



ARAKAN

Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO)



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Myanmar's Federal Vision Hinges on Rohingya Inclusion

Since the February 2021 military coup, Myanmar's shadow government the National Unity Government (NUG) formed by ousted civilian leaders has cast itself as the champion of a federal democratic union. In its 2021 *Federal Democracy Charter*, the NUG pledged "a peaceful Federal Democratic Union which guarantees freedom, justice and equality". It immediately set itself apart from past governments by prioritizing ethnic inclusion: half of the NUG's 26 ministers come from non-Bamar nationalities (including its acting president and prime minister), and one-third are women. The NUG's interim vision calls for a new constitution with race, language and religion protections for all citizens. Domestically and internationally, it has consistently framed itself as fighting dictatorship and upholding human rights. In short, federalism and inclusion are at the heart of the NUG's program, but this vision must reckon with Myanmar's most contentious minority issue: the Rohingya.

A New Rohingya Policy

Just two months after forming, the NUG made history on 3 June 2021 by issuing a formal *"Policy Position on the Rohingya in Rakhine State."* The statement marked a dramatic break from decades of official denial. It vowed that Rohingya who pledge allegiance to Myanmar would have a "right to citizenship" and "full enjoyment of citizens' rights," and it called for "repealing, amending, and promulgating laws including the 1982 Citizenship Law". In practical terms, human rights organizations summed up the pledge as follows: Rohingya would receive birthright citizenship (ending a system that treated them as foreigners), the onerous ID process forcing them to self-identify as non-citizens would be abolished, and the government would cooperate with the International Criminal Court (ICC) and other courts to secure justice. It also guaranteed the "voluntary, safe, and dignified repatriation" of refugees to their homes in Rakhine. Crucially, the NUG promised constitutional guarantees of equality and non-discrimination for all ethnic groups.

This new policy explicitly acknowledges the atrocities of 2016–2017. It "expressly acknowledges the violence and gross human rights violations inflicted upon Rohingya by the thuggish military," including the mass displacement of "hundreds of thousands" of people. By promising justice and reparations, and by stating that "everyone in the Union has full enjoyment of fundamental human rights," the NUG broke with past civilian governments that had denied or downplayed those crimes. Observers note that the language implies the Rohingya will be treated as a legitimate ethnic group with equal standing. As Fortify Rights wrote, the statement "establishes a foundation for the future realization of Rohingya rights in Myanmar, and for a more unified path to democracy".

The NUG was careful, however, with certain loaded words. It did not use the term "genocide" to describe the 2017 campaign, and it said the exact way to formally recognize the Rohingya would be decided later. Still, by committing to repeal the 1982 Citizenship Law, the NUG effectively pledged to end Rohingya statelessness. Deputy Minister Aung Kyaw Moe the NUG's first Rohingya official stressed that abolishing the 1982 law is "absolutely critical" to justice. Under the 1982 law, Myanmar recognizes 135 "national races" by ancestry – and Rohingya were omitted from that list, labeled as "foreigners" or "Bengalis." Replacing the law with a birthright citizenship rule would "restore or grant full citizenship rights" to Rohingya who have lived in Myanmar for generations.

Reversing the Citizenship Law

The 1982 Citizenship Law has long been the linchpin of Rohingya statelessness. By explicitly pledging to "repeal, amend and promulgate" this law, the NUG has confronted

Myanmar's legal framework head-on. Including the Rohingya among the list of "national races," as the NUG's language implies, would mean granting them *full citizenship* and making them full members of Myanmar's national community. This move is extraordinarily sensitive. Many hardline nationalists insist that the Rohingya identity itself is invented, and they reject any legal recognition. Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government never even used the term "Rohingya" and defended the military's actions abroad. In breaking that taboo, the NUG risked blowback: the junta immediately denounced the policy as "selling the country."

But activists say there is no turning back. The Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO), Myanmar's largest Rohingya civil society group, *cautiously welcomed* the NUG's position while demanding guarantees. ARNO praised the NUG's "clear acknowledgment" of past violence and especially its commitment to repeal the 1982 law. The group emphasized that the core of Rohingya demands is being *recognized as citizens of Myanmar*. ARNO urged the NUG to abolish the National Verification Card (NVC) regime and enact laws that "recognize the legitimate rights of the Rohingya as citizens". Importantly, ARNO said the Rohingya must have "rights and privileges on a par with other ethnicities" and that their own ethnic identity be safeguarded in the new Federal Charter. In short, Rohingya leaders insist that full citizenship and cultural recognition are non-negotiable for any credible federal democracy.

Human rights organizations have echoed these demands. Fortify Rights noted that, despite the policy statement, the NUG's June 2021 cabinet included no Rohingya members, and it called on the NUG to appoint a Rohingya liaison or envoy to ensure the policy is carried out. Its CEO said the statement "establishes a foundation for the future realization of Rohingya rights," but warned the NUG must follow through with concrete measures and accountability.

Domestic Reactions

Rohingya and ethnic groups within Myanmar have largely greeted the NUG's moves with cautious optimism, while noting challenges. Rohingya activists have publicly acknowledged that change was long overdue. ARNO stressed that the NUG's expressions of "sorrow and sympathy to the plight of the Rohingya" open a path to reconciliation and fully endorsed the promise of refugee repatriation provided it is implemented with careful planning. Its leaders continue to urge the NUG to press justice processes and to accept the findings of international fact-finding on genocide.

NUG Deputy Minister Aung Kyaw Moe himself has emphasized that the revolution unfolding in Myanmar “must include Rohingya in the nation’s political decision-making”. His very presence in the government – the first Rohingya to hold office since 1962 – is historic. He is tasked with creating a “comprehensive repatriation plan” so refugees can return to their ancestral lands safely. In recent statements he has reaffirmed that the NUG will “abolish the 1982 citizenship law” and all discriminatory laws, turning the policy into laws and programs.

Other ethnic minority leaders have also come forward in support. The NUG’s Human Rights Minister, Aung Myo Min, has explicitly linked Rohingya rights with justice for all minority victims, declaring the NUG “committed to bringing justice for the Rohingya and other ethnic minorities”. Activists from Chin, Karen, Shan and other communities note that the struggle against the junta is shared, and they see the NUG’s outreach to the Rohingya as part of building that multiethnic alliance. Chin community activist Rual Thang warned that reaching out to “the diverse tribal and ethnic communities is necessary,” cautioning that failing to do so “could affect [the NUG’s] legitimacy among ethnic minorities”.

At the same time, tensions persist. Many Buddhist Rakhine state residents and the powerful Arakan Army (AA) resist any official status for the Rohingya. Observers note that the NUG’s pro-Rohingya policy “could surely be a reason why the AA has no interest in forming a political alliance” with it, since the policy is “widely rejected by the Rakhine community”. Without the AA’s buy-in, the NUG would struggle to govern northern Rakhine State, and it risks alienating other Rakhine partners it needs. Analysts warn that sidelining the Rohingya could invite new conflict: desperate refugees or Arakan Rohingya militias might return to armed struggle, perpetuating violence in the region.

In summary, Rohingya activists hail the NUG’s policy as a historic break and a glimmer of hope, while many other ethnic groups welcome a federalist government that acknowledges all persecuted communities. Rights groups credit the NUG for reversing decades of denial, but stress that words must be backed by action. The NUG will need to engage Rohingya leaders, include Rohingya in decision-making bodies, and build broad ethnic consensus if its federal promise is to hold.

International Response

The Rohingya issue has long been a global concern, and the NUG’s stance has drawn

varied reactions abroad. United Nations officials have condemned the military's campaign against the Rohingya, and many welcomed any step toward redress. In recent UN General Assembly resolutions, diplomats explicitly "welcomed" the NUG's new policy, noting that it "acknowledges the Rohingya as Myanmar nationals," and even applauding the NUG's pledge to accept the ICC's jurisdiction for past crimes. UN human rights experts have urged Myanmar to give "unfettered access" to Rakhine to investigate past crimes, and to guarantee conditions for safe repatriation with citizenship for returnees. At The Hague, Myanmar's NUG-appointed ambassador formally asked to represent the country, signaling that the NUG would support continued prosecutions for atrocities like those of 2017.

In sum, parts of the international community see the NUG's policy as an opening. Both UN and ASEAN forums have called on Myanmar (with the NUG as a key stakeholder) to include the Rohingya in any solution and to uphold all international legal commitments. Among ASEAN countries, reactions are mixed. Officially, ASEAN still treats the military junta as Myanmar's government and has not engaged the NUG under its non-interference rules. In practice, the bloc has focused on logistics of repatriation and urged any future government to allow the Rohingya to return safely. But critics note ASEAN has largely ignored citizenship rights and accountability. Human Rights Watch has warned that repatriation without a guarantee of citizenship is doomed: refugees should not return until Myanmar meets "all conditions necessary for voluntary, safe, dignified" return, including granting Rohingya full citizenship. Civil society groups and international monitors have started calling on ASEAN to "wake up" to Myanmar's new realities urging the bloc to engage the NUG and ethnic resistance leaders on Rohingya rights rather than only dealing with the junta.

In Bangladesh, which hosts over a million Rohingya in camps, the response is pragmatic. Bangladesh's government insists on "safe and voluntary" returns and has long demanded an overhaul of Myanmar's citizenship laws, though Dhaka does not officially recognize the NUG. Until now, Bangladesh has negotiated largely with the junta under a 2018 repatriation agreement. However, Bangladeshi lawmakers and civil society have noted the NUG's commitments positively, seeing them as aligned with Dhaka's own calls for citizenship guarantees. Indeed, the 2024 UNGA resolution explicitly calls on "relevant parties, including the NUG," to work with Bangladesh and the UN on a political solution. Experts believe Bangladesh will only settle for a durable solution that includes legal rights and safety for returnees – objectives that match the NUG's public promises. Other major actors have voiced support as well. The United States, European Union, the United Kingdom and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation all emphasize that any Myanmar leadership must address Rohingya citizenship. Western officials have pointed to the

NUG's promises as evidence that Myanmar's anti-junta forces are taking minority rights. Think tanks and rights experts say the NUG's move sets a "high bar for any future government" on inclusion. In short, international pressure now builds expectations that these promises be fulfilled and warns that failure to do so will provoke outrage from donor governments and rights groups.

The Stakes of Inclusion

The NUG's federal vision is inextricably tied to its Rohingya policy. If the NUG fails to follow through, the consequences could be dire both at home and abroad. Ignoring or diluting Rohingya rights would fracture the very federal alliance the NUG is building. Other minorities would question the NUG's commitment to its own values: no credible federal union can exclude a tenth of the population from citizenship. As one analyst warned, unless the NUG "wins the revolution" and then finds a way to engage Rakhine leaders on Rohingya inclusion, the policy risks being "close to impossible to implement." In practice, sidelining the Rohingya could invite new conflict: stateless Rohingya refugees or insurgents might again take up arms, perpetuating cycles of violence in Rakhine. Equally, turning back on this pledge would erode the NUG's international legitimacy and support. Much of the NUG's appeal to foreign governments and diaspora groups is that it offers a rights-respecting alternative to the junta. Western governments view Rohingya rights as non-negotiable, so excluding the Rohingya would undercut the NUG's moral authority. Diplomatic cover, funding and sanctions pressure all hinge on upholding human rights. The NUG's pro-Rohingya stance has already been a selling point overseas (helping rally diaspora advocacy in Australia, Britain and elsewhere). If it were seen as reneging, backers might lose confidence and shift their bets. Observers note that ASEAN and other donors could then re-legitimize the military as the only "responsible" partner, sidelining the NUG. In short, repudiating inclusion could isolate the NUG diplomatically precisely when it most needs outside support.

Humanitarian and legal consequences would be severe as well. Without citizenship and safety guarantees, millions of Rohingya cannot return home. The refugee camps are dire: families have lived in limbo for years, and UN rights officials warn that renewed atrocities could occur if statelessness continues. The leading rights group Human Rights Watch explicitly states that any repatriation plan "lacks credibility" without granting full citizenship otherwise history will repeat its "callous disregard" for Rohingya lives. In practical terms, delaying rights means prolonging the crisis in Bangladesh and unstable

border regions. Finally, ignoring the Rohingya would weaken the push for justice against top generals. The NUG has pledged to cooperate with the ICC and ICJ to hold perpetrators accountable, but those processes only work if a successor government addresses Rohingya grievances. If Myanmar's future leaders appear to shrug off the abuses, international courts may interpret that as acquiescence, closing the door on full accountability. One expert warned that neglecting Rohingya crimes would make the NUG's justice pledges "hollow". In short, sidelining the Rohingya question would undermine "one of the NUG's strongest claims to legitimacy and justice".

