

ISSUE 08

AUGUST 2024



ARAKAN

Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO)

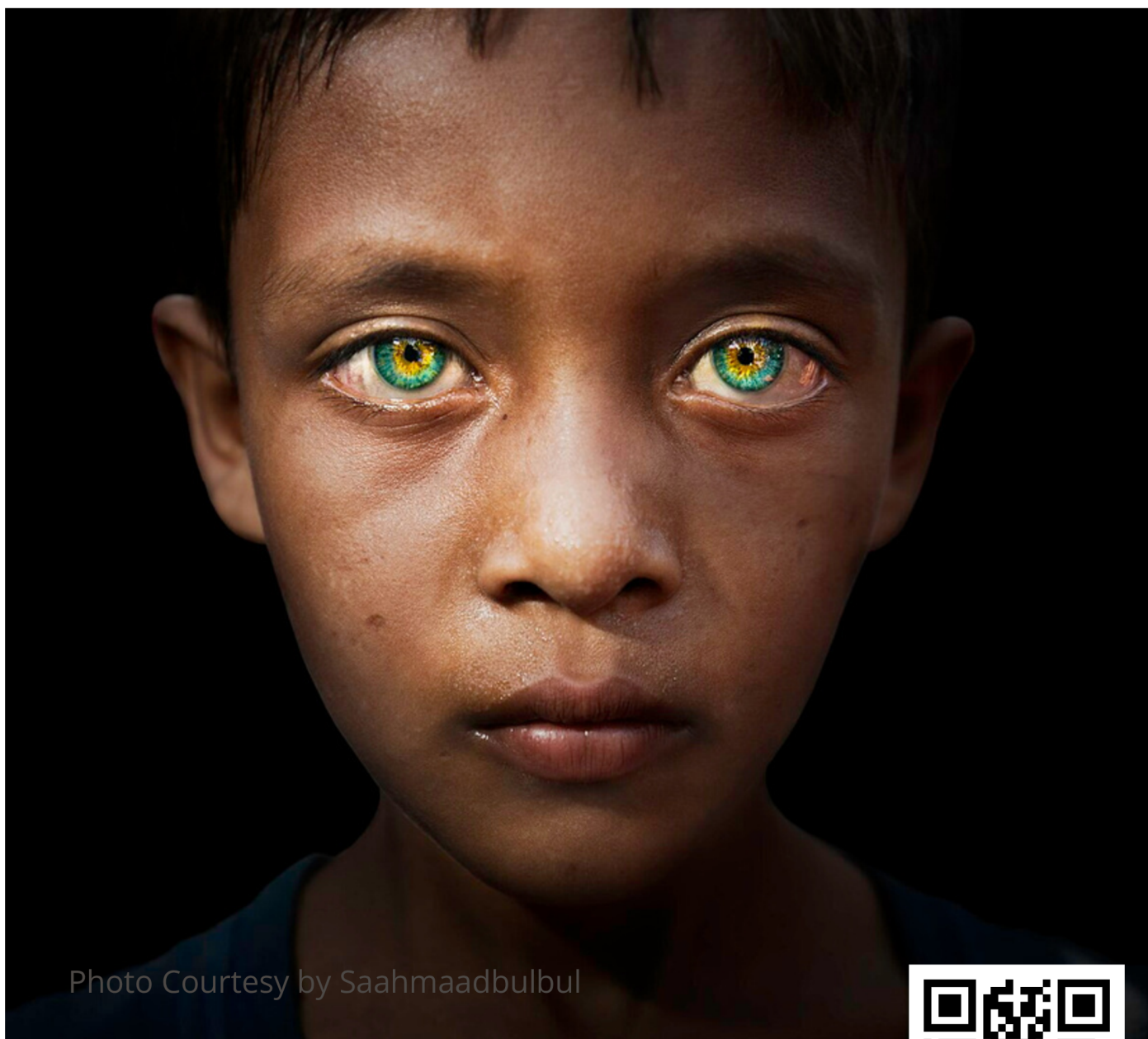


Photo Courtesy by Saahmaadbulbul



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Editorial

The Rohingya Genocide: A Prolonged Crisis Unaddressed by Regional and International Communities

The Rohingya genocide stands as a profound example of the international community's failure to protect human rights and prevent mass atrocities. It is an unaccountable human catastrophe, highlighting failures at multiple levels of the international community and within Myanmar. Seven years have passed since the Rohingya genocide, yet significant steps to address the crisis and bring justice to the victims remain largely absent. This ongoing failure by both regional and international communities highlights systemic issues in responding to and preventing such atrocities. This tragedy exemplifies the severe consequences of impunity, where systemic violations of human rights go unpunished, and justice remains elusive for the victims.



