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Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO)



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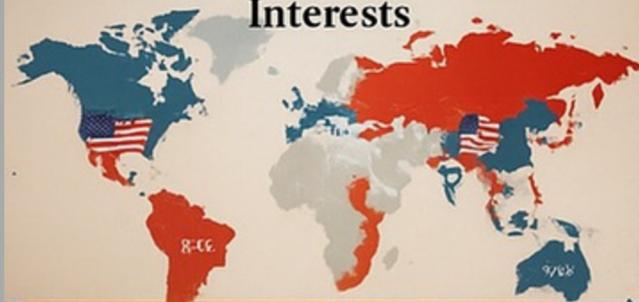


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Rohingyas are in geopolitical crossroad



Global Powers and Competing Interests



EDITORIAL

The protracted Rohingya refugee crisis has become more than a humanitarian tragedy it is a geopolitical crossroads where the interests of global and regional powers intersect. Bangladesh, which hosts over a million Rohingya who fled ethnic cleansing in Myanmar's Rakhine State, finds itself caught in a web of great-power rivalries and strategic calculations. Major players like China, India, Russia, and the United States each view the crisis through the prism of their own interests, often leaving Bangladesh in a difficult position even as it seeks support. At the same time, new security challenges from the rise of Myanmar's Arakan Army insurgents to unrest in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts are emerging and further complicating Dhaka's efforts to resolve the Rohingya issue. In this editorial, we examine how these geopolitical forces shape the Rohingya crisis and what it means for Bangladesh's security and diplomacy.

Global Powers and Competing Interests

Geopolitics has heavily influenced the international response (or lack thereof) to the Rohingya crisis. Each major power's strategic interests in Myanmar and the region have led to divergent priorities, often at the expense of a concerted solution for the Rohingya. Bangladesh must navigate these crosscurrents carefully:

- **China:** Beijing views Myanmar's Rakhine State (the Rohingyas' homeland) as crucial to its Belt and Road Initiative and Indian Ocean access. Major Chinese-backed projects like the *Kyaukphyu deep-sea port* and oil/gas pipelines run through Rakhine. China has tried to mediate the crisis on its terms focusing on economic development in Rakhine rather than pressing Myanmar on human rights. This aligns with China's interest in stability for its investments, but it often means *soft-pedaling* on Rohingya rights. Indeed, Chinese diplomats have been criticized for downplaying the humanitarian aspect in favor of trade incentives, remaining "silent on Rohingya repatriation," as Bangladesh observers note. Beijing has also shielded Myanmar diplomatically (often alongside Russia) by stalling or vetoing strong actions at the UN. While Bangladesh values China's role as a mediator, it is wary that China's primary aim is to secure its strategic corridor potentially at the cost of a just resolution for the Rohingya.
- **India:** India's approach to the Rohingya crisis reflects a balancing act between its values and its geopolitical interests. As a neighbor to both Bangladesh and Myanmar, India worries about regional stability but is also competing with China for influence in Myanmar. New Delhi has generally avoided openly criticizing Myanmar's military over Rohingya abuses. In fact, at the height of the 2017 crisis, India refrained from censuring Myanmar and instead echoed concern about "terrorist" attacks on Myanmar's security forces -- a stance aligned with Myanmar's narrative. This muted reaction was tied to India's strategic stakes: connectivity projects (like the Kaladan multi-modal transit route through Rakhine) and countering China's footprint. India has provided humanitarian aid and development assistance in Rakhine, hoping to facilitate eventual repatriation without alienating Myanmar. However, Bangladesh sometimes feels that India's support is constrained by New Delhi's desire to keep Myanmar's generals onside. India's reluctance to condemn Myanmar strongly has made it harder to build unified pressure, but Bangladesh also recognizes India as a crucial partner in regional diplomacy and security.
- **United States:** Washington has taken a firmer stance on the Rohingya issue on moral and legal grounds, labeling Myanmar's 2017 anti-Rohingya campaign as genocide and sanctioning top Myanmar military officials. The U.S. interest here is twofold: upholding human rights and asserting influence in the Indo-Pacific. Since Myanmar's 2021 coup pushed the junta closer to Beijing and Moscow, the Rohingya crisis also offers the U.S. a strategic opening. The Arakan (Rakhine) region has turned into a "strategic opportunity" for Washington, given that the junta's adversaries (including the Arakan Army and the