Inclusion as Core of Democracy

The dream of a federal, democratic Myanmar cannot be realized on the backs of one of its largest minorities. As ARNO warned, a just solution "requires the NUG to acknowledge all past crimes against Rohingyas and commit to [their] rights and privileges on a par with other ethnicities". In other words, recognizing the Rohingya as full citizens with their own identity is not a fringe demand it is a linchpin of legitimacy for any new government. To date, the NUG's official policy has broken a historic logjam and given Rohingya and international observers reason for hope. But this gamble will only pay off if the NUG turns words into deeds. It must amend laws, grant equal citizenship, and ensure Rohingya have a real voice in the future Myanmar. Failure to do so would betray the NUG's professed values and hand the junta a moral victory. By contrast, upholding an inclusive Rohingya policy would strengthen the NUG's claim to be the true representative government of Myanmar and help win the trust of all ethnic communities.

In the end, Myanmar's new leadership must make its federal vision truly inclusive. Only by fully embracing the Rohingya as citizens and equal partners in the union can Myanmar hope to escape its history of inter-ethnic strife and build a stable, democratic future. The fate of Myanmar's democracy depends on nothing less than that promise.



Photo courtesy: UN Women/Allison Joyce

Myanmar's Draft Law and Women Under Arms

In early 2024 Myanmar's military revived its dormant conscription law, sweeping up new recruits to replenish ranks. Under the People's Military Service Law, men aged 18–35 (extendable to 45) and women 18–27 became eligible for up to two years of service. In practice, the junta initially took only men, but by January 2025 officials were quietly compiling lists of young women for future service. Widespread fear of conscription quickly swept the country: as one news team noted, *"thousands of people" have decided to leave their homes* since the draft was announced¹. Women's rights advocates warn that even if they are enlisted as noncombatants, female conscripts will face grave risks loss of education, sexual exploitation, and trafficking[2]. In this climate of coercion, Myanmar's ethnic armed groups are also ramping up recruitment, including of women and girls.

Arakan Army's Draft in Rakhine State

In Rakhine State the insurgent Arakan Army (AA) an ethnic Rakhine militia has instituted its own draft, enrolling women alongside men. Local reports in March–April 2025 describe AA recruiters summoning villagers and warning that *"those who haven't fought yet are required to join the AA"* for a two-year term. One young villager told journalists the AA's enlistment calls covers *"men aged 18 to 45 and women aged 18 to 35"*³. Another recruited woman from Mrauk-U confirmed that *"women between ages 18 and 35 will also be required to serve"*. These are striking figures: until now, Myanmar's guerrilla armies have seldom conscripted women into combat roles.

The AA says it needs the manpower as it seizes more territory but families fear it is simply forcing young women into uniform against their will. AA propaganda posters and training videos often show masked women fighters marching and firing rifles. But behind the scenes there is little choice. In one northern Rakhine township, youths were told they would be entered into a lottery for the draft, and that those chosen must obey or face punishment. The AA's Arakan political wing even imposed an unprecedented ban on travel, warning that anyone who tried to leave Rakhine *"would be seized by junta patrols, step on mines, be conscripted into Myanmar's military and become victims of trafficking"*. The stated aim was to *"protect people"* in other words, to stop frightened villagers fleeing conscription (by the junta or the AA). In effect, both the army in Naypyidaw and the AA insurgents are hemming women in.

Early accounts from Rakhine underscore the climate of fear. Journalist reports from the region note that as AA forces advanced, *"many Rakhine locals left" their homes in March 2024 to avoid the crossfire and any compulsory service.* When the fighting shifted in May, the AA even gave mixed messages: at one point AA fighters told Rohingya civilians in Buthidaung that *"you sent your sons to the military [now] you don't have the right to live here"* a chilling reference to conscription stoking communal revenge. In this chaos, the AA's own draft order looms large for Rakhine families: women may join or risk punishment, and those who try to escape the state face minefields, junta patrols, or trafficking as AA leaders warned.

Militia Drives and Conscription in Other Ethnic Areas

The Arakan Army is only the most visible case. Across Myanmar, ethnic militias – both anti-junta rebels and pro-junta forces – are coercing civilians of all genders into their ranks. In northern Shan State's Kokang region, for example, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) has quietly begun drafting women. Local media report the MNDAA held community meetings on June 15, 2025, demanding each village send male and female recruits to serve in town security forces. A Shan villager in Hseni recounted that each ward was told to supply *"two people"* meaning both men and women or *"they'll come and take them themselves,"* she said. When the ward could not find volunteers, the MNDAA openly threatened abduction. *"Nobody wants to go and serve,"* another resident said. *"They're scared of dying. Last time our village sent three people. Now they're asking again, but there's no one left to send. People have already fled,"* she added.

In other words, some Kokang families are already running away to avoid the draft.

Pro-junta militias in Kachin and Shan states have likewise escalated forced enlistment. RFA reports that Lisu, Shanni and other border guard forces began rounding up villagers and detaining family members to coerce enlistment after the junta revived conscription in February 2024. In one area of Kachin State, Lisu militiamen “detain female and elderly family members to force the return of men of fighting age,” a resident said. Elsewhere the Shanni National Army in Mohnyin arrested passersby by force to meet quotas. Similar measures are reported in other eastern regions. In southern Bago region, anti-people draft squads have spread too: a Reuters report in February 2024 found nearly every youth in one town “on the run” to avoid being drafted. “They arrest girls aged 18 or 19,” said a local, noting that even underage young women were being collared. These accounts show a pattern: where one armed force demands soldiers, all sides quickly follow suit, trapping civilians especially women and girls in a web of forced recruitment.

Meanwhile, junta-aligned ethnic militias in Mon and Karenni areas have also been implicated. Mon activists documented that since late 2024 the Pa-O National Army (a Pa-O ethnic militia fighting with the junta) “is forcing women and underage girls to join the military service,” according to the Human Rights Foundation of Monland. This chilling admission confirms that women in minority communities are being pressed into service by irregular armies across the country. The upshot is that no ethnic township is untouched: from Rakhine and Shan down to Karenni and Mon lands, local women report being swept up into militias either as combatants, porters or camp support staff against their will.

“No Option but to Fight” Voices from the Ground

The impact on civilians can only be described as traumatic. Survivors and displaced women speak of being “trapped” by the draft law. In Kachin State, one 23-year-old teacher put it bluntly: *“It’s not OK for us, and we don’t accept it [The conscription law] is intended to force us to kill our own people.”* Like many others, she sees no safe path: if she can’t flee abroad, the only remaining choice may be armed resistance. *“Those who don’t want to join the military or can’t leave the only option is to join another armed group,”* said another young woman. *“The hands that once held flowers will hold guns now.”* These wrenching words capture a new reality: ordinary women feel driven either underground or into guerrilla ranks.

On the Thai-Myanmar border, one 36-year-old activist nicknamed “Estelle” fled overland from Yangon, explaining that while married women were officially exempt, she never trusted the promises. *“That’s just words,”* she said of the junta’s pledge. *“We never know when they will make difficulties for us.”* Another young woman, Catherine from Myitkyina, said her family scrambled to hide from recruiters. *“I have no choice,”* she sighed. *“If I go back*

I will be recruited and maybe killed by [the junta]." Their stories are echoed by hundreds of displaced women: many have paid traffickers to smuggle them over the Thai border, hoping to work abroad rather than serve in a war. "Thousands of women [are] fleeing," human rights observers note, with some becoming targets of human traffickers as they escape.

In Rakhine and along the Bangladesh border, Rohingya women also face terrifying prospects. Even though most Rohingya are not Muslim combatants, AA spokesmen have pleaded with them to flee Myanmar altogether: *"I would like to urge young Muslim men to find the best way to escape from being forcibly drafted and to flee into the liberated areas,"* an AA spokesman told the media. The implication was clear any Rohingya who stay risk abduction by the junta. Indeed, UN investigators have confirmed that junta troops systematically swept Rohingya villages to conscript men, in one case snatching five youths from a single hamlet. Communities already decimated by the 2017 massacres now brace for another upheaval.

Flight and Displacement: Families Fleeing Drafts and Fighting

The draft law is coming on top of a full-blown humanitarian crisis. Even before 2024, years of civil war had uprooted millions: by mid-2024 the UN estimated roughly *2.6 million* internally displaced and *1.35 million* refugees from Myanmar in the region. Conscription fears are adding to this outflow. In northern Myanmar's jungles, aid workers report whole villages emptied out as young people slip away. As one Karen activist put it, *"Everyone from the town is on the run."*

In Rakhine's borderlands, the pattern is stark. Reuters documented that as AA battles loomed in spring 2024, *"many Rakhine locals left in March"* from contested towns. When AA fighters burned Rohingya neighborhoods in May 2024, "thousands" of Muslim civilians fled across the border to Bangladesh. Hundreds of Buddhist Rakhine also fled in panic, some believing junta airstrikes were coming. In many cases, families cited just one reason: fear of forced mobilization by one army or the other. One displaced woman from Rakhine told an aid worker: *"I chose to flee I am afraid both the Myanmar army and the Arakan Army will come and take my children."*

Across Myanmar, regions not actively at war are seeing exoduses too. In Shan State's Lashio area, villagers say children are disappearing as rebels recruit across battle lines, and terrified parents pack their bags. In central Bago Region, fields lie fallow as young people slip away to avoid the draft. Even in the capital Yangon, an urban manager noted a quiet flight of middle-class families with draft-aged sons, while wives and daughters brace for a collapse of stability.

Violence, Trafficking, Early Marriage

Humanitarian and women's groups warn that drafting women carries unique dangers. The junta's own women's movements decried the draft order on International Women's Day 2024, emphasizing the gendered violence to come. In a public statement, *"eight Myanmar women's organizations"* explicitly warned that forcibly recruited women would be *"exposed to rape, gang rape, sexual slavery and other brutal forms of sexual violence"*. These fears are borne out by history: UN investigators recently documented multiple cases of sexual abuse of arrested protesters and minority women by junta soldiers. Now every young woman who boards a recruitment bus or is swept into the jungle faces that same threat of assault.

Other risks loom: UN Special Rapporteur Tom Andrews has highlighted trafficking and forced marriage. He noted that some authorities' exemptions (for example, barring *married* women from service) incentivize early marriage. In a February report Andrews warned that conscription *"raises the risk of early and forced marriage for girls and women"*. In practice, many families now arrange underage marriages to keep girls out of draft ranges. As ND-Burma noted, across states like Kachin and Kayah, girls in their late teens are being betrothed suddenly all to claim them as 'married' and technically exempt.

Families in flight have paid the price. A Thailand-based women's group says some displaced girls have disappeared into trafficking networks after leaving Myanmar. Every crossing of the border exposes them to exploitation: brokers promise safe passage but often enslave girls in labor or sex work. As one NGO put it, the only alternative to conscription for many women is a dangerous gamble. *"They rely on brokers or travel clandestinely," it reported, "putting them at heightened risk of trafficking and abuse"*.

Response from Rights Groups and Observers

International watchdogs have been swift to condemn the draft and related abuses. Human Rights Watch and the UN have documented both the junta's forced conscription of Rohingya and AA's targeting of civilians. HRW's August 2024 report on Rakhine highlighted how the junta's illegal press-ganging of Rohingya men has *"stoked tensions"* with ethnic Rakhine, fueling revenge attacks. (Notably, HRW found that AA fighters then accused Rohingya villagers of recruiting for the military, using it as a pretext for violence.) The same report described mass displacements caused by the fighting, echoing how recruitment drives upend community stability.

The UN's special rapporteur for Myanmar has been especially outspoken. In July 2024 he warned that forcibly drafting Rohingya was “*shocking*” and a replay of 2017's ethnic cleansing. He called on the junta to release all conscripts and allow detainees to return home, echoing the Arakan Army's own plea that Rohingya avoid conscription. He also highlighted the women's plight: trafficking spikes and forced marriages were “*inevitable*” consequences of the draft law. These analyses are shared by local NGOs: Burma's Network for Human Rights Documentation (ND-Burma) and ethnic women's unions have issued detailed warnings of the “*catastrophic*” effects on women.

Regional actors have offered mixed signals. Bangladesh, still hosting over a million Rohingya, said little publicly but quietly increased patrols as news of Rohingya conscripts emerged. Thailand has closed some border points to avoid a refugee influx, even as it leaves many would-be escapees in limbo. Neighboring India has so far refused most new Myanmar asylum claims. No international military actor has condemned the conscription law explicitly, leaving the UN as the main forum for pressure. Human rights groups urge foreign governments to recognize the severity of these new human rights crises from forced labor to gender violence unfolding under the draft.

Official Denials and Evasion

The junta itself has downplayed all accusations of mass conscription or abduction, even as domestic reportage and NGO analyses paint a contradictory picture. In January 2025, a junta official claimed the women's lists were merely a census and that “*there has been no separate call for women*” at present. In February, a junta spokesperson for Bago region dismissed reports that civilians were being drafted, insisting only “*members of organizations related to the PDF*” had been arrested. In other words, the regime portrays all these incidents as either myth or isolated counterinsurgency actions.

Likewise, the Arakan Army has not publicly acknowledged forcibly taking women. AA spokesmen have focused on political goals, not recruitment methods. The AA claims it helps displaced civilians and denies burning villages or kidnapping anyone (its spokesperson “*strongly*” denied any burning of Buthidaung). But victims and aid workers report internally that AA security units are going door-to-door to round up conscripts. Neither the junta nor the AA offers any recourse for families ripped apart by these policies.