Context and Background

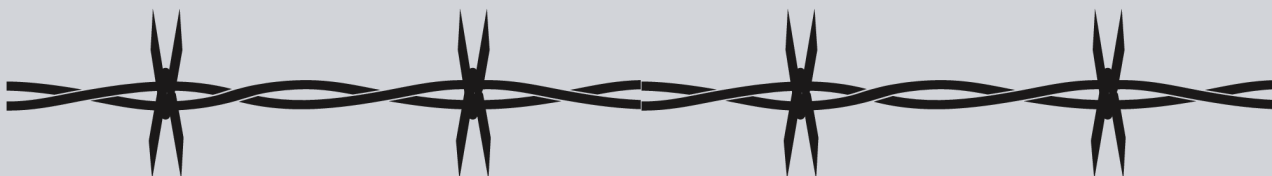
The Rohingya, a predominantly Muslim ethnic community in Myanmar's Rakhine State, have been subjected to severe discrimination, statelessness, and periodic violence for decades. The most egregious episode began in August 2017, when the Myanmar military launched brutal "clearance operations," leading to mass atrocities, including killings, rapes, and the burning of villages. This forced over a million Rohingya to flee neighboring Bangladesh, creating one of the world's largest refugee crises in recent history. Despite global condemnation, substantive action to address the crisis and hold perpetrators accountable has been limited.

Key Failures and Lack of Significant Steps

Failure of Early Warning Systems: The international community ignored numerous early warning signs, including historical marginalization, discriminatory laws, and previous outbreaks of violence. This includes denial of citizenship under the most discriminatory 1982 Citizenship Law, restrictions on movement, and limited access to education and healthcare. Despite credible reports from human rights organizations and media, preemptive action was not taken.

Over the years, there were several outbreaks of violence between the Rohingya and the Buddhist Rakhine community, often fueled by state and military actors. Significant incidents occurred in 2012 and 2016, where communal violence led to the displacement of thousands of Rohingya. There was a noticeable increase in hate speech and anti-Rohingya propaganda, often disseminated through social media and local media, portraying the Rohingya as illegal immigrants and a threat to national security.

Prior to the mass exodus in 2017, the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) conducted several so called "clearance operations" in Rohingya villages, which were characterized by reports of arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings, and other human rights abuses.



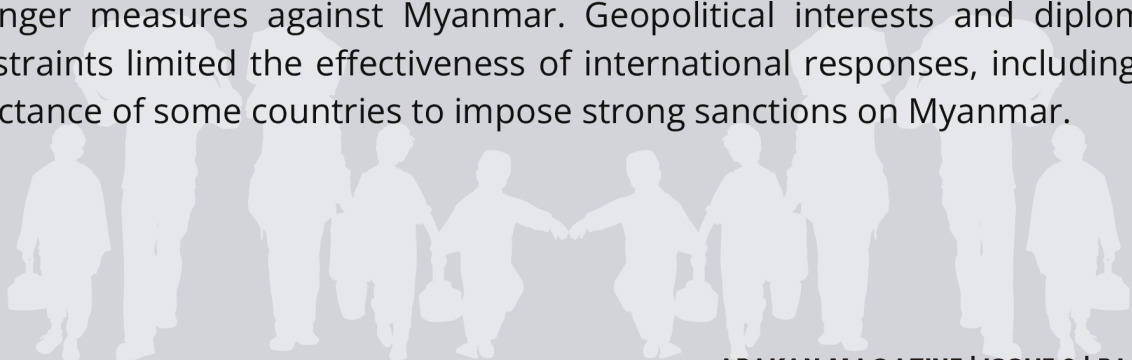
Failure of Regional Stakeholders: The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has struggled to address the crisis effectively due to its principle of non-interference in member states' internal affairs. ASEAN's response has been largely confined to humanitarian assistance, without addressing the root causes or pursuing accountability.

