



# ARAKAN

Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO)



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- CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT- WHAT ARE THEIR RIGHTS AND HOW CAN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY PROTECT THEM?
- THE SITUATION IN MYANMAR: IS BANGLADESH MISSING AN OPPORTUNITY?



— *In this Issue*

Editorial: Acknowledging History, Building Peace: The Case for Recognizing Rohingya Ethnicity	02
Children in Armed Conflict- What are their rights and how can the international community protect them?	05
Village Tracts of northern Rakhine State	07
The situation in Myanmar: Is Bangladesh missing an opportunity?	08
Unsettling settlements: ‘half a million’ Rohingyas in remote villages isolated from mainstream Rohingya society	10
A short chronological summary of the events that took place in May 2024 in Myanmar's Rakhine State affecting the Rohingya people	14
ARNA Press Release: AA following footsteps of Junta, Rohingyas fear another genocide	15
Joint Statement: Rohingya Facing Existential Threat In Arakan	17



*Editorial*

**Acknowledging History, Building Peace: The Case for Recognizing Rohingya Ethnicity**

The Rohingya are a predominantly Muslim community. They are an ethnic group living in Arakan with a long history. They are a people who have developed in Arakan from peoples of different ethnical backgrounds over the many centuries. They speak Rohingya or Ruaingga, a dialect that is distinct from other languages spoken in Myanmar. Despite being indigenous to Arakan, they are not tolerated in Myanmar for their ethnicity, religion and South-Asian appearance in contrast to Southeast Asian of dominant Bamar. The regime has purposely excluded Rohingya from the list of the so-called 135 officially recognized ethnic groups of Myanmar rendering them stateless in their own homeland.

The lack of legal recognition has contributed to severe discrimination and persecution of the Rohingya. This callous disregard for human life has escalated oppressive measures, mass violence, forced displacement, and other serious human rights abuses by state forces and state sponsored local groups or non-state actors culminating in one of the gravest genocides in 2017 triggering an unprecedented mass exodus of Rohingya to neighbouring Bangladesh, where many now live in one of the world's largest refugee camps.

The importance of recognizing Rohingya ethnic identity in Myanmar is pivotal for several reasons, especially in the context of achieving peace and stability in the region:

**Human Rights and Inclusion:** The respect for and promotion of human rights of Rohingya people as well as recognition of 'Rohingya' ethnic identity is central to addressing the longstanding issues of statelessness and denial of citizenship faced by the Rohingya population. The successive Myanmar military or military dominated regimes have denied the existence of Rohingya in Myanmar.

**In 1982, late dictator Ne Win adopted his 'Burma Citizenship Law', redefined citizenship and declared Rohingya as non-nationals.** The 1982 law violates several fundamental principles of international customary law standards, offends the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and leaves Rohingya exposed to no legal protection of their rights.

The Burma Citizenship Law of 1982 is the cruellest of injustice done to the Rohingya people. The 1982 Citizenship law does not include the Rohingya in the so-called 135 ethnic groups that the military regime has officially recognized as Myanmar nationals rendering them stateless in their native land. The law continues to create outflows of refugees, which overburden other countries posing threats to tranquility within the region. This is a wholly arbitrary deprivation of the fundamental right to citizenship of one's country for a group of people all of whom were born there, who had lived there all their lives, who have never been anywhere else and have no other allegiance, and who have made immense contribution to that country. There is no justification for denying ethnic and citizenship rights of the Rohingya, including their civic and political rights, in Myanmar. By all legal standards the Rohingya are entitled to their 'ethnic identity' and absolute equal citizenship and all accompanying rights. They must be restored without delay in the interest of peace and stability in Arakan and Myanmar.

**Peace and Durable Solutions of the Refugee Crisis:** The conflict in Arakan/Rakhine State, the ancestral homeland of Rohingya, has been one of the most significant sources for instability in Myanmar. Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya have fled to neighbouring Bangladesh and other countries, due to persecution, conflict, violence, and grave human rights violations.

The future of Arakan is closely linked to the durable solutions for the Rohingya refugees. In this connection, recognition of Rohingya ethnic identity -- by acknowledging the grievances, wrongs and historical injustices faced by the Rohingya-- is an important step to address the root causes of the crisis and conflict towards finding durable solutions: voluntary, safe and honorable repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration of Rohingya refugees in their original places in Arakan. In brief, the situation of the refugees should be satisfactorily and permanently resolved to enable them to live normal lives.

**Regional Stability:** Ethnic tensions and conflicts have destabilized Rakhine/Arakan State for decades. Acknowledging Rohingya identity, rights and freedoms could be a step towards reducing ethnic conflicts and fostering peace and stability in the region. This would involve not only the Myanmar authorities but also various ethnic and political groups working towards a comprehensive and inclusive political solution. The Rohingya crisis has not only been a great humanitarian disaster but also a source of tension in Myanmar and neighboring countries, especially Bangladesh, where over a million Rohingya have sought refuge. By resolving the status of the Rohingya by formally acknowledging them as an integral part of Myanmar, the authorities in Myanmar can alleviate these tensions and contribute to regional peace and stability.

**International Relations and Reputation:** How Myanmar addresses the Rohingya issue has significant implications for its international relations. Failure to recognize Rohingya rights and identity increases further international condemnations and sanctions. Addressing this issue positively by recognizing their ethnic identity can help improve Myanmar's international standing and open opportunities for foreign aid and investment that are currently withheld.

**Sustainable Development:** Disenfranchisement and conflict prevent effective development. By ensuring that the Rohingya are recognized and integrated into the societal framework, Myanmar can more effectively plan and implement development projects in Rakhine State, which would benefit all residents, regardless of ethnicity.

