



ARAKAN

Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO)



- **PATHS TO PEACE: FOSTERING COEXISTENCE BETWEEN ROHINGYA AND RAKHINE COMMUNITIES IN MYANMAR**
- **THE ROHINGYA AND FACEBOOK: UPSIDE DOWN, INSIDE OUT**
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Editorial

Paths to Peace: Fostering Coexistence between Rohingya and Rakhine Communities in Myanmar

The history of the Rohingya and Rakhine communities in Myanmar, characterized by both periods of peaceful coexistence and conflict, illustrates the complexity of their relationship. The Rohingya, a Muslim ethnic group, primarily reside in Arakan/Rakhine State, where the predominantly Buddhist Rakhine form the ethnic majority.

Historically, Arakan was home to a diverse array of ethnicities, including the Rohingya. The era of British colonial rule was marked by relatively peaceful interactions between the Rohingya and the Rakhine, although the colonial policy of divide and rule existed. However, tensions escalated post-Myanmar's 1948 independence, significantly due to state-sponsored hostilities, discrimination, and marginalization, with Myanmar's Military denying them citizenship and labelling them as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh while depriving them of their fundamental rights and freedom, including restricting their freedom of movement, education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

The Rohingya crisis has escalated into a genocide in 2017, prompting international outcry and demands for accountability. Efforts aimed at fostering peace and reconciliation are often challenged by deep-rooted ethnic and religious tensions and a lack of political resolve from Myanmar's government to tackle the conflict's root causes.

Despite these obstacles, instances of solidarity between the Rohingya and Rakhine communities, along with initiatives by civil society and international stakeholders to encourage dialogue and reconciliation, demonstrate the potential for positive change. However, lasting peace necessitates addressing fundamental issues of discrimination, inequality, and exclusion.

Potential strategies for fostering coexistence include:

1. Addressing Root Causes: Tackling conflict drivers, such as discrimination, marginalization, and economic disparities, is critical. These require mutual respect and acknowledgement, recognizing historical injustices and developing inclusive policies that address both communities' socio-economic and political grievances.
2. Reconciliation and Dialogue: Community-level dialogue and reconciliation can build trust and understanding across different ethnic and religious groups. Dialogue forums, community meetings, and interfaith dialogues are vital for facilitating communication and easing tensions.
3. Legal and Political Reforms: Equal rights and protections for all ethnic groups are essential, necessitating the amendment of discriminatory laws, ensuring Rohingya identity and collective rights, equitable citizenship access, and inclusive governance.
4. Humanitarian Assistance and Development: Investing in humanitarian and development initiatives in Rakhine State can alleviate poverty and improve living standards for both communities, promoting social cohesion and reducing tensions.
5. International Engagement: The role of international actors, including neighbouring countries, regional organizations, and the UN, is crucial in dialogue facilitation, humanitarian assistance, and reconciliation efforts.
6. Transitional Justice: Transitional justice mechanisms, like truth commissions, reparations, and accountability for past atrocities, can address violence and human rights abuse legacies, aiding healing and reconciliation.
7. Community Empowerment: Empowering local communities to engage in decision-making and peacebuilding initiatives can foster sustainable peace from the grassroots level.
8. Education and Awareness: Campaigns promoting tolerance, challenging stereotypes, and celebrating diversity can combat prejudice and enhance social cohesion.

Achieving enduring coexistence between the Rohingya and Rakhine in Myanmar demands a comprehensive approach that confronts conflict drivers and champions reconciliation, equality, and mutual respect among all ethnicities.



The Rohingya and Facebook: Upside Down, Inside Out

Beginning in 2018, the Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO) sent several communications to the Facebook corporation indicating the need for the company to redress the mistakes it made in 2017 allowing violence and hate speech to run rampant on their platform toward the Rohingya. Facebook (now known as META) indicated to ARNO no interest in meeting to discuss reparations. Since 2019 there have been other actions taken against Facebook which have not yielded any favourable results to date.

