THE ROHINGYA CRISIS IN MYANMAR
Magnitude at a Global Scale

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Rohingya ethnic minority – indigenous people of Arakan

The multiple waves of violence against Rohingya ethnic minority in Myanmar and the Government of Myanmar asking the international community not to use the term “Rohingya” have renewed the curiosity at the international stage – who are Rohingya? Rohingya people are indigenous to Arakan (re-named Rakhine state by the Myanmar military dictatorship) in the western region of Myanmar. They are one of the two major ethnic groups of Arakan, and the other Buddhist Rakhine, along with a relatively small number of other minorities such as Kamen, Daingnet, Mro, Thet, and others. The word “Rohingya” is derived from the word ‘Rohang,’ which was the original and ancient name of Arakan. In the medieval works of poets of Arakan and Chittagong regions, such as Alaol, Qazi Daulat, Mardan, Shamsher Ali, Ainuddin, Abdul Ghani and others, Arakan is frequently referred to as Roshang, Roshango Des and Roshango Shar.

Currently, the Rohingya Muslims number approximately 3 million worldwide. Due to the persecution, violence, and ethnic cleansing policy of the Government of Myanmar, nearly 1.5 million Rohingya, have been forced out of their ancestral homeland and they are currently living in various parts of the world, including the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia, Far East, Australia, Europe, and North America. The Government of Myanmar continues to fabricate the etymology of Rohingya and the demography of Arakan and denies their ethnic identity.

The original inhabitants of pre-Islamic Rohang were Hindus, Buddhists and animists. From the pre-Islamic period, the region was very familiar to the Arab seafarers. Many settled in the Arakan region, and mixed with the local population; thus leading to the present stock of the indigenous population known as ethnic Rohingya. Some historians mention that the first Muslims to settle in Arakan were Arabs, under the leadership of Muhammad ibn Hanafiya in the late 7th century (C.E.). He married the queen Kaiyapuri, who had converted to Islam. Her people then embraced Islam en masse. Dedicating to them, the names of the two peaks (Tonki) of a mountain in Arakan, known as Hanifa Tonki and Kaiyapuri Tonki, still exist.
The second major influx of early Muslims dates back to the 8th century (C.E.). The British Myanmar Gazetteer (1957) says, in 788 AD, Mahataing Sandya ascended the throne of Vesali, founded a new city (Vesali) on the site of old Ramawadi and died after a reign of twenty-two years. During his reign several ships were wrecked on Rambree Island and the crews, said to have been Mohammedans (referring to Muslims), were sent to Arakan Proper and settled in villages. They were reportedly Moor Arab Muslims.

The third major influx came after 1404 A.D., when the Arakan king, dethroned by the Burmese, took asylum in Gaur (the capital of Bengal) and pleaded for help from Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah, the Sultan of Bengal, to regain the lost throne. The Sultan sent tens of thousands of soldiers to conquer Arakan. Many of these Muslim soldiers subsequently settled there.

Later, other ethnic groups, namely - the Mughals (i.e, with the flight of Mughal prince Shah Shuja in 1660), Turks, Persians, Central Asians, Pathans and Bengalis - also moved into the territory and mixed with the Rohingya people. The spread of Islam in the Arakan (and along the southern coastal areas of Bangladesh) mostly happened through the sea-borne Sufis and merchants. This fact is testified by the darghas (shrines), which are dotted along the coast of Arakan.

![Ancient 14th Century Badar Makam Mosque in Arakan, Myanmar](image)

The Burmese historian U Kyi reportedly wrote “The superior morality of those devout Muslims attracted large number of people towards Islam who embraced it en masse”. Hence, the Rohingya Muslims, whose settlements in Arakan date back to the 7th century C.E., are an ethnic group that developed from different stocks of people. To date, the ethnic Rohingya Muslims maintain a rich language, culture, and devout Islamic religious identity.
Rohingya citizenship, constituency, and the electoral process

During the past several decades the Government of Myanmar has concealed the fact that the ethnicity of Rohingya was recognized by the democratic Government of Myanmar many years prior to overthrowing of the civilian government by the Burmese military. As a national race, Rohingya people held the National Registration Certificate (NRC) like any other ethnic group of Myanmar since the system of NRC was instituted. Since the independence of Myanmar, there have been numerous Rohingya leaders who have contested and/or elected to serve the country and their constituency in Arakan, from the Civilian Government in 1950s and 1960s to the Military’s State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC)’s multi-party national election in May 1990 and the recent Union Parliament and State Assembly until 2015.

In the 1990 National Election, two Rohingya political parties, Students and Youth League for Mayu Development (SYLMD) and the National Democratic and Human Rights (NDPHR), were reportedly formed. The NDPHR won all four seats in Maung Daw and Buthidaung constituencies. In each constituency, the two parties received over 80 per cent of the total votes. The turnout in both constituencies reportedly was consistent with the national average - 70 percent of the eligible voters. The NDPHR also had candidates contested in four additional electoral districts – Kyuktaw (1), Minbya (1), Mrauk U (2) and Sittwe (2), and they received an average of 17 per cent of the votes despite the heavy population of Buddhist Rakhine in these districts.

In the 2010 Election, two Rohingya political parties - the National Democratic Party for Development (NDPD) and National Democratic and Peace Party (NDPP) - have contested. Additionally, there were several Rohingya candidates from the Military’s Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) and some independent Rohingya candidates also contested in the election. Candidates from the USDP were elected, three to the Union Parliament, and two to the Arakan State Assembly. In 2015, the military-led USDP Government of Myanmar revoked the voting rights of Rohingya and therefore, no Rohingya candidate was allowed to contest in the National Election in 2015.