In summary, the recognition and respect for Rohingya ethnic identity in Myanmar are critical for ensuring their human rights, resolving the refugee crisis, promoting socio-economic development, achieving political stability in Arakan/Rakhine State, and improving Myanmar's international relations. It could be a transformative action for promoting a more inclusive, democratic, and peaceful society. It's a step towards correcting historical injustices and building a foundation for sustainable peace and development.



# CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT- WHAT ARE THEIR RIGHTS AND HOW CAN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY PROTECT THEM?

Dr. Hilly Moodrick-Even Khen, Senior lecturer of international law, Ariel University, and chair of Ariel University Center for the Research and Study of Genocide

Two years ago, in May 2022, the theme of the UN Secretary General (SG) report to the Security Council on the responsibility to protect was "prioritizing children and young people." The SG pointed at the myriad harrowing ways in which children and young people can be adversely affected by armed conflicts: being killed and maimed, tortured, abducted and facing forms of sexual violence, in addition to suffering trauma and having their education disrupted; the SG then called the international community for action.

Indeed, the attacks of terrorist organizations, insurgent militias and also military crackdowns of corrupt regimes, which the world witnessed from the beginning of this millennium, and unfortunately continue to these days, showcase the endless suffering of children and youth from war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. These crimes spread across the world, from Ukraine in Europe to Sudan, South Sudan and Nigeria in Africa, from China in Asia to Syria in the Middle East, and more. The Rohingya genocide is no exception to the rule, and the suffering of the victims now being advocated for in various fora, must include the plight of children and youth.

Atrocities and armed conflicts have a double adverse effect on children's rights. Firstly, children's general human rights are violated, such as the right to life and physical integrity, freedom of movement and speech and religion, and social rights such as the rights to healthcare and dignified existence. Secondly, specific rights and special care children are entitled to, are also violated, such as the right to education and mental aid, as trauma could be much exacerbated for them. In addition, children are victims of specific crimes, such as the genocidal crime of the forcible transfer of children from one group to another, acknowledged both by the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948) and the International Criminal Court's (ICC) Statute (1998). There is evidence that this crime has been committed by Russia during the war in Ukraine.

While the direct suffering of children and the harm to their general rights is particularly disheartening, and calls for immediate action on behalf of the international community, it is their indirect suffering, such as when the right to education is violated, that is sometimes overlooked and thus requires special attention. Various researches made by organizations or UN agencies focusing on children or education, such as UNESCO and UNICEF, discovered that the impact of armed conflict on the right to education stretches far beyond the duration of the conflict. Among the long-lasting and pervasive economic consequences of armed conflicts are those affecting individual-level education outcomes for children. Other implications include the consequences of terror—an inevitable factor of armed conflicts. Terror affects the social and emotional development of children as well as their cognitive developments and skills such as literacy, numeracy and critical thinking.

The interruption of daily routine and the impact on health, education and nutrition can have devastating effects on children's lives.

The international Convention on Children's Rights (CRC) (1989) acknowledged these post-conflict implications and thus instructed states parties to 'take all appropriate measures to promote the physical and psychological recovery... of child victims of any form of neglect . . . occurring during armed conflict'. Yet, a plethora of factors often deprive states of their ability to abide by their obligations and secure children's right to education during armed conflicts. Thus, the international community must find ways to provide the means for those states to meet their obligations under international law in general and the CRC in particular.

As a first step, the international community should pay special attention to the plight of children who are victims of atrocities and, as the UN Secretary General's report indicated, "support cooperation policies aimed at strengthening national capacities to improve the situation of those children and to assist in their rehabilitation and reintegration into society." The SG report enumerates seven priorities for protecting children and young people from atrocity crimes, which include both prevention and early warning and a requirement to honour commitments for the protection of children and young people and pursue accountability for atrocities against them.

Yet, perhaps one of the most interesting recommendations made in the report is to leverage education for peace, and building societies that are inclusive, tolerant, respectful of diversity and able to manage conflict. Education is thus seen not only as a vital and crucial right that must be secured during conflict but also as a tool serving to underwrite the protection of children's rights in a way that would strive towards peace and prevent their plight in the first place. As much as it is unfortunately unrealistic to expect a complete elimination of armed conflicts and atrocities from our world, it is still encouraging to believe that paying attention to the plight of the most vulnerable and applying the right policies, could minimize children's suffering and make a slight change for the better of us all.

The illustration is taken from a collection of children's drawings of Sudan's conflicts over the past 20 years, published by the NGO Waging Peace. The pictures depict villages being bombed by the Sudanese air force, the RSF (previously called the Janjaweed) slaughtering civilians and women being led off in chains to slavery. For more information see: <https://www.ariel.ac.il/wp/rsg/renewed-massacres-in-sudan/#headline>; [www.WagingPeace.info](http://www.WagingPeace.info)



# Village Tracts of northern Rakhine State (Buthidaung, Maungdaw, Rathedaung Townships)



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Map produced by the MIMU - E-mail: info.mimu@undp.org  
 Website: www.themimu.info

**Legend**

- State Capital
- Coast
- (Main Town)
- (Other Town)
- Township Boundary
- District Boundary
- State Boundary
- International Boundary
- Buthidaung Township
- Maungdaw Township
- Rathedaung Township

**Data Sources**  
 BASE MAP - MIMU;  
 Boundaries - WFP, modified by MIMU 2008;  
 Place name - Ministry of Home Affairs (GAD)  
 translated by MIMU  
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# The situation in Myanmar: Is Bangladesh missing an opportunity?

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Many areas of Myanmar are now under rebel control.

Bangladesh has been talking about repatriation since the beginning as the only way to solve the Rohingya crisis. In 2022 and 2023, there were some initiatives from Myanmar in this regard, such as bilateral meetings and camp visits, but currently the hope of Rohingya repatriation is turning into despair.