In 2023 a group of refugees in Ireland brought a case forward against META for having its platform act as a “echo chamber” and contribute to the violence in 2017. There is no further update regarding the case yet. Now, in January 2024, a group of refugees in India, have brought a case forward against META in New Delhi based on a 2019 report written by Equality Labs. The public interest litigation indicates that META's platform has contributed to hate speech, discrimination, and violence against the Rohingya in India. It is unclear whether the case will proceed as the Rohingya who filed the suit, are UNHCR cardholders, and therefore may not have standing to file public interest litigation complaints within the Indian court system. In addition, Amnesty International's has a campaign to ask META to pay reparations to the Rohingya for the “recklessness” they have shown in allowing hate speech against the Rohingya on their platforms.

While all of these efforts are worthwhile and ARNO encourages the actions of victims and lawyers involved in pursuing these cases, ARNO also encourages META to consider donating funds to the World Food Programme or to other humanitarian organizations which can provide aide to the Rohingya. In addition, or alternatively, creating scholarship funds for Rohingya students who are in refugee camps or providing material to allow children to become computer literate would be a great contribution.

ARNO also encourages META to consider its current efforts at targeting hate speech on its platform and working closely with experts from Burma, Malaysia, Indonesia, and India to identify and remove hate speech, not only towards the Rohingya but the other ethnic groups throughout Burma who are also suffering as a result of violence from the Myanmar military.

Social media companies play a vital role in the dissemination of information but also must vigilantly guard the messages posted so that abuse, hate, and violence do not proliferate. This year will be of particular importance as many countries around the world will go into their election seasons. The Rohingya must remain united in its request to ask META to consider an apology and reparations for its conduct.



Forced Conscription of Rohingya in the Arakan

ARNO Justice Committee

Since the end of 2023, the fighting between the Arakan Army and the military junta has created dire conditions for people in the Arakan, which still has not fully recovered from Cyclone Mocha. The fighting has escalated to the point that the Bangladesh government has already announced that it will not accept any more refugees and they are closely monitoring their borders. The Rohingya have been detained, arrested, and are now being forcibly conscripted by the military junta to fight the AA. It has been reported that Rohingya people are threatened with violence if they do not submit and comply with the directives to fight.

On February 10, 2024 the Myanmar military junta enacted a compulsory conscription law, called the People's Military Service Law. The enactment of the law has caused civilians from all over the country to flee. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Tom Andrews, stated, "by seeking to activate the conscription law, the junta is trying to justify and expand its pattern of forced recruitment, which is already impacting civilian populations around the country. In recent months, young men have reportedly been kidnapped from the streets of Myanmar's cities or otherwise compelled into joining the military's ranks. Villagers have reportedly been used as porters and human shields..."[1] Forced conscription is reportedly a tool used in the war between Russia and Ukraine.

Given the volatile dynamics in the Arakan, ARNO pleads with the international community that:

- The UN Security Council should demand that Myanmar adhere to UNSC Resolution 2669.
- The UN Security Council should refer the situation of Myanmar for full investigation to the International Criminal Court.
- The international community must remind Myanmar of its legal obligations under the Preliminary Order as issued by the International Court of Justice.
- ARNO also calls upon The Gambia to bring attention to the ICJ, the issue of forced conscription and the use of Rohingya as human shields in the fighting between the Arakan Army and military junta.

[1] United Nations Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/myanmar-military-junta-even-greater-threat-civilians-it-imposes-military>

THE SAC'S DANGEROUS STOKING OF THE ETHNIC TINDERBOX OF ARAKAN

By Tin Thein

Anyone might be forgiven for thinking that the history of the Rakhine people has entered a golden era. The freedom loving and adventurous Rakhine people united through the Arakan Army have given the Tatmadaw the bloodiest nose in their history, a bloody nose which they probably deserve. Even as this article is being written, dozens of military men are abandoning their outposts and running away to neighbouring Bangladesh - - seeking refuge in the hands of people they had traditionally dismissed as inferior and un-martial. Such feelings have their origins in Myanmar's nationalist ideology dominated by martial traditions where the military is the mainstay of the state and every aspect of the state is geared for military purposes (Myanmar knows no peacetime; the nation has been in perpetual war since independence and before it). But that also means the military steeped in the traditions of war has enormous experience in combining indirect stratagem along with overwhelming firepower.