Bangladesh has borne the brunt of the refugee crisis, providing shelter and humanitarian aid to the displaced Rohingya. Efforts to repatriate Rohingya refugees have stalled due to ongoing violence and discrimination in Myanmar. The Rohingya are reluctant to return without guarantees of safety, citizenship, and basic rights. However, without significant regional support, Bangladesh's capacity to handle the crisis is strained.

India's response to the Rohingya genocide has been inadequate, marked by a lack of humanitarian support, inconsistent foreign policy, and politicization of security concerns. To address these failures, India needs to adopt a more humane and proactive approach, leveraging its regional influence to support the Rohingya and advocate for their rights.

China's failure to address the Rohingya genocide effectively reflects a prioritization of economic and strategic interests over human rights and ethical considerations. By shielding Myanmar from international accountability and providing limited humanitarian support, China has contributed to the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe. A more balanced approach that incorporates human rights considerations and leverages China's influence for positive change is crucial for addressing the crisis and preventing further atrocities.

Insufficient International Action: Despite numerous warnings from human rights organizations and UN bodies, the international community failed to take timely and decisive action to prevent the atrocities. While the UN has condemned the atrocities and provided humanitarian aid, its actions have been limited by geopolitical considerations and the veto power of permanent members in the Security Council, notably China and Russia, who have blocked stronger measures against Myanmar. Geopolitical interests and diplomatic constraints limited the effectiveness of international responses, including the reluctance of some countries to impose strong sanctions on Myanmar.



Sanctions imposed by Western countries have been piecemeal and have not significantly impacted Myanmar's military. Diplomatic efforts to isolate and pressure Myanmar have been inconsistent and often undermined by countries with strategic or economic interests in Myanmar.

Lack of Accountability: Efforts to hold Myanmar accountable through international legal mechanisms, such as the International Criminal Court (ICC), have faced significant challenges, including issues of jurisdiction and state sovereignty. Legal proceedings have been initiated, but they face significant obstacles, including issues of jurisdiction and the slow pace of international legal processes. The ICC has opened an investigation, and the ICJ has ordered provisional measures to prevent further genocide, but tangible results and accountability are yet to be seen.



Recommendations for Moving Forward

Strengthening International Legal Mechanisms: Support and expedite investigations and prosecutions at the ICC and ICJ to hold Myanmar's military and civil officials, including non-state actors, accountable. Encourage more countries to recognize the jurisdiction of international courts over the genocide.

Increasing Diplomatic Pressure: Enhance diplomatic efforts to isolate Myanmar's military regime and increase pressure for reforms and accountability. Coordinate sanctions more effectively among like-minded countries to maximize their impact.

Enhancing Regional Cooperation: ASEAN should take a more proactive role, potentially revisiting its non-interference principle in cases of gross human rights violations. Increase regional support for Bangladesh, providing resources and assistance to manage the refugee crisis.

Supporting Rohingya Refugees: Ensure adequate humanitarian aid and support for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and other host countries. Develop long-term strategies for education, healthcare, and livelihood opportunities for refugees.

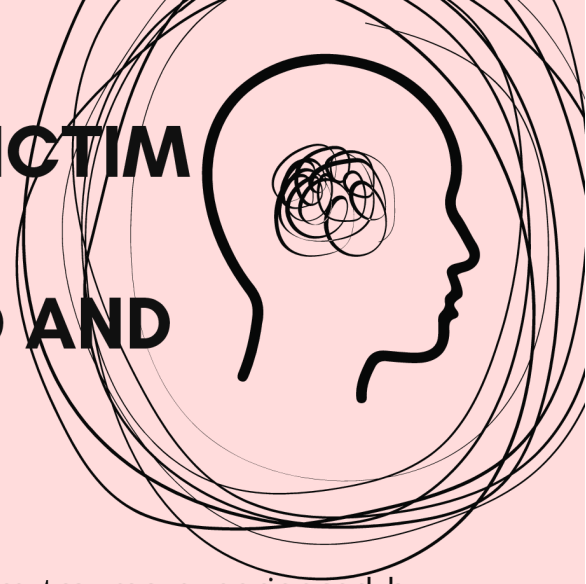
Addressing Root Causes in Myanmar: Work towards political and social reforms in Myanmar to address the root causes of the crisis, including discrimination and statelessness of the Rohingya. Promote reconciliation and dialogue between ethnic groups in Myanmar to build a more inclusive and peaceful society.

