

Faith Coalition

TO STOP GENOCIDE IN BURMA

Interfaith Coalition to Stop Genocide in Burma Overview of Crimes Against Rohingya

Women Victims of Violence

“Rape has been a prominent and devastating feature of the Burmese Military campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya. The Burmese military’s barbaric acts of violence have left countless women and girls brutally harmed and traumatized.”

- Skye Wheeler (Women’s rights emergencies researcher at Human Rights Watch)

The Burmese Military has used mass rape and sexual violence as a devastating weapon for genocide. At least 52% of Rohingya women refugees interviewed by the UN reported being victims of sexual violence and rape; the actual number is likely much higher. In Oct 22 - 28 alone, 306 gender-based violence cases were reported, 96% of which required emergency medical care. Survivors now further risk abuse and exploitation at the hands of traffickers.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) interviewed 52 Rohingya women and girls who had fled to Bangladesh, including 29 rape survivors, 3 of whom were girls under 18. The rape survivors came from 19 villages in Rakhine State.

In every case reported to HRW, the rapists were uniformed Burmese security forces, almost all military personnel. Ethnic Rakhine villagers, in apparent coordination with Burmese military, also sexually harassed the Rohingya women and girls. Adding to the trauma and stigma of rape is the loss of their income-earning male family members - 80% of these new arrivals are women and children, and their menfolk have been killed, or are unaccounted for.

First Hand Accounts:

“They wanted to terrorize the population, so they took some women into... mosques and gang raped them while other women were outside and listening. They wanted the women outside to know what was happening so they were terrorized. They would have around eight women and twenty men from the military in the mosque, and the men would take a turn with each woman.”

Myanmar’s consistent use of mass rape as a military weapon in ethnic conflicts was vehemently denounced by Aung San Suu Kyi before taking power. For decades, the Army has held Muslim women in Rakhine State as sex slaves, with many reports of soldiers detaining Rohingya women for weeks on military bases, where they were gang-raped and abused, and many women died.

Further reading:

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/11/16/burma-widespread-rape-rohingya-women-girls>

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/rape-rohingya-women-sweeping-methodical-ap-171211063236832.html>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/25/rohingya-children-fled-myanmar-violence-charity>

<http://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/statement/statement-by-the-special-representative-of-the-secretary-general-on-sexual-violence-in-conflict-ms-pramila-patten-security-council-briefing-on-myanmar-12-december-2017/>

<https://kaladanpress.files.wordpress.com/2018/02/rapebycommandweb3.pdf>

Tula Toli Massacre

“They just kept catching men, making them kneel down and killing them. Then they put their bodies on a pile. First they shot them, and if they were still alive they were killed with machetes.... It took them one-and-a-half hours to carry all the bodies.”

-Shawfika, 24, who witnessed her husband and father-in-law killed.

The Rohingya have long been denied citizenship and basic rights, and have been systematically persecuted by the Myanmar government. This fact leads the United Nations’ top human rights official to refer to the violence against the minority Muslim Rohingya as “a textbook example of ethnic cleansing”.¹

One of the most egregiously vicious attacks occurred on August 30, 2017 at the village of Tula Toli, near the Bangladesh–Myanmar border. Burmese soldiers, with the help of local Rakhines, attacked and burned the village to the ground, and massacred over 1,000 Rohingya inhabitants. Although journalists have not been permitted into that area, satellite images confirm the destruction, and those who fled shared eyewitness accounts of mass slaughter, rape and mutilation of the Rohingya villagers there.

These survivors also recounted numerous stories of soldiers and local Buddhist mobs stealing valuables from the Rohingya even days before the attack. They told of an early-morning campaign by the army that killed dozens, including the elderly grandmother of one man, Petam Ali, who was decapitated and then burned. Others said soldiers callously drowned babies and toddlers in the river surrounding the village.²

These horrors are unfortunately not unusual and certainly not confined to this one village, but rather shows the widespread pattern of the behaviour of the Myanmar soldiers and their Rakhine allies. No one can stay silent in the face of the atrocities visited on such innocent Rohingya villages all across Burma.