Enter the Rohingyas, once known as the forgotten people of East Asia. While the genocide of 2017 has laid bare the plight of the long suffering people, they continue to remain one of the most misunderstood people in the world. Outside observers are often baffled by the reaction of the Rohingyas to the events unfolding in Arakan state. Shouldn't the Rohingyas, a community that has suffered much more than the Rakhine community, lost thousands of their men, women and children to the bloodthirstiness of the Myanmar military take advantage of this golden times when the military is outfought by the Rakhine Ethnic Armed Organisation AA? Yet whenever someone asks the Rohingya to unite their cause with the Arakan Army, the reaction is outrageous scorn, even mirth and disbelief at those suggesting such a mammothly foolish proposal!

Ironically, the only outsider who actually understands the reaction of the Rohingya is the same entity that engineered the genocide of 2017 and the brutal abuses directed against them, i.e. the military. The understanding is reflected in the way that military has not only handled the genocide against the community, but also in its ongoing plans to turn the tide of Arakan in their favour.

Let us briefly consider the modus operandi of the military in 2017. Generally security operations in the Arakan state are directed from the Western Command based in Buthidaung. However in August 2017 Rohingyas saw a hitherto unknown class of soldiers which those close to the military has described as 'new soldiers'. These were soldiers from the elite 'Light Infantry' divisions (LID)s, in this case the 33rd and 99th LID. These units are under the central command overseen by the big bosses, in this case the main authority being Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. The soldiers of these units are meant to do only one thing - violence. They were quickly flown in from other parts of the country in August 2017 to lead the clearance operations against the Rohingya and drive the rest of them away from all areas west of the Mayu river (except the towns). Reports from eyewitnesses and survivors quote many of them boasting of killing rebels in Kachin state from where they were presumably stationed before flying to Arakan. This makes sense as there were intense ongoing clashes between the KIA and the military during that time.

The LID units led the operations but did not act alone. Typically they were guided to the villages by the BGP, local police and collaborators from the Rakhine community to Rohingya villages, which acted as support staff. The LID units were small in numbers as it was established that they were fighting unarmed villagers as opposed to well armed insurgents as is often the case in Myanmar. The LID came with their weapons blasting, caught the survivors, rounded and killed them, raped, threw babies into the fire and moved on. This was basically their modus operandi in a nutshell. Then they moved on until all Rohingyas had died or moved to Bangladesh (some managed to hide. They did not spare even the collaborators, the notorious Tabbeys who traditionally acted on behalf of the security forces, no one was spared. Many a collaborator with good relations with the security forces had walked up to welcome the Tatmadaw and had found themselves shot without a chance to reminisce what had happened. Following a month of rampage that resulted in the deaths of around 25,000 Rohingyas and exodus of survivors to Bangladesh, they left as suddenly as they had come. The Rohingyas who had escaped with their lives had never seen them before, and probably do not expect or want to see them again.

In the background, lurked the BGP, police and collaborators from the Rakhine villages who often acted as guides or other support services for the elite soldiers. They were often well known to the survivors. In many cases they brushed off the spots which the LID in their haste had missed. This also meant more killings and rape albeit in a less systematic manner. The difference is they did not go away, Arakan was their home before and after. They have been the eyes and ears for the invisible powers of Naypyidaw and Yangon long before this. They were as determined to finish the Rohingyas as the men in green. The difference was unlike the LID soldiers, this was their home territory - or if not, then from other parts of Arakan. Even before those months of 2017, when a Rohingya man or woman faced direct discrimination, it was generally these men from the neighbourhood who were the face of the brutalities.