paraallel National Unity Government) control much of the area. Notably, the Arakan Army in late 2024 invited foreign investment into Rakhine. This presents a chance, albeit a risky one, for Western engagement in Rakhine's economy, potentially bypassing the junta. For Bangladesh, U.S. humanitarian aid has been crucial in supporting the refugee camps, but Dhaka is also mindful that the U.S. rivalry with China could play out on Bangladeshi soil. Bangladesh has to maintain a careful balance, cooperating with U.S. calls for accountability and refugee support, while avoiding being drawn into any great-power confrontation.

- **Russia:** Moscow has consistently backed Myanmar's government in international forums, viewing Myanmar as a strategic ally and arms customer. Alongside China, Russia has opposed UN resolutions calling for Myanmar to halt abuses and accept Rohingya back. Since the 2021 coup, Russia has deepened military ties with the isolated junta, supplying it with fighter jets and helicopters. This alignment means Russia has little incentive to support Rohingya rights if it jeopardizes its rapport with Naypyidaw. Bangladesh, meanwhile, has its own growing ties with Russia such as the construction of a nuclear power plant – which complicates Dhaka's ability to push Moscow on the Rohingya issue. To Bangladesh's disappointment, Russian officials have often echoed Myanmar's line that "*terrorism*" (referring to Rohingya insurgents) sparked the crisis, rather than condemning the ethnic cleansing. Thus, Russia's stance has largely left Bangladesh without support in the UN Security Council, forcing Dhaka to rely on bilateral diplomacy instead.

In sum, the major powers' rival agendas have hampered a unified international solution. China and Russia shield Myanmar from punitive measures, India treads softly, and the West's moral outcry hasn't translated into decisive action on the ground. For the stateless Rohingya languishing in camps, this power politics stalemate means continued limbo. And for Bangladesh, it means carrying a humanitarian burden with insufficient global burden-sharing, all while tiptoeing through the minefield of great-power interests.

Bangladesh's Difficult Balancing Act

Bangladesh is at the center of this geopolitical crossroad, trying to turn a dire situation into a diplomatically manageable one. On one hand, the presence of nearly 1.2 million Rohingya refugees has strained Bangladesh's resources and posed socio-economic challenges. On the other hand, Bangladesh's role as host has given it a moral high ground and increased its strategic significance in the region. Dhaka has at times leveraged this position to garner international aid and attention. Yet, it must also perform a careful balancing act not to alienate any of the powerful players whose support it needs:

• ***Diplomacy with Myanmar (via China):*** Bangladesh knows that Myanmar's military will not be easily swayed by Western pressure, so it has leaned on China to mediate repatriation talks. Beijing indeed brokered a tripartite dialogue that led to a tentative pilot repatriation plan, although progress remains slow. The downside is that China's mediation comes with strings Bangladesh is often expected to support Chinese-led platforms and refrain from harshly criticizing Myanmar. Dhaka walks a tightrope, welcoming China's influence to get Myanmar to the table, but also quietly pushing China to do more. As one Bangladeshi analyst observed, China tends to look at the crisis through the lens of its "national interest," prioritizing projects over people. This leaves Bangladesh in a bind: it relies on China's good offices but remains frustrated that economic development alone won't resolve Rohingya statelessness.