Mounting Toll on Women, Families and Stability

Myanmar's draft law and accompanying militarisation have torn through communities. Women and girls once largely excluded from combat now face the prospect of forced service, brutalization and permanent displacement. Even where they are not on the battlefield, the draft upends their lives: education halted, jobs lost, families broken. Ethnic

minorities fear that the conscription law is being used to redraw loyalties and punish dissent, while everyday citizens fear that flight is the only option to protect their children. Human rights groups warn that without urgent intervention, women in Myanmar have “no safe place”. As one analyst put it, the junta’s conscription “is only the latest scheme” by a regime “of war criminals” to consolidate power. Civil society’s solution is clear: stop the forced drafts, guarantee women’s safety, and engage in genuine dialogue not more guns. In practical terms, this means halting all compulsory conscription and demobilizing illegal militias; ensuring women are not caught between armies; and accelerating humanitarian aid to conflict zones.

The testimony of victims and observers lays bare the crisis: Myanmar’s generals and rebels alike are now fighting and recruiting women in a country already wracked by war. Families will not go quietly. As Catherine and Estelle have learned, the only alternatives to forced service are dangerous exile or armed resistance. The international community must not look away as Myanmar’s daughters are drafted and as entire villages burn to the ground around them.

Independence Promises and the Systematic Stripping of Minority Rights in Myanmar

Burma (Myanmar) began its independent life in 1948 with promises of equality and unity among its diverse peoples. Early documents and agreements surrounding independence guaranteed equal rights to all inhabitants, including the Rohingya Muslim community of western Burma. Over the decades, however, successive military juntas, civilian governments, and even local militias have systematically eroded those rights. This gradual legal and political exclusion of the Rohingya and other minorities paved the way for what many observers now call a state-orchestrated genocide. In this investigative analysis, we chronicle how Burma's founding pledge of equal citizenship gave way to institutionalized persecution, focusing on the Rohingya while briefly noting the plight of other ethnic minorities. We will examine key domestic laws and amendments that stripped minority rights, as well as the international legal standards these actions violate. The historical record reveals a deliberate step-by-step process from inclusive citizenship at independence to apartheid-like policies and mass violence today that exemplifies how genocide can be bureaucratically engineered through law and policy.

Independence and Inclusive Citizenship (1945–1962)

When Burma emerged as an independent nation, its founding leaders envisioned a nation built on inclusivity and equal rights for all communities. General Aung San's 1947 Panglong Agreement with ethnic leaders promised the creation of a federal Union based on equality for all ethnic groups. In the same spirit, the Nu-Attlee Agreement of October 1947 signed between Burmese negotiator Thakin Nu and British Prime Minister Clement Attlee explicitly recognized all people of Burma as full citizens. Article 3 of that independence agreement even identified the Rohingyas as bona fide citizens of Myanmar, making clear that one did not need to belong to a "recognized" ethnic race to be a citizen. This principle carried into Burma's first Constitution of 1947, which broadly defined a Myanmar citizen as any person belonging to an indigenous race or anyone who had at least one grandparent from an indigenous race or who had lived in British Burma prior to 1942. These provisions effectively included Rohingya people as citizens from the start.

In the initial post-independence years, the Rohingya were treated as equal citizens under the law. The new Parliament in 1948 passed the Union Citizenship Act, which affirmed all citizens as equal regardless of ethnicity or religion. Prime Minister U Nu's government went further to officially acknowledge the Rohingya as an ethnic nationality of Burma. U Nu declared the Rohingya one of the "national races" of the Union, on par with groups like the Kachin, Karen, Mon, Rakhine, Shan, etc., and affirmed their rights as Burmese nationals. During the 1950s, Rohingya leaders even held political office: Rohingya representatives sat in Parliament and one, Sultan Mahmud, served as Minister of Health from 1960–62. In northern Arakan (Rakhine) State, where Rohingya were concentrated, U Nu's administration created a special Mayu Frontier Administration zone to give Rohingya Muslims a degree of local autonomy. In short, the early independence period upheld the promise that all inhabitants, Rohingya included, were full citizens with equal rights.

Yet even in this era, seeds of future conflict were present. Communal tensions in Rakhine had simmered since World War II (when the Rohingya had largely supported the British, and the Rakhine Buddhists aligned with Japanese forces, leading to inter-communal bloodshed). Overall, however, the constitutional and legal framework of the 1950s protected minority rights, and Rohingya Muslims enjoyed citizenship, voting rights, and governmental representation during the country's first decade of independence. The stage seemed set for an inclusive Union of Burma where diverse ethnicities could coexist under a common nationality.

The Rise of Military Nationalism and Early Discrimination (1962–1970s)

This hopeful trajectory changed dramatically after General Ne Win's military coup in 1962. The new junta brought with it a Buddhist Burman nationalist ideology that began singling out certain minorities as not truly part of the Burmese nation. The 1947 Constitution was summarily suspended, and the military rulers increasingly spoke of "taingyintha" the so-called "national races" or "sons of the soil" as the true Burmese, implicitly casting others as foreigners. The Rohingya, with their darker skin and Muslim faith, were quickly branded as outsiders despite their generations of residence in Arakan.

In 1974, Ne Win's regime cemented its nationalist vision with a new constitution and laws that marked a sharp departure from the inclusive principles of 1948. The 1974 Constitution (Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma) formally recognized 135 ethnic groups as the country's national races and tellingly, the Rohingya were excluded from this official list. No longer were Muslims of Rakhine considered a native ethnicity; the state narrative increasingly labeled them as interlopers from neighboring Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan). That

same year, the junta introduced sweeping Emergency Immigration provisions requiring every citizen to carry a National Registration Card (NRC) for identification. In practice, Rohingya were denied NRCs despite having held them in the past and were instead issued Foreign Registration Cards (FRCs) that identified them as non-citizens. This 1974 move was the first official act to strip Rohingya of their citizenship status, transforming many overnight from citizens into “foreigners” in their own homeland.

Institutional discrimination escalated further in the late 1970s. In 1977–78 the military launched Operation Naga Min (“Dragon King”), a nationwide campaign ostensibly to register citizens and screen out “illegal immigrants.” In Rakhine State, this operation became a pretext for violent mass expulsions of Rohingya. Soldiers, immigration officers, and local Rakhine militias swept through Rohingya villages with lists, accusing families of lacking proper ancestry or documents. The result was widespread brutality – murder, rape, and looting were reported – and the flight of over 200,000 Rohingya into neighboring Bangladesh in 1978. Branded as illegal “Bengalis,” these Rohingya refugees languished in squalid camps across the border. It was only after international pressure (including from the UN and Muslim countries) that the Burmese government agreed to take most of them back in 1979. However, the authorities did so without acknowledging them as citizens – an ominous sign of things to come.

By the end of the 1970s, the pattern was clear. Through selective laws and military operations, Myanmar’s rulers had begun carving the Rohingya out of the national community. The Rohingya went from holding identity cards as Burmese citizens in the 1950s, to being issued foreigner documents in the 1970s, to being driven out under the slightest pretext. This period also saw broader Burmanization policies affecting other minorities: ethnic Shan, Kachin, Karen, Chin and others lost the autonomy guarantees envisioned at Panglong, and many took up arms in response. Minorities that were officially recognized (like the Shan or Kachin) at least remained citizens but still faced military repression and “Burmese Way to Socialism” assimilationist policies. Those not officially recognized (like the Rohingya or people of Indian and Chinese descent) became ever more vulnerable. Ne Win’s regime even targeted ethnic South Asian communities; thousands of Indo-Burmese and Burmese Chinese were stripped of citizenship or had their businesses nationalized in the 1960s, leading to large exoduses of those communities as well. In sum, the junta’s Buddhist-Burman nationalist revival marked the beginning of systematic legal exclusion for groups deemed outside the “national races” with the Rohingya bearing the worst of its impact.

Institutionalizing Rohingya Statelessness

The most fateful legal turning point came in October 1982, when Burma’s military government promulgated a new Citizenship Law that entrenched ethnic discrimination in the

very definition of nationality. This law still in force today created a hierarchy of citizenship types and effectively revoked citizenship from the vast majority of Rohingya. Under the 1982 law, full citizenship was reserved for members of the officially recognized “national races” who could trace their lineage in Myanmar back to before 1823 (the start of British conquest of Arakan). The law listed 135 such national ethnic groups, mostly Buddhist, and pointedly omitted “Rohingya” from the list (even though it included the Rakhine Buddhists of the same region). Rohingya Muslims, viewed as descendants of relatively recent migrants despite their centuries in Arakan, were thus ineligible for full citizenship by law.

The 1982 act did include lower tiers of citizenship associate and naturalized but these were difficult for Rohingya to obtain. Associate citizenship was offered only to those whose citizenship status was pending from the 1948 law, and naturalization required proof of entry and residence in Burma prior to independence (before 1948) plus fluency in a national language. Crucially, applicants needed to provide “conclusive evidence” of their family’s residence history, a nearly impossible demand for impoverished, often landless Rohingya villagers who had never been issued proper birth certificates or whose documents had been confiscated in prior purges. As a result, almost all Rohingya were effectively rendered stateless by the 1982 law. Even those who could produce some paperwork often found the bureaucracy unwilling to recognize their claims. The law thus formally codified what had been happening informally. It “refuted the legality of citizenship of almost all Rohingyas,” stripping an entire people of their nationality.

It is hard to overstate the significance of this apartheid-like law. With the stroke of a pen, the junta eliminated the Rohingya’s political and civil rights. No longer citizens, Rohingya residents of Rakhine had no legal status other than as “resident foreigners” (if even that). They could not travel outside their townships without special permits; they could not work in the government; their access to higher education, healthcare, and employment was severely restricted. In essence, the Rohingya were now a people without the “right to have rights,” to quote a famous phrase: a direct violation of Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which prohibits arbitrary deprivation of nationality. Notably, this mass denationalization also flouted Myanmar’s obligations under international law (Myanmar had ratified the UN Genocide Convention in 1956, and such persecution on racial/religious grounds also contravenes treaties like the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination). But at the time, the world paid little attention, and the tragedy moved largely under the radar.

In the years immediately following 1982, Rohingya’s situation grew increasingly desperate. The government launched citizenship scrutiny drives to enforce the new law: Rohingya households had their old National Registration Cards nullified and were issued temporary

“Registration Certificates” identifying them as foreigners. In 1989, a new system of color-coded Citizenship Scrutiny Cards was introduced for Myanmar citizens – pink cards for full citizens, blue for associate, green for naturalized. Virtually no Rohingya were given any of these cards, since by law they did not qualify. In 1991–92, the military’s Operation Pyi Thaya (Clean and Beautiful Nation) drove another mass exodus of some 200,000 Rohingya into Bangladesh under the guise of “population control,” mirroring the 1978 purge. Through the late 1980s and 1990s, reports emerged of Rohingya being used as forced labor on infrastructure projects, having their land confiscated for Buddhist settler villages, and being targeted by sporadic pogroms all enabled by the fact that as non-citizens they had no legal protection. Step by step, Myanmar’s laws had made the Rohingya into foreigners in their own ancestral land, setting the stage for further abuses.

Continuing Persecution under Civilian and Military Rule (1990s–2010s)

Despite a transition from outright military rule to a quasi-civilian government in the 2010s, the plight of the Rohingya only worsened. The junta’s successor regimes continued the same policies of exclusion, and new laws and measures further tightened the noose on minority rights. In 2008, Myanmar adopted a new Constitution (drafted by the military) which, while introducing electoral politics, still enshrined key restrictions aligned against the Rohingya. For example, the 2008 Constitution made citizenship and associated rights hereditary: it required that a person’s parents be citizens for that person to be recognized as a citizen. On the surface this might seem benign, but for Rohingya it was devastating. Generations of Rohingya, even if born in Myanmar, could not meet this requirement because their parents had been stripped of citizenship before them. Thus the 2008 charter perpetuated statelessness across generations, effectively denying Rohingya any path to restore citizenship rights. The document also barred anyone holding a foreign citizenship (or even having a foreign spouse or children) from high office, a clause aimed at Aung San Suu Kyi’s family but also reflective of the regime’s obsession with “foreign” threats. In short, even as Myanmar introduced elections, it kept the Rohingya disenfranchised and marginalized by constitutional design.

Real-world events soon underscored this institutional discrimination. In 2012, ethnic riots broke out in Rakhine State between Rohingya Muslims and local Rakhine Buddhists. What began as mob violence after a rumored rape quickly escalated into organized attacks on Rohingya communities. Hundreds were killed and over 140,000 Rohingya were driven into squalid internal displacement camps where many remain to this day. Investigations revealed that Buddhist monks and Rakhine political leaders actively incited and led the pogroms, often with the tacit support of state security forces, who in some cases participated in the attacks

or stood aside and let mobs rampage. Entire Rohingya neighborhoods were razed; afterwards, the government barred the displaced from returning and even seized their vacated lands and properties. This 2012 violence was a grim preview of worse to come. It also showed how state-sponsored militias and civilian ultranationalists were enlisted in the campaign against minorities. Local militias and Buddhist nationalist groups (like the 969 Movement and MaBaTha) fanned anti-Muslim hatred nationwide. Anti-Rohingya discrimination soon spread beyond Rakhine in 2013, anti-Muslim riots, encouraged by extremist monks, erupted in central Myanmar (Meiktila and elsewhere), targeting Muslim minorities at large.