Now the question is where was the AA when this was happening. The AA, unlike many other Rakhine insurgent movements in the past did not have their base of operations in Arakan but in Kachin state. In only a year or so however the AA, and its political counterpart the ULA would manage to become synonymous with the struggle of the Rakhine people. This, at least in the eyes of the Rohingya people included the same Rakhine people who had committed not only the genocide of 2017, but have been directly involved in the slow burning genocide taking place for half a century. The ground realities of Arakan were well exploited by the military to create an atmosphere of 'Divide and Rule'. For the Rohingya people, the enemy are their despised neighbours who had inflicted untold misery in all walks of their life. The mastermind behind the genocide had remained far off - - and for the suffering villagers who had lost their loved ones, was effectively invisible. In a community without a civil society or leadership, where modern education is all but absent, the enemy was those who stayed in the next village and not in the far off military garrisons.

When the Rakhine people unite in a powerful entity like the Arakan Army, it arouses a great deal of uneasiness that this includes people who have been involved in the genocide of Rohingya Muslims. If anyone dares to point out that most AA fighters are probably not involved in the genocide, the immediate tendency will be to brush such foolishness aside! Anyone pointing out that the fact Tatmadaw has been the mastermind of this policy will at best be met with polite silence.

So deadly is the animosity towards the Rakhine, that hundreds of young Rohingyas at the service of the AA, even those with patriotic motives, prefer to hide their actions from the community. As long as there is animosity towards the Rohingyas, and in the absence of a dialogue between the two communities, this deep-rooted mistrust will remain. There are reports that west of the Kaladan river, there have been friendly interchanges between the Rohingya and Rakhine. However, it would be premature to read too much into such reports. Due to movement restrictions in place, especially since the riots of 2012, the communities in the villages and IDP camps in the area are not only cut off from each other but also from the outside world. While one small community might be friendly to the Rakhines, this might be out of fear for their survival rather than genuine brotherly love for neighbours. Once again, it is the military who has had access to this intelligence better than anyone else. Long experience of playing the 'Divide and Rule' card puts them in a better position than other stakeholders to exploit the complicated scenario. The military have already told gatherings of Rohingya elders in areas they control that the Rakhine is their main enemy. While it is unlikely that many Rohingyas would take any statement from the military without a pinch of salt, the historical animosity between the Rakhine and Rohingya could prove to be as unpredictable as deadly. Rohingya community leaders might face an uphill task if they want to convince their people to stay on the right side of history. So far, many Rohingya Muslims have even been arrested for refusing to serve the SAC. But a spark in the ethnic tinderbox of Arakan might set off a chain of events in a ground where the military is the only familiar player.



At least 23 Rohingya Muslims including infant children killed in Myanmar Junta airstrikes on Minbya village

At least 23 Rohingya Muslim villagers including children were killed, and 60 were injured when Junta forces conducted air raids in the Minbya region on March 18, according to our local correspondent.

Fighter jets dropped bombs and fired on villagers from the air in Thar Dae village of the Chen Taung village tract on the dead of the night, shortly after 1.30 am.

It is believed 20 villagers died in the spot and three later died at a local medical facility. 12 others are currently in critical condition.

In one house which was totally destroyed, five members of the same family including three infant children and their two parents died during the air raid.

Tensions have increased around many Rohingya villages as locals defy army attempts to conscript them in their fight against Rakhine insurgent outfit Arakan Army.

The Myanmar Junta facing losses in multiple fronts all over the country have retaliated with air raids resulting in the deaths of civilians on a regular basis. While the myriad guerrilla forces over the country have shown increasing successes in inflicting losses on the army forces, they lack means to defend against air attacks.

Air attacks have emerged as the Junta's preferred method to shore up its fledging defences.

The Myanmar armed forces are known for their brutality in carrying out attacks against civilians. In 2017, armed forces led a genocidal campaign against Rohingya villagers killing around 25,000 and driving almost a million Rohingyas to Bangladesh.