• ***Engaging India and ASEAN:*** Bangladesh has closely engaged India, as a regional power and immediate neighbor, to seek support for repatriation and to prevent any regional fallout from the refugee crisis. Dhaka often reminds New Delhi that a stable Myanmar (with Rohingya safely repatriated) is in everyone's security interest. India has cooperated on some fronts – for example, sending relief supplies to Cox's Bazar and funding development in Rakhine State. Still, Bangladesh senses the limits of India's support given Myanmar's strategic importance to Delhi. Beyond India, Bangladesh has reached out to ASEAN countries and Muslim-majority nations to build diplomatic pressure. These efforts saw some success in the UN General Assembly, where most countries have urged Myanmar to ensure safe Rohingya return but the Security Council remains paralyzed by big-power vetoes.

• ***Maintaining Great Power Relations:*** Perhaps the toughest challenge for Bangladesh is juggling its relationships with Beijing, Washington, New Delhi, and Moscow all while focusing on its own national interest. Bangladesh has historically followed a policy of non-alignment and "friends to all" diplomacy. The Rohingya crisis tests this policy. For instance, Bangladesh values U.S. humanitarian aid and advocacy, but it cannot fully side with Western sanctions on Myanmar without risking Chinese and Russian backlash. Similarly, Bangladesh appreciates Chinese investment in its economy but does not want to become overly dependent on Beijing's agenda. The government in Dhaka has thus far managed a pragmatic stance: seeking help from all, aligning with none. It joined China's BRI but also engages in the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific Strategy; it courts Indian investment while also buying Russian technology. This balancing act, while difficult, could be advantageous if Bangladesh can extract commitments from each power such as development projects or trade deals in exchange for cooperation. Yet it also means Bangladesh must constantly calibrate its foreign policy, ensuring that the Rohingya crisis remains an international concern rather than a forgotten footnote.

In essence, Bangladesh is both burdened and positioned by the Rohingya issue. Burdened, because it bears the humanitarian and security costs. Positioned, because its cooperation is essential to regional stability, giving it a degree of leverage in global forums. The challenge is turning that leverage into concrete outcomes for Rohingya repatriation and refugee welfare, without letting the country become a pawn in bigger geopolitical games. The balancing act is precarious: any tilt too far towards one patron could alienate others and undermine the united front Bangladesh seeks for resolving the crisis.

Arakan Army's Rise a New Twist in the Crisis

Compounding the geopolitical complexity is the rise of the Arakan Army (AA) an ethnic Rakhine armed group in Myanmar which has dramatically altered the ground reality in Rakhine State. Over the past two years, the Arakan Army has fought Myanmar's junta forces to establish de facto control over large parts of Rakhine. In fact, by late 2024 the AA had routed the Myanmar military from most of northern Rakhine, seizing 14 out of 17 townships and the entire Myanmar-Bangladesh border in that region. For Bangladesh, this development is a double-edged sword. On one side, the power vacuum in Rakhine raises doubts about who Bangladesh should even negotiate with for Rohingya repatriation – the Myanmar state or the insurgent authority. On the other side, the Arakan Army's ascendancy has come with new threats and tensions that spill across the border.

Most alarming is the Arakan Army's hostility toward the Rohingya community. Despite being an enemy of the Burmese junta, the AA harbors ethnonationalist views similar to the regime's when it comes to the Rohingya. The Arakan Army aspires to create a *"homogenous Rakhine State"* and has voiced ambiguous or even derogatory positions about the Rohingya's status. There is credible evidence documented by human rights groups that AA fighters have engaged in persecution of Rohingya civilians: including targeted killings, abductions, and forcing Rohingya villagers to flee. Since the AA launched a major offensive (dubbed Operation 1027) in late 2023, an estimated 125,000 additional Rohingya have fled from Rakhine into Bangladesh, escaping AA-controlled areas for fear of reprisal. In other words, the very force that ousted the Myanmar military from Rakhine has itself become a new driver of Rohingya exodus. This grim irony means Bangladesh's refugee burden is growing even without new actions by the junta. It underscores that repatriation prospects have grown more remote with the Rohingya's homeland now fragmented and ruled by an insurgent group that largely distrusts or scapegoats them.