Given the lack of effective initiatives on the one hand, and deep doubts about getting citizenship after returning to their homeland on the other hand, the reluctance of the Rohingyas to return is natural. Is Myanmar's internal war-conflict closing all the doors to solving the Rohingya crisis? Or can Bangladesh be tactical and turn problems into possibilities despite such apparent uncertainty?

Shortly after taking up arms against the military junta, the Arakan Army raised its flag in Paletwa in southern Chin province—taking control of an 80-kilometer length of the Bangladesh-Myanmar border. They have also taken control of several other important areas under the military government. If this trend continues, full control and rule of the Arakan Army may be established in Rakhine. It is too much to hope that a solution to the Rohingya problem will be found.

On the other hand, Bangladesh's inaction after the changing situation in Myanmar and the success of the Arakan Army is also a symptom of weak diplomacy. The role of Bangladesh in this regard depends on the attitude of the Arakan Army towards Bangladesh and the Rohingyas, Myanmar's duplicity and insincerity, and the past and present role of Asia and the international community.

At the beginning of the conflict, when the UN Resident Coordinator said that it was not the right time to send the Rohingyas back, the Chinese ambassador commented that the way Beijing is working to calm the situation in Rakhine State will soon open the door for Rohingya repatriation. But Rohingya repatriation is becoming more complicated for various reasons.

While many expect the success of the Arakan Army and a possible new reality for Myanmar, it is important to remember that both the Myanmar military regime and the Arakan Army are perpetrators of the Rohingya genocide. To both, Rohingyas are 'illegal Bengalis'. The Arakan Army controls a large portion of the drugs that enter Bangladesh. Often Rohingyas are arrested and accused of drug trafficking in Bangladesh. However, Rohingyas have nothing to do with the production, marketing, and transportation of these drugs. The entire network operates under the umbrella of the Arakan Army and the military junta. But the blame goes to the Rohingyas.

However, after taking control of the border area of Bangladesh-adjacent Myanmar, Arakan Army is now largely dependent on Bangladesh. Being landlocked by the laxity and rigidity of the border area, they are dependent on exports from Bangladesh for their basic needs and potentially strategic supplies. This is the best time for strategic communication from Bangladesh.



That chance may no longer be available if the Arakan Army captures Sittwe. China already maintains close ties with both the military government and anti-government forces. The Arakan Army has also assured China that the Arakan Army will not harm China's huge investment. There is no doubt that the capture of Sittwe port will create another level of communication and dependence between China and the Arakan Army. The importance of Bangladesh will decrease a lot then.

But without considering these issues, Bangladesh is still engaged in complacent propaganda such as 'there are no terrorists in the camp' or 'the law-and-order situation in the camp is good enough' - or using the term FDMN (Forcefully Displaced Myanmar nationals) instead of 'Rohingya refugees'. If the opportunity is missed, the crisis will intensify.

As the repatriation of the Rohingyas to Myanmar is uncertain, Bangladesh can now take an opportunity to negotiate with the Arakan Army, and demand the creation of a state or province for the Rohingyas in Maungdaw, Sittwe and Mrauk-U. Like other ethnic groups, Rohingyas will also be under the federal union. Rohingyas will have equal rights like Rakhines. Participation will be in administration, judiciary, security etc.

After the formation of such a specific area for the Rohingyas, so that it does not fall into conflict in the future or create another 'Assam' after a few years, if the discussion with the Arakan Army becomes a decision, it should be quickly brought under an international agreement or consensus. Doing so has legal obligations to follow.

Usually, the United Nations or an international court oversees the implementation of such agreements in accordance with international law, with the possibility of formal action if violated. None of the various past Rohingya repatriation initiatives were included in any internationally binding legal framework. So, they were not sustainable.

Will the Rohingya problem be solved by sitting in dialogue with the Arakan Army? There is no single answer to this question. Because this dialogue is basically an attempt to take a chance, which may or may not succeed. However, if such an opportunity occurs, will China or Russia be silent observers? Not at all. Therefore, the possible behavior (intervention) of these countries, economic relations with them etc. should be taken into consideration.

In fact, the government can take practical steps in this regard by setting up such a commission—which can make recommendations that are impartial and considerate of all aspects. Notably, Japan's special envoy has also spoken to the Arakan Army after a meeting with the military government in November 2023. China held a meeting in Kunming in January to seek reconciliation between the Arakan Army and the military government. India sent its representative to meet with the Arakan Army on bilateral interests in February. Is Bangladesh not taking a lot of time to decide what to do?

Bangladesh can strongly bring up the issue of solving the Rohingya crisis in the meeting with the Arakan Army. However, it is also important to have your own internal policies. Even after 40 years of hosting refugees, Bangladesh has not been able to formulate a refugee management policy.

Rohingya refugees should be repatriated immediately after they enter Bangladesh with the help of the international community. Without doing that, time has passed with thinking either they will be called refugees, or they will be called FDMN. Then sending a wrong message to the world by fencing parts of their camps with barbed wire, sending a wrong message to Myanmar by relocating some Rohingyas to Bhasanchar, taking repeated steps of repatriation, none of which materialize—it's time to take stock. Actions taken on an ad hoc basis without any policy will lead to the same results in the future and opportunities will be missed.

# **Unsettling settlements: 'half a million' Rohingyas in remote villages isolated from mainstream Rohingya society**

When Rohingya activists speak of the people for whom they advocate, they generally refer to all the Rohingya people. However, years of movement restrictions, isolation of the villages, the remoteness of the land, and the very nature of the terrain means that there is a huge part of the Rohingya population who are useful as a number but the numbers do not have a face or an identity.