The elected Rohingya parliamentarians from pre-independence to 2015:

**Pre-Independence period**
1947
1. U Sultan Ahmed (Constituent Assembly - Maungdaw)
2. U Abdul Gaffer (Constituent Assembly - Buthidaung)

**Post-Independence period**
1952
1. U Sultan Ahmed (Maungdaw-North)
2. U Zohra Begum (alias) Daw Aye Nyunt (Maungdaw South; House of Deputies)
3. U Abul Bashar (Buthidaung)
4. U Abdul Gaffer (Maungdaw/Buthidaung, including House of Nationality in 1956)

1956
1. U Sultan Ahmed (Maungdaw North)
2. U Abul Khair (Maungdaw South)
3. U Azhar Meah (Buthidaung North)
4. U Abdul Bashar (Buthidaung South)
1960
1. U Rashid (Maungdaw North)
2. U Abul Khair (Maungdaw South)
3. U Abul Bashar (Buthidaung South)
4. U Abdul Subhan (House of Nationalities/The Upper House)

1. Dr. Abdur Rahim (Maungdaw South; 1974)
2. U Abul Hussein (Buthidaung; 1974)
3. U Tun Aung Kyaw (*alias* Abdul Hai (Maungdaw South; 1979)

1990 (*Elected but did not take office due to the military coup against Aung San Suu Kyi*)
1. U Fazal Ahmed (Maungdaw South)
2. U Mohammed Ibrahim (*alias*) U Chit Lwin (Maungdaw North)
3. U Kyaw Min (*alias*) Shamshul Anwar-ul-Huq (Buthidaung North)
4. U Noor Ahmed (Buthidaung South)

2010 (*First election in democratic transition*)
1. U Htay Win (*alias*) Zahidur Rahman (Maungdaw; Amyotha Hluttaw/Upper House)
2. U Aung Zaw Win (*alias*) Zakir Hussain (Maungdaw; Pyithu Hluttaw/Lower House)
3. U Shwe Maung (*alias*) Abdur Razak (Buthidaung Pyithu Hluttaw/Lower House)
4. Dr. Bashir Ahmed (Buthidaung; Pyinay Hluttaw/State Assembly)
   a. U Aung Myo Myint (*alias*) Mohammed Jahangir (Maungdaw; Pyinay Hluttaw/State Assembly)

**Degrading the Rohingya citizenship**

The Government of Myanmar is poised to destroy the very identity of Rohingya ethnic minority in Arakan by labeling the ethic group as illegal Bengali immigrants from Bangladesh. During the past five decades, attempts by the Government of Myanmar of military dictatorship to label Rohingya as illegal immigrants have reoccurred several times in various forms of various names such as Kalar, Kawtaw, Nawa, Chittagonian, Bengali, and others in the past even before the national census of 2014. The national census of 2014 was held with the financial and technical assistance from the United Nations Population Funds, European Union, and a number of NGOs through an agreement signed by the Government of Myanmar that every individual will be allowed to self-identify himself/herself with regards to ethnic and religious identity in the data collection form. However, the government reneged the agreement and Rohingya were denied from self-identification, forcing the term ‘Bengali’ to be put on the form. The attempts by the Government did not succeed as Rohingya people rejected the move by the Government. In a pilot project in IDP camps in Myebon Township, a group of ethnic Kaman Muslims were deceitfully mislabeled by the authorities as ‘Bengali’ or ‘Bengali-Kamen’ or ‘Bengali-Bengali-Kamen’ and issued the red card (citizenship) or the green card (naturalized citizenship). It should be noted that Kaman Muslims are one of the 135 ethnic groups recognized by the military regime with full citizenship. Despite issuance of the cards, no one was allowed to leave the IDP camps.
and return home in their respective townships. The authorities have threatened the Rohingya with dire consequences such as placing them in internment camps where they will be detained indefinitely, if they continue to reject the term ‘Bengali’. There are reports that victims are tortured and beaten when they refused to write Bengali in the census form. The authorities produced forms that a group of 34 people in a village in Maungdaw Township have registered as Bengali in June of 2013; however, those registrants dispute the claim by the authorities indicating that they were told to leave the ethnicity space blank.

The Junta’s 1982 Citizenship law was enacted, primarily targeting the Rohingya, after the repatriation of over 200,000 Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh who were earlier forced out of their homes in Arakan as a result of the ethnic cleansing operation known as Nagamin Sitsinye (Operation King Dragon). Following the failure of the Nagamin Sitsinye, the Myanmar Junta reached an agreement with the Government of Bangladesh, and the Rohingya refugees were repatriated to their original homes in Arakan because of the evidence that they are Myanmar nationals. The Junta’s 1982 Citizenship law classifies the citizenship into three categories, and the description of each category is quite intricate (details of the categories may be located at http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?docid=3ae6b4f71b and various other locations).

Brief description of each category is as follows:

- **Class I: Full Citizen**
  Nationals and ethnic groups that have settled in any of the territories included within the State as their permanent home from a period anterior to 1823 A.D. are Myanmar citizens. The Council of State may decide whether any ethnic group is national or not.

- **Class II: Associate Citizen**
  Applicants for citizenship under the Union Citizenship Act, 1948, conforming to the stipulations and qualifications may be determined as associate citizens by the Central Body.

- **Class III: Naturalized Citizen**
  Persons who have entered and resided in the State anterior to 4th January, 1948, and their offspring’s born within the State may, if they have not yet applied under the union Citizenship Act, 1948, apply for naturalized citizenship to the Central Body, furnishing conclusive evidence.

