

A DOCU-COMIC

RHINGYA

ARIF IQBAL

STATELESS

B A Y O F B E N G A L



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A D O C U - C O M I C

STATELESS

A R I F I Q B A L



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PREFACE

ActionAid Bangladesh (AAB) has been responding to the Rohingya crisis in Cox's Bazar since the very beginning of the influx in 2017. In line with its core mandate, AAB has been implementing a women-centred response in support of Rohingya refugees, with an emphasis on the protection of women and girls. Following international human rights law and humanitarian principles, we work to ensure the rights of the Rohingya for safe, dignified and voluntary repatriation along with their right to adequate and appropriate humanitarian assistance during displacement. By identifying and communicating critical needs and concerns with relevant stakeholders, and by capturing the knowledge and sharing the circumstances of the crisis with audiences home and abroad, we hope to deepen awareness amongst national and international policymakers and civil society alike.

AAB regularly uses research, studies, statistics and position papers as tools to sensitize people about the crisis. These tools, while effective, can only reach certain segments of society. In order to increase our coverage both in sheer numbers and diversity, we have started to integrate more and more innovative campaign ideas alongside the conventional ones; for instance, a photography exhibition on unpaid care work and a sports event with the participation of sportswomen for a campaign against gender-based violence. The success of these events inspired us to this new idea – that of a graphic novel or a docu-comic. We recognise cartoons and comics as key elements of contemporary social activism and a creative communication tool for spreading critical messages to wide audiences. Visuals, either alone or paired with short captions, often get more visibility and attention than mere text.

We are optimistic that this innovative work will energize the existing dialogue on protecting women and girls in emergencies and contribute towards greater awareness around these issues among the current generation as well as the next.

Farah Kabir
Country Director
ActionAid Bangladesh



A D O C U - C O M I C

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PROLOGUE

OCTOBER 10, 2018

SADIA HAS A BUSY SCHEDULE, SHE IS WORKING WITH US AS AN INTERPRETER THESE DAYS.

THERE IS NO STRESS IN SADIA'S VOICE. I FEEL LIKE I AM THE ONLY ONE SUFFERING FROM THE AFTER EFFECTS OF THE SHEER TERROR WHICH UNFOLDED IN FRONT OF ME.

THIS IS BEYOND IMAGINATION! THIS IS ENORMOUS!!

YES SIR. AND THIS IS WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE NOW. IT WAS CHAOTIC WHEN THE CRISIS BEGAN.

MORE CHAOTIC THAN THIS?

SIR, THERE WERE NO ROADS, NO DRINKING WATER AND NO SANITATION. THIS WAS NO PLACE FOR A FAMILY TO LIVE OR CHILDREN TO GROW. I COULDN'T WALK TEN MINUTES WITHOUT THINKING OF FAINTING FROM THE HEAT AND CONGESTION.

... AND HERE WE ARE

KUTUPALONG, BALUKHALI
BANGLADESH

THE NEW INFLUX MAKES IT THE LARGEST REFUGEE CAMP IN THE WORLD, INHABITED BY FORCEFULLY DISPLACED PERSONS WHO FLED FROM RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC CLEANSING BY THE MYANMAR MILITARY. FOLLOWING THE MILITARY'S
OPERATION PYITHAYA
(OPERATION CLEAN AND BEAUTIFUL NATION)
IN THE EARLY 90'S THE FIRST ROHINGYA REFUGEE SETTLEMENT BEGAN IN COX'S BAZAR BANGLADESH.