Further Reading:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/19/myanmar-satellite-imagery-confirms-rohingya-village-of-tula-toli-raided>

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/12/19/burma-methodical-massacre-rohingya-village>

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/22/witness-carnage-burmas-rakhine-state>

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=HRp0o0fzB2I>

¹<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/19/myanmar-satellite-imagery-confirms-rohingya-village-of-tula-toli-raided>

²

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/19/myanmar-satellite-imagery-confirms-rohingya-village-of-tula-toli-raided>

The Lost State of Rohingya

Bubba Murray

Since August 2017 alone, hundreds of thousands of Rohingya have been driven from their homes by the brutal Myanmar regime, which in a bitter irony is now de facto led by Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi who had been honored with that prize for opposing the Human Rights abuses of her current Government partners. Almost 700,000 Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh to escape a military campaign of atrocity and scorched earth that destroyed over 350 Rohingya villages, along with mass rape and mass murder.

Amnesty International recently reported that Myanmar's security forces have begun bulldozing houses and are constructing new security facilities in the western Rakhine state. Their goal is two-fold: destroy evidence which could prove a genocide, and create barriers for repatriation of the displaced Rohingya.

Amnesty's report, *Remaking Rakhine State*, shows the razing of Rohingya villages and new construction on top of former Rohingya villages and property have intensified since January 2018. Such building on the ashes of Rohingya villages and land make it unlikely refugees could return to their homes.

The report, based on satellite imagery and witness testimony of Rohingya refugees, also describes the construction of three army outposts since January. Amnesty crisis response director Tirana Hassan states, "We are seeing in Rakhine State a land grab by the military on a dramatic scale. New bases are being erected to house the same security forces that committed crimes against humanity against Rohingya."

In January Myanmar and Bangladesh had announced a repatriation deal, but human rights groups worldwide and the Rohingya refugees have raised serious and unresolved concerns about that agreement.

Amnesty notes Myanmar's "reshaping" of Rakhine State appears designed to accommodate more security forces and non-Rohingya villagers, and to deter refugees from returning. "Rohingya who fled death and destruction at the hands of the security forces are unlikely to find the prospect of living in close proximity to those same forces conducive to a safe return," the group said, "especially given the continuing lack of accountability for (preventing) human rights violations."

References:

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/03/myanmar-building-military-bases-rohingya-villages-amnesty-180312150129214.html>

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-43367720>

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/03/myanmar-military-land-grab-as-security-forces-build-bases-on-torched-rohingya-villages/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/12/myanmar-builds-military-bases-on-the-site-of-rohingya-homes-and-mosques-report>

The Ongoing Discourse on Rohingya Repatriation

In late December 2017 the Government of Bangladesh announced that it had prepared a list of [100,000 Rohingya refugees](#) to be repatriated in a first phase of their deal with Myanmar, which was set to begin on January 22, 2018. Though implementation has been [delayed](#), in mid-February 2018 Bangladesh authorities handed Myanmar a list of over [8,000 Rohingya](#) that they plan to send back.

Despite the assurances of the Bangladesh government, many Rohingya fear that the 700,000 refugees that have fled into Bangladesh this year will be eventually forced to return to an extremely dangerous and uncertain situation. Especially given the role that the Myanmar military has played in recent mass atrocities, [forced repatriation](#) (or “refoulement”) would be cruel and [contrary](#) to international law.

Under international law, refugees have the right to be repatriated in their original villages and homes. Instead, the Burmese authorities have spoken about isolating any returnees in “model villages” a form of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Camp, some of which had been constructed evidently with funds [from Japan](#). The Myanmar government has already announced that it is seizing the lands and properties left behind by displaced Rohingya. Under law, such properties become property of the state and in Myanmar there has been no positive public discussion of either restoration or reparation. On March 12, 2018 Amnesty International released a new [report](#) detailing how military land-grabbing is erasing traces of Rohingya villages and building up a military presence in Rakhine State. Other [research](#) has indicated connections between massive land-grabbing and the economic exploitation of local resources.