Promoting Global Solidarity and Advocacy: Mobilize global civil society, including NGOs, media, and human rights organizations, to keep the plight of the Rohingya in the international spotlight. Encourage public and governmental advocacy for stronger action to protect and support the Rohingya.

Conclusion

The Rohingya genocide remains an unaddressed humanitarian catastrophe, and the lack of significant action by regional and international communities underscores the challenges in dealing with such crises. It remains a stark reminder of the international community's failures and the urgent need for reform to ensure such atrocities are prevented and effectively addressed in the future. Moving forward requires a renewed commitment to human rights, justice, and coordinated efforts to provide protection and support to the Rohingya. The international community must prioritize accountability.

ROHINGYA GENOCIDE VICTIM WOMEN AND CHILDREN: SEVERELY TRAUMATIZED AND FACING CATASTROPHIC CONSEQUENCES



Seven years after the Rohingya genocide, the severe trauma experienced by Rohingya women and children has escalated into a catastrophic mental health crisis. The atrocities committed against them—mass killings, widespread sexual violence, and forced displacement—have left deep psychological scars that continue to impact their lives profoundly. This ongoing trauma threatens not only their mental and physical health but also the stability and future of their community.

The Depth of Trauma

Women Bearing the Brunt of Brutality:

Thousands of Rohingya women and girls were subjected to sexual violence by Myanmar military forces. These traumatic experiences have left them with long-lasting physical injuries and deep psychological wounds. Many women witnessed the brutal killing of their family members, including children. The grief and guilt from these losses are overwhelming and often manifest as severe depression and PTSD. The trauma of being uprooted from their homes and enduring perilous journeys to refugee camps exacerbates their mental health issues. The constant uncertainty and fear for their safety compound their trauma.



Photo Courtesy by
UN Women | Allison Joyce

Children's Innocence Lost: Many Rohingya children witnessed horrific acts of violence, including the murder of family members and the destruction of their homes. These experiences have profound impacts on their psychological development. The harsh and overcrowded conditions in refugee camps like those in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, are detrimental to children's mental and physical health. Lack of proper nutrition, education, and safe spaces to play further exacerbates their trauma. Many children were separated from their parents during the violence and displacement. This loss of parental protection and support leaves deep emotional scars.

Catastrophic Consequences

Mental Health Crisis: Both women and children exhibit symptoms of PTSD, including flashbacks, nightmares, and severe anxiety. Depression is also rampant, characterized by persistent sadness, hopelessness, and loss of interest in life. Traumatized children often show signs of behavioral problems, such as aggression, withdrawal, and difficulties in forming healthy relationships. These issues can affect their educational performance and social integration. Some survivors, particularly older children and teenagers, may turn to substance abuse as a coping mechanism, further complicating their mental health challenges.

Physical Health Impact: The trauma, combined with poor living conditions, leads to chronic health issues such as malnutrition, respiratory infections, and other diseases. Mental health problems also manifest physically, with survivors experiencing headaches, stomach problems, and other stress-related ailments. Traumatized women often have complications during pregnancy and childbirth, affecting both their health and that of their infants. The lack of access to adequate healthcare services exacerbates these issues.

Addressing the Crisis

Comprehensive Mental Health Services: Providing access to professional mental health care, including trauma-informed therapy, is crucial. This should be tailored to the specific needs of Rohingya women and children and include culturally sensitive approaches. Establishing peer support groups and community-based mental health programs can help survivors share their experiences and support each other. Training local health workers in psychological first aid and trauma-informed care can help bridge the gap in mental health services.

Enhancing Living Conditions: Investing in better living conditions in refugee camps, including access to clean water, nutritious food, healthcare, and safe spaces for children, is essential. Providing educational opportunities and safe recreational activities for children can help mitigate the impact of trauma and support their psychological development.

Long-Term Support and Advocacy: Ensuring sustained funding and resources from international donors and organizations is critical for the long-term support of Rohingya refugees. Advocating for the rights of the Rohingya and seeking justice for the atrocities committed against them can help restore a sense of dignity and hope among survivors. Working towards the safe and voluntary repatriation of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar, with guarantees of citizenship and protection, is essential for their long-term stability and well-being.