It should be noted that there are numerous provisions in Class II and Class III Citizenship for revocation of the citizenship:

Chapter III Section 30(c) states that an Associate Citizen be entitled to enjoy the rights of a citizen under the laws of the State, *with the exception of the rights stipulated from time to time by the Council of State*. Chapter III Section 35 (a-f) and Chapter IV (a-f) that are also noteworthy. *(See the details at the aforementioned URL: www.refworld.org)*
NVC The National Verification process – The motive behind

The notorious NVC also known as ‘National Verification’ process, originally devised by the Military dictatorship, is a scheme by the Government to smear the long history of the indigenous Rohingya ethnic group in Arakan through false allegation of being illegal Bengali immigrants. The ‘verification’ was originally crafted by the Myanmar Military dictatorship as a strategic plan to further cement the on-going violations of the political and human rights of Rohingya in Arakan aiming at consolidation of the government policies on political and basic human rights violations. These include all forms of restrictions placed on Rohingya, arbitrary imprisonment, and systematic confiscation of NRC (Nationality Registration Certificate) and White Cards (used for voting in the National Election) that have not been turned in by the Rohingya people. The Government of Myanmar has attempted to mislead the Rohingya people and the international community by referring the verification process analogous to Greencard (permanent residency card) in the United States as “pathway to citizenship”. Government of Myanmar has maintained that the NVC is the requirement to naturalization. The naturalization scheme is a deceptive move because the naturalization in Myanmar means Class III Citizenship that has no equal right and it can be revoked by the Government if deemed necessary. Nonetheless, only the application of NVC-holding Rohingya applicants that are approved by the government will receive Class III Naturalized citizenship in a best-case scenario. The Government is requiring Rohingya to submit documentary evidence that they are from Arakan. The Myanmar military has destroyed the documents during the assaults and burning of Rohingya villages that has caused over a million Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh, India, Thailand, Malaysia, and several other countries. The applications for NVC and naturalization will be certainly denied, if any of the Rohingya choses to apply, because such documentary evidences no longer exist. Besides, the Rohingya people categorically reject the NVC process that evidently intended to undermine the political and human rights of the Rohingya. Currently, the civilian Government of Myanmar continues to impose the NVC process crafted by the Military; however, Rohingya people maintained their opposition to this campaign and refused to cooperate with the government.

Myanmar authorities and armed police force Rohingya to write Bengali in various forms
The human right violations against Rohingya have spiraled since the confiscation of NRCs in recent years. A special paramilitary unit (formerly NASAKA, now renamed BGP) was deployed in Rohingya areas to remove all the evidences and documentation of Rohingya ancestry and residency for centuries in their native Arakan. NASAKA has conducted operation of elimination of the evidence at least twice a year. The house-to-house operations are so vicious that any family member in Rohingya household not present during the surprised raids or scheduled investigation are removed from the household list, known as Intaung Zu Sayin. During the past several years, tens of thousands of names from the family household list were deleted simply because the individuals are not present at home during the raids or scheduled investigations. The verification process has also been linked to the lack of progress in repatriation of Rohingya IDPs to their place of origin in various townships in Arakan.

Persecution of Rohingya in Arakan

The United Nations describes the Rohingya ethnic minority in Arakan as one of the most persecuted people on surface of the earth. Various experts and analysts in the international community describe it as genocide, outright genocide, hidden genocide, slow-burning genocide, persecution, ethnic cleansing, and others, based on intensity of the campaigns against Rohingya by the government personnel and armed forces at any given time and event over the past half-a-century. The atrocities by the government forces have often risen to a level that some experts have described it crime against humanity. The persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar is systematic, systemic, and intricate. It did not receive widespread attention from the international community until June of 2012, when gruesome massacres of Muslim pilgrims by Buddhist Rakhine took place in the Southern Arakan city of Taungoke. Though anti-Islamic and anti-Rohingya sentiments in the Buddhist community and the Government existed during pre- and post-colonial period in Myanmar, the systematic ethnic cleansing of Rohingya by the Government of Myanmar did not surface until 1962. According to the United Nations, the Rohingya people are one of the most persecuted people in the world. Although the plight of Rohingya has been confined by and large to Arakan state, during the past half-a-century, it is no longer an issue within the territory of Myanmar, and has now become a regional issue in Southeast Asia, and it is rapidly reaching a global scale as a humanitarian and political issue. The Rohingya issues have reached the ASEAN Summit, OIC Council of Foreign Ministers Conference, United Nations Security Council, United Nations General Assembly, United Nations Human Rights Council, United States Congress, Canadian Parliament, European Union, and the Government and non-Government institutions in numerous countries worldwide.

Violence, atrocities, and terror against Rohingya

The violence against Rohingya has been the centerpiece of the persecution policy aiming at terrorizing the Rohingya population that is aimed at setting off mass exodus of Rohingya from Arakan. The single objective of that is reduction of Rohingya population in Arakan or possibly eliminate through a multitude of highly sophisticated strategies that makes the current situation in Arakan immensely intricate. The Myanmar military regime’s attempts for elimination of the Rohingya population in Arakan began in 1962 when former dictator General Ne Win overthrew
the democratically elected Government of U Nu that had recognized Rohingya as one of the ethnic minorities of Myanmar with full citizenship as a national race.

