

# ROHINGYA REALITIES; ROHINGYA FUTURES

Winners of Oxfam's 2020 Art Competition

[www.oxfam.org](http://www.oxfam.org)



**OXFAM**

# FORWARD

This photobook celebrates the diverse perspectives and artistic expressions of Rohingya people. The 12 Rohingya artists featured in the book are the winners of “Rohingya Realities; Rohingya Futures,” Oxfam’s August Art 2020 Competition.

August 2020 marked three years since the start of a brutal military crackdown in Myanmar, which resulted in more than 700,000 Rohingya people fleeing to Bangladesh in search of safety. To help mark this moment, Oxfam asked Rohingya artists to share works reflecting on their own experiences and dreams for the future. We received a wide range of visual art, photography, music and poetry from artists in Bangladesh, Myanmar and further afield. From the submissions received, a committee of Oxfam staff selected these 12 winning entries. The artwork speaks to the resilience of the Rohingya community as artists reflect upon past hardships and trauma, daily joys, and their hopes for a more peaceful future.

Selected pieces reflect the views and opinions of individual artists and do not necessarily reflect those of Oxfam.

Oxfam provides life-saving humanitarian assistance to forcibly displaced Rohingya communities in Myanmar and Bangladesh while working to support their rights and resilience. To find out more about our work, please visit <https://www.oxfam.org>.

ISBN: 978-1-78748-718-5

DOI: 10.21201/2021.7185

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Oxfam would like to thank all the artists who shared their stories and artwork with us. We hope you continue to create and share your stories with the world. The following artists who participated in this project have been awarded honorable mentions: **Abu Bokor Sedik, Johara, Juhura, Junaied, M Zubair, Mamun Rafique, MD Aiyas, MD Jaber, Mohammed Asom, Mohammed Younus, Noor Hakim, Sahat@Zia Hero Naing, and Samjida.**

Oxfam would also like to acknowledge the support of ActionAid Bangladesh’s Community Outreach project, the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN), and the many individuals who helped to circulate the call for submissions.

The Oxfam website is linked to in the Forward.

The following initiatives share more stories as told by Rohingya artists:

**The Art Garden Rohingya** is the first Rohingya community-based online poetry website with about 200 emerging young Rohingya poets involved. <https://www.facebook.com/HeartbeatsOfRohingya/>

**Omar’s Film School** is based in Kutupalong Camp in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh. The school trains Rohingya youth in photography and videography. <https://www.facebook.com/Omars-Film-School-113149230462735/>

**Rohingya Photography Competition** for Rohingya refugees initiated by Shafiur Rahman, UK-based journalist and activist. <https://kutupalong.com/about>



# LOST GENERATION

**Artist:**

Azad Mohammed

**About the Artsit:**

Azad is a 25-year-old Rohingya photographer from Rakhine State, Myanmar. He was formerly living in one of the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh but has now been granted refugee status in Germany

"A Rohingya refugee is eating ice on the roadside at Kutupalong camp in Cox's Bazar—in search of a better future. The boy is eating ice with the feeling that it is ice cream. By seeing his face, you can read his sorrow and difficulties. He looked sad but was still trying to survive as a normal boy like others."

"My inspiration was that if these refugees were any other children, they would be in

school or enjoying time with their parents. Children at this age should have nothing to worry about but, in our community, being refugees for more than three years now...our children have lost their future and they are trying to survive enough for a daily meal. There is no education for them, no secure life for them, no good care for them."

## My Buddhist Friend

Dear friend,  
We were born in the same country.  
We grew up in the same village.  
We studied in the same school.  
We sing the same national anthem.  
And living in the same motherland.

Why do you ignore  
To call me with my own identity?  
Why don't you accept me?  
As a human being?  
Just because I'm a Muslim?

Dear friend,  
We inhale the same oxygen.  
We drink the same water.  
We walk on the same roads.  
We share the same nation.  
And living in the same union.

Why can't I travel  
As free as you can?  
Why can't I celebrate my festivals?  
The way you do yours freely?

Why can't I enjoy my rights?  
As same as you can?  
Why? Why?  
Just because I'm a Muslim?

# MY BUDDHIST FRIEND

## Artist:

Quick Learner

## About the Artist:

This poet, who requested his work be published under the pen name 'Quick Learner', is 23 years old and lives in Rakhine State, Myanmar.