Photo Courtesy by UN Women | Allison Joyce

Conclusion

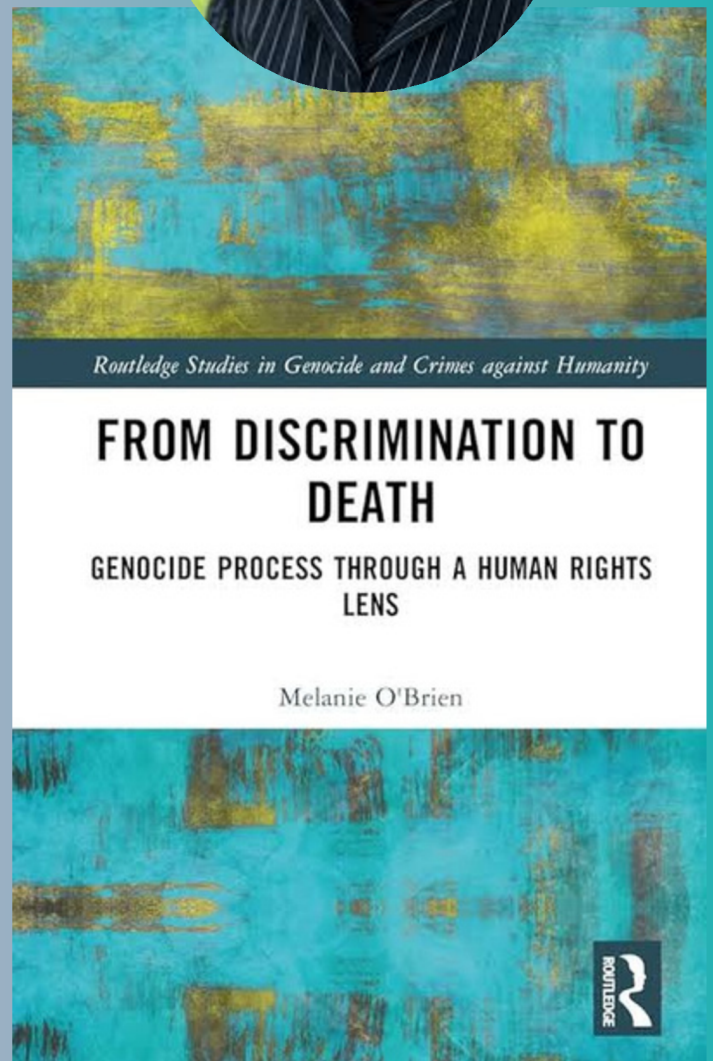
The trauma experienced by Rohingya genocide victim women and children has reached catastrophic levels, with severe mental and physical health consequences. Addressing this crisis requires a comprehensive and sustained effort from local, regional, and international actors. By providing adequate mental health care, improving living conditions, and advocating for justice and rights, we can support the Rohingya in their journey towards healing and rebuilding their lives. The international community must act decisively to prevent further suffering and ensure that such atrocities are never repeated.

In Conversation with Dr. Melanie O'Brien

Dr Melanie O'Brien is Associate Professor of International Law at the UWA Law School, University of Western Australia, and President of the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS). Dr O'Brien was a 2023-24 Visiting Professor at the Center for Holocaust & Genocide Studies, University of Minnesota, and is a Visiting Scholar with the Human Rights Center at the UMN Law School.

The International Criminal Court has cited Dr O'Brien's work on forced marriage, and she has been an ICC amica curia. She has been an expert consultant for multiple UN bodies and is widely consulted by global media for her expertise on international criminal law. She has conducted fieldwork and research across six continents. Dr O'Brien is a member of the WA International Humanitarian Law Committee of the Australian Red Cross.

Dr O'Brien's most recent book is From Discrimination to Death: Genocide Process through a Human Rights Lens (Routledge, 2022). ARNO asked her some questions about her new book and why she was interested in researching the Rohingya genocide.



1. What motivated you to write and examine the Rohingya genocide?

The main reason is the same thing that motivates me to research any genocide: the need to understand what has happened, and to give the victims and survivors a voice through my work, with the goal of helping to contribute to accountability for perpetrators of these crimes. Accountability for the Rohingya genocide is (still) lacking, even with processes underway in the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court. I have written about the slow wheels of justice for the Rohingya, but the fact that there are some kinds of justice processes underway is nonetheless promising, and I hope that my work will inform such justice. I really do hope that there will be some justice soon. I was also drawn to research the Rohingya because it is an under-researched, current genocide, but also because it is taking place in the broader region where I live (Asia-Pacific).