The genocidal operation of 2017 led by the Tatmadaw's 33th and 99th light infantry divisions, concentrated on the townships of Maingdaw, Buthidaung and Rathedaung, specifically the area west of Mayu river which was the last Rohingya majority area in Arakan. There was no need for an operation in Akyab. The state capital with a previously mixed population, where once the Rakhines only had a slim majority over their Muslim counterparts was made virtually Rohingya free in the riots of 2012. The survivors in the state capital were rounded up and herded into the ghetto of Aung Minglar where they were separated from the now Rakhine only city by barbed wires. So the ominous treatment meted out by the Tatmadaw led forces were reserved for the Rohingyas of Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Rathedaung. Approximately 25,000 including men, women and children are believed to have been killed and a million escaped to neighbouring Bangladesh. Crimes against the Rohingyas of the area included burning infant children to death or throwing them into the rivers dotting the landscape of Arakan, rape and sexual crimes especially on women but men were not exempt and horrendous forms of punishment that took even seasoned aid workers and observers by shock.

Today, the area stretching from Kutupalong to Nayapara in Teknaf of South Western Bangladesh is the main habitat of the Rohingya population. Village after village over the border is devoid of human population, with presumably more Rohingyas left in Buthidaung than Maungdaw, which always had more than 90 percent Rohingya population with the rest mostly being the Mrong people who traditionally prefer seclusion and the higher altitudes of both Arakan and Bangladesh. Even in Buthidaung, a place with a 70 per cent Rohingya population at one time, Rakhines presently outnumber the Rohingyas. In Rathedaung there are only a handful of survivors left.

Of course, exact statistics are notoriously difficult to gather in Arakan. Even then, analysts predict 600,000 Rohingyas are left in Arakan. That is a tricky number to say as the numbers of Rohingyas in Maungdaw and Buthidaung are very much depleted following the great killings and the exodus of 2017.

Even then, the number of 600,000 might not be far off the mark.

The map of Arakan shows a thin strip of land which stretches for around 500 kilometres. The Rohingyas have traditionally only existed in Northern Arakan, and it can be said they lived in half the territory. Of course by now these are ancient history. Pogrom after pogrom have meant that Rohingyas in search of safety have since the World War 2 migrated in the North West direction for safety. At first, they considered the area west of Kaladan as safe, then it became Mayu until today the Rohingya majority lives in a different country.

However, the entire strip of Northern Arakan east of the Mayu river is dotted with isolated Rohingya settlements. They are so isolated as to be invisible, voiceless and without representation even in the numerous Rohingya activists organisations. Nor are they present in the world's largest refugee camp, which many fear is going to be the permanent home of the Rohingya community. Ask any Rohingya where they are from, one will hear Maungdaw or Buthidaung, with the occasional Rathedaung or Akyab, you will not hear Mrauk U, Kyauktaw, Kyaukphu or the numerous other places of Northern Arakan where there has been a Rohingya presence for generations.

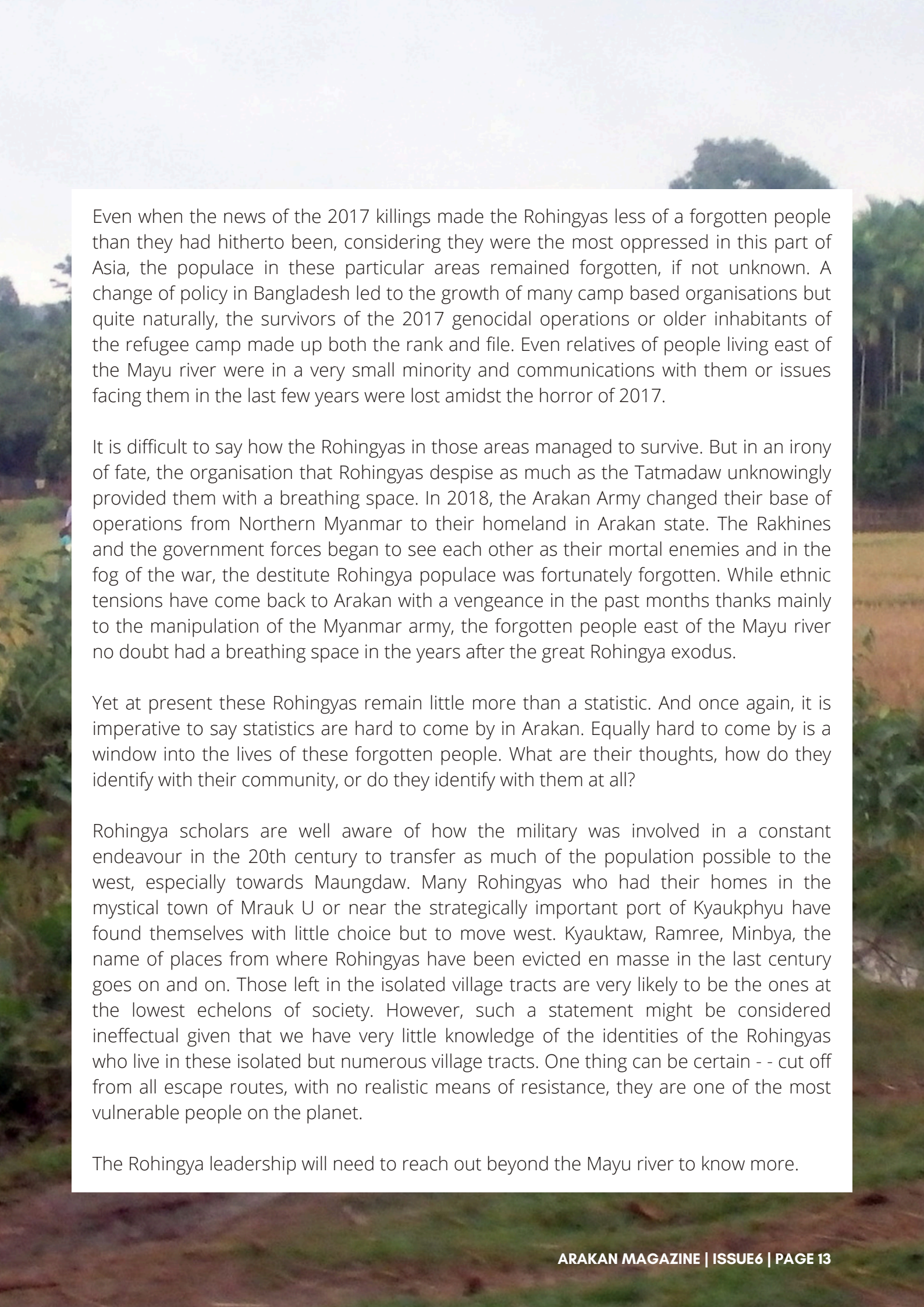
The people in these areas have long borne the burden of being an unaccepted minority in an area with a hostile Rakhine population, but since 2012 they have become invisible. Survivors of the 2012 carnage, where the death toll remains a big mystery to this day have been herded from their homes to IDP camps.