The Myanmar ultra-nationalist military regime has always perceived the Rohingya ethnic minority a major obstacle to its quest for national purity of Burmese race, culture, and Buddhist religion. The indigeneity and ethnicity of Rohingya is signified by their deep-rooted cultural, linguistic, and religious attributes that are squarely viewed by the Myanmar military and the radical Buddhist elements in Myanmar with tremendous hostility. A great number of Buddhist in Myanmar are peace-loving and highly tolerant to people of other faiths; however the militancy in a particular segment of Theravada sect of Burmese Buddhist extremists in Myanmar, dating back to the pre-colonial British era. It has surged significantly during the previous successive military regimes as it has provided the fertile ground for the rapid growth of ultra-nationalist ideology. The Military Junta elevated the anti-Rohingya and anti-Islam sentiments to an even greater level with systematic approach through imposition of regional policies in Northern Arakan state that specifically target the Rohingya. The regional policy persecution has been the driving force for waves of violence against Rohingya in Arakan.

The primary reasons for terrorized persecution of Rohingya in Myanmar are:

- Part of a national policy of purity of Myanmar race and religion–Arakan as a model system
- Destruction of Rohingya ethnic identity and elimination of Rohingya from Arakan as they are perceived by the Government as an obstacle to implementation of its policy of purity
- Destruction of Islamic identity in Arakan, a foundation of Rohingya cultural and religious attributes
- The divide-and-rule policy of the Government of Myanmar in Arakan that effectively weakens both the Rohingya and Rakhine communities – a strategy aiming at marginalizing
Rohingya while deterring Rakhine from seeking greater autonomy or independence (reclaiming the old Rakhine Kingdom from occupation by Myanmar)

The masterminds of the violence

The persecution of Rohingya by the Burmese military is so intricate that it is often perplexing to many experts in the international community. During the 50-year reigns by the military regime, its dictatorial policy with widespread persecution of Rohingya has provided the fertile ground for the growth of ultra-nationalist movement at the grassroot Burmese population targeting religious minorities, particularly the Rohingya Muslims of Arakan.

The persecution of Rohingya in Arakan initiated by the former military dictator General Ne Win has been driven by the successive military dictators committing terror and atrocities against Rohingya men, women, and children while continuing systematic basic human rights violations against Rohingya such as deprivations of freedom of movement, freedom to worship, right to marry, denial of basic education and health care, destruction of places of worship, confiscation of lands, building settlements (Natala) of “Buddhist Magh” illegal immigrants from Bangladesh on Rohingya lands, arbitrary arrests, extortion, rape, sex slavery, and aiding human traffickers by government officials and armed forces along with Buddhist Rakhine mobs.

During the several waves of violence against Rohingya in Arakan beginning from June 2012, all the evidences of sources of violence have pointed at the operatives of the Myanmar military establishment orchestrating the violence while the military had referred to it as sectarian violence. However, in the recent violence that started in October 2016, the government forces were directly involved in the violence. In fact, all the attacks were pre-planned, well-orchestrated, and carried out to trigger mass exodus of Rohingya from Arakan to neighboring countries in the region. Several NGOs, international human rights groups, and United Nations agencies have documented involvement of Government security apparatus in killing the Muslims and abetting the crimes committed by Buddhist Rakhine mobs. On July 12, 2012, then President of Myanmar, U Thein Sein, the highest office holder in the Government of Myanmar, have reportedly told the UN High Commissioner for Refugees that:

“...These people (Rohingya) pose a threat to national security and that they should be transferred to in any third country that is willing to take them”

A number of ministers and senior officials of the President Thein Sein’s Government and the Military Chief also have made incendiary statements against Rohingya ethnic minority, often publicly calling them ‘Bengali’ or ‘Illegal Bengali Immigrants’. Such statements have fueled the violence against Rohingya. It should be noted that ‘Bengali’ is a derogatory term used by the military government and Buddhist community in Myanmar (analogous to the N-word in the West). Use of such derogatory term by government officials and Buddhist extremists is the center piece of their hate speech that has been the catalyst for violence and terror against Rohingya.

Self-identification by Rohingya people and the renaming Rohingya as ‘Bengali’ by Buddhist Rakhine extremists and some government officials have continued to further polarize the two communities. In June of 2016, as a step forward to resolve the issue in Arakan, Foreign Minister/State Counselor, Nobel Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, of the new Government has urged the people of Myanmar and the international community to focus on peace and stability in Arakan as a priority over the ethnic name terminology. At the same time, the Foreign Minister acknowledged that any community around the world has the right to self-identify their ethnic identity. Subsequently, the Buddhist Rakhine extremists have begun to wage a war on this small
step taken by Aung San Suu Kyi. The Buddhist Rakhine extremists and radical monks had organized public demonstrations against the proposal by the new Government to solve the issue and bring peace to Arakan.

Anti-Rohingya rally by Buddhist extremists and monks

**Renewed violence against Rohingya – a turning point**

The violence against Rohingya in 2012 and 2013, resulting in uprooting of thousands of villages and displacement of over 250,000 Rohingya internally and externally, had only limited effects on the destabilization of Northern Arakan where Rohingya are the overwhelming majority, particularly in Maungdaw and Buthidaung Townships. There have been mountains of evidence that the extremist elements in the Government of Myanmar and military have been eying at Northern Arakan for destabilization and population displacement as it did elsewhere in Arakan in 2012 and 2013.

On October 9, 2016, an armed clash between a group of Rohingya and Myanmar paramilitary border police (BGP) took place in Maungdaw North in Northern Arakan state. According to the accounts by the Burmese Government, 9 members of the Burmese Police Force and 8 insurgents were killed. Following the armed clash with insurgents the Myanmar Government armed forces have begun to assault the Rohingya villages in Maungdaw North. In recent days the number of casualties in both Myanmar Government forces (combined military, border guard police, and local police) and the insurgent sides became murky and turned out to be questionable. Strange and contradicting information is being released by the Government.