The Arakan Army's rise also complicates the diplomatic calculus. Bangladesh can no longer rely solely on talks with the Myanmar government, since on the ground the AA is *"the new neighbor"* across the border. There have been suggestions in Bangladeshi policy

circles about informal engagement with the Arakan Army's leadership, if that could ensure safe conditions for eventual returns. The AA, for its part, has shown some pragmatism internationally: it announced that it would protect Chinese and Indian infrastructure projects in Rakhine, presumably to earn goodwill from those powers. This indicates the AA seeks external legitimacy and investment. The United States has even noted the opportunity to directly interact with the AA's local authorities by encouraging investments, as the group welcomed foreign investment in late 2024. Such moves by the Arakan Army might strengthen its hand vis-à-vis Myanmar and give it resources to govern – but they also risk cementing a divided Rakhine where the Rohingya have no place and where Bangladesh has less influence. If China and India grow friendly with the AA for business reasons, Dhaka worries that Myanmar's central government (which Bangladesh has pressed for repatriation) might cede responsibility and claim it cannot control Rakhine anymore. Bangladesh faces a delicate situation: whether to treat the Arakan Army as a stakeholder (which could antagonize Myanmar's government), or to insist that Myanmar proper remains accountable for its citizens. Either way, the Rohingyas' fate is entangled with this new power on the block, which adds another layer of uncertainty to an already intractable crisis.

Cross-Border Threats in Southeast Bangladesh

As if diplomatic headaches weren't enough, Bangladesh is now contending with escalating security threats along its southeastern frontier, directly linked to the turmoil in Myanmar. The Arakan Army's activities have spilled over the border, raising tensions and violence in areas of Bangladesh adjacent to Myanmar's Rakhine and Chin states. For decades, the Bangladesh–Myanmar border saw occasional skirmishes or refugee flows, but recent developments are far more ominous for Dhaka's national security:

- **Border Incidents:** The Arakan Army has repeatedly violated the boundary, turning the borderlands into a zone of volatility. Bangladeshi civilians and security forces have been on edge as AA fighters at times fired bullets and mortar shells that landed on the Bangladeshi side during Myanmar's civil war flare-ups. Over the past year, AA insurgents have targeted Bangladeshi fishermen in the Naf River (which separates the two countries) abducting crews and even shooting at boats. Although captives were eventually released in most cases, these incidents have instilled fear in border communities and disrupted livelihoods. The strategic St. Martin's Island, near the maritime boundary, has also felt the impact of AA's reach, with reports that the group seeks to tax or control local maritime trade. Such interference in Bangladesh's territorial waters and trade routes is unprecedented and seen as a direct affront to its sovereignty. Dhaka has beefed up coastal patrols and protested these actions, but the message is clear: Bangladesh's border is no longer peaceful, as conflict in Myanmar increasingly bleeds over.

• **Arms and Drugs Smuggling:** Alongside violent incidents, transnational crime has surged amid the lawlessness. The Arakan Army is reportedly involved in narcotics trafficking (particularly methamphetamine) that flows from Myanmar into Bangladesh^[30] ^[31]. This has aggravated Bangladesh's drug epidemic, especially in Cox's Bazar, and complicates Dhaka's anti-narcotics campaigns. Additionally, with the AA and other militias flush with looted weapons from Myanmar's war, there are fears of a spill of small arms into Bangladesh. Any such influx could arm criminal gangs or insurgent elements on the Bangladesh side, threatening internal security. Bangladeshi authorities have thus stepped up border surveillance and intelligence-sharing with neighbors to stem these illicit flows, recognizing that a porous border can quickly undermine stability in the southeast.