NUMBERS TELL A STORY:

899,349	INDIVIDUALS	55% CHILDREN
207,265	FAMILIES	42% ADULT
64,142	PEOPLE WITH SPECIFIC NEEDS	3% ELDERLY
4,385	SEPARATED CHILDREN	
1429	UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN	

SOURCE: UNHCR POPULATION FACTSHEET, 2018



CHALLENGES FACED BY THE NEW ARRIVALS:

- SHELTER AND WASH SUPPORT
- LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES FOR LIVELIHOODS
- HIGH RISK OF SEXUAL AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE
- PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR THOSE WHO SUFFERED VIOLENCE
- ACCESS TO JUSTICE
- EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN
- HIGH RISK OF TRAFFICKING AND CHILD MARRIAGE

LET'S LOOK BACK TO WHEN IT ALL STARTED:



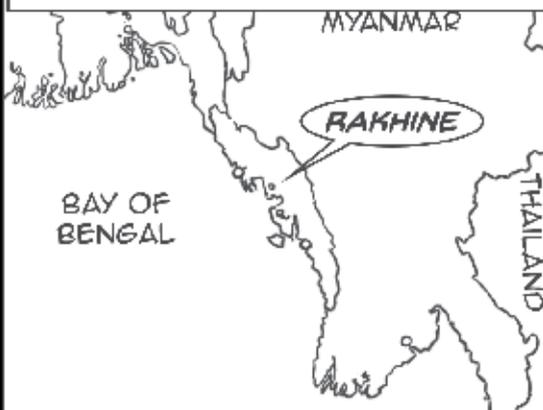
9TH-15TH CENTURY:

ARAB AND OTHER TRADERS SETTLED DOWN IN ARAKAN AND INTER-MARRIED WITH VARIOUS RACES IN THE REGION, FORMING AN ETHNICALLY AND CULTURALLY DISTINCT GROUP.



1784:

ARAKAN BECAME PART OF BURMA, PRESENT DAY MYANMAR. THE ANCESTORS OF ROHINGYA ESTABLISHED THEIR PRESENCE IN NORTHERN RAKHINE STATE.



WORLD WAR II- (1939- 1945):

THE JAPANESE ARMY INVADDED BURMA. ARAKAN BUDDHISTS ALIGNED WITH THE JAPANESE. MUSLIM POPULATION REMAINED LOYAL TO THE BRITISH.



1948- 1954:

AN ARMED REVOLT TO CREATE A MUSLIM STATE WITHIN BURMA CONTINUED BUT WAS ULTIMATELY SUPPRESSED, RESULTING IN LAND AND PROPERTY CONFISCATION.



1982:

THE MYANMAR CITIZENSHIP LAW OF 1982 RENDERED THE ROHINGYAS STATELESS.

UNDER THIS LAW, A TOTAL OF 135 ETHNIC COMMUNITIES ARE RECOGNIZED;

HOWEVER, THE EXISTENCE OF THE 'ROHINGYA' ETHNICITY IS NOT BEING RECOGNIZED BY THE LAW. HENCE THEY REMAIN DE FACTO STATELESS.



1992:

UNHCR ESTABLISHED ITS PRESENCE IN BANGLADESH TO ASSIST THE COUNTRY WITH INFLUX OF SOME 250,000 FDMC*.

1994-2005: AROUND 95% OF THE FDMC RETURNED TO MYANMAR BY MID 2005.

MANY WERE FORCED TO COME BACK TO BANGLADESH IN SUBSEQUENT YEARS.



2012:

VIOLENCE AND MASS INFULX OF FDMC STARTED AGAIN.

2013:

IN SEPTEMBER 2013 THE CABINET PASSED THE NATIONAL STRATEGY ON FORCEFULLY DISPLACED MYANMAR CITIZENS AND UNDOCUMENTED MYANMAR NATIONALS.



