



Dhaka, 4th June 2018, Press Release

Civil Society and Experts express concern on ecological damages and urge for quick repatriation or decongestion or redistribution of Rohingya Refugees.

Separate Environment Recovery Fund is urged to Save Natural Resources of Cox's Bazar

Dhaka, 4 June 2018: Today in a press conference held at the National Press Club, civil society leaders and experts urged the quick repatriation, redistribution or decongestion of the Rohingya refugees to avoid the permanent damage on Cox's Bazar natural resources. They also urged to develop an environmental recovery fund for Cox's Bazar. COAST Trust and CCFN (Cox's Bazar CSO NGO Forum) jointly organized the press conference on the eve of 5th June World Environment Day. Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, the Co-Chair of CCFN and Executive Director of COAST Trust moderated the press conference. Dr. Atiq Rahman, renowned climate expert and Chief Executive of BCAS (Bangladesh Center for Advanced Studies) raised expert opinion in the press conference while Barkat Ullah Maruf of COAST Trust presented the research findings on environment, water, pollution situation in Ukhiya and Teknaf. Fazlul Quader Chowdhury of Green Cox's and President BAPA Cox's Bazar presented research findings on the ground water situation of the district.

In the keynote presentation, Barkat Ullah Maruf said, daily 2,250 tons of firewood is being burnt only for cooking and if alternative fuel is not provided the entire forest of Ukhiya and Teknaf will be lost by 2019. All the 21 canals and streams are completely polluted. More than 100 tons of disposable garbage in the camps apart from plastics and polythene is collected every month. He proposed seven immediate action points in this regard, (i) Refugees should be quickly repatriated or they should be redistributed or decongested but must in fulfilling of their basic human rights, (ii) There must be an environment recovery fund with a portion of contribution including a contribution from relief or aid money, (iii) Alternative cooking fuel like LPG gas bottle should be supplied to refugees without any further delay and on priority basis, (iv) All natural canals of Ukhiya and Teknaf have to be cleaned and there should be massive re-excavation of ponds in these areas to enhance preservation of surface water, (v) There should be a policy to limit the extraction of ground water in Ukhiya and Teknaf, (vi) Including in Ukhiya and Teknaf whole over the Cox's Bazar all aid agencies and government should take massive tree plantation in this rainy season and (vii) Coordinated short and long term effort should be taken to disaster risk reduction, e.g., all school buildings should be renovated as cyclone shelters etc.

Fazlul Quader Chowdhury said that, the ground water of Cox's Bazar has been affected during the last decades for rapid urbanization and extra pressure of tourism. Radioactive elements like, Uranium, Thorium, Monazite and Zircon has been found in more than acceptable level in the ground water of Cox's Bazar town and district. While surface water sources of Cox's Bazar are reduced to 63% but settlement has been increased by 246%. He proposes recovery of surface water sources and also introduction of desalination plant for drinking water supply in Cox's Bazar town.

Dr. Atiq Rahman said in his speech, Forest is not just some trees. This is a composition of several ecosystems of lives and it cannot be replaced with growing some trees once the forest is lost. He also said, we are in an emergency situation and we have to count the 1 million Rohingyas along with the host community for whatever development plan we initiate.

Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, the moderator of the press conference said that, the Rohingyas have been living under tarpaulin and plastic sheds in fact which is a recipe for all kinds of disaster. There is tremendous heat and that's why they are frequently getting sick. He proposed to change present shelter approach with redistribution or decongestion of refugees is a must which should be more human and respecting to their right to life.

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