According to sources from Myanmar and international analysts, some key Myanmar military operatives were implicated in creating the violent situation in Northern Rakhine state in waves of violence in 2012 and 2013. Reports from the grounds also suggest that that the Rohingya insurgent group was trapped by the Myanmar military with the aimed at creating instability in Maungdaw and Buthidaung townships that have been relatively trouble free in the past.
Spread of violence from Arakan to elsewhere in Myanmar

While the international community is deeply engaged in Arakan dealing with humanitarian crises, the Buddhist extremist elements with alleged involvement by the Myanmar military operatives, instigated violence against Pathi Muslim Muslims in Central Myanmar, as a diversionary tactic. As a result of the anti-Muslim violence in Meikhtila in Central Myanmar over one hundred Pathi Muslim were killed, some of them burned alive. Muslim businesses, homes, mosques, and religious schools were reduced to ashes overnight. On April 30, 2013 anti-Muslim violence broke out in the town of Okkan, north of Yangon. Several persons were killed and houses, mosques and shops were burned down.

Muslim houses and a mosque torched by Buddhist mobs and monks

Subsequent events of violence in other cities ensued in the following weeks. On May 2, 2013, in the mining town of Hpakan in Northern Kachin State, and on May 28, 2013 in Lashio in Shan State. When the attention from the international community shifted to the violence in Central Myanmar, the violence against Rohingya resumed in Arakan – this time in Sandoway in Southern Arakan. The violence started in Sandoway with the killing of a 93-year old Rohingya elderly woman. The violence continues, and on 24 August anti-Muslim violence erupted in Kanblu in Sagaing region in Central Myanmar.

On January 13, 2014, Myanmar government forces and Rakhine mobs jointly carried out a five-day raid in the village of Du Chiratan in Maungdaw South in Arakan on the pretext of searching unauthorized mobile phones. Violence began when Burmese forces inappropriately touched Rohingya women during body search for mobile phones. Over 80 Rohingya were killed
during the five-day assault including women and children while the villages were sealed off by the Myanmar armed forces. The operation of humanitarian group, Doctors without Borders (MSF), was shut down by local the Burmese Government officials because it reportedly treated 23 injured Rohingya from Du Chiratan. Witnesses also reported that truckloads of dead and mutilated bodies of Rohingya men have been removed from the vehicles and buried in mass graves.

In June of 2016, Buddhist mobs led by monks stormed the mosque in Thuye Thama in Pego Division north of Yangon and a mosque in Lone Khin village of Hpakant Township, Kachin State in Northern Myanmar.

**Myanmar military assault on Rohingya civilian population – a landmark crisis**

A major humanitarian catastrophe was set off by assaults on Rohingya civilian population by the Myanmar military in August 2017 following an attack on Myanmar police posts by a Rohingya insurgent group, known as Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army. Initially, on August 28, 2017, the Military began to selectively torch villages in Maungdaw. The entire Ward No. 5 of Maungdaw town, and a number of villages including Bakaguna, Thio Kyun, Nwayong Daung, Kwaisarabil, Kyiganbyin, Myothugyi, Dongsay, Chauk Shoung have been reduced to ashes. On January 18, Myanmar authorities have reportedly issued eviction notices to the Rohingya families of 11 remaining homes in Quarter #5 in Maungdaw East that were not affected by the arson by the Government forces and the militia.

In a span of three weeks, the attack by the military had destroyed 354 Rohingya villages and over 750,000 Rohingya were forced to flee to safety in Bangladesh across the border - now in camps in Southern Bangladesh, one of the most crowded refugee camps in the world. Over 70% of the refugees in Bangladesh camps are women and children. Destruction of homes and atrocities against Rohingya civilians in Buthidaung and Rathedaung townships have spiraled during that period. Several thousand men, women, and children have been killed, hundreds of women and girls were raped, some mutilated, and thousands tortured.

On November 27, 2017, the governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh reached an agreement for return of the Rohingya refugees which clearly states “dignified, safe, and voluntary return to their original homes”. On the contrary, while cooperating with the Government of Bangladesh for repatriation of Rohingya, the Myanmar armed forces continues to demolish homes in Rohingya villages that are still intact or only partially damaged. Further, on January 14, 2018, there were reportedly new arrivals of Rohingya (estimated over 600) in Maungdaw South from Buthidaung South, on their way to Bangladesh. The newly arrived expressed major security problems in their villages in Buthidaung South where family members have been attacked and houses have been looted.

Nearly three years after signing the agreement, there is no sign of repatriation. There are reports of non-conducive conditions on the ground in Arakan. The situation on the ground in Arakan has not improved. There is no plan of repatriation of the 142,000 internally displaced.
Bangladesh hosting over a million refugees in camps in Cox’s bazaar district

persons (IDPs) from the camps in Arakan to their home by the Government of Myanmar. The original homes of the IDPs are as little as 7 kilometers away from their camps in Arakan. In fact, the repatriation of the IDPs to their original homes will be much easier and straightforward task than repatriation from Bangladesh as there is no need for negotiated settlement with another host country. The several IDP camps in Arakan are turning into ghetto with squalid conditions. Further, Myanmar Government has been reportedly building large internment camps with barbwire fences in Maungdaw North and small prefabricated housing units elsewhere on salt marsh lands isolated areas.