• **Reigniting the Hill Tracts Insurgency:** Perhaps the gravest threat is the risk of Myanmar's conflicts rekindling old embers of insurgency within Bangladesh's own territory. The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), a forested, ethnically diverse region in southeast Bangladesh experienced a decades-long tribal insurgency that ended with a 1997 peace accord. The peace held for over two decades, though underlying tensions remained. Now, there are worrying signs of new armed groups emerging in the CHT with cross-border ties. In early 2023, a militant outfit named the Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF), comprising members of the ethnic Bawm community, launched guerrilla-style attacks in Bandarban district (part of CHT). The KNF set off IED blasts and ambushed Bangladeshi soldiers, killing several and shattering the relative calm that prevailed since the 1990s. Bangladeshi forces cracked down, and dozens of KNF operatives were arrested, but intelligence revealed a disturbing link: the KNF had likely been collaborating with the Arakan Army or other Myanmar-based rebel groups. Bandarban borders Myanmar's Chin State, and as of now the Arakan Army controls the Myanmar side of that frontier. It appears AA may have provided arms, training, or safe haven to the KNF insurgents, aiming to "exert leverage over Dhaka" by opening a new front in Bangladesh. In one incident, Arakan Army members even intruded into Bangladesh during a local ethnic festival, sparking public outrage. This nexus between Myanmar's rebels and fringe elements in the CHT is an extremely volatile development. Bangladesh has long kept heavy security deployment in the Hill Tracts to prevent unrest, and now it is on high alert to ensure foreign-backed miscreants do not destabilize the region. Nevertheless, the very notion that the Arakan Army while fighting Myanmar's army might entertain ulterior motives toward Bangladesh's Chittagong region is a nightmare scenario for Dhaka. Historically, parts of CHT and Chittagong were under the old Arakan Kingdom, a fact not lost on hardliners who dream of revanchist maps. While the AA's current focus is Myanmar, Bangladeshi strategists caution that Dhaka must "not rule out" potential designs on these "historical lands" in the distant future. Thus, what began as a Myanmar internal conflict now carries the seeds of a wider regional insurgency if left unchecked.

In summary, the rise of the Arakan Army and its entanglement with armed groups across the border have created a powder keg in Southeast Bangladesh. A humanitarian refugee crisis has evolved into a security crisis. The once tranquil hill tracts and border rivers are now points of friction where Myanmar's unresolved conflicts meet Bangladesh's sovereign territory. Dhaka's immediate priority is to neutralize these threats – through border fencing, military operations against infiltrators, and diplomatic warnings to Myanmar's authorities as well as the AA. Yet, the situation remains fraught. The longer the Rohingya remain in limbo and Myanmar remains unstable, the more opportunity arises for militant exploitation and unrest that can drag Bangladesh into the maelstrom.

A Crossroads of Crisis and Opportunity

The Rohingya crisis has truly placed Bangladesh at a geopolitical crossroads, one that is as dangerous as it is defining. On this crossroads converge a humanitarian tragedy, big-power realpolitik, ethnic insurgencies, and Bangladesh's own national security concerns. For the Rohingya themselves, it has been an unending ordeal of displacement and despair, caught between the country that persecutes them and the countries that debate their fate. For Bangladesh, it has been a test of compassion and resilience, as well as an exercise in high-stakes diplomacy. Despite the immense challenges, Bangladesh has managed the refugee influx with generosity and has kept the issue alive on the world's agenda. But the burden is growing heavier, and the entry of new actors like the Arakan Army means time is not on Bangladesh's side.

Will this crossroads become a dead-end or a turning point? Much depends on whether global and regional powers can look beyond their narrow interests and forge a common approach to address both the symptoms and root causes of the crisis. As it stands, the competing agendas of China, India, Russia, and the U.S. have produced paralysis: strong on rhetoric, weak on results. Bangladesh's diplomatic balancing and appeals for justice must be met with genuine support not just in aid dollars, but in political resolve to press Myanmar (and the Arakan Army controlling its west) to guarantee the Rohingyas' safe, dignified return home. The international community, including the great powers, should recognize that a destabilized Bangladesh or a permanent refugee underclass serves no one's interest in the long run. It is in everybody's interest to prevent the Bay of Bengal region from becoming another chronic conflict zone.