*FDMC - FORCEFULLY DISPLACED MYANMAR CITIZENS

INFLUX- 25TH AUGUST 2017

POPULATION - 741,577

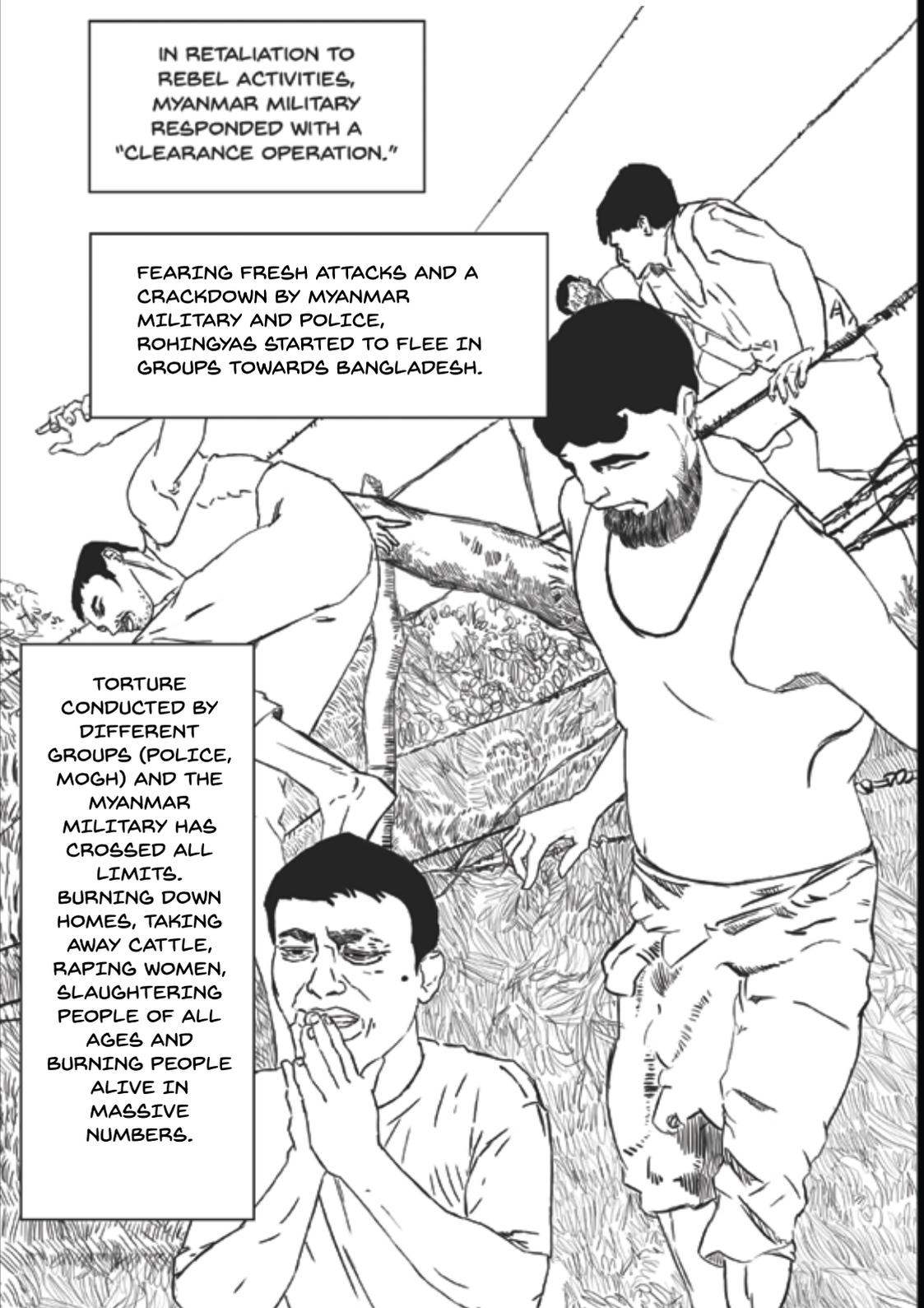
HOUSEHOLD - 172,910

IN RETALIATION TO
REBEL ACTIVITIES,
MYANMAR MILITARY
RESPONDED WITH A
"CLEARANCE OPERATION."

FEARING FRESH ATTACKS AND A
CRACKDOWN BY MYANMAR
MILITARY AND POLICE,
ROHINGYAS STARTED TO FLEE IN
GROUPS TOWARDS BANGLADESH.

TORTURE
CONDUCTED BY
DIFFERENT
GROUPS (POLICE,
MOGH) AND THE
MYANMAR
MILITARY HAS
CROSSED ALL
LIMITS.

BURNING DOWN
HOMES, TAKING
AWAY CATTLE,
RAPING WOMEN,
SLAUGHTERING
PEOPLE OF ALL
AGES AND
BURNING PEOPLE
ALIVE IN
MASSIVE
NUMBERS.