Of a total Rohingya population of over 3 million only little over half-a-million remains in Arakan. Their safety and security increasing becoming a major concern due to a highly volatile condition on the ground. Since January 5, 2019, the armed conflict between the Myanmar military and ethnic Buddhist Rakhine insurgent group known as the Arakan Army have escalated and spread to several townships in Arakan. Casualties and loss of lives in Rohingya villages in Arakan remains a serious problem amidst the armed conflict. A number of Rohingya farmers, loggers, and fishermen in Buthidaung township have been reportedly killed by the Myanmar armed forces by shelling villages in discriminately with heavy artillery. Rape cases by the Myanmar armed forces in Rohingya villages in the conflict zone is reportedly rising again in an alarming rate.

Uprooting and displacement of Rohingya population at an alarming rate

As of January 5, 2017, over 800 innocent Rohingya civilians have been reportedly killed by the Myanmar armed forces; however, Myanmar government has downplayed the number to less than 100. The overwhelming number of killing of Rohingya civilians were done in summary execution and atrocities. Over 2,000 Rohingya homes from 14 villages have been torched by the Myanmar armed forces. Of the 14 villages two villages were completely burnt down where
not a single Rohingya home was spared. Over 40,000 Rohingya have been displaced internally from October to December of 2016 in Northern Arakan adding to already existing 140,000 in camps elsewhere in Arakan. Additionally over 30,000 have crossed into Bangladesh for safety adding to the 250,000 Rohingya in refugees camps in Southern Bangladesh.

In December 2016, the Government of Myanmar has shifted the strategy of uprooting the Rohingya families from torching the homes to demolition. As of January 8, 2017, over 3,000 Rohingya homes in Maungdaw township have been demolished creating additional 15,000 people homeless. There is no sign of ease in driving Rohingya people out of their homes. On January 4, 2017, Myanmar government forces have expanded the campaign in Buthidaung township starting with raids of Maung Gyi Taung village tract with the pretext of seizing homemade rifles from Rohingya homes that the families have vehemently denied.

![Rohingya victims lost homes and family members – a desperate situation](image)

**Crimes against humanity in Arakan**

Several families including women, young children, and toddlers were shot and by killed by Myanmar armed forces in the open under broad daylight while escaping their burning villages. Some children and toddlers were reportedly thrown into the fire by the Myanmar armed forces as the families tried to escape their burning homes. Witnesses have reported that Myanmar army helicopters fired upon the fleeing Rohingya families and killed scores of Rohingya men, women, and children. There were hundreds of reported cases of rapes. Gang rapes of Rohingya women have led to death of dozens of Rohingya women and underaged girls. A number of images and video clips have surfaced since the violence has erupted. In some of the videos *(in Rohingya language)*, the witness in a highly emotional state describes how they had to leave behind the dead body of their teenage girl in the wood as she died from extensive bleeding resulting the gang rape by Myanmar armed forces. She also describes how the Myanmar forces killed the rape victim’s grandmother brutally as she pleaded them to spare the
little girl. Myanmar government has bluntly denied the allegations; however it has reportedly admitted the atrocity shown in a video leaked by an individual from the Myanmar armed forces.

Arbitrary arrests of Rohingya civilians were rampant during the early part of the violence, and currently the extrajudicial arrests and summary execution is rising at an alarming rate. Myanmar armed forces made arbitrary arrests of over 450 Rohingya men who are being tortured at various detention camps. A recent report received on November 29, 2016, indicated that approximately 200 Rohingya detainees in Myanmar Border Guard Police (BGP) station in Kyigan Pyin have been undergoing brutal inhumane treatment that is extremely disturbing. A witness who has escaped from the Kyigan Pyin BGP station narrated some horrifying events that took place in Kyigan Pyin detention camp. Myanmar armed forces reportedly have kept groups of Rohingya detainees naked in the large halls, tied their hands, and making them crawl and eat rice grains that were thrown and dispersed on the floor. Dogs were brought in and the dogs have attacked and mauled some of the Rohingya detainees. A kind of waterboarding using steaming hot water have been witnessed by the escapee. The dead bodies of the tortured were reportedly disposed in the nearby forests.
Security forces and Buddhist Rakhine mobs routinely enter houses of Rohingya in IDP camps. The security forces and Rakhine mobs harass and beat family members, abuse and rape women and often commit looting their properties. During the village raids many people are subjected to random killing, severe beatings arrest and torture. Mosques and religious schools have been forced to shut down since the outbreak of violence in 2012. Muslims cannot perform congregational prayer, and those who secretly pray in their houses are heavily punished if found. Several mosques, which were partially destroyed during riots, have been demolished by the authorities.

**Internally displaced peoples (IDP) camps in Arakan**

The displaced Rohingya and Kamen Muslims in the IDP camps solely rely on the humanitarian assistance provided by the international community. The movement of IDPs is confined within the camps encircled by barbed wire fences under the watchful eyes of the Myanmar government forces. They are not allowed to go outside the camp in search of food, medicine, or water. In early 2014, when the international humanitarian groups were expelled by the Government, food supplies ran out quickly. Out of desperation some IDPs venture out of the camps in search of food were reportedly shot dead by the Myanmar police. Several cases of sexual assault and rape of Rohingya women in IDP camps by the security forces have also been reported.