At the same time, Bangladesh can seize this moment to strengthen its hand. The very fact that it lies at a crossroads of great-power influence can be an advantage. Dhaka can continue leveraging its strategic importance whether as a partner in China's Belt and Road, a linchpin in India's "Act East" connectivity, or a key player in the Indo-Pacific sought by the U.S. to garner commitments that also benefit the Rohingya cause. For instance, any investment in Rakhine's development must be tied to Rohingya inclusion; any counter

terrorism aid to Bangladesh must consider the new insurgent dynamics born from the Rohingya impasse. Bangladesh's leaders have to remain vigilant and clear-eyed, putting national security first while refusing to let the Rohingya crisis slip from global consciousness.

In the end, the phrase "geopolitical crossroad" signifies a point where paths intersect and a direction must be chosen. The Rohingya crisis is at such a junction. The world and Bangladesh can continue on the current path of *stalemate* and creeping insecurity, or choose a new path of collaboration to resolve one of the most pressing refugee crises of our time. The latter road is undoubtedly hard to pave, but it is the only way out of this quagmire. In navigating this crossroads, Bangladesh will need both unyielding resolve and adept diplomacy. The Rohingya, meanwhile, wait in hope that the global players who have treated them as pawns will finally come together to champion their rights. The crossroads could then become a path towards a sustainable solution -- one where a persecuted people can return home, and a burdened host nation like Bangladesh can finally breathe easier. For now, however, the Rohingyas remain stuck at this perilous intersection of geopolitics, and Bangladesh remains boxed in yet striving at the center of it all, determined to find a way forward.



Photo courtesy: UN Women, Actionaid Bangladesh

A Rohingya refugee woman runs a thriving food stall in the Cox's Bazar camp, symbolizing the entrepreneurial spirit blossoming even in exile.

Rohingya Resilience in Exile

Rebuilding Lives in Refugee Camps

In the sprawling refugee settlements of Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, now home to nearly a million Rohingya who fled genocide, resilience takes root in everyday acts of courage. One Rohingya mother, who escaped armed attacks and mass violence in Myanmar in 2017, struggled at first to feed her children alone. Yet by 2025 she proudly owned a bustling food stall in the camp's Women's Market, a business she built from a humble corner kitchen with the help of entrepreneurship training. With her earnings, she can cover her family's needs and even pay her children's school fees, a feat that once seemed impossible. Her success has inspired other women in the camp to believe in themselves -- proof that with a little support and a lot of determination, new beginnings can blossom on even the hardest soil.

Hers is not an isolated story. Makeshift markets have sprung up throughout the refugee camps, despite official restrictions on work. Resourceful refugees have opened roadside stalls and shops selling everything from hot snacks to tailor-made clothes. In one corner, a 15-year-old boy fries rings of dough, a sweet snack called rashfuri that remind customers of home. In another, a young entrepreneur runs a tiny media shop, downloading Bollywood music and news clips onto customers' phones so they can stay connected with the world. Even without legal jobs, an informal economy thrives, driven by ingenuity and the will to survive. These micro-businesses not only put food on tables but also rekindle a sense of purpose and community. "People come to my shop because they miss home," one teenaged shopkeeper says of his little café, where familiar flavors offer comfort to the displaced.

Support from humanitarian partners has further nurtured this resilient spirit. The Women's Market where the Rohingya mother opened her café is a safe, women-led marketplace featuring 24 shops run by refugee women from tailoring services to grocery stalls. Established with help from UN agencies and NGOs, it provides training, secure facilities, and an inclusive space for women to earn incomes with dignity. Such initiatives recognize that empowering refugees with livelihoods not only reduces aid dependency but restores personal agency. As the proud food stall owner put it, "If more women receive the kind of support I did, they too can find the strength to succeed". Amid the tarpaulins and bamboo shelters of Cox's Bazar, she and many like her are proving that hope can be cooked up even in a refugee camp's kitchens.

