

## Who Are We

1. We are a non-profit, non-sectarian, non-political collective conceived to provide humanitarian assistance to the stateless people in Bangladesh.
2. We are registered under the laws of the State of Texas, USA as a non-profit corporation.

## Our Objectives

1. Inform the world about the plight of stateless people in Bangladesh.
2. Assist these people in organizing to get their basic human rights in the country of their choice (Bangladesh or Pakistan).
3. Keep abreast of developments in Bangladesh, Pakistan and around the world as it affects the stateless people in Bangladesh.
4. Provide them with a way to communicate with the world.
5. Provide relief and developmental aid to communities of stateless people in Bangladesh.

## History of the Stateless People in Bangladesh

Before the British departed from India in 1947 the Indian sub-continent was divided into two countries India and Pakistan. Muslim majority areas became Pakistan and the rest became the present day India. Country of Pakistan consisted of two areas East Pakistan and West Pakistan separated by a distance of almost a thousand miles. After the partition India went through a great turmoil, a huge transfer of population took place. Millions of Muslims of India moved either to West Pakistan or East Pakistan. Muslims mostly from the Indian province of Bihar migrated in large numbers to East Pakistan.

After the birth of Pakistan, Karachi was chosen as the capital and Urdu was declared the official national language. Many governments came and went but people and institutions of West Pakistan remained dominant in the national life of Pakistan. The aspirations and language of the people who were the majority of the population 'Bengalis' in East Pakistan and Pakistan overall were neglected particularly in the early years. Politicians of Bangladesh spoke to these and many other grievances of the people of East Pakistan and eventually achieved a convincing victory at the ballot box. The Government of Pakistan and West Pakistani politicians were unable to reach necessary compromises, which resulted in a civil war. Pakistan army tried to bring things under control using force and assistance of local population. Pakistanis cooperating with federal government were often Urdu speaking commonly referred to as "Biharis". These were the people who had moved from India in 1947 and spoke Urdu as their mother tongue. With India's active military assistance the civil war turned into an international conflict in which Pakistan was defeated.

Eventually some 95,000 Pakistani armed forces and other personnel surrendered in Dhaka in 1971. India took control of the prisoners of war. East Pakistan declared itself the independent state of "Bangladesh". The minority, which cooperated with the Pakistani government, were now considered traitors and were under assault by the majority. These people considered themselves "Pakistanis" and were prepared to move to Pakistan as soon as it was possible. In the mean time fearing for their lives they gathered in certain areas of the country, which later came to be known as camps. Bangladeshi government as well as these people considered themselves Pakistani nationals. Therefore the citizenship of Bangladesh was not extended to them. Some Pakistanis made it back to Pakistan and some were brought in by the Government of Pakistan. However the Government of Pakistan particularly and its people generally did not take any responsibility or take any practical steps to allow return of 250,000 of these patriotic Pakistanis to the country of their citizenship. Bangladeshi government continued to call for repatriation of these people to Pakistan. For the following 32 years these people have been living in Bangladesh deprived of the right to be a citizen of one country or the other, the condition of "Statelessness".

## Consequences of Statelessness

The Stateless People and their families are denied every government service such as schooling and immunization for the children, treatment of the sick, personal identification, and issuance of any type of government documents such as a passport, driver's license, and business license. They do not have the right to vote. These people can even be denied security of person. In fact hundreds were lynched by the mobs during the victory celebrations immediately after Pakistan Army surrendered.

A whole generation of these people was born and has grown up in Bangladesh with out education, medical treatment, job opportunities, geographic or social mobility or the right to own property; which guarantees them a life of perpetual poverty and depravation. These people are still living under inhuman conditions in small encampments in various parts of Bangladesh. Not only have they suffered for the last 32 years there is no hope for them toward improving their situation in life through their own efforts. This condition of statelessness has been suffered by the whole generation of people who were never accused of an offense or tried in any court of law. This collective and perpetual punishment has befallen all members of the community including women, children and the aged. Not only that, people who were not even born at the time of the freedom struggle of Bangladesh have suffered the same fate. See more about living conditions in the camps under 'Witness to Agony' or in the Gallery of Horrors.

## Why we believe

We want to outline clear rationale for our beliefs, to solidify the convictions of our friends and visitors and refute the objections of our critics, convincingly and permanently. We know our facts and values and have utmost confidence in them both. We state our arguments clearly and respectfully to all concerned. Following are some of the objections we frequently come across.

1. *Muslims of Bihar migrated from India to Bengal in 1947 and they are still in the same country, what is the problem. Bangladesh is an Islamic country too.* Muslims of India migrated in 1947 to Pakistan, East Pakistan to be specific. So long as East Pakistan was part of Pakistan they were loyal and patriotic Pakistani citizens. When Bangladesh came in to existence they indicated their choice by not accepting its citizenship and therefore they remain Pakistanis. The Right of return to Pakistan for them and their offspring has been denied without a good reason.
2. *It is such an old problem, the current generation of these folks was born and raised in Bangladesh, they speak fluent Bengali, and live like Bengalis and for all practical purposes are Bengalis.* We agree this issue has stood unresolved for far too long. This situation should have been resolved within a few months of the creation of Bangladesh. But the victims must not be blamed. If Pakistan had not blocked the return of these patriotic citizens back to Pakistan we would not be talking about it today. Yes most stranded Pakistanis speak fluent Bengali; they have lived in Bangladesh for two generations. Speaking Bengali was an economic and cultural necessity for them. Yet their mother tongue is and remains Urdu and they are a distinct cultural group in Bangladesh. We are sure you have noticed many other long standing issues in our national life such as Kashmir which is an even older issue but Pakistan has not rescinded her rights and continues to struggle for a favorable resolution at every turn. So it is with this issue.
3. *You see Pakistan is a very poor country we just can't absorb another large batch of unskilled and unemployed manpower.* Do you really think we were better prepared in economic terms when millions of refugees came to Pakistan in 1947, or when refugees from Jammu & Kashmir came in or when 3 million Afghan refugees came in from Afghanistan? Stranded Pakistanis from Bangladesh have never demanded anything (like housing, education, employment or medical care) All they ask for is the bare minimum of being domiciled in the geographic boundaries of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The total number of stranded Pakistanis is less than 10% of Afghan refugees. No state can abandon any of its citizens on account of prevailing economic conditions.
4. *Well it really does not matter where you are, if you are a minority you will eventually become a part of the majority in a few generations. Besides the reason why these folks were so hated in East Pakistan is because they considered themselves superior to the Bengalis and did not want to assimilate in the main stream of Bangli society.* Just a couple of paragraphs