2. What new information did you learn about the Rohingya people that you did not know before through your research and interviews?

The Rohingya have been denied access to education for decades in Myanmar, and of course this has resulted in generations of illiteracy. What I had not thought of as an outcome of this, however, was a lack of understanding of time, which means it is difficult to place a person's testimony in a timeframe. This will no doubt be a challenge for prosecutors when putting together evidence for cases in court, but lawyers and judges will need to be flexible and offer a greater understanding about how the Rohingya perceive and can discuss time.

3. What was it like for you to visit the camps?

When I was in the camps, I interviewed Rohingya women, and it was incredibly meaningful to meet these strong women who have survived so much violence and so many challenges in their lives. They continue to struggle, as they are living as long-term refugees, and yet the women I interviewed were so generous and welcoming when we visited them for interviews. I was honoured that they gave their time to talk with me.

I was surprised to see the variety of quality of the camps. The older camps (i.e. camps with lower numbers) have received much more infrastructure from NGOs (e.g. solar lighting), while the newer camps (with higher numbers) have minimal infrastructure. This highlights how much time it takes for NGOs to work on setting up these camps to provide needed infrastructure for the residents. Setting up refugee camps is not an overnight project.

4. What tips do you have for scholars and researchers who are interested in documenting and furthering conversations about the Rohingya genocide?

Visiting the camps is administratively very complicated; you do need to get multiple government permissions. I would advise researchers to arrive in Bangladesh several weeks before your intended research start time, to enable time to arrange the administrative aspects of the visit, but also to organise an interpreter. It is best to have one interpreter that you trust and can work with across all your interviews; if you have to use several, it is not as productive and can result in varying quality of interpretation. Make as many contacts as possible before you go, as this is very useful with all the organisation. You will also need to organise a car and driver; the camps are quite a distance to travel every day from Cox's Bazar. I would also advise women to be cautious, and not to walk around Cox's Bazar (take a tuk-tuk, no matter how short the distance).

These are only some of the practical challenges involved in undertaking this research in the camps, however I would encourage researchers to not be dissuaded from engaging with the Rohingya as a case study for their research. Comparative genocide studies contribute significantly to our understanding of genocides, and therefore our ability to prevent and punish genocide, and I hope more scholars take up the Rohingya genocide as part of their research.

150 Rohingya Dead in Myanmar: Arakan Army Held Responsible for Devastating Drone Strike

A devastating attack on August 5, 2024, left around 150 Rohingya refugees dead in Maungdaw, Myanmar, with the Arakan Army being held responsible. The refugees were fleeing intense fighting between the Arakan Army and the Myanmar military when drones struck the fleeing crowds, causing mass casualties.

Eyewitnesses described a terrifying scene as drones dropped bombs on a large group of Rohingya attempting to escape the conflict. Survivors recounted that bodies were scattered across the riverbank and in fields. Many victims included women and children, and the chaos resulted in a significant number of injuries in addition to the fatalities.

Hostilities in Rakhine State have been intensifying since November 2023, ending a fragile ceasefire between the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army. This has placed the Rohingya in a perilous situation, as both groups have targeted them in the ongoing conflict.

The attack has drawn international condemnation, with human rights organizations calling for accountability and an end to the violence. Human Rights Watch and other groups have urged the international community to impose targeted sanctions on military and Arakan Army leaders involved in human rights abuses. The United Nations has also been called upon to increase pressure on Myanmar's military junta to halt the violence and protect the remaining Rohingya population.

The Rohingya in Rakhine State have long faced systemic discrimination and violence. This recent attack has compounded their suffering, leaving them with nowhere to turn for safety. Over 600,000 Rohingya remain in Myanmar, living under severe restrictions and vulnerable to renewed attacks. Those who manage to flee to Bangladesh face dire conditions in overcrowded refugee camps.

The deadly attack in Maungdaw has once again highlighted the plight of the Rohingya in Myanmar. With the Arakan Army implicated in the massacre, the situation remains volatile and dangerous for this marginalized community. Urgent international action is needed to protect the Rohingya, hold those responsible accountable, and work towards a lasting resolution to this ongoing crisis.

Rohingya Relocation Sparks Concerns: Arakan Army's Role in Changing Rakhine's Demographic Landscape

The Arakan Army (AA) has come under scrutiny for allegedly adopting tactics similar to those of the Myanmar military to alter the demographic composition of northern Rakhine State. Recent reports indicate that the AA has been involved in efforts to relocate Rohingya communities from their traditional homelands, raising concerns about a potential strategy aimed at changing the region's ethnic makeup.

