

Myanmar Rohingya refugees returning to Myanmar will have no explicit guarantees of citizenship or freedom of movement throughout the country, under a secret agreement between the government and the UN seen by Reuters.

The UN struck an outline deal with Myanmar at the end of May, aimed at eventually allowing hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Muslims sheltering in Bangladesh to return safely and by choice, but did not make the details of the deal public.

Reuters on Friday reviewed a copy of the memorandum of understanding (MoU) agreed between the UN and Myanmar authorities.

The draft also leaked out online.

Citizenship and rights of refugees who return to Myanmar were key points of contention during negotiations over the agreement to restore access to conflict-ravaged Rakhine state for UN agencies that have been barred since last August.

The MoU states “returnees will enjoy the same freedom of movement as all other Myanmar nationals in Rakhine State, in conformity with existing laws and regulations”.

No mention of laws

However, it does not guarantee freedom of movement beyond the borders of Rakhine or addresses the laws and regulations that currently prevent Rohingya from traveling freely, according to the text seen by Reuters.

Refugee leaders and human rights groups say the agreement fails to ensure basic rights for the Rohingya, some 7,00,000 of whom have fled a military crackdown some Western countries have called “ethnic cleansing”.

“As it stands, returning Rohingya to Rakhine means returning them to an apartheid state, a place where they can’t move around freely and struggle to access schools, hospitals and places they rely on for work,” said Win Myat Aye, Amnesty International’s Myanmar researcher.

Myanmar government spokesman Zaw Htay and Social Welfare Minister Win Myat Aye did not answer multiple phone calls seeking comment.

REUTERS, AP, AFP

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