

6th

ROHINGYA GENOCIDE REMEMBRANCE DAY



Imagine a world where someone's entire existence is upended in a single day, and the next six years unfold as if frozen in time. This very scenario is the reality for thousands of Rohingya inside the expansive refugee camps of Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

Sofura, a young woman in her mid-20s, resides within the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar, confined to a tarpaulin shelter. Her world was shattered in 2017 when her village fell victim to a brutal attack by the Myanmar military, claiming the lives of her husband and close family members in a single night. This forced her, with many others, to flee to Bangladesh, escaping from the campaign that sought to erase an entire population of Rohingyas. Along the way, she endured rape and extreme sexual violence at the hands of the Myanmar military. At just 19 years old, the young mother of two started life alone within a foreign camp. The 2017 horrors remain etched in her memory, "**My life feels stuck in 2017 ever since. Every day is a constant reminder to me of the darkness human beings are capable of inflicting on powerless people like us.**"

In the camps, Sofura discovered she wasn't alone. Refugee women who bore similar physical and emotional scars were united by their determination to regain dignity as they faced displacement's challenges and started rebuilding their lives together. In 2020, Sofura met a network of women volunteers from Legal Action Worldwide (LAW) that brought a pivotal turn to her life.

LAW supports a network of survivor advocates who provide peer counselling to victims of international crimes who are participating in ongoing cases to hold Myanmar military accountable. Many network members have also survived severe sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), enabling them to connect and build trust with the victims they support through their shared experiences. Inspired by these women, Sofura was trained by LAW's legal experts on activities such as sharing legal updates with the community, and advocating for gender rights, and became a part of this network.

In 2023, she became one of the very first Rohingya witnesses to give direct evidence before a foreign domestic court which is currently investigating crimes of genocide and crimes against humanity, including sexual violence committed by the Myanmar military and by non-Rohingya civilians.

Testifying before prosecutors, before unfamiliar faces worlds apart from the camp that had become her home for the past six years, was emotionally draining. Recalling her experience as a witness, Sofura admits, "Speaking about the family members I have lost in 2017 was the hardest part. I still feel shaken when I say their names." However, she knew that her testimony could make a difference – **"Only if I speak, will the world know"**.

"The court must punish the culprits," Sofura emphasized, her resolve unwavering. "Our lost family members deserve justice. Without it, it's a failure. We won't accept their [perpetrators] escape from punishment."

As she exited the courtroom, a sense of empowerment and relief washed over her as she realized that she had reclaimed a piece of herself— transitioning from one of the thousand voices silenced by violence to the very voice that demanded justice.



Though this marks just the initial phase of a lengthy legal procedure, her testimony has lent momentum to the battle for justice on behalf of the Rohingya people, edging us closer to the objective of securing arrest warrants against the perpetrators. Sofura asks one last question, **'I know Justice takes time, but for us, how much longer?'** These reflections resonate not only within the camps but also within the broader humanitarian context. The Rohingya people should not continue to endure this protracted crisis for yet another six years.

**The identity of the survivor in the story has been altered, and the names and locations of the proceedings referred to have been kept confidential for security reasons.*