"I wrote this poem in November 2019. Being a Rohingya, I face discrimination everywhere in Myanmar, where we can't enjoy our rights like other communities. I describe the daily struggles and challenges we face. On behalf of my Rohingya community, I wrote this poem to let the world know how we are surviving in Arakan. I truly believe that poetry can change society—this is why I choose a poem to share this message to all people around the globe.

# REALITY OF ROHINGHYA

## Artist:

Enayet Khan

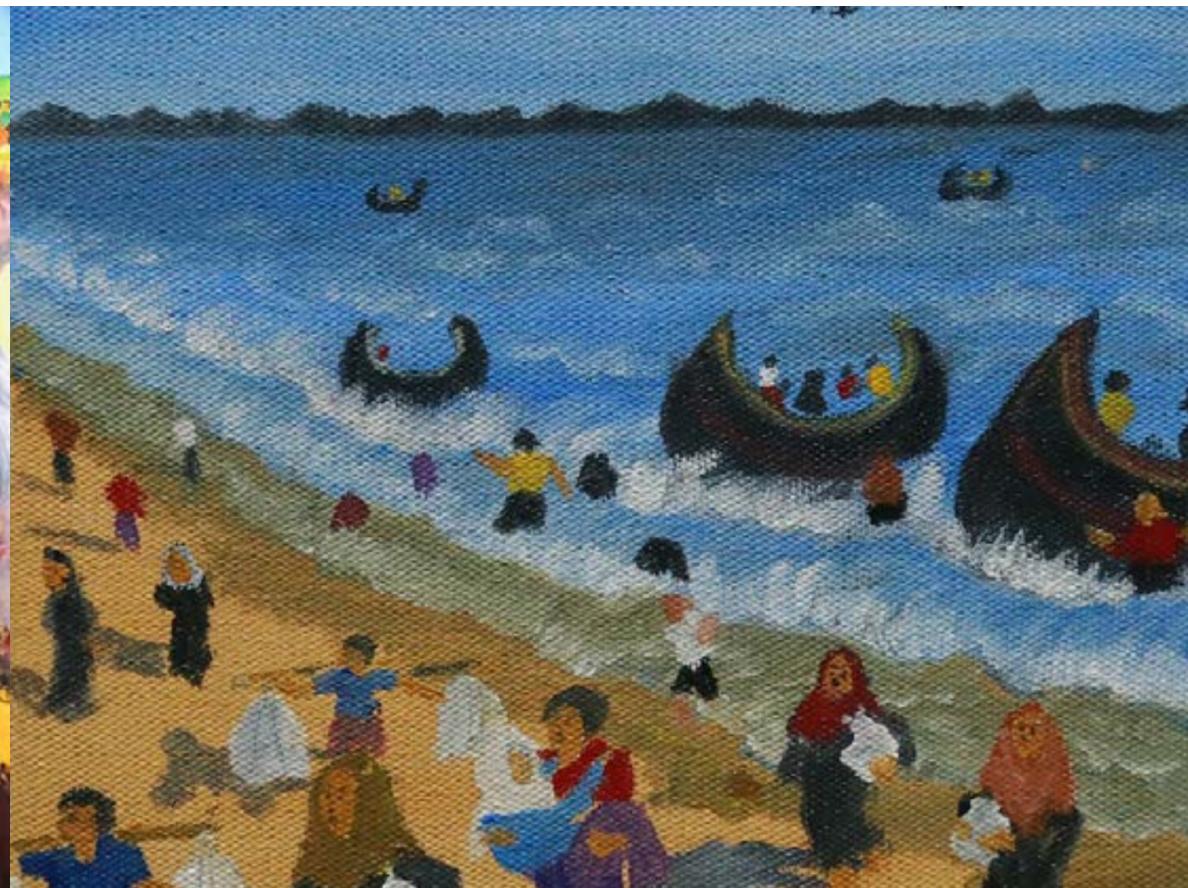
## About the Artist:

Enayet Khan is a 19-years-old painter from northern Rakhine State, Myanmar. In 2017, he and his family fled from violence and sought safety in Bangladesh where they have been living in refugee camps ever since..