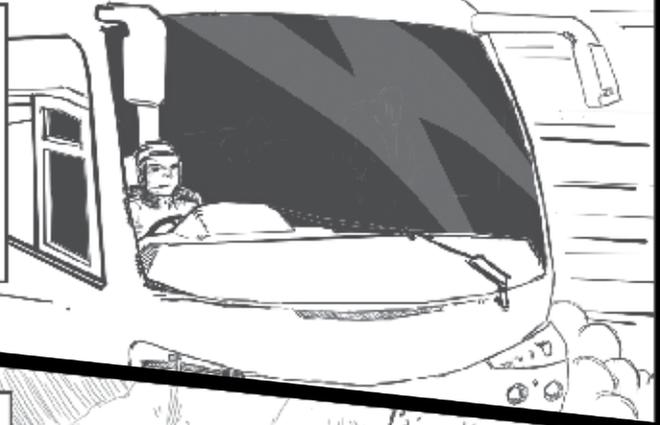
THE JOURNEY:

4TH OCTOBER, 2018
EDITOR AHSAN HABIB'S DESK
UNMAD MAGAZINE OFFICE,
MIRPUR, DHAKA, BANGLADESH.

ARIF, THE ONGOING
FORCEFULLY DISPLACED
MYANMAR CITIZENS
ISSUE IS A HUMANITARIAN
CRISIS. WE AS CARTOONISTS
SHOULD DOCUMENT THIS IN
SEQUENTIAL FORM.



MY PRIMARY GOAL IS TO DO MY
RESEARCH AND HEAR DIRECTLY
FROM THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE
WITNESSED AND SUFFERED
FROM THIS ONGOING
PERSECUTION. I STARTED
IMMEDIATELY TO COX'S BAZAR
ON AN OVERNIGHT BUS DRIVE.



THEN FROM COX'S BAZAR THERE'S
ANOTHER LONG DRIVE TOWARDS
THE REFUGEE CAMPS IN BALUKHALI.



FINALLY WE REACHED THE CAMP, IT
WAS A DIFFICULT WALK THROUGH
SLIPPERY MUD AND LIGHT RAIN.



AS EVERY PATH HAS A DESTINATION, WE
EVENTUALLY REACHED OURS. THERE WAS NO
WELCOME PARTY, NOR ANY SAD OR HAPPY FACES,
JUST PEOPLE EAGER TO BE HEARD.



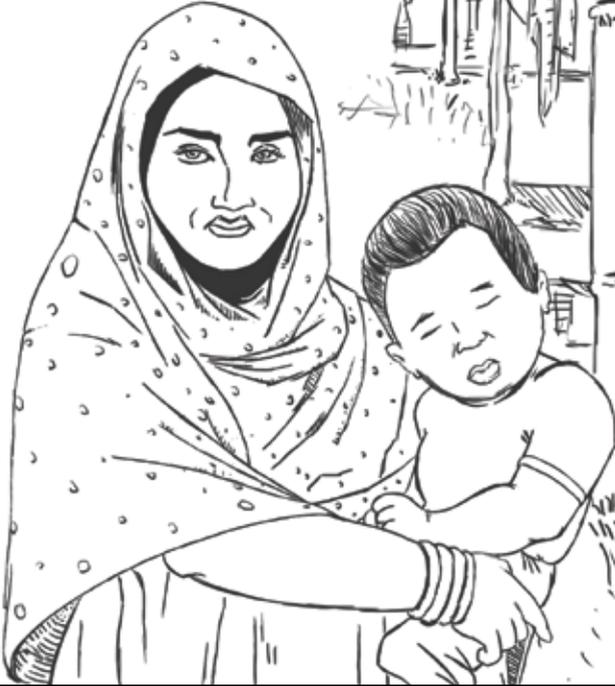
NAZNEEN'S STORY:

WOMAN FRIENDLY SPACE
(WFS)
BALUKHALI CAMP
COX'S BAZAR

NAZNEEN IS A RECENT ARRIVAL, HAVING FLED MYANMAN WITH HER HUSBAND AND FOUR SONS.