In response to growing Buddhist nationalist pressure, the government under President Thein Sein (a former general) enacted a package of controversial “Protection of Race and Religion” laws in 2015. These laws championed by hardline monks placed restrictions on interfaith marriage, religious conversion, polygamy, and birth rates. While not overtly naming any group, they were clearly aimed at Myanmar’s Muslim minority and further legitimized a climate of suspicion against Muslims in general. In practice, they contributed to systematizing the discrimination against Rohingya, who were already ghettoized and subjected to marriage and birth permit requirements in Rakhine State. Also in early 2015, in the lead-up to national elections, the semi-civilian government made a telling move: it revoked all Temporary Registration Cards (the “white cards”) that had been issued to Rohingya since the 1990s. Those white cards had never granted citizenship, but they did allow holders to vote in the 2010 election and a 2012 by-election. Their cancellation in 2015 stripped the last political rights from the Rohingya, disenfranchising them completely before the pivotal 2015 vote. Simultaneously, any remaining Rohingya parliamentarians or local officials (a tiny number) were barred from contesting elections on the grounds that they failed citizenship criteria. As one researcher noted, by 2015 the Rohingya had lost even “their last human right in Myanmar” the right to vote, capping off the decades-long erosion of their status.

The landslide 2015 election brought Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD) to power in a power-sharing arrangement with the military. Hopes were high that a democratic government would reverse some of the racist policies. Yet those hopes were quickly dashed. Suu Kyi’s government, wary of rocking the boat and mindful of the Bamar majority’s prevalent anti-Rohingya sentiment, did nothing to restore Rohingya citizenship or rights. If anything, it doubled down on denial. In 2016 the NLD-led authorities even banned usage of the word “Rohingya” in official settings, insisting that officials and diplomats say “Muslims of Rakhine” or “Bengalis” instead. Suu Kyi herself studiously avoided uttering “Rohingya.” Her administration maintained the NDAA (National Verification) process, which required Rohingya to accept National Verification Cards (NVCs) identifying them as foreigners seeking naturalization, an oft-rejected policy that Rohingya felt was a trap to seal their stateless status. No discriminatory laws were repealed; the 1982 Citizenship Law remained untouched.

In August 2017, the Myanmar military (still constitutionally autonomous from civilian oversight) unleashed what the UN and many international observers have called a genocidal campaign against the Rohingya. Following insurgent attacks on August 25, 2017, the Tatmadaw (army) along with armed local Rakhine militias began systematically wiping out Rohingya villages in northern Rakhine State. Troops executed unarmed men, raped women, burned homes and mosques, and drove survivors over the border. Within weeks, over a million Rohingya roughly two-thirds of the Rohingya population fled Myanmar into Bangladesh, in what became the largest human exodus in Asia since the Vietnam War. UN investigators documented mass atrocities: widespread killings (including of infants), gang-rapes, whole villages torched, all indicating a deliberate intent to destroy the Rohingya as an ethnic group. By some estimates, several thousand were killed in just the first month of the onslaught, and independent researchers later assessed that at least 25,000 Rohingya were killed, 18,000 women raped, and hundreds of villages burned during the 2017 campaign. The UN Fact-Finding Mission in 2018 concluded that top Myanmar generals acted with “genocidal intent,” and international jurists echoed that the pattern of violence coupled with the long history of legal oppression bore the hallmarks of genocide. Suu Kyi’s civilian government, rather than condemning the military, defended its actions on the world stage, denying any genocidal intent even as evidence mounted. In 2019, The Gambia filed a case against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for violating the Genocide Convention, a case that is ongoing. Tellingly, Suu Kyi traveled to The Hague to personally reject the genocide allegations, aligning her administration with the military’s narrative.

Thus, by the end of the 2010s, the Rohingya had gone from full citizens at independence to a persecuted, stateless minority facing extinction. This persecution has persisted under the current junta that seized power again in February 2021. The same generals responsible for the 2017 atrocities are now in charge, and the roughly 600,000 Rohingya still left in Myanmar (including 140,000 confined in internal displacement camps since 2012) remain under a regime of apartheid-like restrictions and fear. Unsurprisingly, few Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh are willing to return under these conditions. Every stage in this tragic saga was enabled or even driven by laws, regulations, and official policies showcasing how a genocide can be bureaucratically scripted long before the mass killings begin.

International and Domestic Law Context

From a legal perspective, Myanmar’s treatment of the Rohingya grossly violates modern human rights norms. Domestically, as we have seen, a string of laws and constitutional measures progressively stripped the Rohingya of rights granted at independence. Key among these were:

- **1947 Constitution & 1948 Union Citizenship Act:** Initially inclusive, defining citizenship broadly to include all long-term residents and all ethnic groups in Burma. This laid a foundation of equal rights that would later be undermined.

- **1964–1974 “National Races” Policies:** The concept of officially recognized taingyintha (national races) was promoted by the junta. The 1974 Constitution solidified this by naming 135 ethnic groups (excluding Rohingya) as citizens, and the 1974 Emergency Immigration Act required IDs but gave Rohingya only foreigner cards. These moves formally began the legal othering of Rohingya.
- **1982 Citizenship Law:** The cornerstone of institutionalized persecution, revoking Rohingya citizenship by not recognizing them among indigenous races and setting impossible proof requirements. This law made most Rohingya stateless overnight.
- **2008 Constitution:** Continued to entrench ethnic-based citizenship, tying rights to parental citizenship status, which effectively locks out stateless groups like Rohingya. It also ensured a continued military veto over any legal changes, making repealing anti-Rohingya laws very difficult.
- **2014–2015 Measures:** The 2014 census outright excluded any self-identified Rohingya (they were told to register as “Bengali” or not at all). In 2015, the government invalidated Rohingya temporary white cards and passed Race and Religion Protection Laws, which, while nationwide, further marginalized Muslims by restricting interfaith marriages, conversions, and births. These measures removed voting rights and added new layers of social control over minorities.

Each of these steps was essentially an amendment or addition to the legal architecture of discrimination, creating what some scholars call a “paper genocide”: the destruction of a people’s identity and rights on paper before their physical destruction is attempted. The cumulative effect of decades of citizenship erosion, coupled with oppressive bylaws (e.g. village-level orders limiting Rohingya marriages and births), was to prepare the ground for mass violence by dehumanizing Rohingya in the eyes of the state and many citizens. The fact that these abuses were encoded in law gave a veneer of legality to persecution.

International law, on the other hand, forbids such systematic discrimination and violence. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) proclaims that “everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms without distinction of any kind” (Article 2) and that “no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality” (Article 15). Myanmar’s treatment of Rohingya flouts both principles. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention on Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) similarly prohibit discrimination based on race or religion, obligations Myanmar has ignored by effectively creating an apartheid regime in Rakhine State. Most starkly, the Genocide Convention (1948) – to which Myanmar is a state party – outlaws acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. It specifically mentions killing members of the group, causing serious bodily or mental harm, and deliberately inflicting conditions of life

calculated to bring about a group's destruction as genocidal acts. As documented by the UN and human rights groups, Myanmar's authorities have arguably committed all of these acts against the Rohingya: from mass killings and rapes to the systematic deprivation of food, healthcare, and livelihoods by confinement in camps and villages. In 2018, a UN fact-finding mission explicitly concluded that the crimes in Rakhine State were "genocide" under international law and called for the prosecution of Myanmar's top generals. The ongoing ICJ case (*The Gambia v. Myanmar*) is testing the international community's resolve to enforce the Genocide Convention; in January 2020, the ICJ ordered provisional measures requiring Myanmar to prevent genocidal acts and preserve evidence. So far, however, Myanmar's government whether under Suu Kyi or the military junta has failed to take meaningful action to comply, continuing to deny wrongdoing.

Other Minorities in Myanmar's Union: Brief Comparisons

While the Rohingya have suffered a unique fate of statelessness and genocidal persecution, other ethnic and religious minorities in Myanmar have also endured grievous repression (albeit under different terms). Myanmar is an incredibly diverse country. Besides the Bamar majority, it has over a hundred ethnic groups, several of which have waged long-running insurgencies for autonomy or independence. Indeed, after the 1962 coup, Myanmar plunged into what is often called the world's longest-running civil war, as the military fought ethnic rebels from the Karen, Kachin, Shan, Chin, and other communities. The military's counterinsurgency tactics were notoriously brutal, involving village burnings, massacres, rape, and forced displacement actions that in some cases amounted to war crimes or crimes against humanity. For instance, the Karen people in eastern Myanmar faced scorched-earth campaigns in the 1980s and 1990s; the Kachin in the north have, since 2011, been under assault with bombings of civilians and widespread human rights abuses as documented by the UN. The Shan have also been targets of military atrocities during conflict. These groups, however, were never stripped of citizenship and they are recognized "national races" with states named after them. Their struggle has been against political domination and human rights abuses, rather than denial of belonging in Myanmar.

Another group to note is the Rakhine Buddhists of Rakhine State (historically Arakan). While they are co-religionists of the Bamar, the Rakhine have long felt like second-class citizens within Myanmar. Rakhine State is one of the country's poorest regions, and Rakhine nationalists argue they have been economically neglected and culturally repressed by the central Bamar-dominated government. Ironically, some of the same Rakhine political forces that persecute the Rohingya also harbor grievances against Naypyidaw for marginalizing Rakhine interests. This dynamic has fueled the rise of the Arakan Army (AA), an ethnic

Rakhine insurgent group (distinct from the Rohingya) that in recent years has fought the Myanmar military fiercely for greater Rakhine self-rule. The AA's emergence led to a complex three-way conflict in Rakhine State by 2020: the Myanmar military, the Arakan Army, and the remaining Rohingya civilians caught inbetween. Reports indicate the Arakan Army has also committed abuses against Rohingya civilians in areas it controls, reflecting the deep communal divides sown by decades of propaganda.

Religious minorities beyond Islam have not been spared either. Myanmar is roughly 87% Buddhist, and Buddhist nationalism has occasionally targeted Christian minorities (many of whom are ethnic Chin, Kachin, or Karen). For example, churches have been destroyed in conflict zones, and Chin and Kachin Christians have faced pressure and discrimination from authorities (though not on the scale of anti-Muslim actions). During military campaigns, soldiers have desecrated churches and forcibly recruited Christian villagers as porters, like they did with Muslims.

To summarize, other minorities in Myanmar have experienced state-sponsored violence and repression, and many feel the state has not treated them as equals. Kachin, Shan, Karen, Chin and others have all been "othered" in the Bamar-dominated nation-state, often seen as separatist threats. Yet none of those groups were ever legally erased from the union in the way the Rohingya have been. They retained their citizenship and a place (however subordinate) in the national narrative, whereas the Rohingya were pushed entirely outside the constitutional family. This stark difference is why the Rohingya crisis stands out as a genocide-in-process, while Myanmar's conflicts with other minorities are characterized as civil war or internal strife. The Rohingya's lack of legal status made them easy prey they had no political voice, few sympathizers in the populace, and even their very identity was criminalized. Myanmar's military exploited this to rally extreme Buddhist nationalist sentiment against a defenseless minority, a classic divide-and-rule tactic that unfortunately found fertile ground in a society long taught to view the Rohingya as outsiders.

Genocide by Law and Policy

The story of the Rohingya in Myanmar is a chilling case of how a genocide can unfold in slow motion, through a stepwise erosion of rights and an accumulation of hatred, long before the mass killings capture the world's attention. In the span of seven decades, Myanmar went from a hopeful vision of unity in diversity, where a Rohingya Muslim could serve as a cabinet minister to a dystopia of genocide where Rohingya survivors huddle in refugee camps, stripped of citizenship and mourning countless dead. This tragedy was not an abrupt frenzy of violence; it was methodically prepared and implemented through state policies. Each law and amendment that marginalized the Rohingya the 1974 ID scheme, the 1982 Citizenship

Law, the 2008 Constitution, the cancellation of voting rights -- built the legal scaffolding of persecution. The military, along with ultra-nationalist monks and politicians, then lit the fuse by demonizing the Rohingya as "foreign invaders" and "terrorists". Local militias and vigilantes were mobilized to participate in pogroms, with state security forces often facilitating or joining in the atrocities. In short, genocide in Myanmar has been a highly organized crime, coordinated at the highest levels of the military and supported (or at least tolerated) by segments of the civilian leadership and populace.