*Extreme shortage of food, medicine, water in Rohingya IDP camps taking heavy toll on the IDPs*

The government authorities often attempt to cut off aid supplies to the IDP camps using Buddhist Rakhine extremists and monks. Authorities have instigated protests and attacks against the international humanitarian NGOs destroying several office building and food warehouses.
After the expulsion of the NGOs, the Government has created the Emergency Coordination Committee (ECC) chaired by the mastermind of the attacks on the NGOs. Currently, the ECC dictates the aid supplies of the NGOs to the IDP camps. There has been an extreme shortage of food, water, and healthcare services in the IDP camps. Emergency cases such as child-delivery and other life-threatening illnesses, involving Rohingya patients, are denied treatment in Government hospitals or clinics. The Union Government or Rakhine State authorities have taken no step to repatriate the Rohingya IDPs to their own residence of origin. The authorities have reportedly drawn a master plan of segregation to make the IDP camps permanent or semi-permanent and are devised to compel the IDPs to leave Arakan due to hardship and austerity in camps.

Rohingya issues has been used by several contesting political parties in the national elections in Myanmar. In 2010 National Election the military’s USDP party had overwhelming victory in Northern Arakan with the support of Rohingya voters. Three Rohingya MPs to Union Parliament and two Rohingya MPs in the State Assembly were elected on the USDP tickets. During the 2015 Election campaign season, a law was passed by the parliament that the holders of White Cards would be allowed to vote in the 2015 election (White cards are temporary cards given to Rohingya after confiscating their Nationality Certification Cards). However, President Thein Sein withdrew the law passed by the parliament, and instead, voided all the White Cards effectively disenfranchising Rohingya from the 2015 National Election.

Certain sectors of the international community continue to label the violence in Arakan as inter-communal and sectarian, the body of evidence collected from human right organizations shows that the State and its security forces played a vital role in the physical destruction of the Rohingya community, their properties, cultural heritage, religious structures during and after the 2012 violence against Rohingya.

Myanmar Government forces watch while the Buddhist Rakhine mobs torch Rohingya homes
Implications – From regional to a global scale

The intensity of the terror and violence resulting in major political and humanitarian crises in Arakan have spilled over to Central Myanmar, and then South and Southeast Asia. Religious and racial terrorism, preaching hate, and instigation of violence against Rohingya and Muslim population of Myanmar by the Buddhist extremist monks have caused a domino effect to locations as far away as Sri Lanka. Human trafficking, forced labor, and sex slavery involving Rohingya victims have become rampant in Thailand as a result of the persecution and terror against Rohingya in Arakan.

The Government of Myanmar continuously maintains that the Rohingya issue is an “internal affair” of the country, bluntly disregarding the international law on human rights, crimes against humanity, and the violence and persecution against minorities and the vulnerable populations. Analysts and experts in the international community have called the Rohingya IDP camps “21st Century Concentration Camps”. International communities have vehemently spoken out about the humanitarian and political crisis faced by the Rohingya in Myanmar. U.S. President Obama, former President Jimmy Carter, the Secretary of State, Congressional leaders, UN Secretary General Ben Ki-moon, OIC Secretary General, leaders of the European Union and several countries in the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia, Ministry officials in China and the Russian Federation have all spoken about Rohingya issue, and called on the Government of Myanmar to find a solution to the problem.

The United Nations General Assembly, Human Rights Council, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, The United States Congress passed resolutions demanding the Government of Myanmar to end the persecution of ethnic Rohingya minority. Additionally, the former and current UN Special Rapporteurs on Myanmar have released astounding reports of human right violations committed by the Government of Myanmar against Rohingya people in Arakan state. Some ASEAN member states have also sought diplomatic solution to the Rohingya issue. In November 2017, the governments of Malaysia, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and several countries around the world have expressed deep concerns over the violence against Rohingya in Arakan. The Government of Malaysia have publicly expressed outrage over the gang rapes, atrocities, summary execution of Rohingya civilian population in Northern Arakan. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Physicians for Human Rights, Doctors Without Borders, United to End Genocide, U.S. Campaign for Myanmar, Muslim World League, Myanmar Campaign UK, and several other organizations from Turkey, Europe, Middle East, and Asia have spoken out about the Rohingya political and human right issues.

The U.S. House Resolution implores the Government of Myanmar to respect internationally recognized human rights for all ethnic and religious minority groups within Myanmar. The Resolution sends a clear message to the Government of Myanmar that blatant racism will not be tolerated by the international community. The United States Senate has drafted a similar resolution, but in a stronger language, and is working on introducing it in the new session in 2017. United States Congress, the Canadian Parliament, the British Parliament, and several other institutions have conducted hearings multiple times on Rohingya political, human right, and humanitarian issues in Myanmar.
Solution to the crises in Arakan

The Rohingya political and human right issues are not as complex as the Government of Myanmar claims. The radical elements in the Government of Myanmar have capitalized on the longstanding Rohingya ethnic cleansing policy of the former Military dictatorship during the democratic transition in Myanmar. In every effort made by the international community to find a solution in Arakan, the unyielding Government officials in Naypyitaw paint a complex picture of the issue in order to avert any possible progress. Delay tactics and instigation of violence by the extremist elements in the Government, are the two most common obstacles in finding a solution to Rohingya issues in Arakan.

There are seemingly very few avenues in making progress on Rohingya issues internally in Myanmar because of the unfavorable political climate for the Rohingya people in Arakan and elsewhere in the country. The realistic situation on the ground and in Naypyitaw points the issue essentially towards the international community that has evidently made some tangible progress, despite limited increments. It should be noted that the root of the problem in Arakan is the longstanding persecution policy of the government against Rohingya ethnic minority; therefore, the key to the solution lies with the Government. The new Government of Myanmar must address the issues realistically with a long-term vision, and there will be very little or no challenge if the Government has no will power to solve the issue with utmost sincerity.