THIS 30 YEAR OLD AND HER FAMILY HAD TO FLEE AFTER MYANMAR MILITARY AND POLICE CRACKED DOWN IN THEIR AREA.

THEY WERE INHABITANTS OF THE MAUNGDAW TOWNSHIP UNDER THE MAUNGDAW DISTRICT OF RAKHINE STATE IN MYANMAR.



NAZNEEN'S FATHER WAS A FARMER. HE HAD SOME LAND AND FARMING WAS THEIR ONLY SOURCE OF LIVELIHOOD.

THE MYANMAR ARMY SNATCHED THE LAND AND HER FATHER BECAME JOBLESS.

HE CONTINUED TO SOMEWHAT SUPPORT THE FAMILY BY SELLING FRUITS AND VEGETABLES.

FOUR YEAR'S AGO NAZNEEN'S MOTHER DIED FROM A CARDIAC ARREST. SHE DID NOT RECEIVE ANY MEDICAL SUPPORT.

ROHINGYA PATIENTS COULD NOT GO TO HOSPITALS STRAIGHT AWAY. THEY HAD TO COLLECT CLEARANCE PAPER FROM THE LOCAL CHAIRMAN TO VISIT HOSPITALS. NAZNEEN'S MOTHER DIED DUE TO LACK OF TREATMENT. HER FATHER ALSO DIED NINE MONTHS AFTER HIS WIFE'S DEMISE.



FOURS YEARS AGO, NAZNEEN WAS INTRODUCED TO THE VIOLENCE LED BY THE MYANMAR MILITARY AND THE POLICE. AT THAT TIME THE MYANMAR ARMY TOOK AWAY MANY MEN AND BOYS FROM THE VILLAGES WITHOUTH JUSTIFYING THEIR ACTIONS. LATER ON, THEY CAME TO KNOW THAT THE REASON WAS SOME REBEL GROUP THAT HAD TAKEN SHELTER IN THEIR AREA.



THE MYANMAR ARMY AND POLICE CONTINUED THEIR TORTURE IN DIFFERENT WAYS.

THE MYANMAR GANG RAPED A GIRL NEAR NAZNEEN'S HOUSE.



AND AFTER THE MOTHER PROTESTED, THE ARMY PERSONNEL STABBED HER.



NAZNEEN SAW THE DEATH OF A 14 YEAR OLD BOY, BEATEN UP BY THE MILITARY. AND THE BOY'S CRIME WAS USING A MOBILE PHONE.



MEN CAN HIDE OR RUN AWAY ... BUT WOMEN CAN'T.

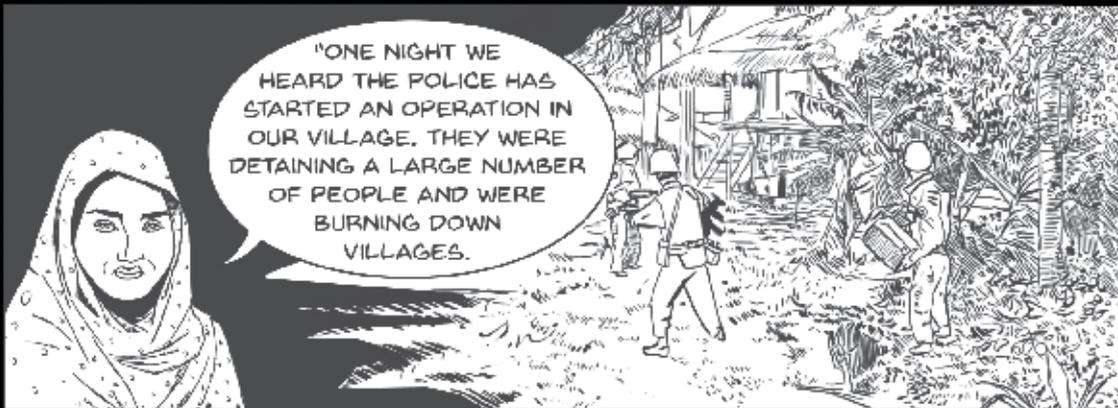
WOMEN BECOME FIRST
VICTIMS FROM SURPRISE ATTACKS
FROM THE ARMY.

