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# We are **Real**, We **Exist**, and **Our Voices** Should be heard.

## Rohingya women organize for change

(April 10, 2019)

Rohingya women have suffered for decades, but we are more than victims.

In Myanmar, we are denied opportunities, dehumanized, and destroyed. In the diaspora, we are creating our own opportunities, and using our skills, we are standing for the people.

In Kuala Lumpur, we, Rohingya women, came together as a community for three days to continue the work of addressing the issues facing our society. We are doctors, journalists, housewives, social workers, students, teachers, tailors. But we are all activists who have talents and knowledge and insight that can be used to improve our community.

Many of us have men in our lives who support us. They stand behind us and encourage us—they trust us, they believe us, and they tell us they are proud of us to be leaders within our community and to act as an example for the next generation. We are united. As Rohingya women, we seek to work side by side with men—to neither lead nor be led.

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Many people in our community are not empowered. However, those who appear to be the weakest among us often have the best solutions. You do not need to be highly educated to inspire positive change. A few people are not enough to fight for our rights. We must work together.

We are working to find solutions to end genocide and protect our basic human rights. We don't only seek solidarity among ourselves. We seek solidarity with other ethnic groups in and from Myanmar, wherever we are. The suffering is similar. We desire to rebuild friendships and ties with other communities. Our elders tell us of days when they lived closely with the Rakhine people. We want peace for and among us all.

There is an impression among some in the international community that, as victims of genocide, we cannot support or represent ourselves. This is mistaken. We need to be our own voice, to make our people and others see that we are powerful.

Women are the architects and backbones of our society, and we need to be our own voice. Our collective experience is an example of what can happen when Rohingya people are empowered.

Our culture has suffered. There is a reason why all Rohingya songs are of despair—we are enduring genocide. But all cultural elements evolve. We want to work together, to be agents of change, together in unity. It was a tool of genocide to kill our scholars and artists. We have to address the loss of our culture and traditions and rebuild. We are open to new ideas and capable of adapting and co-existing.



**Rashidah**  
International  
Rescue Committee  
Interpreter



**Azizah**  
Mother



**Syaedah Husain**  
Rohingya Women  
Development  
Network



**Hafsa Khanom**  
Masters of Business  
Administration



**Laila Begum**  
Rohingya Women  
Development  
Network Children's  
Teacher



**Rumana**  
Rohingya Women  
Development  
Network



**Sheikhsinar**  
Community Worker



**Khatijah Bi**  
Student



**Nay Zar Hla Tin**  
European Rohingya  
Council



**Atiya Rauf**  
University of  
Oregon and  
Rohingya Women  
Development  
Network



**Kushidah**  
Mother



**Junairah**  
Student



**Roima Begum**  
Entrepreneur

In our society women are looked upon as role models to look after the children and household. This is a fixed job for life. However, it does not have to prevent us from creating positive social change. Mothers have an essential role in rebuilding our community and should not be left out.

The majority of our people do not have access to opportunity. Many are illiterate and denied a voice, but we do have “helom”—skills, wisdom—which we use to do our best. We have come together as sisters for all Rohingya people, regardless of the circumstances in every place where we live. We need everyone.

We have high hopes. We are working to ensure more Rohingya women can come forward to work for solutions. We are talented Rohingya women, and we want to be a part of building a democratic Myanmar/Burma.

**Rohingya women are real,  
we exist, and our voices  
should be heard.**