UN agencies have also been excluded from the Rohingya Repatriation Deal. Current discussions at the United Nations are [promoting a role](#) for the UNHCR and other international agencies to monitor and implement Rohingya integration and peaceful coexistence in Myanmar, according to the plan for co-existence envisioned by the Rakhine Commission led by Kofi-Annan. Following the five-point plan of that Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina articulated in the Fall of 2017, other advocacy groups assert that safe zones and peacekeepers will be required for peaceful repatriation.

Over the decades there have been at least four mass expulsions of Rohingya into Bangladesh, but none of previous repatriation agreements solved the root causes of displacement: comprehensive [civil rights restrictions](#) that keep the Rohingya minority stateless. Repatriation must be linked to the restoration of Rohingya rights, return of land and property as well as safety guarantees.

Further Readings:

<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/south-asia/bangladesh-targets-100000-for-first-rohingya-repatriation>
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/22/rohingya-muslims-repatriation-back-to-myanmar-postponed>

<http://theconversation.com/myanmar-and-bangladesh-strike-a-shameful-deal-on-rohingya-refugees-88041>

<http://openmigration.org/en/op-ed/the-point-of-no-return-the-case-against-rohingya-repatriation/>

<http://burmacampaign.org.uk/india-and-japan-end-support-for-rohingya-repatriation/>

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa16/8018/2018/en/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2017/jan/04/is-rohingya-persecution-caused-by-business-interests-rather-than-religion>

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-repatriation-rohingya/u-n-calls-on-myanmar-for-unhindered-access-to-rohingya-camps-idUSKBN1FD0QE>

http://www.fortifyrights.org/downloads/Yale_Persecution_of_the_Rohingya_October_2015.pdf

THE APARTHEID BEFORE THE GENOCIDE

The following comparison of the Buddhist and Rohingya population illustrates how Burmese government policies violate Rohingya's basic rights

BUDDHIST NEIGHBORS	ROHINGYA NEIGHBORS
Are Citizens	Citizenship taken away in 1982
Have one physician available per 681 people ¹	Have one physician per 158,000 people ¹
Have the ability to live and own their own homes	120,000 are in Burmese concentration camps, 1 million in Bangladeshi camps and 1 million dispersed elsewhere ²
Can marry without a license ⁴	Ten years imprisonment for those who marry without permission. Permission is rarely granted ⁴
Can have as many children as they wish ⁴	Are allowed only two children per family ⁴
Can attend school as they please ⁴	Ban from entering school buildings since 1982 ³
Can be employed	Cannot be employed ⁴
Can worship freely	Banned from the entering a mosque since 2012 ³
Can travel freely ⁴	Cannot travel freely ³

1. Mahmood, Syef S, et al. "The Rohingya people of Myanmar: health, human rights, and identity." *The Lancet*, vol. 389, no. 10081, 1 Dec. 2016, [www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(16\)00646-2/references](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(16)00646-2/references).
2. Ellick, Adam B. "21st-Century Concentration Camps." *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, www.nytimes.com/video/opinion/100000002939059/21st-century-concentration-camps.html.
3. "Amnesty International." Myanmar: Rohingya trapped in dehumanising apartheid regime, *Amnesty International*, 21 Nov. 2017, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/11/myanmar-rohingya-trapped-in-dehumanising-apartheid-regime/.
4. Lindblom, Alina , et al. "Persecution of the Rohingya Muslims: Is Genocide occurring in Myanmar's Rakhine State? A Legal Analysis." *Fortify Rights*, Allard K. Lowenstein International Human Rights Clinic at Yale Law School, Oct. 2015, www.fortifyrights.org/downloads/Yale_Persecution_of_the_Rohingya_October_2015.pdf