THE FIRST THING THE ARMY DOES IS TO RAPE
OR ABUSE WOMEN AFTER ENTERING A HOME.
SOMETIMES THEY EVEN TOOK THE WOMEN TO
THE ARMY CAMPS. THEY ALSO LOOK FOR
JEWELLERY AND ALL OTHER VALUABLES FROM
THE WOMEN. PROTESTING MEANS
MORE PAINFUL DEATH THAN OTHERS.

WE ALWAYS HAD TO
STAY ALERT FOR A
POSSIBLE ATTACK BY
ANY OF THE
LAW ENFORCEMENT
AGENCIES. MYANMAR
ARMY LEAVES NO ONE
BUT THE PREGNANT
WOMEN FOR THE SAKE
OF THEIR OWN
SEXUAL PLEASURE.
AS A RESULT, AMONG
THE ROHINGYA WOMEN,
THERE IS A HIGH
TENDENCY OF GETTING
PREGNANT. IT
HAPPENED EACH YEAR
JUST TO KEEP
THEMSELVES SAFE
FROM THE MILITARY
TORTURE.



IN SOME AREAS TO KEEP THE WOMEN SAFE, MEN USED TO GIVE A
HANDSOME AMOUNT OF BRIBE TO THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES. IN HER OWN
VILLAGE, THEY GAVE ABOUT A MILLION IN LOCAL CURRENCY TO KEEP THE
WOMEN SAFE. BUT THAT DIDN'T HELP. THE ARMY TORTURED WOMEN.
THEY ALSO DETAINED YOUNG BOYS, SO THAT THERE WERE NO WORTHY
OPPONENTS TO CAUSE A REBEL.



"ONE NIGHT WE HEARD THE POLICE HAS STARTED AN OPERATION IN OUR VILLAGE. THEY WERE DETAINING A LARGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE AND WERE BURNING DOWN VILLAGES.

I STARTED RUNNING WITH MY FAMILY. LIKE EVERYONE ELSE WE CROSSED THE NAF RIVER AND ARRIVED IN BANGLADESH. ONE RELATIVE HELPED ME CROSS THE BORDER.



I FEEL BETTER AND SAFE IN BANGLADESH. BUT I ALSO MISS MY OWN HOME.

I COULDN'T EVEN HAVE A FULL MEAL BACK THERE, BUT EVERYTHING I HAD WAS MY OWN.