The Arakan Army's Divide-and-Rule Tactics Against the Rohingya

In Myanmar's Rakhine State, the persecuted Rohingya people are facing a new chapter of fear and oppression. This time, it is not only the Myanmar military targeting them, but also the Arakan Army (AA), a group that once claimed to fight for the freedom of Rakhine's people. Instead of bringing relief to the Rohingya, the AA is accused of using the same "divide-and-rule" tactics that Myanmar's military (the Tatmadaw) long used to torment this minority. By pitting Rohingya against Rohingya and denying their identity, the AA appears to be repeating history, inflicting fresh wounds on an already traumatized community.



Photo courtesy: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Rakhine's Conflict and the Arakan Army's Rise

For decades, the Rohingya Muslim minority in Rakhine State suffered under systemic persecution by Myanmar's authorities. In 2017, the Tatmadaw launched a brutal "clearance operation" that killed thousands of Rohingya and drove more than a million people out of Myanmar into Bangladesh[1]. The campaign is widely condemned as ethnic cleansing that devastated Rohingya communities and left those who remained in Myanmar living under apartheid-like conditions. Around the same time, the Arakan Army, an ethnic Rakhine armed group formed in 2009, was growing in strength. The AA fought Myanmar's central government for greater autonomy in Rakhine. By late 2020, it had secured an informal ceasefire with the Tatmadaw and established a degree of self-governance in parts of Rakhine. However, the fragile peace didn't last. In late 2023, heavy fighting reignited between the Arakan Army and Myanmar's military, shattering the calm. The AA rapidly expanded its control across northern Rakhine State amid this renewed conflict. As clashes intensified, Rohingya civilians were once again caught in the middle. Human rights monitors warned that the violence in 2024 "bears a terrifying resemblance" to the atrocities of August 2017¹. In fact, the conflict since November 2023 has displaced more than 320,000 people in Rakhine and neighboring areas[2], a grim indicator that history may be repeating itself.

A New Force, Same Old Divide-and-Rule Tactics

When the Arakan Army gained ground, many hoped this local force might treat the Rohingya better than the national military had. The AA's leadership even spoke of building an "inclusive" administration. In early 2024, the AA (through its political wing, the United League of Arakan) announced the formation of an Arakan People's Government in areas it controls, promising equal rights for all ethnic groups. The AA's commander, Major-General Twan Mrat Naing, claimed Rohingya residents would have "equal citizenship" in Rakhine and even be allowed to travel with foreign passports. The new Arakan authorities set up some mixed local committees and reportedly gave a few Rohingya token positions in community policing, health, and agriculture projects. But behind this inclusive rhetoric, a more sinister strategy appears to be unfolding. The AA has co-opted a small number of Rohingya individuals -- often those who are vulnerable or looking to improve their own situation - and given them minor roles in the new administration. These token Rohingya "representatives" have little real power. Instead, they are used as tools by the AA to control and divide the Rohingya community. By showcasing a few Rohingya in its ranks, the AA projects an image of inclusivity to

outsiders, but on the ground, it continues to marginalize and repress the broader Rohingya population. Seasoned observers note that the AA is effectively mimicking the Tatmadaw's old playbook of divide-and-rule. Under successive military regimes, Myanmar authorities frequently pitted Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims against each other to weaken any united resistance. Now the AA seems to be using a similar approach for its own ends. Internal divisions are being weaponized: Rohingya are being turned against Rohingya, making it harder for the community to unite or stand up for their rights. As in the past, the tactic is to instill mistrust and paranoia so that people fear even their neighbors. "It fosters a culture of mistrust so deep that meaningful resistance or self-advocacy becomes nearly impossible," one analyst warned. In short, a new power in Rakhine is behaving much like the old: exploiting ethnic and religious fault lines to entrench its rule.

Turning Rohingya Against Rohingya

One of the clearest signs of the AA's divide-and-rule strategy is its recruitment and use of Rohingya informants and collaborators. According to reports from conflict zones like Maungdaw and Buthidaung, AA forces have been pressuring young Rohingya men, especially those who are desperate or displaced to join their ranks or assist them. Some youths have been lured or coerced into roles as village guards, local administrators, or even fighters for AA-linked militias. In exchange, the AA offers them promises of safety, food, or a bit of local authority. But these recruits often end up spying on their own communities or enforcing the AA's orders against fellow Rohingya. It is an eerie echo of the 1990s and 2000s, when Myanmar's military used a handful of Rohingya collaborators (such as the infamous majhi camp leaders) to control and punish their own people. Those Rohingya who cooperate with the AA may do so out of a sense of self-preservation. In interviews, some community leaders admitted they worked with the AA just to ensure basic services for their people. For example, one Rohingya camp leader in Paletwa joined an AA-organized agriculture committee simply because his village needed food and aid, not because he believed in the AA's ideology. "We had no choice," another said: if they refused to attend AA's training or meetings, they might be barred from farming or moving freely. The line between coercion and volunteering is blurred in such cases. Many Rohingya participating in AA-run programs fear they'll be labeled "insurgents" if they don't go along. Their cooperation is often a means of survival rather than genuine allegiance.

On the flip side, Rohingya who resist the AA or refuse to collaborate face severe retaliation. Community activists report that simply voicing dissent or trying to stay neutral can get one branded as a "troublemaker" or a traitor. Under the AA's watch, being labeled an "ARSA supporter" (a reference to the Rohingya insurgent group Arakan

Rohingya Salvation Army) or a “Myanmar military informant” has become a death sentence in some areas. False accusations are encouraged: the AA has allegedly directed its Rohingya informants to falsely accuse others in their villages of having ties to enemy groups. The consequences are devastating and immediate. Families of the accused have been abducted or killed, people disappear overnight, and entire villages empty out in fear as neighbors turn on each other.

A harrowing example comes from the testimony of Seno Ara, a 23-year-old Rohingya woman from Buthidaung. She recalled how AA soldiers burst into her home one day looking for her husband, whom they accused (without evidence) of being a Myanmar military informant. When Seno told them her husband wasn’t there, the soldiers accused her of lying. They restrained and brutalised her in front of her children, even sexually assaulting her. When her husband eventually came home and tried to intervene, the soldiers attacked him. “They said today was his last day, he was an informant to our enemy, and they slaughtered him with a sharp knife,” Seno recounted[1]. Traumatized and widowed, she fled with her two young kids to Bangladesh for safety. Stories like Seno’s illustrate how the AA’s tactics of fear and punishment mirror the worst abuses of the Tatmadaw – using accusations of treachery to justify horrific violence.

By creating an atmosphere where Rohingya are pressured to inform on each other and live in constant fear of being called a “spy,” the AA achieves several objectives. It shatters the community’s unity and neutralizes potential opposition, since people are too afraid to organize or speak out. It also feeds a narrative (for external audiences) that any Rohingya resistance or unrest is due to internal feuds, not the AA’s oppression. As one Rohingya activist observed, both the Myanmar military and the AA seem to view the Rohingya “as a means to an end, a mere afterthought” in their struggle for power³. In other words, the Rohingya are being used by both sides and are victims of both.

Abuses Under a New Flag

The Arakan Army’s rule has brought not only political manipulation but also outright violence and abuse against Rohingya civilians. Multiple human rights organizations and witnesses have accused the AA of committing atrocities reminiscent of the 2017 genocide, only now under a different banner. In April and May 2024, as AA fighters seized control of townships like Buthidaung and Minbya, they reportedly burned down dozens of Rohingya villages. Satellite imagery reviewed by Human Rights Watch confirmed thermal signatures of widespread arson, indicating that hundreds of homes were deliberately set on fire. Rohingya villagers caught in these offensives described nightmare scenarios: AA soldiers looting property, executing unarmed residents, and raping women under the pretext of hunting for “insurgents”. These scenes were “tragically reminiscent” of the military’s 2017 campaign, noted HRW’s Asia director Elaine Pearson.

One particularly deadly incident occurred on August 5, 2024, near Maungdaw in northern Rakhine. As fighting raged between the AA and Myanmar's junta, thousands of Rohingya civilians tried to flee toward the Bangladesh border. According to numerous accounts, drone strikes and shelling rained down on the fleeing crowds, causing mass casualties. Videos from that day showed dozens of bodies of men, women, and children strewn along the escape route. Rohingya witnesses blamed the Arakan Army for the carnage, saying its forces attacked the civilians from the air. (The AA denied this, and the Myanmar military also tried to deflect blame onto the AA, making it difficult to immediately verify responsibility). What is clear is that large numbers of Rohingya were killed in the crossfire of that battle nearly 200 people by some counts making it one of the worst single-day tolls since 2017.

Throughout 2024, reports of abuse mounted. By Amnesty International's estimate, at least 2,500 Rohingya were killed and some 40,000 were forced to flee Myanmar between March and August 2024 alone. This toll came not only from open battles, but also from targeted brutality. Rohingya civilians have described AA raids on villages, summary executions, torture, and sexual violence, all under the cloak of counter-insurgency operations. Mohammad Ayas, a Rohingya man from Maungdaw, told The New Humanitarian how AA troops attacked his home and massacred his family with knives, ostensibly searching for ARSA fighters. Another survivor recounted to researchers that AA members gang-raped her and then killed her husband after accusing him of being a spy (this was Seno Ara's story above). Such horrific accounts underscore that the patterns of abuse are alarmingly similar to those employed by the Tatmadaw during its campaigns of ethnic cleansing.

The Arakan Army's leadership vehemently denies targeting Rohingya civilians. AA spokespeople have dismissed these reports as "fabricated" propaganda. They frequently blame the violence on other forces claiming that any burned homes or killed villagers were either caused by Myanmar's own troops or by Rohingya insurgents trying to make the AA look bad. In May 2024, after international outcry over village burnings, the AA issued a statement categorically rejecting the accusations and even suggested that Rohingya militants and the Myanmar army were behind the arson in Buthidaung. However, these denials ring hollow in the face of consistent evidence to the contrary. Independent investigations using satellite data, survivor testimonies, and media reports all point toward the AA's involvement in many of the abuses. Human Rights Watch plainly stated that Rohingya now face "extrajudicial killings, sexual violence and torture on par with the junta's 2017 campaign" in Rakhine.

Tellingly, the Arakan Army's rhetoric toward the Rohingya has begun to mirror that of

the Myanmar military in another way: denial of the Rohingya's identity. AA officials and affiliated media often avoid using the word "Rohingya" at all. Instead, they refer to Rohingya as "Bengali Muslims", a derogatory term used by Burmese ultranationalists to imply that the Rohingya are foreign interlopers from Bangladesh rather than a native ethnic group. This is the same slur that Myanmar's government has long employed to strip the Rohingya of citizenship and claim they don't belong in Myanmar. The AA's adoption of this language is alarming to Rohingya activists. As the United Nations human rights chief warned, such "hateful narratives" contribute to dehumanizing the Rohingya and were the fuel for past communal violence. In fact, a Bangladeshi official noted that AA leaders have been "spreading a false narrative" by calling Rohingya Bangladeshi migrants and not indigenous to Rakhine exactly the claim used for decades to justify Rohingya disenfranchisement. By echoing this propaganda, the Arakan Army risks entrenching the same ethnic hatred that led to previous atrocities. It suggests that, despite branding itself as a revolutionary force, the AA is perpetuating the old politics of erasure and exclusion against the Rohingya.

International Alarm and Rohingya Warnings

As reports of the Arakan Army's abuses have emerged, international observers and Rohingya leaders alike are raising the alarm. Global human rights organizations see disturbing parallels between what is happening now and the events of 2017. "Rohingya in Rakhine State are enduring abuses tragically reminiscent of the military's atrocities in 2017," said Human Rights Watch's Asia director in August 2024. "Once again, armed forces are driving thousands of Rohingya from their homes with killings and arson, leaving them nowhere safe to turn." Both HRW and Amnesty International have issued statements noting that the escalating attacks "bear a terrifying resemblance" to the horrors of August 2017 -- a strong warning that the world must not ignore these patterns just because the perpetrator now is an ethnic rebel army rather than the central government.

Within the Rohingya diaspora and activist circles, there were early warnings about the Arakan Army's intentions. Rohingya advocacy groups such as the Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO) and the Arakan Rohingya National Alliance (ARNA) have long cautioned that the AA's rise could spell trouble for their people. Even when the AA was touting inclusive policies, these groups pointed out signs of exclusion and hostility. They noted, for instance, the AA's reluctance to explicitly acknowledge "Rohingya" as an ethnic category, and they suspected that any inclusion of Rohingya was largely performative. These early alerts were largely ignored on the international stage. Now, as evidence of AA-perpetrated abuses piles up, those warnings appear vindicated. "A new power is rising in Rakhine, but it carries the same old cruelty this time masked in the language of revolution," one Rohingya rights leader observed bitterly.

Some Rohingya activists have been collecting and publicizing evidence of the AA's abuses to press for international action. The New Humanitarian that by mid-2024 at least 2,500 Rohingya had been killed and 40,000 driven out by the AA's assaults. These figures, if confirmed, underscore that the AA's campaign has had a massive human cost. Researchers from groups like Fortify Rights have also documented the forced recruitment of Rohingya youth by the AA, highlighting it as a major concern. John Quinley of Fortify Rights reported hearing "numerous reports of the Arakan Army trying to force young [Rohingya] people to join its ranks." Even the International Crisis Group – which initially held out hope that the AA might govern differently has noted with alarm that the conflict's intensification has "doused initial hopes" for the AA's treatment of Rohingya. Thomas Kean, a Myanmar expert with ICG, said mistrust has now taken root "on all sides" and that repairing the damage will be exceedingly difficult.