“The central issue to a permanent solution to the Rohingya issue in Arakan is the restoring their citizenship through reinstating the National Registration Certificate (NRC, also known as Thone Kauk Sho) and the White Cards along with all the rights of a citizen.”

Attempts to address various humanitarian, human rights, and political issue will yield very little or no results, unless the core issue of citizenship is addressed. Continuous emerging humanitarian issues and the violence have completely overshadowed the central issue of citizenship and human rights.

Rohingya people and the international community must call on the Government of Myanmar to:

- Immediately repatriate the displaced Rohingya IDP camps in Arakan to their original homes.
- Immediately implement the agreement signed by the governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh for dignified and voluntary return of the Rohingya refugees to their original homes in Arakan.
- Designate a safe zone in Northern Arakan that guarantees the safety and security of Rohingya people.
- Reinstate the National Registration Certificate/NRC (Thone Kauk Sho) that Rohingya people currently hold, reissue those that have been confiscated, damaged, destroyed or replaced with White Cards, and update the Form-10s of all Rohingya families through a transparent process, register all the newborns since 1962, as the first step to bring the stability in Arakan.
- Initiate the process transitioning the NRCs to Red Cards (reclassified Class I Citizenship) that have been denied to Rohingya since 1990-1991. The process for Red Cards should include the Children of NRC-holders to whom White Cards were issued by the government.
- Allow Rohingya to travel freely in Arakan and elsewhere in the country using NRC and Form-10.
- Implement the recommendations made by the Kofi Annan Commission.
- Immediately stop the NVC/Verification process that is aimed at downgrading the citizenship status of Rohingya to Class III through the deceptive naturalization scheme.
- Implement recommendation of the Kofi Annan Commission.
- Immediately cease the military operations in Northern Rakhine state and withdraw the military and other armed personnel from Rohingya village tracks.
- Immediately release all the innocent Rohingya civilian detainees from the prisons and detention camps in Northern Arakan.
- Remove the internment camps and isolated housing units from the marsh lands, and rebuild gutted Rohingya villages with housing units on their original land/properties.
- Provide international teams, including the media, unfettered access to all areas in Northern Arakan.
- Remove all the Government blockades to all locations in Northern Arakan and allow free flow of relief supplies from the national and international relief groups.
- Cooperate with the international community in probing the crimes against humanity committed by the Myanmar military against Rohingya men, women, and children.
- Allow Rohingya people to reopen their places of worship in all townships.
- Remove all the restrictions, including restrictions on travel, education, marriages, and community activities placed by the Government of Myanmar on Rohingya.
- Allow Rohingya to seek higher education and provide them access to healthcare and other government services.
- Facilitate interfaith and inter-communal dialogue to promote peaceful co-existence.

The prioritization of the objectives are based on the current needs and situation on the ground; however, the Government of Myanmar, in coordination with the international community, may address some of the objectives with more expediency, if it is truly dedicated to bringing peace and stability in Arakan state and wishes the fledgling democracy in Myanmar to flourish. Restoration of peace and addressing basic human rights of the Rohingya and other ethnic minorities in Myanmar may be a testimony to progress in transition to democracy in Myanmar.

**Conclusion**

The recent developments on the ground in Northern Arakan have clearly shown that the military and the extremist elements in the Government of Myanmar have chosen the path of intimidation, terror, and violence over security, peace, and stability in Arakan. The largely unaffected areas of Rohingya-dominated Northern Arakan during past violence in 2012 and 2013 have evidently become the target of the Myanmar military to set off an exodus 2012, 2016, and 2017. The violence by the Myanmar military and the militia since 2012 has resulted in over a million Rohingya from Northern Arakan displaced internally and externally. The potential peaceful co-existence of both Muslim Rohingya and Buddhist Rakhine community appears to be an obstacle to the advancement of ultra-nationalist ideology of purity of race and religion by the Myanmar military and extremist elements in the present government. As the crisis continue to
unfold in Arakan, the Rohingya issues have clearly surpassed the local and state level and became a national and international issue where it has affected the entire region of South and Southeast Asia. The Rohingya refugee crises in Thailand, Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka further underscore the rapid escalation of the crisis beyond Arakan. Anti-Muslim hate and racial terrorism against Rohingya was ingrained institutionally in Myanmar during the reign of military dictatorship over half-a-century. There is an urgent need for a fundamental paradigm shift on how the world community of nations should approach to solving the Rohingya political and human right issues in Myanmar and to bring all the communities in Arakan together for a lasting peaceful coexistence. There is no sign of a permanent solution to Rohingya crisis unless the citizenship and human issues are addressed by the Government of Myanmar through a pragmatic approach.

The sources of historical and contemporary information for this publication: Sources on the ground in Arakan and Naypyitaw, Dr. Habib Siddiqui, Dr. Abid Bahar, Dr. Mohammed Yunus, AFK Jilani, Aman Ullah, Refworld, Human Rights Watch, United to End Genocide, Physicians for Human Rights, and several other NGOs.

Arakan Rohingya Union (ARU) is a non-profit global umbrella organization representing various Rohingya organizations worldwide with a mission to seek a political solution to the issues faced by the Rohingya ethnic minority in Myanmar. The mission of ARU is to:

- Reclaim their citizenship that guarantees their political and human rights
- Advance the Rohingya people through improvement of socio-economic, cultural, and educational infrastructures
- Foster relations between Rohingya and fellow ethnic groups in Myanmar

ARU is recognized by all the 57-member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and it is registered in the United States as an (501)(c)(3) NGO (Registration #4051717).

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