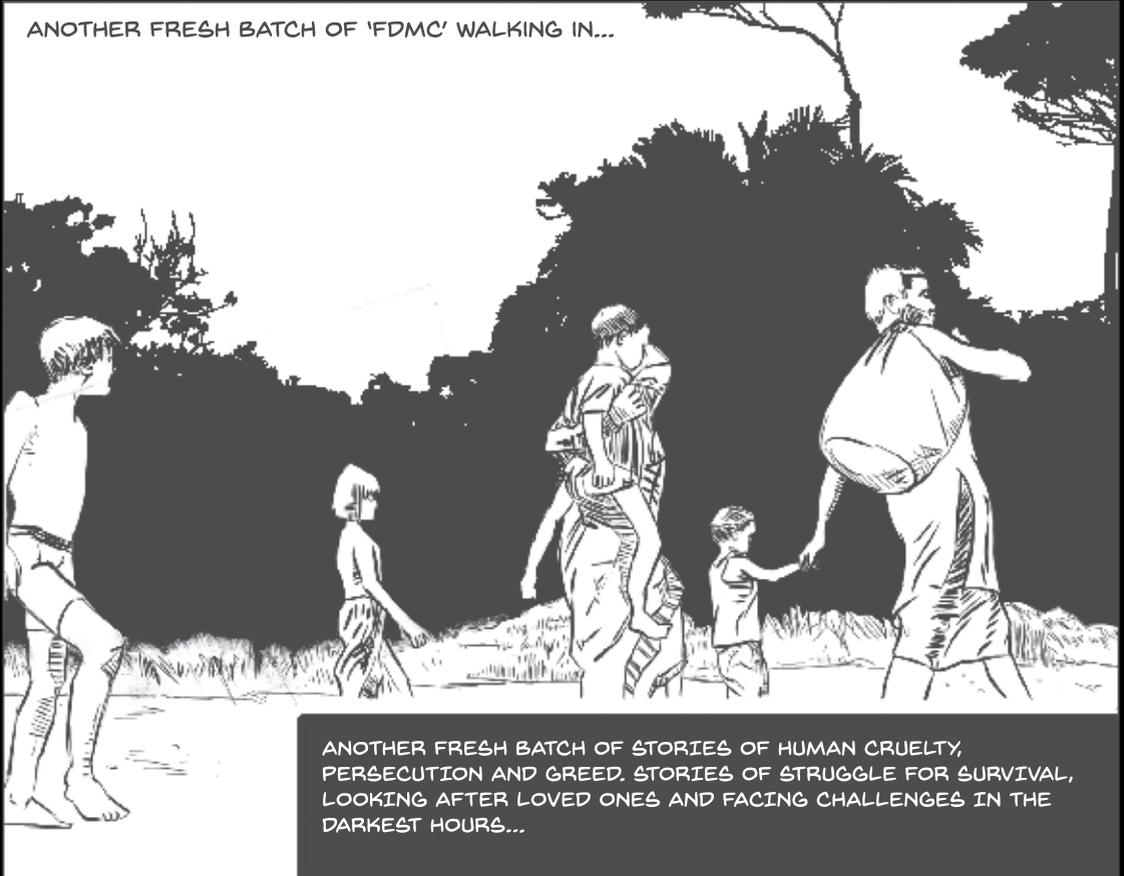
I WANT TO MAKE SURE MY CHILDREN RECEIVE A GOOD EDUCATION. I WANT THEM TO BECOME GOOD HUMAN BEINGS. THAT IS WHAT I AM CONCENTRATING ON AT THIS MOMENT.

NAZNEEN STOPS HER STORY. I NOTICE PIN-DROP SILENCE IN THE ROOM. THREE WOMEN ARE LOOKING AT US. THEIR EXPRESSIONS INDICATE THAT THEY CAN EASILY RELATE TO NAZNEEN'S ORDEAL. AND YET.... THERE ARE MORE UNTOLD STORIES WAITING TO BE TOLD.



I HEARD A COMMOTION COMING FROM OUTSIDE...

ANOTHER FRESH BATCH OF 'FDMC' WALKING IN...



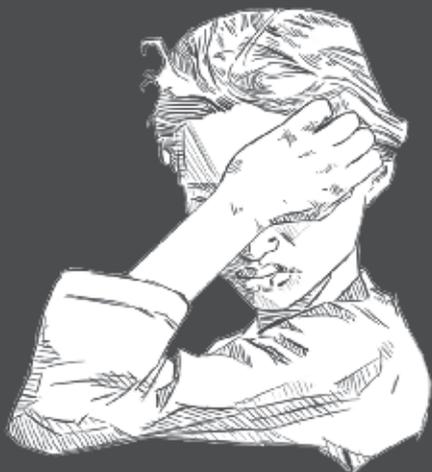
ANOTHER FRESH BATCH OF STORIES OF HUMAN CRUELTY, PERSECUTION AND GREED. STORIES OF STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL, LOOKING AFTER LOVED ONES AND FACING CHALLENGES IN THE DARKEST HOURS...



