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Bachelet shocked by killing of Rohingya human rights defender

01 October 2021

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GENEVA (1 October 2021) – UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet on Friday expressed her shock and sadness over the killing of Rohingya human rights defender Mohib Ullah and called for a prompt, thorough and effective investigation into his death.

“It is heartbreaking that a person who spent his life fighting to ensure that the violations committed against the Rohingya people were known world-wide has been murdered in this way,” Bachelet said.

“I want to pay tribute to an exceptional human rights defender, who despite the risks that his work entailed, nevertheless continued defending the rights of his people,” she added.

Mohib Ullah, who was chair of the Arakan Rohingya Society for Peace and Human Rights (ARSPH), was shot dead on Wednesday by unknown assailants in the Kutupalong / Cox’s Bazar refugee camp in southern Bangladesh. Set up in August 2017, the camp currently hosts more than 750,000 Rohingya who fled the mass killings, rapes and persecution by the Myanmar army and security forces.

For years, Mohib Ullah methodically collected information about human rights violations suffered by the Rohingya in their home state of Rakhine, in northwestern Myanmar, and sought to galvanise international action.

He travelled to Geneva in March 2019 to address the 40th session of the Human Rights Council in person, explaining how deeply the Rohingya had been discriminated against for decades and deprived of their basic rights, including nationality, land, health and education.

“Imagine if you have no identity, no ethnicity, no country. Nobody wants you. How would you feel? This is how we feel today as Rohingya,” he told

States attending the Human Rights Council session. “We are citizens of Myanmar, we are Rohingya.”

“His words were very powerful and highlighted the terrible situation of the Rohingya and today, four years later, they echo as a reminder that Rohingya are still waiting for justice and still waiting to return home,” the High Commissioner said, adding that Mohib Ullah’s death highlights the precarious conditions of the Rohingya in both countries. “We need to do much more to help this persecuted community, both in Bangladesh and in Myanmar,” she added.

Insecurity has been increasing alarmingly in the Kutupalong / Cox’s Bazar camp, with growing criminality, rising tensions between different groups, as well as heavy handed security crackdowns during anti-drug operations. Anti-Rohingya sentiment has also been increasing within Bangladeshi communities.

“Whoever was responsible for his murder, Mohib Ullah’s death is a clear example of the insecurity in the camp, and the apparent attempts to silence moderate civil society voices,” the High Commissioner said.

“A prompt, thorough, and independent investigation should be conducted not only to identify and apprehend his killers, and expose their motives, but also to define what measures are needed to better protect vulnerable civil society leaders, while avoiding further securitisation in the camps,” Bachelet said.

“I fully understand the huge challenges Bangladesh has faced in hosting the Rohingya refugees, and the need for more external support. However, the safety and protection, as well as basic rights of refugees and those hosted in Cox’s Bazar and Bhasan Char, must be ensured,” Bachelet said.

Meanwhile in Myanmar itself, the situation of approximately 600,000 Rohingya who remain in Rakhine State remains dire, with many still confined in camps. Alleged violations include unlawful killings, arbitrary arrest and detention, and high levels of extortion.

“Mohib Ullah’s killing should be a clarion call to the international community to redouble its pressure on Myanmar to recognize the Rohingya and accept their return, and to pursue accountability for the terrible crimes committed against them,” she added.

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