"The Contributions of Facebook Have Created Hell for Us:"
Rohingya Youth Share Desire for Education in Refugee Camps, Ask Facebook for Reparations

Given Facebook’s complicity in the ethnic cleansing campaign in Myanmar, Rohingya youth argued they are owed a remedy from the tech giant, and want it in the form of educational support.

On Thursday, December 9, 16 Rohingya youth from refugee camps in Bangladesh filed a complaint with the Irish Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) National Contact Point, detailing Facebook’s reticence to work collaboratively to provide access to educational resources for Rohingya youth living in Cox’s Bazar refugee camp, Bangladesh.

“Education can bring hope and especially peace and social cohesion [so we can] exist on this planet as dignified human beings,” said Mohammed Nowkim, 25, one of the complainants. “The Rohingya community’s future is with the new generation.”

Since 2013, Facebook’s platform has been consistently used in Myanmar to share racist and hateful speech aimed at the Rohingya people. During this time, Facebook failed to adequately moderate content inciting people to violence. In 2017, Myanmar’s military, the Tatmadaw, began a campaign of extreme and systematic violence against the Rohingya. Facebook hosted the military’s official page, did not remove posts made by Tatmadaw officials promoting the campaign, and allowed content which dehumanized, degraded, and encouraged violence against the Rohingya to remain online and be widely shared. The ethnic cleansing campaign displaced hundreds of thousands of Rohingya people, mostly into Bangladesh. To learn more about the Rohingya living in the Cox’s Bazar refugee camp, click here.

“I cannot imagine what kind of life I will have in the future,” said Umme Salma, 18, another complainant. “Now my life has fallen into darkness because though I could be able to study at a university, I don’t feel [happy about] this as many students like me are
wasting their time being futureless in the refugee camps. It's because we don't have access to higher education or university education for the Rohingya.

“When I see students from other countries are studying in universities, I feel [like] crying, [wondering] why Rohingya students don't have such an opportunity, why we are being excluded?"

Now, the youth have submitted the complaint to the OECD, a quasi-judicial organization working to build international standards and policies and mediate conflicts between international businesses and individuals whose rights have been violated by their operations. This international body is charged with ensuring that corporations around the world respect human rights in their business practices. If the complaint is successful, the OECD will recommend mediation between these 16 individuals and the tech giant.

James Douglas of Victim Advocates International (VAI), a membership organization for victims of serious international crimes, including crimes against humanity and genocide, and a lawyer representing the Rohingya, said that Facebook has yet to fully take responsibility for their actions.

“Facebook’s breaches of the OECD guidelines contributed to the human rights violations to which the Rohingya suffered in 2017, and as such they have a duty to provide a remedy,” said Douglas, an attorney based in Ireland. “Repeatedly, we have seen that Facebook has failed to act when it knows that its platform is harmful, and this pattern applies to what happened in Rakhine state.

“What happened to the Rohingya is the worst thing that has ever happened on Facebook’s platform. Rohingya voices need to be amplified in any discussion around the harm that Facebook facilitates.”

Sayed Ullah, 19, a community leader in a Bangladesh refugee camp, spoke passionately about his resolve to hold Facebook accountable.

“The contributions of Facebook have created hell for us,” he said. “Rohingya younger generations are growing up without a formal education. Accepting or rejecting our offer is up to Facebook.

“I will not give up, I will fight and will inspire people continuously to fight against the human rights violations of Facebook.”
Victim Advocates International (VAI) is a membership organization for victims of serious international crimes, including war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Through VAI membership, victims can act in solidarity with other victims across the world and can access the resources they need to effectively lead justice movements.