Historically, the Myanmar military, also known as the Tatmadaw, has been accused of systemic efforts to reduce the Rohingya presence in Rakhine State. This included the brutal crackdown in 2017, which forced over a million Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh. The AA, which has emerged as a significant force in Rakhine State advocating for the rights of the ethnic Rakhine people, now appears to be following a similar pattern in northern Rakhine.

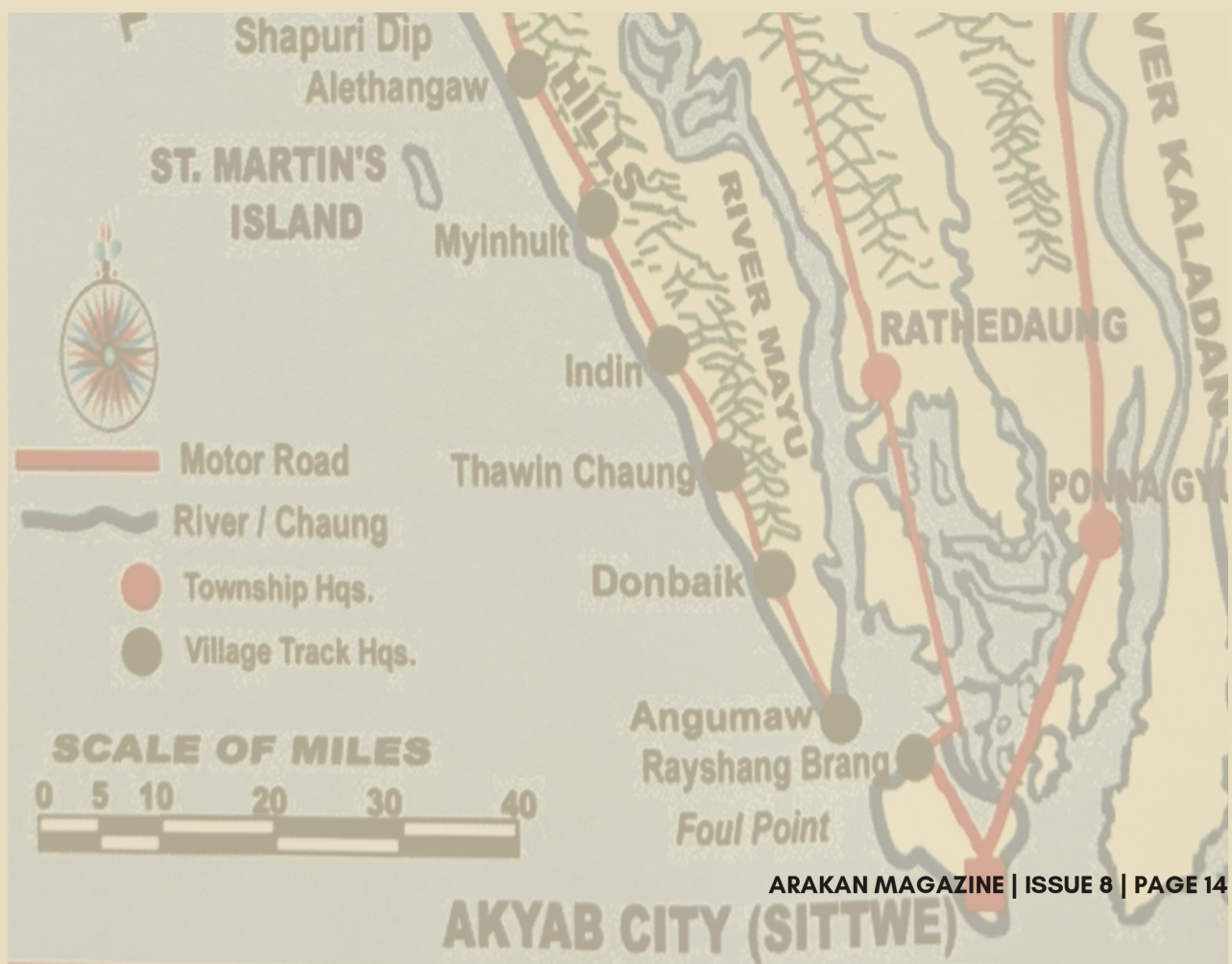
Local sources and human rights groups suggest that the AA has been exerting pressure on Rohingya communities in areas like Buthidaung and Maungdaw Township, urging them to evacuate under the pretext of security concerns amid escalating tensions. The AA claims this is a protective measure due to the increasing likelihood of conflict with the Tatmadaw. However, critics argue that these actions contribute to a deliberate strategy to displace the Rohingya, thereby facilitating a demographic shift in favor of the ethnic Rakhine population.