Not everyone ended up in the IDP camps. Some stayed in their old villages and in many ways this was worse. As mentioned before, these villages were in the Rakhine majority areas, and whenever there was a Rohingya village nearby, Buddhist nationalist gangs sprang up in nearby Rakhine settlements in lightning speed from mid 2012. For Rohingya villagers, leaving their settlement became a mortal risk. Some fishermen or woodcutters venturing to the waterways or the woods ended up without a head. Going to the market could be suicide. The odd Rakhine trader who engaged in commercial activities with these Rohingya villages was publicly humiliated or beaten up in front of his fellow villagers, by his fellow villagers. Even going to the hospital was a mortal risk. Many women with pregnancy complications chose to suffer without medical care as pregnant women and even new born children were were rumoured to be injected with poison.

In one instance, a Rakhine nurse after hearing her colleagues discussing plans to murder a new born child warned the relatives of the patients to run away without informing anyone. As usual, statistics are impossible to come up with in Arakan. But there is no doubt that surrounding every Rohingya village in these regions, Buddhist nationalist gangs made it their mission to ensure the slow destruction of these isolated but numerous Rohingya villages by starving them. The local government apparatus, as well as military officers were not only aware of this but actually masterminded the operation. This was a time when Myanmar was being lauded from all corners of the world for its supposed transformation into a democratic society.

The few aid workers who made their way in these impoverished areas spoke in hushed voices about the determination of the Rakhines to destroy these Rohingyas and how dangerous it was for them. But they chose to keep it very quiet. The savvy Myanmar military made it very clear that if aid organisations wanted to operate in the designated zones, they would have to keep their mouths shut. Aid workers fearing expulsion often deleted their facebook accounts, changed phone numbers out of fear that someone on the other end of the line out of ignorance would utter something deemed unacceptable to the military interceptors. The bar set by the interceptors was incredibly low. Complete silence was preferable if one wanted to work for this invisible population.

The almost complete lack of representatives from this part of the Arakan among Rohingya activist organisations makes it very difficult to gauge how events transpired. There are times when one will hear a Rohingya say he is from Mrauk U or Kyauktaw. However, further questioning will reveal that s/he escaped the area one or two generations back. In truth, there are no representatives of the Rohingya community from that part of Arakan in the contemporary era. Neither are Rohingyas aware of the situation of their brethren in those areas. The military has been successful in utilising the geographical isolation of these villages into political and social isolation. In all parts of Arakan, Rohingyas are subjected to movement restrictions and this played its part in making a huge part of the Rohingya populace invisible.



Even when the news of the 2017 killings made the Rohingyas less of a forgotten people than they had hitherto been, considering they were the most oppressed in this part of Asia, the populace in these particular areas remained forgotten, if not unknown. A change of policy in Bangladesh led to the growth of many camp based organisations but quite naturally, the survivors of the 2017 genocidal operations or older inhabitants of the refugee camp made up both the rank and file. Even relatives of people living east of the Mayu river were in a very small minority and communications with them or issues facing them in the last few years were lost amidst the horror of 2017.

It is difficult to say how the Rohingyas in those areas managed to survive. But in an irony of fate, the organisation that Rohingyas despise as much as the Tatmadaw unknowingly provided them with a breathing space. In 2018, the Arakan Army changed their base of operations from Northern Myanmar to their homeland in Arakan state. The Rakhines and the government forces began to see each other as their mortal enemies and in the fog of the war, the destitute Rohingya populace was fortunately forgotten. While ethnic tensions have come back to Arakan with a vengeance in the past months thanks mainly to the manipulation of the Myanmar army, the forgotten people east of the Mayu river no doubt had a breathing space in the years after the great Rohingya exodus.

Yet at present these Rohingyas remain little more than a statistic. And once again, it is imperative to say statistics are hard to come by in Arakan. Equally hard to come by is a window into the lives of these forgotten people. What are their thoughts, how do they identify with their community, or do they identify with them at all?

Rohingya scholars are well aware of how the military was involved in a constant endeavour in the 20th century to transfer as much of the population possible to the west, especially towards Maungdaw. Many Rohingyas who had their homes in the mystical town of Mrauk U or near the strategically important port of Kyaukphyu have found themselves with little choice but to move west. Kyauktaw, Ramree, Minbya, the name of places from where Rohingyas have been evicted en masse in the last century goes on and on. Those left in the isolated village tracts are very likely to be the ones at the lowest echelons of society. However, such a statement might be considered ineffectual given that we have very little knowledge of the identities of the Rohingyas who live in these isolated but numerous village tracts. One thing can be certain - - cut off from all escape routes, with no realistic means of resistance, they are one of the most vulnerable people on the planet.

The Rohingya leadership will need to reach out beyond the Mayu river to know more.

