

My name is Khalid Hussain. I am Bihari- Urdu Speaking linguistic minority of Bangladesh and formerly stateless person. I was born in Geneva Camp in Bangladesh without a nationality because both of my parents were stateless socially, culturally and economically subject to marginalization and exclusion, like millions of other stateless people in the world, most of whom belong to minorities like me.

Reason behind the stateless was 1947 when India was divided in two countries India and Pakistan. The Urdu speaking Muslim minority of the Indian provinces of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Orisha and West Bengal migrated to the then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).

In 1971, East Pakistan revolted against the rule of West Pakistan and fought a 9-months war of liberation, which resulted in the emergence of Bangladesh in 16th December 1971. A small section of the Urdu speaking community played an anti-liberation role by siding with the Pakistan army and therefore, at the end of the war Biharis became victims of the situation and were forced to abandon their homes, business, properties and employment. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) built large and small settlements Camps all over in Bangladesh and to provide shelter, food and medical support to the displaced Biharis. These settlements, approximately 116 in number, are commonly known as Bihari camps. Residents were in effect stateless, without identity documents to recognize citizenship in any country.

The Bihar community survived by struggling 4 decades without citizenship, without having access to state-guaranteed rights to basic services that include housing, water and sanitation, education, jobs and other livelihoods. But I never gave up. I always knew that I need to fight for my rights, even though citizenship was denied to me.

In 2001 we 10 youth from Geneva Camp including me filed a writ petition in High Court and claimed our self as by born Bangladeshi citizens and just after one year 5th May 2003 High court has declared our citizenship. That was the first achievement of ending our statelessness. After getting nationality and voting rights we realized the importance and uses of civil documentation like birth certificate, national identity card and passport.

In June 2013 Council of Minorities and NAMATI started a community based paralegal project inside the camps. Our paralegals are assisting to the Camp community to achieve civil documentations like birth certificate, national identity card, passport, trade license and others citizenship documents. Within five years we have successfully achieved 8,700 birth certificates however in some places our birth registrations have been rejected due to the camp address. The authority require electricity bill and permanent address but we do not have any permanent address without the camp address and even our electricity is free provided the government.

There is no change in the socio-economic status of the Biharis. Despite we have national Identity Card and becoming voters. Camp dwellers face discrimination in every part of their life. It is very unfortunate for Mohammadpur, Mirpur and Chittagong Camps dwellers are denied to get passport. Their passports are rejecting due to the camp address. Investigation officers always said that Biharis and Rohingyas are not able to get passport. Whenever our paralegals talk with the investigation officers and they said we have written instruction form the home ministry.

Then after in 2014 I have asked to home ministry under the Right to Information act (RTI) that do you have any policy to provide passport to the Bihar camp dwellers and after 1.5 months I got an order from home ministry and the order said that Biharis are able to get passport. Now even though we have an order from the home ministry but repeatedly our passports are rejecting.

In May 2015 I have filed complain to National Human Rights Commission regarding our passport rejection and NHRC has issued 7 letters to the home ministry and copied to me. However, no response from the home ministry after received 7 letters from NHRC.

At the international level the aim to end statelessness by 2024. But in 2015 the cabinet of the government of Bangladesh has approved a draft citizenship bill. The matter is now under the consideration of the parliament. There are so many sections are contradictory to create statelessness in Bangladesh. But I trust our government will review the bill before enact in the parliament.

Recommendations:

1. Revise the draft Citizenship Bill 2015 to protect the nationality rights of all Bangladeshis and prevent the risk of statelessness in Bangladesh
2. Ensure the Birth Registration of the new born Rohingyas in Bangladesh
3. Issue an official order to guide the issuance of passports, birth certificates, and other documentation to the Bihari camp dwellers on an equal basis with other Bangladeshis and without any hassle of investigation officials
4. Government should take some necessary action to rehabilitate the Bihari camp people with dignity.
5. The government of Bangladesh should stop evictions of the Bihari Camps.

At the end I want to say thanks to OHCHR for its minority fellowship program and I am one of the minority fellow of 2008 after completing my fellowship I have established Council of Minorities in Bangladesh and working for the establishment of rights of the minorities.

-:Thanks to all:-