“I started drawing when I was nine years old in class four. Growing up, I chose to spend my free time drawing and painting instead of playing with friends because art made me feel better. I feel most comfortable explaining myself not by speaking or through my body language, but through my art. “

The three paintings illustrate different aspects of the flight and exile of Rohingya refugees. Fleeing for their lives from the violence in Myanmar, Rohingya people walked great distances and travelled by boat to reach safety in Bangladesh. While safe from violence in the camps in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, refugees continue to grapple with floods and monsoons each

year in flimsy, overcrowded shelters as they dream of the day they can return safely to Myanmar.



## Because We are Rohingya

Birds can fly freely.  
They can live freely.  
They can pasture foodstuff their ways.  
But we, Rohingya can't,  
Do you know why?

Being born in the same land,  
Having the same mundane title as human,  
You can enjoy the basic rights.  
But we, Rohingya can't,  
Do you know why?

Being studied in the same class,  
But we are not allowed to sit in first seat  
Being passed the same matriculation  
But we are not allowed to attend the university  
You can do as you wish but we cannot.  
Do you know why?  
Because we are Muslims,  
And Rohingya.

# BECAUSE WE ARE ROHINGYA

### Artist:

Myo Thway

### About the Artist:

Myo Thway is a 21-year-old poet living in Rakhine State, Myanmar.

“I wrote this poem to let the world know how our life is in Arakan -our native land. I was born in Buthidaung Township, Myanmar, but I am still without citizenship. Since childhood I have faced many difficulties. In my life enjoyments are rare, regrets are many, and lovers are less than haters. I have so many dreams that are left unfulfilled due to restrictions of the government. I have been writing poetry for a few years to let people know my situation all over the world. I believe poetry can bring peace. My poems are my life and my inner feelings.”

# THE LIFE OF ROHINGYA WOMEN IN THE REFUGEE CAMP

## Artist:

Mayuu Khan

## About the Artist:

Mayuu Khan is a 19-year-old artist living in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. He was born in Rathedaung Township in northern Rakhine state.

"In the world's largest and most overcrowded refugee camp in Cox's Bazar there are many hundreds of thousands of children, elderly and women living together. The weather here is diverse and we are seeing the results of climate change, the temperatures are rising, and we are experiencing more heavy rain in

the camps. The refugees living here are mentally broken because the repatriation process has stopped, and they are unable to return to their homes. Women face critical challenges. Rohingya youth are becoming a lost generation living in the camps and older Rohingya people are very worried about their futures. This is what the older woman in the artwork feels while looking out over the camps. The modern world doesn't feel our reality. They don't understand our language. I am inspired to draw artwork from people who are unable to speak and express themselves. Being a refugee, I am banned from formal education. I'm a victim of many tortures and a member of the lost generation of Rohingya. When I express my stories then they become poetry and when I sketch my stories then they become artworks. My situation has made me a poet and artist. I am hungry for my rights and thirsty for my freedom."





# ROHINGYA TRADITIONAL FLUTE-PLAYING

**Artist:**

Boshir Ullah

**Flute Performance Video:**

<https://www.oxfam.org/en/rohingya-realities-rohingya-futures-winners-oxfams-2020-art-competition#entry5>

**About the Artist:**

Boshir Ullah is a musician living in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. He is originally from Maungdaw Township in Rakhine State, Myanmar. Boshir Ullah started playing mandolin and flute when he was 13 years old. Now he works as an artist and plays mandolin to help heal and entertain people, with the aim of helping them overcome the trauma of August 2017.

"Playing the flute is a cultural tradition in our Rohingya community. Mostly farmers play the flute while they are working on their farms and paddy fields. Sometimes people also play the flute during special events and ceremonies like weddings." - Azad Mohammed

# FLYING OUR VOICE TO THE PEOPLE OF THE WORLD

**Artist:**

Mohammed Ershad

**About the Artist:**

Mohammed Ershad is an artist. He is 30 years old and currently lives in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

“A Rohingya child flies a kite in the open blue sky. The fun of their childhood in Myanmar has come alive again in Bangladesh. Through flying the colored kite, the child would like to speak and share their colorful life in the camp. Rohingya children play in the available spaces in the camps. They have many expectations, dreams, hopes and ambitions. The radiant kite will fly freely. It is not tied with rope.”



Sajide Begum



# WOMEN LIFE, LIVELIHOOD AND LEISURE

**Artist:**

Sajide Begum

**About the Artist:**

Sajide Begum is a 31-year-old artist living in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. She and her daughter, along with other women in their community, do stitch work (embroidery) in their leisure time.