...STORY OF SURVIVAL OF A SMILE



STORY OF SURVIVING AGAINST ALL ODDS



END OF CHILDHOOD DREAMS



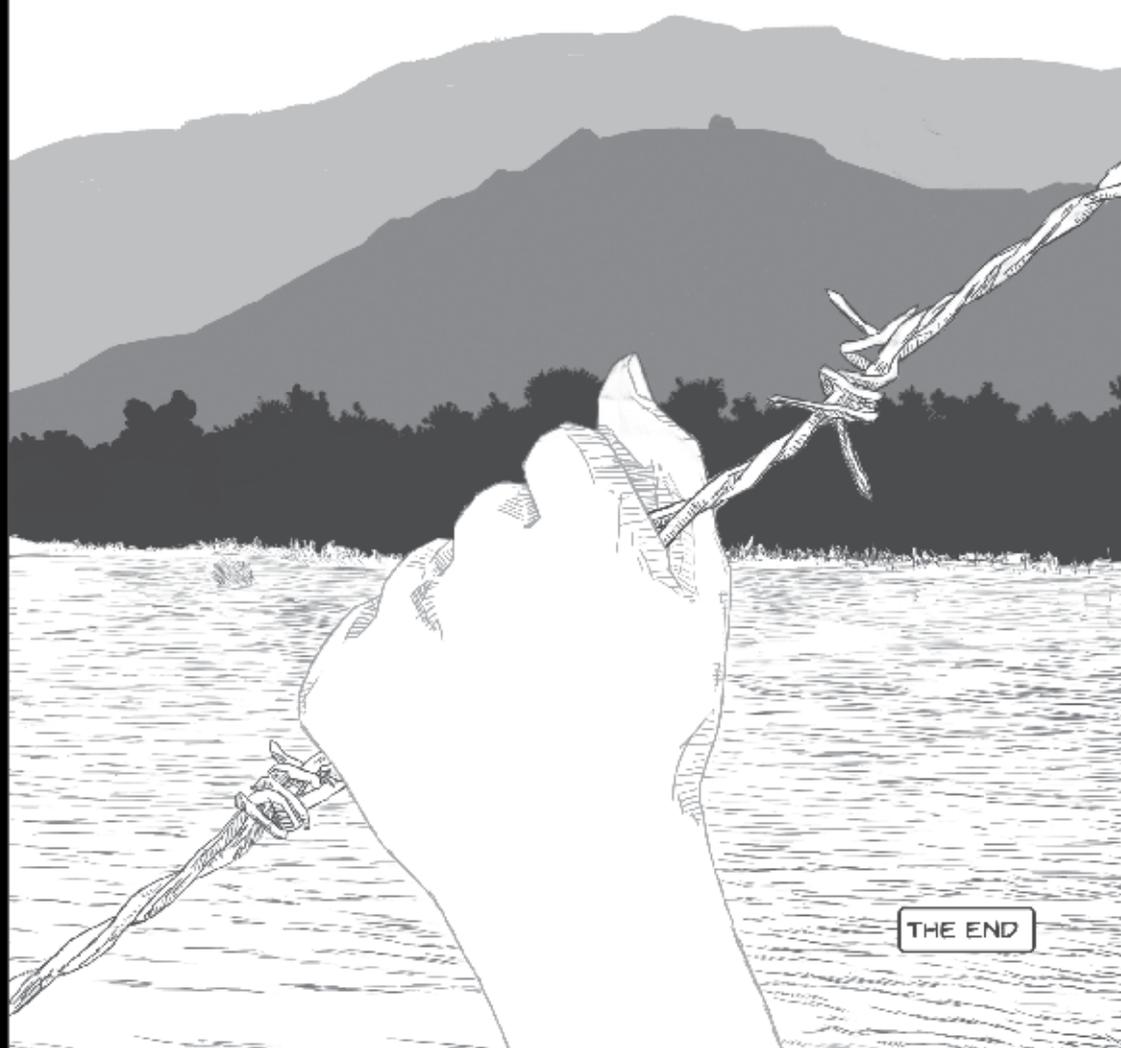
STORY OF DEFIANCE



STORY OF REBIRTH

NAZNEEN'S LAST WORDS RING IN MY EARS...

"WE DIDN'T WANT TO LEAVE OUR COUNTRY.
BUT OUR GOVERNMENT DOESN'T LIKE US.
THE GOVERNMENT DOES NOT ALLOW US
TO STAY IN OUR OWN PLACE."



THE END



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**WOMEN
RIGHTS
&
GENDER
EQUITY**



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