# A short chronological summary of the events that took place in May 2024 in Myanmar's Rakhine State affecting the Rohingya people:

**Mid-May 2024:** The Arakan Army (AA), an ethnic Rakhine armed group, captures Buthidaung town. This event marked a significant escalation in the conflict between the AA and the Myanmar military.

**May 17, 2024:** Two days after the Myanmar military retreated from Buthidaung, the town experiences widespread arson attacks. The Arakan Army is reported to have taken full control of the town by this date.

**Following the arson:** Tens of thousands of Rohingya are displaced due to the burning of homes and villages. Many flee toward the border with Bangladesh, seeking refuge from the violence.

**Responses to the crisis:** The United Nations and various human rights organizations receive reports of the situation and issue statements. They report on the severe abuses, including arson, killings, and extortion, faced by the Rohingya civilians at the hands of the Arakan Army.

**International reaction:** The U.N. calls for urgent action to protect the Rohingya and to provide them with humanitarian aid. There is a global call for immediate cessation of violence and protection of all civilians, emphasizing compliance with international law.

## *ARNA Press Releases*

# AA following footsteps of Junta, Rohingyas fear another genocide

**May 18, 2024**

The Arakan Rohingya National Alliance (ARNA) strongly condemns the violence and criminal acts of any individuals or groups against the Rohingya people and all other communities of Myanmar.

While all over Myanmar, we see a heroic resistance to the Junta by the people, it is with deepest regret that we see arson attacks on Rohingya and Rakhine people, and civilian infrastructures orchestrated by both the Myanmar military and Arakan Army (AA) in Maungdaw and Buthidaung townships.

The two warring groups are forcibly recruiting the Rohingya youths for military services to use them in the frontlines as human shields. A number of such draftees have already been killed, maimed and injured. Nowadays, both the military and Arakan Army are targeting the Rohingya people resulting in a colossal loss of lives, destruction of homes and villages, properties and possessions, and the forced displacement of tens of thousands.

Now the situation is very tense in northern Arakan. Particularly Rohingya civilians in Buthidaung town and surrounding villages have been under attacks from the Arakan Army including the bombing of Buthidaung High School where escapees from almost 20 villages were taking shelter with their families believing the educational institute would be a safe place. It was not, they were targeted by a drone and bombed.

AA has also ordered the Rohingyas to leave Buthidaung town on May 18. Even before that deadline, AA fighters set fire on houses inhabited by Rohingya families on May 17. All Rohingya residential quarters in downtown Buthidaung are burned to the ground.

There is no secret that the Junta which has been at the helm of the Rohingya genocide is trying to revive ethnic tensions in Arakan by manipulating both the Rohingya and Rakhine communities. We think it is imperative that both the communities do not fall victim to this time tested 'divide and rule' strategy used by the Junta to keep their control of Arakan. Of course, the deception of the SAC should not take our attention away from the wider crisis facing the Rohingya community and the potential danger we face from the Arakan Army.

The attitudes of the AA towards the Rohingya Muslims are eerily similar to that of the Junta they have fought to replace. The nature of mass killings and other acts of terror targeting Rohingya civilians makes one wonder whether the forces that now control North Arakan are as determined as the junta in forcing the Rohingyas out of the homeland and over the border to Bangladesh.

In this worrisome situation, we call on the United Nations, ASEAN, Myanmar's neighbours and wider international community to take immediate action in order to prevent yet another genocide on the Rohingya people in Arakan.

We also invite the attention of the National Unity Government (NUG) and all ethnic and resistance groups of Myanmar to help ensure peace and harmony in Arakan in the interest of federal democracy. We would like to remind them that when the country's most vulnerable minority communities are being persecuted by fighters from another ethnic group, it is a bad precedent for federal democracy. So many people in Myanmar are sacrificing so much, including their lives for the ideals of federal democracy which makes it all the more unfortunate if such dreams are dashed in the very early stages because of ethnically driven hate politics.

The continued genocide of the Rohingya means the continuation of the Junta's most brutal policy. No country that has ever fought for federal democracy has won the struggle by eliminating any of their nation's ethnic and religious minority. On the contrary, revolutionary forces that have targeted minorities for their religious and ethnic identities tend to destroy the entire process of revolution from within. It will be a dangerous precedent for the freedom struggle of Myanmar, and the SAC is fully aware of it.

The NUG and all other resistance groups fighting Junta must step up to find the voice of revolution to unite us all under the umbrella of federal democracy. The road to overthrowing the Junta is fraught with numerous difficulties, and it will require the greatest strategic wisdom. Otherwise, there is always the chance that a fight for democracy will degenerate into ethnic conflict, and that will make the sacrifices of the people of Myanmar fruitless.

Last but not least, we would like to remind the freedom loving people of Myanmar that we stand beside them in their fight against the Junta and their collaborators.

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# Rohingya Facing Existential Threat In Arakan

**May 22, 2024**

Rohingya organisations call for urgent international humanitarian assistance

- Out of 600,000 Rohingya left in Arakan or Rakhine State after the genocidal attacks of 2016-2017, we estimate that only one third remain in their original homes.
- Tens of thousands of Rohingya are internally displaced in Buthidaung and Maungdaw townships.
- Rohingya in Buthidaung downtown were ordered to leave the town by 10 am on 18 May by the Arakan Army (AA). There was no fighting taking place in Buthidaung downtown. Late at night on 17 May, AA soldiers fired shots overhead to frighten people out of their homes, then looted and set fire to the houses. Thousands of Rohingya, including women, children and the elderly, were forced to flee for their lives. We condemn all the atrocities committed by the Arakan Army.
- Displaced Rohingya have no food and shelter. The death toll will likely soon rise through starvation, lack of clean water and medical care. International humanitarian assistance is urgently needed.

Rohingya organisations today urge the international community to immediately put pressure on the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army to end mass forced displacement and human rights violations against Rohingya communities in Rakhine and to uphold international humanitarian law.