“As a woman in the Rohingya community, we have to stay at home most of the time. Men go outside for work while we stay inside. After completing household work, we do handicrafts to pass the time and also help contribute to our family's income.”

# ILLUSTRATIONS OF TRADITIONAL EMBROIDERY

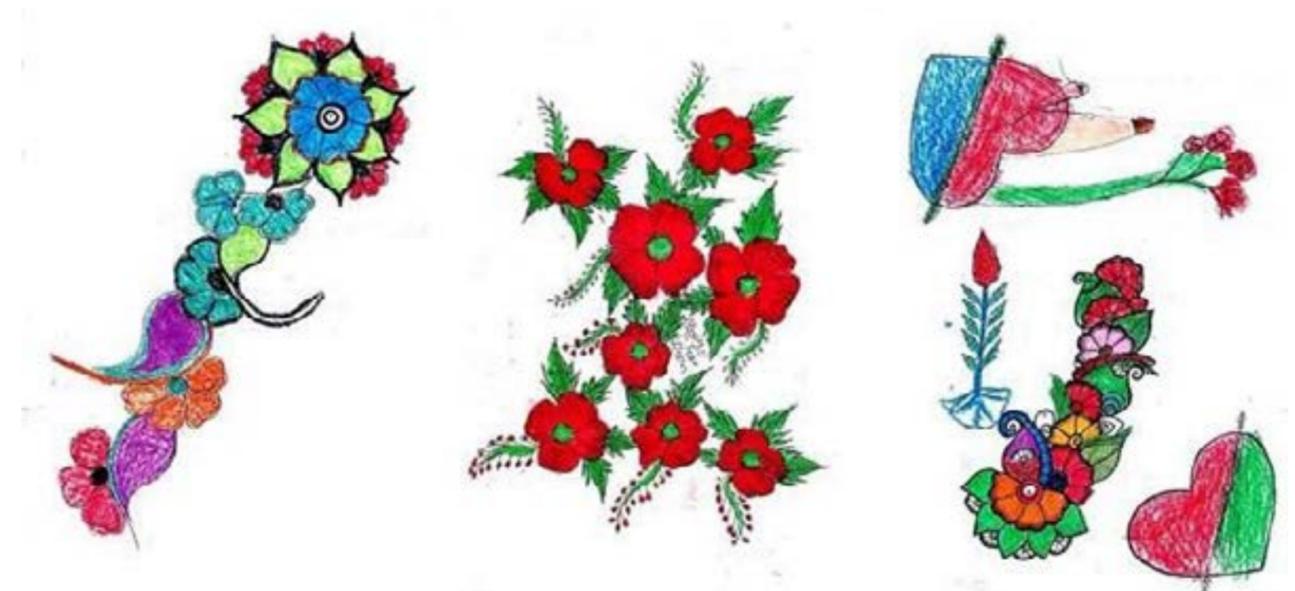
## Artist:

Jesmin Ara & Husana

## About the Artist:

Jesmin, age 13, and Husana, age 14, live in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar Bangladesh.

The artists, Jesmin and Husana, drew these embroidery patterns and illustrations to show what refugee girls in the camps are doing during their free time. Stitchwork keeps them active and allows them to make showpieces, which they can sell. During the pandemic, they are also using their talents to make masks to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The art shows traditional flower patterns and needlepoint and this work illustrates the often unseen role adolescent girls are playing in preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the refugee camps.



# COVID19 AWARENESS SONG IN ROHINGYA LANGUAGE

**Artist:**

Osman Goni & Omar's Film School

**Performance Video:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KICzgNICg\\_M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KICzgNICg_M)

**About the Artist:**

Osman Goni is a 25-year-old musician living in Kutupalong Refugee Camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. "I have been living in Kutupalong Refugee Camp. I'm the youngest son in my family because my father passed away when I was five years old. I started school in the refugee camp, and I try to sing with school friends. I attended music events in the camp and decided to learn how to play the flute and mandolin."

"Most of the people are illiterate in my community, so this song is for those who don't know about COVID-19. After seeing this song, they will be able to protect themselves from Coronavirus."



## Rohingya Women Dream

We are the survivors of an inequitable life,  
living as no life of human being,  
As we people of world ignorance,  
Only named by Rohingya refugee,  
For us, everything is limited even the movements.

Cannot find a way to improve,  
It has been three years, having refugee life,  
No changes or solutions come out,  
No one care of our rights,  
No one care of our dreams.