Thar Dae village has been partially destroyed following the air raids. A tense situation is currently prevailing in the area as air strikes remain the resort of the SAC to weaken dissent in the restive region.

In recent days, both Rakhine and Rohingya civilians have been killed in regime airstrikes and long range artillery attacks.

Lies follow lies as Rohingyas rounded up for military service

“The news that the State Administrative Council has been enrolling the Bengalis in Rakhine State to serve in military service is not absolutely true; it is just a fake story, according to the Rakhine State government.

Such a news item on the website of The Business Standard, a Bangladeshi media, accused the Myanmar government of recruiting Bengalis from refugee camps by luring them with free travel.

“There is no such case. Bengalis are not even our citizens. The People’s Military Service Law is only at the stage of forming state and regional committees. It needs to form many committees at different levels such as district, township and ward/ village. And it must draft and stipulate bylaw for it. So the aforesaid news is not true. There is no such thing in Rakhine state”, an official of the Rakhine State government said.

The Bangladesh based Dhaka Tribune also published another item of false news that there an unverified report about the arrest and recruitment of thousands of Bengali refugees from the border region to fight in the ongoing war. As malicious media have been fabricating misinformation after the announcement of the People’s Military Service Law in order to cause anxiety and worry among the people and the locals, that is another pattern of spreading fake news, said a Yangon-based media observer – Myo Khine/Zine. *

***New Light of Myanmar**

The above is an exact copy of a news release published on February 28 in the government owned English mouthpiece The Global New Light of Myanmar. The newspaper prides itself as the oldest English newspaper in the country, though its contents are more official government propaganda rather than actual news. The comparatively few English news readers of Myanmar do not take it as their medium of choice for learning about events unfolding in Myanmar. However, it does provide insight into the messages communicated by the Myanmar government to its people and the rest of the world.

By now, Rohingyas and anyone interested in the affairs of Arakan state know very well that hundreds of people from the community have been rounded up, with some already dispersed to the army units fighting against the rapidly advancing AA. Rohingyas have not been given any choice, they are simply rounded up and taken for military service with almost no training. The words ‘human shields’ make more sense in this regard than soldiers.

While the recruitment of Rohingyas show the desperate manpower shortages faced by the army, it also reflects a growing effort by the SAC to divide the Rohingyas and Rakhines into ethnic lines to light the ethnic tinderbox of Arakan state.

However, while the military wants the Rakhine people to think the Rohingyas have betrayed the people of Myanmar and have joined hands with the SAC, they also want to make sure that outside Arakan -- especially in the Burman heartlands where for the first time the military is experiencing an armed challenge to their rule -- their claim as protectors of Myanmar against a foreign Muslim threat is not under scrutiny.

Just as in Arakan the government has long played the Rakhines and Rohingyas against each other, throughout the country, the army likes to pose as the protector of Buddhism which is resisting the spread of Islam and their followers coming out of Bangladesh. Recent steps taken to enrol the Rohingyas, while playing conveniently in Arakan to create Rakhine-Rohingya tensions, counters the regime's image as Buddhism's protector in the entire country -- a card it has consistently played in troubled times.

The news release is interesting for reasons other than its role in denying obvious manipulative measures the Tatmadaw has undertaken to create tensions between the two communities in Arakan.

It uses the term Bengali, again and again, thereby stressing that in no way can the Muslim community be regarded as citizens of the country. For those hoping (extremely naively) that the Myanmar army has changed its attitude only a few years after committing the genocide against Rohingya Muslims, this should be a slap in the face. The Global New Light of Myanmar is the official mouthpiece of the Myanmar military government, and says here beyond any discrepancy that they consider the Rohingyas as Bengalis and not as citizens of Myanmar. The small population now remaining in Myanmar is described as refugees and not as Internally Displaced Persons (IDP).