The international community must also robustly engage with the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army for the safe and unrestricted delivery of international humanitarian assistance to all communities, including the Rohingya, in the areas of Rakhine State under its control.

With the Burmese military restricting humanitarian aid deliveries from the areas of Burma which it occupies, we call on the government of Bangladesh to open up its borders for the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance into areas of northern Rakhine State which have been freed from military rule. International donors, UN agencies and INGOs must engage with the government of Bangladesh and the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army to enable the opening of this humanitarian lifeline.

We call on the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation in Myanmar, and the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar to immediately begin investigations into the current crisis, with a view to publicly reporting on what is taking place and collecting evidence for future prosecutions to hold those responsible for human rights violations to account.

We call on the government of the United Kingdom to urgently convene a meeting of the United Nations Security Council to discuss this current crisis and to call on the Arakan Army to end the mass forced displacement and human rights violations against Rohingya.

We remain disappointed that during the recent UN Security Council meeting on the situation in Rakhine State, an opportunity to try to prevent the current crisis was missed. Security Council members failed to address the regime's ongoing violations of the provisional measures ordered by the International Court of Justice to protect the Rohingya. Likewise, they failed to call on the Arakan Army to abide by international law.

We propose a dialogue process including all ethnic and religious communities in Rakhine State, in order to work together for peaceful co-existence, effective administration and the economic development of Rakhine State as it is finally liberated from Burmese military rule.

Once again, hundreds of thousands of Rohingya are fleeing for their lives. Once again, the international community was warned about what could happen and failed to act. Now is not the time to hide behind claims that it is not clear what is going on or how complex the situation is. We have been here before. Now is the time for bold action.

### **The current situation in Buthidaung**

On the morning of 17 May, fierce fighting between the AA and Myanmar military took place in the Rohingya village of Zabbar Fara (Tat Yar) to the south of Buthidaung town. Several Rohingya civilians were killed and injured, while others fled to Buthidaung downtown for safety.

The Arakan Army issued an order for all Rohingya to leave Buthidaung downtown by 10am on 18 May. Tens of thousands of Rohingya IDPs were seeking shelter in Buthidaung downtown after their villages came under attack in the preceding days and weeks.

Rohingya residents and IDPs refused to leave the town because they had nowhere else to go. Before the deadline had expired, Arakan Army soldiers surrounded the town. According to eyewitnesses, they fired shots overhead to frighten people out of their homes, then looted them before setting fire to them. Rohingya were forced to flee and seek shelter in nearby paddy fields for many hours. They were then directed by the Arakan Army to go to Hpon Nyo Leik and other villages that are in areas under Arakan Army control.

In the days prior to the arson attack on Buthidaung downtown, the Arakan Army is also reported to have launched artillery strikes and used drone bombs to attack the high school and hospital in Buthidaung town where Rohingya IDPs were taking shelter, resulting in deaths and injuries. Residents in Buthidaung downtown reported that Myanmar army soldiers, their proxies, and Rohingya forced recruits had already retreated to Maungdaw township before such attacks took place.

There have also been credible – but as yet unverified – reports of mass killings and mass abductions of Rohingya civilians, arson attacks and forced displacement of numerous villages in Buthidaung township by the Arakan Army in the days and weeks preceding the arson attack on Buthidaung town. Such atrocity crimes are alleged to have taken place in Tat Min Chaung, Kyauk Phyu Taung, Let Wei Dat Pyin Shay, Nga Kyin Tauk, Htan Shauk Khan, Pyar Pin Yin, Ywet Nyo Taung, Kun Daing and Da Pyu Chaung village tracts.

## **Divide-and-rule strategy**

The regime has employed its decades-old divide-and-rule strategy in Rakhine State to devastating effect. Since February, the Myanmar military has forcibly recruited several thousand Rohingya men from the detention camps in Sittwe and Kyaukphyu, as well as from villages in Buthidaung and Maungdaw townships. Due to the regime's freedom of movement restrictions on Rohingya communities, it is extremely difficult for Rohingya to flee or evade such orders. Rohingya forced recruits have been sent into battle with the AA and the regime is using them as cannon fodder. Hundreds are feared to have already been killed. Local media reports indicate that Rohingya conscripts are currently being used by the Myanmar military in their battles with the AA in Maungdaw and Thandwe. The AA has also forcibly recruited Rohingya in Buthidaung, Maungdaw and Minbya townships, although in smaller numbers.

At the same time, the regime has coerced Rohingya communities in Sittwe and Buthidaung to participate in protests it has organised to denounce the AA. The regime has used this for propaganda purposes to incite ethnic and religious hatred and violence towards the Rohingya. In addition, the military is collaborating with the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), Arakan Rohingya Army (ARA), and Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO). Fighters from these groups are alleged to be fighting alongside the Myanmar military in its battles with the Arakan Army. Even more concerning are the credible reports that these groups are abducting Rohingya refugees from the camps in Bangladesh and trafficking them to Maungdaw to fight alongside the Myanmar military. We again totally reject ARSA, ARA, and RSO. Those groups do not represent or act on behalf of Rohingya communities. We condemn their actions unequivocally.

In April, reports emerged of the Myanmar military, along with Rohingya conscripts and members of ARSA committing arson attacks on Rakhine homes in Buthidaung. Similar reports emerged from Maungdaw in May. We wholeheartedly condemn such crimes. Their words and actions do not represent Rohingya communities. We understand only too well the pain of losing our homes and belongings in such attacks and we stand in complete solidarity with the Rakhine victims of such crimes.

Against this backdrop, there has been an increase in the intensity of violations of international law and likely war crimes by the Arakan Army towards Rohingya, and a distinct shift in rhetoric. The ULA/AA leadership has repeatedly referred to Rohingya as 'Bengali', used in a derogatory manner to suggest that Rohingya are outsiders from Bangladesh, and 'Muslim extremists'.