Once, we had home, villages and school in Arakan,  
But now, the damaged tents in the camp,  
Waiting for line up to receive food,  
Nevertheless, we haven't lost our ambitions,  
Being refugees fear or murder our dream.

Likewise, women in our own country,  
We were like blooming rose in the garden,  
But now, we are being unprotected in the camp,  
Where women feel worst safe,  
Shelters like birdcage and camp like jail,  
Can go nowhere except sorrowful world.

Are refugee women call women of difficulty?

That's we face restriction to study,  
Forced for marriage although we are too young,  
Our tears are flooding inside our world,  
Are women weak or scapegoat for situation?

Students were happy in schools,  
Genocide has ruined their student's life,  
Fled the native land and lost education,  
Killed their intelligences and talents,  
Nowhere they are learning, now here too.

A partial life we are living through it is a hard lesson,  
Lost, losing but ever trying to overcome,  
However, the days, years, and time are passing,  
That's increasing our hopes and dreams,  
One day, our realities will bring us to our goal.

Want to convert to a peaceful life,  
Want not to hear anymore calling us refugees,  
Want to spend the precious time,  
Want to erase the words discrimination and racism  
from people's minds.

Every single should have their rights and liberty,  
As an individual should have the ability to do anything,  
That they want in their life without persecution,  
We should behave in an assertive way, not submissive.

# ROHINGYA WOMEN DREAM

## Artist:

Parmin Fatema

## About the Artist:

Parmin Fatema is a poet. She lives in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh and is originally from northern Rakhine in Myanmar. She volunteered as a female team leader for two years with a humanitarian agency and currently studies at the Asian University for Women.

"I create art to share my feelings, my opinions about my people, and to share what is happening to my community. In this poem, the feelings, lines and stanzas I have written are based on the reality of our Rohingya community and the future we hope for. I expressed how women Rohingya refugees are facing difficulties and how they feel unsafe surviving this refugee life. Most importantly I showed how the Rohingya women hope and dream for the future."

# I'M A ROHINGYA

## Artist:

Ro Pacifist

## About the Artist:

Ro Pacifist (pen name) is a poet. He is 23 years old and lives in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

"I'm a Rohingya youth from Myanmar currently surviving in the refugee camps of Bangladesh. I work as a humanitarian aid worker and I teach English language to hundreds of Rohingya students whose access to education is restricted. I love to make written artwork in my free time such as poetry, essays, and historical memoirs about my past and about my Rohingya community. It has become such a hobby of mine that nothing except writing poems and poetry can relieve my stress and sadness."

"My friends, my teachers, and my seniors are always encouraging me by showing their appreciation for my writing. So, both my circumstances and my community inspire and motivate me to keep writing more and more."

## I'm a Rohingya

A huge blessing upon me that  
The Almighty God created me a human  
But a huge tragedy of mine that  
My birth was given to a Rohingya family  
Because the world is too narrow  
To host a Rohingya quite enough  
I can belong to no piece of piece on this Earth  
Despite an innocent one like a lamb.

I don't know how to live life  
I learned just how to survive my life  
Because I have been a forever survivor since my I came  
into this planet.

I heard much about freedom of life  
But I could never ever taste it, bitter or sweet.  
People say that they enjoy their lives  
I am curious to take part in the enjoyment  
But I can't do at all  
Just because I'm a Rohingya.

I see people get all their dreams fulfilled  
But the dreams I dream always remain as dreams  
Although I try my damndest to make them come true.  
Just because I'm a Rohingya.  
Being a Rohingya is my absolute fault.

My pa and ma told me that I was born on this Earth  
And my teachers explained to me the same in class too

I believed that I'm indeed from here  
But I found myself that I'm from nowhere.

Wherever I go,  
Whenever it is,  
Whatever I do,

All become zero even if I'm a hero.

It's just because I'm a Rohingya.  
Is it my fault that I'm being a Rohingya?

I want to express my story to the World  
But I find no one to hear me  
Because my voice is not sweet being a Rohingya  
refugee.

The world is too blind to even see the ongoing tortures  
me.

Still I'm hardly alive  
Despite a big victim of Genocide.  
Still I want to build my life as others  
I am eager to make a beautiful future

I wish to develop my planet by applying my ability  
I believe that I can be part of the change of this world

Let me be what I want  
Let me perform what I wish  
Let me belong to the parts I deserve.



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