Internationally, pressure is beginning to mount for accountability. In November 2024, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant for Myanmar's junta chief Min Aung Hlaing over the 2017 Rohingya atrocities. While that warrant concerns the military's crimes, the ICC and other bodies are also monitoring the current situation in Rakhine. Investigators have indicated that if the AA is committing widespread abuses against the Rohingya, those acts too could constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity. There is a growing call that any peace negotiations or diplomatic engagement with the Arakan Army must address these allegations head-on, rather than treating the AA as a benign actor. Simply put, the world is being urged not to "give a pass" to the AA just because it opposes the hated junta. As one Rohingya activist put it, oppression is oppression and "as long as the AA perpetuates the military's divisive and abusive strategies against the Rohingya, it forfeits any claim to moral high ground or legitimate governance".

Humanitarian Crisis and the Call for Justice

Meanwhile, on the ground in Rakhine State, the humanitarian situation for Rohingya civilians has gone from bad to worse. The renewed fighting since 2023 has created a massive displacement crisis. Over 320,000 people (mostly Rohingya) have been uprooted from their homes in Rakhine and neighboring Chin State as villages are attacked or emptied out. Many displaced Rohingya have fled to the same places they did in 2017 some attempt the perilous sea journey in rickety boats to reach Malaysia or Indonesia, while tens of thousands have crossed the border into Bangladesh, swelling the already overcrowded refugee camps of Cox's Bazar. In scenes heartbreakingly similar to the past, families are trudging through jungles or paddling across the Naf River to seek safety. One Rohingya man described the river on August 5, 2024 as "full of dead Rohingya bodies" as people tried to escape the drones and shells.

Inside Rakhine, those who remain face an increasingly dire situation. Humanitarian access is heavily restricted under the AA's de facto authority and the ongoing military blockade. Aid groups have reported that deliveries of food, medicine, and other relief to Rohingya communities are being blocked or delayed by both the Arakan Army and the junta, each wary of supplies reaching areas under the other's control. This has led to widespread hunger and medical shortages. Observers on the ground speak of malnutrition in displaced camps and the spread of preventable diseases because clinics lack supplies. In some instances, aid is weaponized with reports that the AA grants assistance to Rohingya villages that cooperate, while villages deemed "uncooperative" are cut off from help. Mosques, schools, and farms have been destroyed in the fighting, undermining livelihoods. The overall picture is one of a community on the brink of humanitarian collapse, caught between a rock (the military's onslaught) and a hard place (the AA's harsh rule).

These humanitarian consequences have prompted urgent calls for action. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have implored all parties to protect civilians and allow unrestricted aid access in Rakhine. They emphasize that a change in who controls the territory does not change the rights of the people living there. Every armed group, whether state or non-state, is bound by international law to spare civilians and permit relief to reach those in need. Yet, on the ground, these appeals have largely gone unheeded, and Rohingya civilians continue to bear the brunt of the violence. As humanitarian conditions deteriorated, an HRW director warned the international community: "Once again, armed forces are driving thousands of Rohingya from their homes... leaving them nowhere safe to turn." The sense of déjà vu is palpable and infuriating for those who lived through 2017 and thought the world's "Never Again" actually meant something.

Legal and diplomatic efforts are slowly gearing up to address these abuses. The International Criminal Court (ICC) has an ongoing investigation into the 2016-2017 Rohingya violence, and there are discussions about expanding its scope to include recent events. In a parallel move, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) is hearing a genocide case against Myanmar for the 2017 atrocities, and there is global pressure for the court to consider evidence from the current Rakhine crisis as well. The United Nations Security Council, despite being hamstrung by politics, passed a resolution in late 2022 demanding an end to violence in Myanmar; now advocates want the Council to explicitly condemn the abuses by all sides in Rakhine, including the Arakan Army. So far, meaningful action has been slow, but the documentation of AA's alleged crimes is growing. Many observers stress that accountability is key: if the Arakan Army's commanders believe they will face war crimes charges or international sanctions for targeting Rohingya, they may think twice before continuing on this path.

Within the region, some voices are urging a different approach one of reconciliation and inclusion as the only way out of this destructive cycle. In late 2024, a Rohingya representative appealed to the Arakan Army and Rakhine Buddhist leaders to “work together with the Rohingya people” for a shared future, instead of treating them as enemies. He reminded them that the Rohingya and Rakhine communities had lived side by side for generations, and that peace in Rakhine State is impossible if one group is intent on dominating or expelling the other. However, he also acknowledged the immense trust deficit created by decades of violence and propaganda. Indeed, after so many cycles of betrayal, the Rohingya have learned to be wary of any political program that claims to help them. As one United States Institute of Peace analysis noted, the junta’s long-standing divide-and-rule tactics had already sown deep distrust between Rohingya and Rakhine communities. Now, the AA’s actions are reviving those old animosities, making reconciliation ever more difficult.

For the Rohingya, the current situation is both profoundly tragic and painfully ironic. They remain a stateless, persecuted people – but now they are also being irreparably divided from within, turned against each other by a rebel army that professes to fight oppression. As one Rohingya elder lamented, it is as if their land, identity, and future are being carved up by “new overlords flying a different flag”. The humanitarian imperative is clear: the violence and division must stop, and aid must reach those in need. But beyond that, there is a moral imperative for the world to speak up for justice. The Rohingya’s plight did not end in 2017, and it will not end as long as groups like the Arakan Army can commit abuses in the shadows.

Ultimately, real peace in Rakhine will require accountability and inclusion. The Arakan Army cannot be allowed to hide behind the banner of “revolution” while carrying out ethnic persecution. If it wants to be seen as a legitimate governing force, it must abandon the tactics of divide-and-rule, cease the abuses, and genuinely respect Rohingya rights including recognizing their identity and citizenship. For the international community, this means engaging with Rakhine’s complex conflict with eyes wide open, not through rose-colored glasses. Any support to the AA or any other group in Myanmar should be contingent on humane conduct and respect for all civilians. As the saying goes, “never again” must mean something. The Rohingya have suffered enough under one oppressor; they must not be left to suffer under another. Bringing the AA’s actions to light, and holding perpetrators accountable, is an essential step toward breaking this horrific cycle and allowing the Rohingya a chance to live in peace and dignity at last.

Rohingya Security and Peace in Rakhine



Ali, a 24-year-old Rohingya man from Buthidaung, Myanmar, who said he escaped after being forcibly recruited by the junta, poses for a picture in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, June 25, 2024. Originally published by Reuters

The Rohingya have long suffered systemic statelessness and repression. Under Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law they have been "effectively denied citizenship," making them "one of the largest stateless populations in the world". Decades of discriminatory policies confined Rohingya to ghettos and IDP camps, with severe movement and livelihood restrictions. In 2017 the military's "sweeping campaign" later deemed genocidal drove over a million Rohingya into Bangladesh, leaving some 600,000 trapped in Rakhine under a "system of apartheid and persecution". Even after that exodus, Myanmar's government and society have continued to ostracize Rohingya, barring them from citizenship, land ownership, and legal weapons or political representation. This historical exclusion set the stage for today's crisis: a completely defenseless minority caught between armed factions.

As recent maps show, the 2024 fighting has clustered around northern Rakhine's Maungdaw and Buthidaung townships, home to large Rohingya communities. After the November 2023 ceasefire collapse, the ethnic-Rakhine Arakan Army (AA) surged westward across Rakhine State, quickly overrunning military posts. The AA founded in 2009 to carve out an autonomous Rakhine homeland historically fights

the central government and does not align with Rohingya interests. As battles raged, Rohingya found themselves “stuck between warring parties,” facing “persecution on two fronts” from both the junta and the AA. By mid-2024 the AA claimed Buthidaung and Maungdaw, and humanitarian agencies warned that thousands of Rohingya civilians were fleeing the fighting with “no food or medicine”. In short, the renewed Rakhine war has placed Rohingya already ostracized and disarmed directly in the line of fire.

Arakan Army Abuses Against Rohingya

Multiple independent reports document that AA units have repeatedly targeted Rohingya civilians. In Buthidaung town on 17 May 2024, Arakan Army fighters captured remaining junta bases and then “shelled, looted, and burned Rohingya neighborhoods,” forcing thousands to flee. Satellite imagery confirms that in late April and May the AA systematically torched at least 40 Rohingya-majority villages around Buthidaung. Witnesses described AA fighters using petrol-soaked sticks to ignite homes an assessment later echoed by the UN human-rights office as “every indication” that AA forces were responsible². Amnesty International similarly found that the AA “unlawfully killed Rohingya civilians” and drove them from their homes during this offensive. These documented abuses deliberate mass arson and summary executions mirror the worst crimes of the junta, prompting Rohingya activists to note that the AA is now “committing the same human rights violations against Rohingya” as Myanmar’s military.

The devastation is visible from space. A satellite view over Buthidaung (above) shows towering black smoke plumes on 18 May 2024, evidence of wide-scale village burnings reported by locals². Rohingya victims describe AA fighters besieging towns, attacking schools and hospitals, and setting fire to houses even after ordering civilians to evacuate. In one survivor’s words, “Without any conflict, the Arakan Army besieged the town. They started launching heavy weapons and began setting the houses on fire. People ran, fleeing for their lives”². These acts which the AA flatly denies have already displaced tens of thousands of Rohingya. In diaspora statements, Rohingya groups report AA arson campaigns displacing over 200,000 people and sending 118,000 across borders to Bangladesh and beyond.

In parallel, Rohingya have been forcibly drawn into the conflict by both sides, underscoring their vulnerability. Reuters found that the junta clandestinely abducted and conscripted Rohingya men, even teaching them weapons with the explicit goal of stoking communal revenge. One recruited man, “Ali” from Buthidaung, escaped to Cox’s Bazar; he reports soldiers once told Rohingya conscripts: “These Rakhine people killed your people and burned your houses in 2017. Now, it is time for revenge”[1]. AA fighters have also coerced Rohingya into their armed group. These cases illustrate how Rohingya with no choice and no protection are being exploited by all armed factions.

For example, Reuters photographed “Ali” (above), a 24-year-old Rohingya who was caught up in this turmoil. He posed in a refugee camp in Bangladesh after escaping jungle training given by the military. Another young Rohingya, pictured below, told reporters he was abducted by a junta-allied Rohingya insurgent group and forced back to fight in Rakhine. These personal stories underscore that Rohingya have no safe haven they are “oppressed, scapegoated, and stuck between warring parties”.

The human toll is stark. A Rohingya teenager stands by a window in the Cox’s Bazar camp, a youth one rescue official said was taken to fight against the AA before managing to escape. Rights investigators report that AA and military attacks have caused scenes “tragically reminiscent of the 2017 exodus”¹. One Rohingya leader now estimates that AA assaults in early 2024 killed at least 2,500 Rohingya and displaced 40,000 more. Civilians hide in fear; aid agencies note that in captured towns even hospitals have burned, leaving “communities with no options for medical care”⁴. In short, the Arakan Army’s rise has only made the Rohingya’s plight as vulnerable as ever.

A 15-year-old Rohingya boy, who said he was abducted for conscription by a military-aligned Rohingya insurgent group, poses for a picture in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, June 26, 2024. Originally published by Reuters



Power Imbalance and Rohingya Vulnerability

The root of this crisis is stark power imbalance. Rohingya communities are politically disenfranchised and legally barred from forming any official defense force. Myanmar's government long regarded them as "illegal immigrants," excluding them from census counts and any legal citizenship⁴. By contrast, ethnic Rakhine have both the Tatmadaw (Myanmar Army) and their own armed insurgency (the AA) at their disposal. Even when Rohingya men have attempted self-protection, they were branded terrorists, immediately crushed and demonized. Today, that imbalance remains: Rohingya villages have no sanctioned guns or police to deter attacks, whereas AA units freely wield artillery and air support.

This arms disparity has had tragic consequences. The UN Special Rapporteur warned that Rohingya being "forcibly recruited to stoke communal divisions" is "echoes of the lead-up to the genocidal violence of 2016 and 2017"⁴. In effect, the Rohingya are defenseless targets while powerful militias battle over their land. Human rights observers note that both military and AA "are using hate speech, attacks on civilians, and massive arson to drive people from their homes"². With no ability to respond in kind, the Rohingya "bear the brunt" of atrocities. Decades of apartheid rules have left them unable even to legally own a firearm; as one HRW researcher put it, they remain "exceptionally vulnerable" unless protection is found.

Self-Defense as Deterrence and Peacebuilding

Given this stark imbalance, empowering Rohingya self-defense is not only a right it is an urgent necessity for any hope of stability. Communities in Myanmar and elsewhere often resort to self-protection when the state fails them. Allowing Rohingya to organize armed community defense (even small, carefully controlled militias or patrols) would fundamentally alter the calculus: aggressors could no longer attack with impunity. In conflict zones worldwide, local defense units have often deterred or limited violence against civilians. Likewise in Rakhine, a credible self-defense capability could force the AA and military to think twice before ordering ethnic cleansing.