ago it was being asserted that they are Bengalis for all practical purposes and now the exact opposite is being claimed. We wish our critics would decide if the stranded Pakistanis were too Bengali or not Bengali enough. Assimilation of minorities in the main stream of any society is a natural phenomenon, but it has to be a voluntary process not forced. No minority in any country should be forced to give up its language, culture or religion. Remember you have a lot of Muslims and Pakistanis living in America. We hope America never calls for forced integration of minorities.

5. *Most of the men and women of working age are uneducated and unskilled whether they live in Bangladesh or in Pakistan they are still going to be very poor and deprived So what is the difference.* It may be true but stranded Pakistanis prefer to be poor and deprived in their own country then in Bangladesh. The relationship of state and the citizen is voluntary on the part of the citizen but not the state. Citizens may relinquish their state for any reason at any time. Yet the state shall not denationalize a citizen with out a legal reason and due process of law. State exists for the citizen not vice versa.
6. *Most of the current generation of the stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh don't even want to come to Pakistan, why bring them.* It is possible that the new generation of Stranded Pakistanis have completely given up on Pakistan embracing them or they may have developed a heart felt connection with the land of their birth. No group has ever proposed to the best of our knowledge that all stranded Pakistanis be brought back to Pakistan. Those who wish to become citizens of Bangladesh should be allowed to do so. Being citizen of a state is a fundamental human right according to the Universal Charter of Human Rights. From the beginning to the end we view this as a humanitarian issue to be resolved by the two parties historically associated with this issue.
7. *If all of these stranded Pakistanis are allowed back in, you know where they are headed, to Karachi right away. That would be upsetting for Sindhi's and injurious to their political interests.* We really don't want to injure any community's interests. One of the fundamental rights of citizens is to be able live anywhere in the country. This right can not be offered to some but not all. Let us take this argument a step further will you accept removal of a significant number of non-Sindhi population from the province of Sindhi so a more suitable demographic landscape can be prepared for certain groups or political parties. Most certainly not. However we can see that it may be in our national interest to try to control overcrowding in our major cities and therefore offer incentives to the returnees to choose areas where the infrastructure has greater capacity to absorb additional population. This will have the additional advantage of minimizing cultural and political impact of resettled returnees.
8. *What is the legal situation?* Since 1971 hundreds of articles have been written and studies done to describe and document various aspects of this tragedy. The conclusion of the most authoritative opinions is that a. the stranded Pakistanis for the last 32 years have been defecto stateless b. Pakistan can not unilaterally and arbitrarily denationalize these citizens. C Stranded Pakistanis never surrendered their citizenship and have an undeniable right of return to Pakistan.
9. *You know how the life in the camps is most or at least some of the camp residents have already turned to life of crime or worse of terrorism.* This is the most bogus of all arguments, it tries to blame the victim with out a shred of evidence and

maligns an entire community of hardworking and God fearing fellow Muslims. This is an absolutely baseless allegation and nothing more.

10. *Would you have fought for the repatriation of stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh if they were not Urdu speaking and were from another language group?* There are people from every province of this country who are with us on this issue. As God is our witness we swear that we will fight for justice for you as much as this cause. We have no room nor any desire to be associated with hypocrites of any kind.
11. *Every society new or old, large or small consists of a lot of different minorities of region, color, language, religion, sect, zat, occupation or political views.* If we fail to protect the rights of any one of them we fail to protect ourselves. Future is a long time and anything can happen to you or your group. If you did not protect others who will protect you. In our fragile and rather brief lives we all depend on each other not only for prosperity but indeed for our existence.
12. *What is your Muslim duty?* If you see any wrong or injustice being done, to stop it by force if necessary, denounce it as wrong and if you can't even do that then at least consider it abhorrent and this is the weakest level of "Iman" for a Muslim.
13. *It is really a lost cause. Chances of success are minimal.* We did not embark on this struggle without considering this question. May be there is only a one- percent chance of bringing back all of our fellow citizens. Accepting such a chance even for saving the life of one human being would be a chance worth taking. We are talking about the lives of a quarter of a million Pakistanis. In all things of consequence we must do the best we can. Such is our obligation to fellow man and God. Allah shall ask you one day about all of your actions and omissions and I sincerely hope that you will make your mother, your father and above all your Rasool proud. Now is the time to be that exemplary Muslim you are always telling your kids about.
14. *What is our obligation to humanity?* Even if you the reader or the stranded Pakistanis weren't Muslims what would be our human duty. Would it be anything except to hold the hands of these long suffering and defenseless men, women, children and the aged and lead them to safety and security?

God bless you all and show us all the right path.