By using the term refugee instead of IDP, it shows the conviction of the government that the Rohingyas are people from Bangladesh who should preferably be sent back to their place of origin i.e. Bangladesh. This is another warning to stakeholders who are hoping that the government has changed their stance suddenly after six years and is willing to accept the over one million Rohingya population who are living in the refugee camps of South Eastern Bangladesh. Very clearly, instead of working out ways to take back Rohingya refugees, the government is invested in ways to ensure that the remaining Rohingya Muslims will be shown the way out of their homeland into permanent refugee existence.

By now, the people of Myanmar should know that concerning the Rohingyas, the government has presented one false narrative after another to stir up anti Muslim sentiments and create unrealistic fears. Earlier, in 2017 as Rohingyas fell prey to what was then the most brutal genocide of the 21st century, much of Myanmar was sadly on the wrong side of the truth, owing to decades of propaganda later perfected through the digital advantage provided in the age of Facebook. A few years later, the same machinery that led the genocide of the Rohingyas turned against the people of Myanmar. This time, the people of Myanmar who are fighting the valiant struggle against the forces of evil and oppression should realise that they are on the same side as the hapless Muslim community of Arakan.

Time for unity; the military and their collaborators should belong in the ash heap of history

15 March, 2024

ARNO firmly declares its position as being with the freedom-loving people of Myanmar, who are currently waging a historic resistance against the evil forces of the Myanmar military throughout the country. Never in the history of this nation have people from all walks of life been more united in the revolutionary struggle against the Myanmar military. It is with surprise and cautious excitement we see that regardless of ethnic identities, the people of Myanmar are rallying together against the forces of darkness and injustice which masterminded the genocide of our people.

As the people remain united as never before, the brutal military is once again relying on their age-old strategy of creating divisions along ethnic and religious lines. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the ethnic tinderbox of Arakan, where the SAC forces try to light the fire to destroy this unparalleled unity of our people.

On February 19, the Arakan Rohingya National Alliance (ARNA) issued a press release titled 'United we stand, divided we fall', which mentioned how the SAC is trying to raise 'Village Defence Forces' from Rohingya villages in Northern Arakan.

This old practice of the security forces, raising men to carry out military activities in the form of slave labour, is a continuation of the same tactic the now-disbanded NASAKA once used against Rohingya villagers. In reality, the Village Defence Forces are nothing more than human shields, using a more subtle strategy to continue fanning the flames between the two communities of Arakan state.

Ironically, this is the same military which carried out the genocide of 2017, which ended the existence of ancient Rohingya settlements, west of the Mayu River and forced them into southern Bangladesh, where they currently live as refugees. In many cases, people have been arrested from villages in Buthidaung and Kyauktaw for refusing to serve as human shields against the Arakan Army, which is currently on an offensive against the junta's military.

We would once again like to reiterate that the Rohingya people are victims of the gravest genocide ever committed in contemporary times. We cannot and will not forget the mass atrocities carried out by the military and their accomplices, the peak being in the years 2012 to 2017.

Those who fight alongside the brutal military are complicit in the genocide against the Rohingya people. We are aware of and entirely against the military junta's heinous plans to divide the people, and we reiterate our support to the forces fighting for a federal democratic Myanmar where all ethnic groups have a right to justice and self-determination.

We request that all people of Myanmar, especially those in Arakan, learn from past mistakes and urge everyone to come to a strong understanding so that past mistakes are not repeated. A new chapter in history should be opened to create a federal democratic Myanmar. In our country, the brutal military and its cohorts should be relegated to the dustbins of history.

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ARNA Press Releases

Rohingya remain steadfast against military junta

23 March, 2024

The Arakan Rohingya National Alliance (ARNA) would like to state that:

(1) The protest rally held on 19 March 2024 in Buthidaung town against the Arakan Army was organized by brutal Myanmar military with some helpless and hapless Muslim Rohingyas who had been forced to participate in. It was obvious that they were involuntary participants who are not to blame for what happened. The protest did not represent the voices and aspiration of the Rohingya people.