The right of Rohingya to defend their lives is enshrined in international principles of human rights and humanitarian law. When governments abdicate the duty to protect, communities must be permitted means to safeguard themselves. As one UN expert warned, if nothing changes the situation “carries echoes” of earlier genocide. Recognizing Rohingya self-defense would begin to rectify that danger. In practical terms, self-defense need not mean full-scale militia armies; it could include volunteer village guard units, early-warning committees, non-lethal deterrents, and coordination with neutral peacekeepers. Even limited defensive arms caches under strict oversight could help balance against AA patrols and rogue military elements.

Recommendations

To restore balance and protect civilians, policy must embrace Rohingya self-defense and community protection:

- **Acknowledge Rohingya Right to Self-Protection:** The Myanmar government, armed groups, and international mediators should formally recognize that Rohingya communities have the right to defend themselves. This means rescinding any barriers to Rohingya forming local defense committees and treating such groups as legitimate security partners rather than “terrorists” or “fundamentalist”.
- **Support Community Defense Mechanisms:** International actors (e.g. UN agencies, NGOs) should fund and train Rohingya community defense teams. Training should focus on nonlethal community safety, e.g. building safe shelters, evacuations, first aid and early-warning networks as well as, where necessary, providing defensive weapons under strict accountability. Experience from other crises shows that trained local defense units can deter attacks while minimizing abuse.
- **Ensure Political Inclusion:** Any peace talks or autonomy arrangements for Rakhine State must include Rohingya representatives with security input. The disenfranchisement that spawned this conflict can only end when Rohingya communities have a voice in governance and local security. Facilitating Rohingya participation in local security councils would help legitimize their protection efforts.
- **International Oversight and Pressure:** Global powers should condition aid or engagement on Myanmar and AA allowing independent monitors into Rakhine. Just as the ICC and UN have urged investigations of military crimes, they should also support mechanisms to protect civilians. Sanctions or legal action should extend to AA leaders if they continue civilian targeting as

Rohingya NGOs have demanded. In parallel, the international community should provide a safety net: humanitarian corridors, safe zones, or rapid airlifts, so that Rohingya defenders know there are lifelines if they resist aggression.

In sum, long-term peace in Rakhine depends on rebalancing security. The Rohingya's exclusion and disarmament must be reversed. Empowering Rohingya self-defense through legal recognition, training, and inclusion is not a militaristic escalation but a protective equalizer. When Rohingya people can guard their villages and families, the cycle of violence by both the junta and the AA will no longer go unchecked. Only a credible deterrent on all sides can prevent renewed atrocities and pave the way to a more durable, inclusive peace.

IIMM SHARES EVIDENCE OF CRIMES AGAINST ROHINGYA WITH INTERNATIONAL COURTS



The Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) has delivered substantial evidence of crimes committed against the Rohingya people to the International Criminal Court (ICC), the International Court of Justice (ICJ), and the Federal Court of Argentina. The evidence includes unlawful detentions of political opponents, torture, group massacres, sexual violence, extrajudicial killings, drone and air-strikes, and serious restrictions on humanitarian aid. Civilians in Rakhine State especially Rohingya refugees are reported to be enduring these abuses an estimated 150,000 Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh. Other ethnic groups in the region are also affected.

The IIMM emphasizes that its investigations aim to be unbiased, documenting alleged crimes by both Myanmar's military and armed groups. They've collected personal identifying data for certain perpetrators, and detailed records of abuses regardless of ethnicity or political affiliation. The report stresses that without accountability and international intervention, the cycle of violence may carry on. The IIMM urges enforcement mechanisms to act endorsing earlier calls from bodies like ASEAN and the UN Human Rights Council for ending impunity and providing justice for victims.

Dhaka Declaration: Rohingya Speak with One Voice

For too long, the Rohingya people have been spoken about but not listened to. At two recent consultations in Bangladesh organized by Neeti Gobeshona Kendra and the Arakan Rohingya National Alliance (ARNA), Rohingya refugees, community leaders, and civil society came together to issue a clear and united message: solutions to this crisis must be shaped by the Rohingya themselves.

The outcome, known as the Dhaka Declaration on Rohingya Aspirations, is a collective call for justice, dignity, and the right to return home. Representing this unified voice, Nurul Islam, Chairman of ARNA, stressed that Rohingya political leadership is indispensable if repatriation and reconciliation are to become real and lasting. Our community will no longer accept policies made without us. We demand a seat at the table. The declaration outlines our shared priorities: immediate reversal of food assistance cuts; access to education, healthcare, and dignified living conditions in camps; and recognition of Rohingya identity, full citizenship, and restitution of property as preconditions for safe and sustainable repatriation. Without structural reforms in Myanmar and international monitoring to ensure safety, any return would be unsafe and unsustainable.

We also speak with one voice on the need for justice. The international community must support ongoing cases at the International Court of Justice and International Criminal Court, impose targeted sanctions on perpetrators, and ensure accountability for genocide and crimes against humanity. Without justice, the cycle of persecution will continue. Unity within our community youth, women, elders, and diaspora is central to this vision. Stronger Rohingya leadership will allow us to negotiate effectively with Myanmar, the Arakan Army, Bangladesh, and international actors.

The Dhaka Declaration is not a plea, it is the unified demand of a people who have endured decades of persecution. We call on Bangladesh, regional neighbors, and the international community to stand with us, not as victims, but as rightful partners in shaping a future built on equality, safety, and coexistence in our homeland of Rakhine.

A Mosque Reopens in Maungdaw but What Does It Really Mean?



After 13 long years, the Grand Jame Mosque in Maungdaw has reopened. For the Rohingya community, this is not just about a building. It is a place tied to memory, identity, and belonging. Seeing its doors unlocked again brings relief and a sense of recognition.

The mosque had been shut since the violence of 2012, only briefly opened once under the junta, then closed again when fighting returned. This latest reopening was ordered by the Arakan Army's political wing after requests from local Muslim leaders. People in Maungdaw welcomed the move, though many noticed the mosque is in poor shape after years of neglect. So is this a turning point? Maybe. It could be read as a small step toward including the Rohingya in Rakhine's future. But the timing also raises doubts. With fighting intensifying between the military and the Arakan Army, suddenly embracing Rohingya religious sites could be more about winning attention and credibility than real change. We've seen this before: symbolic gestures while restrictions, displacement, and abuses continue in daily life.

If this reopening is to mean anything, it can't stop at unlocking a single mosque. It has to be followed by repairing the site, protecting worshippers, and giving Rohingya broader rights freedom of movement, safety from attacks, and a real say in decisions. Otherwise, it's just another photo-op at the expense of a community that has already endured too much.

The mosque's doors are open again. The bigger question is whether that door leads to real inclusion, or whether it will shut once more when the spotlight fades.

Rohingya Women are Forced into Arakan Army Rank

Reports emerging from northern Rakhine have sent waves of fear through the Rohingya community. The Arakan Army, which now controls much of the region, is reportedly forcing young Rohingya women into military service. Local sources in Maungdaw and Buthidaung say AA representatives recently ordered each township to send around 50 women for “training.” To many, it sounded less like a request and more like an order backed by threat. For a community that has survived genocide, mass displacement, and years of statelessness, this new development is devastating. Families who have already lost everything now face the prospect of their daughters being drawn into a war they never chose. “We are terrified,” one resident told Rohingya Khobor. “They came to our villages and said we must send women. What happens if we refuse?”

The Arakan Army claims to fight for the rights of the Rakhine people and has portrayed itself as a more disciplined, organized alternative to Myanmar’s brutal military. But reports like these echoes the same oppressive tactics the Rohingya have endured for decades: coercion, forced labor, and fear. While the AA denies the allegations, evidence continues to pile up. Witnesses describe similar orders and threats issued in recent months, often followed by disappearances or forced relocations.

This conscription is not just a local issue. It strikes at the heart of international human rights. Forcing women, especially from an already persecuted minority, into combat roles violates every standard of protection for civilians in conflict. Now, even their right to personal safety is being eroded further. These developments also expose the growing complexity of Myanmar’s conflict. The Arakan Army, once seen by some as a potential force for federal democracy, has instead entrenched its control through fear. Its actions mirror the very military junta it claims to resist. The same pattern of coercion, displacement, and selective inclusion of minorities continues only under a different flag.

For Rohingya women, the stakes are even higher. Many already carry the burden of survival raising children in displacement camps, enduring sexual violence, or scavenging for food amid blockades. To be forced into military service is not empowerment; it is exploitation. It turns victims into tools of war and deepens the cycle of trauma that has defined Rohingya life for generations. The wider world cannot afford to stay silent. The forced conscription of Rohingya women, if confirmed, should trigger immediate international investigation and accountability. The United Nations and human rights organizations must demand unrestricted access to Rakhine and protection for civilians, particularly women and girls. The Arakan Army should be held to the same standards as any other armed actor in Myanmar. Claims of liberation mean nothing if built on the suffering of others.

Beyond condemnation, action is needed. Sanctions against those ordering or carrying out forced recruitment should be considered. Diplomatic pressure must be applied to ensure that humanitarian agencies can safely operate in northern Rakhine, where fear now dictates every aspect of daily life. Aid groups warn that food shortages and forced displacement are already reaching catastrophic levels; adding conscription to that mix only multiplies the danger. There is also a moral test here. For years, the Rohingya have been treated as expendable, used by one side or another to serve political ends. The Arakan Army's treatment of them now - especially of women -- will reveal whether it seeks justice or simply another form of domination. The world's response will reveal whether it has learned anything from the last decade of atrocities.

Rohingya women have shown extraordinary strength through years of persecution. They have rebuilt lives in refugee camps, led community schools, and held families together when everything else fell apart. Forcing them into military uniforms dishonors that strength and turns resilience into tragedy. These reports represent not just a violation but a warning: the violence that began as genocide is mutating into something more insidious, spreading under new authorities. The global community cannot look away again. The Rohingya deserve protection, not propaganda. Their women deserve peace, not conscription.

On the 8th Anniversary of the Rohingya Genocide the Crisis Continues, the World Must Act

Aug 24, 2025 | ARNA Press Release

Eight years after the Myanmar military's genocidal "clearance operations" of August 2017, the Rohingya people remain trapped in an unending nightmare. Over 1 million live in refugee camps in Bangladesh, another 600,000 endure apartheid-like conditions in Myanmar, and thousands more remain displaced with no path home. Despite international promises of "never again," the genocide continues in slow motion, with no signs of stopping.

Since 2017, Rohingya communities have endured killings, mass displacement, and denial of rights. Refugees in Bangladesh struggle to survive on severely reduced aid, with families living on as little as \$12 per month in food support. Inside Myanmar, Rohingya are still confined to camps and villages under travel bans, arbitrary arrests, and aid blockages. These policies starve, weaken, and dehumanize a population already stripped of citizenship.

Recent developments in northern Rakhine show that the threat is intensifying. The collapse of a ceasefire between the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army (AA) has triggered heavy fighting in Buthidaung, Maungdaw, and Rathedaung. Rohingya villages have become battlegrounds. Reports confirm indiscriminate shelling, drone strikes, and raids that have killed dozens of civilians and displaced more than 100,000 in the past year. Families describe hiding in forests without food or medicine, cut off from all aid.

The Rohingya are not only victims of the military's brutality but also of the Arakan Army's abuses. The AA has carried out abductions, village raids, torching of homes, and forced evictions. Mosques and Islamic schools have been locked, and Rohingya men, women, and even girls have been forced into labor and recruitment. In some cases, entire villages were ordered to empty, with properties seized and resettled. These acts show that the Rohingya face persecution from both the junta and the AA, leaving them with no safe space in their homeland.

Eight years on, the intent to destroy the Rohingya people remains clear. The Myanmar junta continues to confine, starve, and deny rights to 600,000 Rohingya inside the country, while blocking all prospects for safe return. The AA, now controlling parts of northern Rakhine, has chosen to target the Rohingya instead of protecting civilians. Together, these forces sustain the same genocidal system by different means.

There are no practical signs of safety or dignity for the Rohingya in Myanmar today. Under current conditions, repatriation is impossible. Any return now would only expose refugees to renewed atrocities. Yet permanent exile is not an answer. The Rohingya's rightful future lies in their homeland, living as equal citizens alongside other ethnic groups.

On this solemn anniversary, ARNA honors the thousands lost and the millions displaced. We also issue an urgent call to governments, international organizations, and policymakers:

- **End the impunity.** Hold Myanmar's military leaders accountable for genocide and war crimes. Expand sanctions and support ongoing cases at the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court.
- **Protect civilians.** Demand that both the junta and the Arakan Army stop targeting Rohingya communities. Guarantee humanitarian access to all parts of Rakhine.
- **Support refugees.** Restore and increase funding for food, healthcare, and education in Bangladesh camps. Prevent forced returns until safety and rights are secured.
- **Prepare for real repatriation.** Plan for voluntary return to original villages in Rakhine under international supervision, with full citizenship restored and equal rights guaranteed.