## **All armed groups must uphold international law**

International humanitarian law requires all parties to internal armed conflict to take precautionary measures to minimise harm to civilians and civilian objects. Parties must distinguish between combatants and civilians and between military and civilian objects, such as schools and hospitals. Reprisal attacks against civilians are prohibited in all circumstances, regardless of the behaviour of other parties to the conflict. Attacks against civilians and civilian objects and pillaging are prohibited and may constitute war crimes. Displacement of the civilian population can only be justified in exceptional circumstances such as to protect civilians from grave danger or for critical military reasons, which must be within the public's interest.

## **Recommendations to the ULA/AA**

Rohingya organisations urge the Arakan Army to immediately end human rights violations and mass forced displacement of Rohingya communities. We call for urgent dialogue with the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army to protect Rohingya civilians and resolve the current crisis.

We call on the leadership of the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army not to fall into the trap of the Burmese military playing divide and rule games and trying to set the people of Rakhine State against each other. Only the military regime will benefit from this.

A free Rakhine State will forever be tainted in the eyes of the world if it begins with mass human rights violations. Just as ethnic people such as Rakhine do not want to be dominated or abused by Bamar, ethnic and religious minorities including Rohingya in Rakhine State do not want to be dominated and abused by Rakhine.

Rohingya want to live as equals in Arakan not under Burmese military rule. We want to live side by side in peaceful co-existence with the Rakhine and other diverse ethnic and religious communities, on equal terms, rooted in dignity and respect for our Rohingya identity. We want a seat at the table, not a separate state.

## **Background**

Around 600,000 survivors of the 2017 Rohingya genocide remain in Rakhine State. The largest population of an estimated 260,000 Rohingya is in Buthidaung township. Around 140,000 Rohingya are confined to detention camps in the coastal towns of Sittwe, Pauktaw, Myebon, and Kyaukphyu. Tens of thousands of Rohingya are in Maungdaw township, while other communities are concentrated in Rathedaung, Kyauktaw, Minbya, and Mrauk U.

On 27 October 2023, the Three Brotherhood Alliance comprised of the Arakan Army, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army launched Operation 1027 against the junta in northern Shan State. The alliance quickly made gains against the Myanmar military and has been credited with inspiring similar operations in other parts of the country. On 13 November, the Arakan Army turned its attentions to Rakhine State and launched attacks on the Myanmar military, even as Rakhine and Rohingya communities were struggling to recover from Cyclone Mocha. The AA has repeatedly stated that it will not stop fighting until it has gained complete control of the territory.

All parties to the conflict in Rakhine State have routinely violated international humanitarian law. Rohingya, Rakhine and other ethnic communities such as Mro and Kaman have suffered greatly. Hundreds of civilians have been killed by the regime's airstrikes and artillery shelling. The Arakan Army has taken over nine of Rakhine State's 17 townships – Pauktaw, Minbya, Kyauktaw, Mrauk U, Myebon Ponnagyun, Ramree, Rathedaung and most recently, Buthidaung township in northern Rakhine State – as well as the northern part of Maungdaw township bordering Bangladesh. Fierce fighting is currently ongoing in Thandwe township to the south of the state and Maungdaw to the north.

Buthidaung and Maungdaw townships are heavily militarised. Myanmar military battalion bases are located nearby Rohingya villages in Buthidaung area, while in Maungdaw area Border Guard Police Battalion outposts are next to Rohingya villages. Rohingya villages have become battlegrounds as the Arakan Army has launched artillery attacks while the State Administration Council (SAC) has deployed airstrikes.

As the Arakan Army has taken over Buthidaung township, fighting is likely to further intensify in Maungdaw township in the coming days and weeks. There are concerning local media reports that the Myanmar military has deployed 500 additional troops from Light Infantry Division (LID) 22 to Maungdaw in recent days. During a previous outbreak of conflict in 2019, LID22 was accused of war crimes against Rakhine and Rohingya communities.

Information has been slow to emerge from Rakhine State due to the regime's rolling communication blackouts. Internet access and Myanmar mobile networks are largely cut off in most of northern Rakhine, heightening the risk of atrocity crimes. Intermittent, sporadic communication is occasionally possible with Rohingya who hold Bangladeshi sim cards, but the connection is generally very poor.

Signatories:

- Arakan Rohingya Development Association – Australia
- Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO)
- Arakan Rohingya Union (ARU)
- Australian Burmese Rohingya Organization
- British Rohingya Community UK
- Burmese Rohingya Association in Japan (BRAJ)
- Burmese Rohingya Association in Queensland- Australia (BRAQA)
- Burmese Rohingya Association of North America (BRANA)
- Burmese Rohingya Community in Denmark (BRCD)
- Burmese Rohingya Community Netherlands (BRCNL)
- Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK (BROUK)
- Burmese Rohingya Community of Georgia, Atlanta (BRCG)
- Canadian Burmese Rohingya Organisation
- European Rohingya Council (ERC)
- Free Rohingya Coalition (FRC)
- Los Angeles Rohingya Association
- Rohingya Action Ireland
- Rohingya American Council (RAC)
- Rohingya Association of Canada
- Rohingya Centre Canada
- Rohingya Community in Japan (RCJ)
- Rohingya Community in Norway (RCN)
- Rohingya Human Rights Initiative
- Rohingya Human Rights Network
- Rohingya Organisation Norway (RON)
- Rohingya Women Development Network-RWDN
- RW Welfare Society (RWWS)
- Swedish Rohingya Association (SRA)

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HAPPY  
*Eid al-Fitr*

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## About ARNO

The Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO) emerged in 1998 as a broad-based organisation of the Rohingya people with a pledge to promote 'Rohingya unity' and to realise the hopes and aspirations of the Rohingya people.

[www.rohingya.org](http://www.rohingya.org)

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