(2) The Arakan Rohingya National Alliance (ARNA) have repeatedly condemned the heinous plans of the Myanmar brutal military to divide the whole people of the country on ethnic and religious lines, especially in Arakan where the Muslim Rohingya are on the horns of dilemma. The ARNA had on many occasions warned the Rohingya and other compatriots not to fall into the harmful traps.

(3) As representatives of the Rohingya community of Arakan, we strongly declare our position as being with the freedom loving people of Myanmar, who are currently waging a historic resistance against the evil forces of the military junta throughout the country.

(4) Earlier on February 19, the ARNA issued a press release under the title 'United we stand, divided we fall'. We had condemned the raising of so-called Village Defence Forces through forced conscription of Rohingya youth, which are nothing more than human shields with the more subtle strategy of continuing to fan the flames between the two communities of Arakan state.

(5) We would once again like to reinstate that Rohingya people are victims of the gravest genocide ever committed in contemporary times. We cannot and will not forget the mass atrocities carried out by the junta and its accomplices, the peak being in the years 2012 to 2017. Those who fight alongside the brutal military are complicit in the genocide against the Rohingya people.

(6) We are aware and completely against the military junta's heinous plans to divide the people, and we reinstate our support to all forces fighting for a federal democratic Myanmar.

(7) We strongly wish to work together with NUG and ULA/AA. It is crucial that they declare unequivocal policies ensuring the Rohingya's right to exist in Arakan on the basis of "full and effective equality", their "right of return" and their inalienable "right to self-determination" consistent with other ethnicities.

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A message from the Rohingya people to mark Bangladesh's Independence Day

26 March, 2024

On behalf of the Rohingya people of Myanmar, The Arakan Rohingya National Alliance extends its heartfelt salutations to the People's Republic of Bangladesh on the 53rd anniversary of Independence. On this occasion, we wish the Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wazed and the people of Bangladesh a happy Independence Day.

Under dynamic leadership of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Bangladeshi people understand deeply the value of freedom and independence as they fought courageously in 1971 to choose their own fate.

First and foremost, we would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the People's Republic of Bangladesh for opening its arms and welcoming around one million victimized Rohingya escaping mass atrocities and genocide in 2016-2017. Without the helping hand led by Bangladesh, many more innocent human beings, including women and children, would have died in the hands of the brutal Myanmar military and non-state actors or other genocidaires. Bangladesh has set an example for the world of empathy and generosity in practice. We will always remember the genuine warmth the government and people of Bangladesh displayed in those difficult times towards our community.

We understand that similar to us, many Bangladeshis left their beloved motherland for the uncertainties of refugee life in the days following the declaration of independence. We hope that like Bangladesh, we will one day succeed in bringing the perpetrators of genocide to justice.

The Bengali people, while suffering enormously in those times came up to defend their lands, avenge their fallen martyrs and turn the tables around in only nine months. But even after six years, the Rohingya people continue their refugee life and as yet there seems to be little hope that we will be able to go back to our native land or get justice for those of us who have fallen prey to the brutality of Myanmar armed forces and their collaborators.

Of course, unlike the Bangladeshi people who wanted an independent nation built on the pillar of sovereignty, the Rohingya people want to achieve the "right of self-determination" consistent with other ethnic nationalities of the Union of Burma/Myanmar. They want "peaceful coexistence" with myriad ethnic groups that populate the country. They also want to peacefully coexist as equals in their motherland-Arakan.

Our struggle is for a federal and democratic Myanmar where all ethnic people, regardless of their race and religion will exist as equal citizens of the country. But like our Bangladeshi brothers and sisters, we would like to replicate a successful struggle to win the right to exist as is the right of all human beings. Right now, many people in Myanmar are waging a struggle against the Myanmar armed forces that identify as 'Tatmadaw', but the Rohingya people have not been able to join with them.

We look forward to developing a relationship of solidarity with our Bangladeshi brothers and sisters on this great day of independence. We hope mutual cooperation will make us stronger along with all the freedom loving people of Myanmar.

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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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