As ARNA leadership states: *"Our people cannot remain stateless forever. The world must act to end this genocide and ensure our safe and dignified return. We are Rohingya, and Arakan is our homeland."*

For further inquiries, please contact:
secretariat@thearna.org

About ARNA:

The Arakan Rohingya National Alliance (ARNA) was formed to align all Rohingya leadership and provide a unified policy framework for the community. It serves as an alliance of Rohingyas from within Myanmar, refugee camps, internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps, and the Rohingya diaspora.

Main Objective of ARNA

The primary objective of ARNA is to unify the Rohingya people under one alliance, amplifying their voices, and to achieve their right of self-determination within the Federal Union of Myanmar. This includes advocating for their right to return to their homes, securing justice for atrocities committed against them, and ensuring their political and human rights are recognized and upheld.

ARNO Expresses Concern Over Crisis Group Report's Misrepresentation of Rohingya Realities

July 6, 2025 | ARNO

The Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO) expresses its strongest condemnation of the International Crisis Group's Asia Report No. 348, titled "*The Dangers of a Rohingya Insurgency*," published on 18 June 2025. The report is troubled with dangerous distortions, unverified claims, and deeply biased narratives that marginalize the Rohingya community while emboldening the very perpetrators of ongoing atrocities.

Instead of accurately reflecting the ground realities in Rakhine State, the report irresponsibly portrays the Rohingya people's existential struggle for survival, justice, and coexistence as a destabilizing force. This flawed framing effectively blames victims and undermines decades of peaceful efforts by Rohingya civil society, diaspora leaders, and political organizations.

Key Points of Rebuttal:

- 1. Genocide Under Arakan Army Control (2023–2024):** The report egregiously omits that since 2023, the Arakan Army has taken control of most of Rakhine and has continued genocidal practices previously deployed by the Myanmar military. Using drones and heavy artillery, the Arakan Army launched indiscriminate attacks on Rohingya villages, displacing more than 100,000 civilians who fled to Bangladesh. These crimes mirror earlier mass atrocities committed by the Myanmar military.
- 2. Land Grabs, Settler Colonialism, and Demographic Engineering:** Entire Rohingya villages have been forcibly depopulated by the Arakan Army and handed over to Rakhine Buddhist settlers. This systematic campaign of land seizure and population replacement reflects a broader agenda of demographic engineering long used as a tool of genocide.
- 3. Continued Persecution and Failure to Protect Civilians:** Despite asserting de facto control over most of Rakhine, the Arakan Army has categorically failed to protect Rohingya civilians. Instead, it has perpetuated persecution and allowed abuses to continue under its authority. This failure, documented by the United Nations and other observers, exposes a troubling disregard for humanitarian obligations and minority rights.
- 4. Suppression of Dialogue and Rohingya Representation:** Rohingya political organizations have made sincere, repeated efforts to initiate dialogue with the Arakan Army toward peaceful coexistence. All such attempts have been rejected or ignored. The Arakan Army continues to deny engagement with Rohingya actors, thereby excluding an indigenous ethnic group from shaping the future of its own homeland.
- 5. Misrepresentation of Rohingya Intentions and Capabilities:** The report falsely frames the Rohingya community as a destabilizing threat, while failing to recognize their long-standing history in Rakhine State and their peaceful calls for coexistence. The Rohingya are an indigenous people, officially recognized before the 1982 Citizenship Law stripped them of legal status. Their commitment to inclusive governance has remained constant, despite betrayal by both the Myanmar state and ethnic allies.

6. Double Standards and Criminalization of Self-Protection: The report applies a discriminatory double standard by glorifying the armed resistance of other ethnic groups while vilifying the Rohingya's call for lawful self-protection. Most ethnic nationalities in Myanmar maintain armed forces in self-administered areas, yet Rohingya aspirations for community defense against tyranny are framed as insurgency -- a clear case of victim-blaming.

7. Forced Recruitment and Human Shields: Both the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army have exploited Rohingya civilians as forced recruits and human shields. These individuals comply under threat of death, not out of ideological alignment. The report downplays these grave violations, further endangering Rohingya lives by misrepresenting their victimhood as militancy.

8. Undermining Repatriation and Reintegration: By demonizing Rohingya political aspirations and distorting their motives, the report directly undermines international efforts or voluntary repatriation and peaceful reintegration. It contributes to exclusionary narratives that justify the ongoing marginalization and statelessness of Rohingya refugees.

ARNO urges the International Crisis Group to retract or thoroughly revise this flawed report and engage in transparent consultation with legitimate Rohingya stakeholders. We also call on international governments, media, and civil society actors to reject narratives that fuel division and instead support the Rohingya people's rightful place on the basis of "full and effective equality".

True peace in Rakhine State can only be achieved through inclusive governance, equitable power-sharing, and full recognition of the Rohingya people's rights to life, dignity, protection, and self-representation.

For more information, please contact:

Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO)
Email: arno@rohingya.org | info@rohingya.org

Eight Years On, Genocide Against Rohingya Persists

Aug 25, 2025 | ARNO

The Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO) today commemorates the 8th anniversary of the Rohingya genocide with a grave warning that the genocide is not over. Eight years after the Myanmar military's brutal campaign in 2017, the remaining Rohingya in northern Rakhine (Arakan) State now face a continuing genocidal onslaught, this time at the hands of the Arakan Army (AA). ARNO is deeply alarmed by ongoing atrocities in north Rakhine that mirror, and in some cases exceed, the horrors of 2017. We urge the international community to recognize the critical urgency of the situation and act immediately to protect the Rohingya before it is too late.

Ongoing Atrocities in North Rakhine State

ARNO has documented indiscriminate killings and attacks against Rohingya civilians in north Rakhine over the past two years under Arakan Army control. Entire villages have been attacked or depopulated in a campaign strikingly similar to the Myanmar military's 2017 genocide. In some incidents, the cruelty has been even more shocking. Women, children, and the elderly have not been spared:

- In August 2024, as fighting engulfed Maungdaw township, Rohingya villagers fleeing for safety were targeted by drone strikes and shelling. On a single day, over a hundred civilian men, women and children were killed while trying to escape across the Naf River. Eyewitnesses described drones dropping bombs on crowds of unarmed families. These attacks drew condemnation from UN human rights experts as "tragically reminiscent" of the mass atrocities of 2017.
- In a separate massacre in northern Rakhine (Htan Shauk Kan village), nearly 600 Rohingya civilians were slaughtered after the Arakan Army seized control of the area in 2024. Survivors from that village recount how the killings came suddenly and without warning; victims included pregnant women, small children, and persons with disabilities. Many bodies were later burned or disposed of, evoking the same terror tactics used by the Myanmar military eight years ago.
- Throughout 2023 and 2024, as the Arakan Army expanded its reach across Rakhine State, it subjected Rohingya communities to shelling, arson, looting, and summary executions. In Buthidaung township, Arakan Army units attacked Rohingya villages and even used heavy artillery in civilian areas, forcing tens of thousands to flee. Over 100,000 Rohingya have been newly displaced from Rakhine State during these recent operations, with many desperate families escaping to Bangladesh. Entire Rohingya villages have been emptied and razed, and then reportedly handed over to Rakhine Buddhist settlers a blatant attempt to change the demography of the region.

Despite these damning reports, the perpetrators have not been held to account. The Arakan Army, once known as an ethnic insurgent force fighting for Rakhine autonomy, has now become a perpetrator of systematic persecution against the Rohingya. Under its de facto administration in Rakhine, Rohingya civilians remain trapped in a deadly clash, caught between an oppressive Myanmar junta and a hostile Arakan Army. UN human rights groups and international observers have raised alarms that Rohingya in Rakhine State are “facing the gravest threats since 2017.” ARNO fully concurs with this assessment: what we are witnessing in north Rakhine today is a continuation of the Rohingya genocide by other means.

International Inaction and Double Standards

ARNO is profoundly dismayed that, despite repeated warnings, no effective action is visible from the international or regional community to curb these atrocities. Over the past years, ARNO and other Rohingya organizations have continuously sounded the alarm about the existential threat facing our people. We have provided credible evidence to the United Nations and ASEAN, urged urgent intervention, and appealed for protection for those Rohingya still in Myanmar. Yet tangible measures on the ground are nearly non-existent. The genocide continues in full view of a world that once vowed “Never Again.”

This failure to act is not only a moral abdication it also reflects an unacceptable double standard in the international response. The Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) has rightly been condemned and sanctioned by many nations for its crimes against the Rohingya. By contrast, the Arakan Army has largely escaped similar scrutiny or consequences, even as evidence of its atrocities mounts. There is no justification for turning a blind eye to one perpetrator while punishing another. Genocide is genocide, whether committed by state actors or non-state actors. ARNO reminds all governments that every state has a responsibility under the UN Genocide Convention to prevent and punish genocide in Myanmar, regardless of who the perpetrators are. Selective outrage or geopolitical considerations must not shield the Arakan Army from accountability. Such bias not only betrays the Rohingya, but also emboldens those committing the crimes.

The Rohingya have now endured eight years of acute suffering and survival since the mass killings and expulsions of 2016–2017. It is unconscionable that even today, in 2025, they remain largely defenceless and unprotected in their own homeland. Unlike most other ethnic groups in Myanmar, the Rohingya do not have militias or autonomous zones to protect them. Many other ethnic nationalities, such as Kachin, Karen, Chin, Rakhine, and others have armed resistance forces and self-administered territories where they can offer some protection to their people. In stark contrast, the Rohingya community has been systematically disempowered and left at the mercy of hostile forces. ARNO emphasizes that it is both morally wrong and strategically short-sighted for the world to neglect the Rohingya’s right to safety and self-preservation. If this bias continues, we fear the Rohingya as a people could be erased entirely from Myanmar.

ARNO’s Urgent Calls to Action

On this somber anniversary, ARNO calls upon the international community to finally move from words to action. The Rohingya cannot afford another year of hollow promises and inaction. Specifically, ARNO urges:

- United Nations intervention: We implore the UN Security Council to put the situation in Myanmar especially in Rakhine State – high on its agenda. The Council should pass a resolution demanding an immediate end to attacks on Rohingya civilians and authorizing robust measures to protect those at risk. We further call on UN member states to support a referral of Myanmar's situation to the International Criminal Court (ICC) without delay. Accountability for past and ongoing crimes is essential to stop the cycle of genocide.
- Targeted sanctions and pressure on the Arakan Army: ARNO and a coalition of Rohingya organizations worldwide have already appealed for targeted sanctions against the Arakan Army leadership and its affiliates. We repeat this call with urgency. Governments, particularly in the West and in the region, should impose travel bans and asset freezes on those commanders responsible for atrocities. The Arakan Army must face consequences for its actions, just as the Myanmar junta does. Additionally, we ask international donors and supporters of Myanmar's ethnic causes to ensure no aid or assistance reaches the Arakan Army as long as it continues to commit human rights abuses. Humanitarian aid for civilians must be carefully monitored so it is not diverted or used as a weapon of coercion against the Rohingya.
- Regional responsibility: ARNO appeals to regional blocs and neighboring countries – notably ASEAN and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) – to take leadership in resolving this crisis. ASEAN must not ignore the plight of the Rohingya during its engagements with Myanmar. We urge ASEAN to press the Myanmar authorities and Arakan Army to allow unfettered humanitarian access to northern Rakhine, and to support international efforts for justice. Likewise, the OIC and other concerned groups should intensify diplomatic efforts to protect the Rohingya and uphold their rights. The continued silence or ineffectiveness of regional actors is no longer acceptable; it only serves to further entrench the persecution.
- Safe and dignified repatriation: Ultimately, the Rohingya's future lies in our homeland of Arakan (Rakhine). ARNO calls for renewed commitments to create conditions conducive to the safe, voluntary, and dignified return of Rohingya refugees currently in Bangladesh and elsewhere. This requires an end to violence, dismantling of the apartheid system, restitution of Rohingya lands and properties, and restoration of full citizenship and rights to the Rohingya. We insist that Rohingya voices be included in any dialogue about Rakhine State's future. Any repatriation plan must not force Rohingya back into internment camps or unsafe situations; instead, it should empower them to rebuild their communities with international protection on the ground.

ARNO remains committed to advocating for the rights and safety of the Rohingya people. We stand ready to cooperate with the UN, governments, and international partners to bring an end to the suffering of our people. On this anniversary of tragedy, let it also be a turning point, a moment when the world finally chooses to protect the Rohingya and uphold justice. There is no excuse for inaction in the face of genocide. The Rohingya people's very existence hangs in the balance, and we implore the global community to rise to the occasion with decisive compassion and courage.

For more information, please contact:
 Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO)
 Email: arno@rohingya.org | info@rohingya.org



Photo courtesy: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

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

For more information, please contact:

Dr. Mohammad Habib Ullah

Email: arno@rohingya.org

info@rohingya.org