Rimu recounted that when she began speaking out about women’s rights, some of her family members did not approve, thinking that she was disrespecting their religion and not behaving correctly. “Some people in my community

## PARTNERS FOR CHANGE

UN Women’s work in Cox’s Bazar aims at ensuring that humanitarian efforts contribute to transforming socio-cultural gender norms and relations through the leadership and empowerment of women and girls and the promotion of positive forms of masculinities. The main goal of the 2020-2022 project “**Reducing Social Tension through Women’s Leadership and the Socio-Economic Empowerment of Women in Cox’s Bazar**” is to strengthen women’s capacities in gender-based violence prevention efforts while fostering the development of community-based, inclusive and long-lasting peace by reducing tensions between the Rohingya refugees and host communities in Cox’s Bazar.

The programme is funded by the Governments of **Sweden** and **Canada** with initial funds from the Government of **Japan**. The programme supports the local **NGO Jago Nari Unnayan Sangsta**, which leads the Young Women Leaders Network and is part of the **Global Network of Women Peacebuilders**.

can also be very discouraging, but I enjoy the challenge of trying to change their minds,” said Rimu.

**“When girls and women are not treated as equals, there can be no real chance of achieving a strong and peaceful society.”**

—RIMA SULTANA RIMU, *Member of the Young Women Leaders Network*

The Rohingya crisis has disproportionately affected women and girls by perpetuating and exacerbating pre-existing gender inequalities, gender-based violence and discrimination in the community. As a result of that, most Rohingya women and girls cannot easily access awareness-raising campaigns or training sessions and face exclusion from leadership and participation. In addition, many girls are forced to leave school at a young age to get married, which exposes them to several forms of gender-based violence and leaves many feeling they cannot report or seek justice due to stigma.

These conditions have been aggravated since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which, among other repercussions, has caused school attendance rates among girls to drop. For Rimu, this meant having to move around the camps to conduct her literacy and numeracy workshops and losing access to learning opportunities provided in the camps.

Despite these challenges, Rimu has not given up: “Teaching girls how to read and write is one of the biggest ways I can make a difference... I will not stop until every woman and girl is aware of their rights and can live happily and safely as equals.”

Although there is increased representation of women and gender expertise among humanitarian actors, police and camps-in-charge, there are still gaps in addressing the specific needs of women and girls and in the design and implementation of gender equality programmes in the camps. Flora Macula, Head of the Sub-Office in UN Women Bangladesh, explained, “Leveraging women’s participation and leadership capacities is not only a way to ensure humanitarian efforts respond to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of affected communities—whether women, men, girls or boys—but is also a strategic investment in the whole community’s resilience.”

## WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh is currently facing one of its worst humanitarian crises due to the large-scale influx of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar. The number of refugees now exceeds **900,000** with **52%** of them being women and girls.






Due to limited viable livelihood opportunities for refugees, women, girls and children are at heightened risk of becoming victims of human trafficking, sexual abuse and exploitation and child, early and forced marriage. Domestic violence is prevalent in the camps.

Despite these violations, Rohingya women and girls are playing a key role in increasing the resilience of their families and communities by being at the forefront of relief and recovery efforts as volunteers and elected and self-mobilised community leaders.

The Government of Bangladesh has been a staunch supporter of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda since 2000, when its Presidency of the UN Security Council played a key role leading to the adoption of the landmark UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

In 2019, with the support of UN Women, Bangladesh launched its first **National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325**. This is a blueprint for the country’s efforts to ensure women’s meaningful participation in the prevention of conflict and violent extremism, and the protection and advancement of women’s rights to promote resilience during crises.

### FOLLOW UN WOMEN AT:

-  [www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org)
-  [www.facebook.com/unwomen](https://www.facebook.com/unwomen)
-  [www.twitter.com/un\\_women](https://www.twitter.com/un_women)
-  [www.youtube.com/unwomen](https://www.youtube.com/unwomen)
-  [www.instagram.com/unwomen](https://www.instagram.com/unwomen)