The relocation of Rohingyas from their ancestral lands not only exacerbates the humanitarian crisis but also raises questions about the AA's intentions. For many Rohingya, these areas are their traditional homelands where they have lived for generations. The forced evacuation disrupts their way of life and further marginalizes a community already enduring systemic discrimination and statelessness.

Human rights organizations have condemned these relocations, warning that such actions risk perpetuating a cycle of violence and exclusion. They argue that any effort to change the demographic balance in Rakhine State is likely to have long-lasting implications for peace and reconciliation in the region. The United Nations and international observers have called for an immediate halt to any forced relocations and have urged the AA to ensure the protection and rights of all communities, including the Rohingya.

While the AA has positioned itself as a defender of ethnic Rakhine interests, its recent actions indicate a complex and troubling approach to the region's ethnic dynamics. By seemingly emulating the Tatmadaw's tactics, the AA risks undermining its own stated goals of promoting justice and equality for all ethnic groups in Rakhine State. The international community is closely watching these developments, concerned that such strategies could further destabilize an already volatile region and deepen the humanitarian crisis for the Rohingya.



Press Releases

ARNA Condemn Aerial Attacks on Rohingya Communities in Maungdaw Township, Rakhine State

August 7, 2024

The recent escalation of violence in Maungdaw Township, Rakhine State, has resulted in a series of devastating drone attacks targeting Rohingya communities, attributed to the Arakan Army (AA). The attacks have caused significant loss of life, injuries, and displacement among the Rohingya population around Maungdaw, exacerbating the already dire humanitarian situation in the region. On August 3 & 4, 2024, the AA launched a drone attack on Shikder Para, Fayazi Para, and Ukeel Para (Auk Rwa), which resulted in hundreds of deaths and injuries among residents, including women and children. The drone reportedly dropped bombs indiscriminately that hit civilian homes, causing widespread panic and destruction.

Subsequently, on August 5, 2024, further drone strikes were launched in and around Maung Ni Para (village), targetting the fleeing civilians, resulting in the death of many men, women and children. Rohingya people are in dire need of protection. ARNA urges upon the National Unity Government (NUG) and the international community to immediately intervene in the crisis:

1. To stop the current terrible situation and ensure protection to the Rohingya people;
2. To stop the demographic changes of Rohingya homeland by forcible expulsion of Rohingya people;
3. To provide necessary aid and support to the affected Rohingya population;
4. To work for an efficacious solution ensuring security, rights and freedoms of the Rohingya people.

For further information and updates, please contact: secretariat@thearna.org

Press Releases

ARNO condemns Aerial Assault on Rohingya by Arakan Army

August 7, 2024

ARNO has strongly condemned the series of drone attacks by the Arakan Army targeting Rohingya civilians and homes in several Rohingya villages with intent to destroy or force the remaining Rohingya people to flee from Maungdaw town and surrounding areas. On 5th August alone, the Arakan Army had killed more than 100 Rohingya civilians while they were escaping from their villages.

By the order of the Arakan Army, all people have left the Habi para village. On the other hand, thousands of Rohingya civilians, including women and children, are trapped in Latha Ward and Etalia (Horitala) village with no way out.

ARNO calls upon the international community to take further action on this issue at the UN Security Council. Specifically, ARNO calls for a referral of the matter of Myanmar to the International Criminal Court. ARNO calls upon the International Criminal Court Prosecutor, Karim Khan to look closely at the situation which is causing forced displacement, starvation, and causing enormous amounts of refugee movements, which is how the genocidal pogroms of 2017 began.

ARNO calls upon all States to uphold their obligations under the UN Convention on Genocide and prevent further annihilation of the Rohingya people. Further, the United States should be careful and selective of the aid provided under the BRAVE Act so that groups like the AA do not become emboldened to continue to commit atrocities.

For more information, please contact:

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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

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