A one day international seminar on ‘Food and Health Security of Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh: Human Rights Perspective’ was held at the Senate Building of Rajshahi University (RU) on September 23, 2016. Law faculty of RU and Arctic Centre of Lapland University of Finland jointly organized this seminar with the support of FinCEAL Plus project. The seminar had four sessions on food and health security of Rohingya Refugees.

Among others, RU Pro-Vice Chancellor, former Chairman of Bangladesh National Human Rights Commission, Director and researcher of Arctic Centre of Lapland University, professors from Dhaka University law department and Rohingya refugees attended at the inaugural and technical sessions of the seminar. The seminar had 200 participants including students from the faculty of law, policy makers, academics and other non-governmental organizations from Rajshahi City and Cox’s bazar, Bangladesh.

Rohingyas are an ethnic, linguistic and religious minority group in Myanmar and have long been deprived from their fundamental rights. They have been suffering and living inhumanely in many ways in the society in Bangladesh as refugees and asylum seekers. Hundreds of thousands, many of them being tortured, have fled their country, to seek refuge from the neighboring countries like Bangladesh, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and some others. In May 2015, thousands of Rohingyas´ became stranded in the Andaman sea and Bay of Bengal.

There are 50,000 refugees who are registered and residing in two refugee camps (Nayapara and Kutupalong) of Cox’s Bazar district. The camps are under the supervision of the UNHCR, and controlled by the Bangladeshi government and more than 200,000 Rohingyas are living illegally in the Bangladesh border. They are totally dependent on aid for maintaining their lives.

Addressing the seminar, the speakers said that the Rohingya Refugees are almost deprived from food and health security which are the basic needs of human being. Many of them have been living without any aid and support in the Bangladesh and Myanmar border. Yet, the problems are not being solved. Regionally and internationally the topic has been seen as a “matter of regret” as was stated by one of the Rohingya participants in the seminar. The speakers also requested the Bangladesh and Myanmar governments as well as the United Nations to solve the Rohingya Refugee’s problems immediately.
The World Food Program has launched a brand new “Electronic food card” that aims to ensure a better food distribution among the registered refugees. Each member of the family gets one food card that is about 65 euros but this is not enough to cover their daily living costs. Their residential rights, freedom of movement are restricted and those not registered in Bangladesh have no access to the health care services. However, as a speaker in the seminar mentioned, increased donor contributions and development assistance through UN could provide the opportunity to improve the health, nutrition, food and education security of Rohingyas.

At the end of the day the speakers agreed to create policy dialogues for raising awareness on Rohingya Refugees and the seminar topics, among the international community. Based on the discussions, there is a need for consortia and thematic network for sharing knowledge on this topic, since the international community knows so little about this issue. The participants of the seminar decided to create joint research collaborations and projects between Finland and Bangladesh as well as Europe and Asia for further discussions and broadening the knowledge on this international crisis.
Keynote speakers: professors from Dhaka University and Rajshahi University, director of the Arctic Centre (University of Lapland, Finland) and the former President of Human Rights commission of Bangladesh.