Pursuing Education Against All Odds

Education is another arena where Rohingya refugees are striving to rewrite their story. Denied schooling for generations in Myanmar and often barred from universities in exile, Rohingya youth have refused to let their dreams be crushed. Farhana Roshan, for example, was a young Rohingya girl in India who faced one obstacle after another, expelled from school due to lack of official papers and nearly forced to abandon her studies. But Farhana and her parents fought back. They petitioned authorities and, in a breakthrough, Farhana became one of the first Rohingya in India to finish high school, scoring top marks on her exams. Her academic victory infused new hope into the local Rohingya community, encouraging many parents to imagine a brighter future for their daughters and sons. Farhana didn't stop there. She went door-to-door in Rohingya settlements, persuading families to send their girls to school, and personally helped 50 young Rohingya girls enroll in classes for the first time. When university doors in India remained closed to her due to refugee status, Farhana looked abroad. In 2024, her perseverance paid off: she earned a private scholarship, and admission offers from two universities in Canada including the University of British Columbia, making her the first Rohingya refugee international student in Canada. "I will surely go to Canada and start my studies," she said, keenly aware that her own journey is opening paths for others. Farhana remains focused on those she leaves behind: "I do not want others to stop their studies. Something needs to be done here in India," she insists, determined to lift others as she rises.

In the refugee camps of Bangladesh, a young man named Maung Sawyeddollah shared a similar fire for education. As a 15-year-old, Sawyeddollah fled the 2017 genocide in Myanmar, making a harrowing two-week trek on foot to reach Bangladesh. In Myanmar he had been barred from university simply for being Rohingya, and in Bangladesh he found more roadblocks: refugees were not allowed to enroll in local colleges. Rather than giving up, Sawyeddollah became an advocate. He founded the Rohingya Student Network (RSN) to press for higher education opportunities in the camps, organizing trainings and mentorship for Rohingya youth like himself. He even publicly campaigned for accountability urging companies like Meta (Facebook) to fund "educational reparations" after their platforms were used to incite anti-Rohingya violence. All the while, Sawyeddollah

never abandoned his personal dream of university. He applied to school after school, 147 universities in all, across numerous countries and faced one rejection after another due to his stateless status. Finally, in late 2024, his persistence was rewarded. New York University accepted him and offered a full scholarship, making Sawyeddollah the first Rohingya student ever at NYU. When he arrived in New York to begin classes in 2025, even the U.S. Embassy in Dhaka took notice. “From the hardships of genocide to admission at NYU your unwavering commitment is a testament to resilience and determination,” the Embassy lauded in a public congratulatory message. Indeed, Sawyeddollah’s journey from a makeshift shelter in Cox’s Bazar to the halls of a top international university stands as an inspiration. “May your story inspire others and pave the way for dignity and justice for the Rohingya people,” the embassy’s message read. Now settled into his social science degree, Sawyeddollah continues to advocate for refugee education, determined that others after he will not have to apply 147 times just to go to college.

Advocacy and Leadership Across the Globe

Not only are Rohingya refugees rebuilding their own lives, many are lifting up others and leading grassroots and international advocacy efforts for their people. Across continents, Rohingya men and women are emerging as powerful voices of their community challenging injustice, preserving their culture, and empowering the next generation.

One of the largest Rohingya diaspora communities is in Malaysia, where about 75,000 Rohingya have settled. There, a 25-year-old activist named Sharifah Shakirah is ensuring that women are not left on the margins. Sharifah, who fled Myanmar as a child, founded the Rohingya Women Development Network in Kuala Lumpur and opened a modest classroom where Rohingya women gather to learn languages, crafts, and life skills. For many of these women refugees in a foreign land, often with no formal schooling, it’s the first time anyone has invested in their education. Sharifah passionately believes in female empowerment. “I want women to feel like they can do things, so they can stand for themselves,” she says, adding that “education gives people hope”. She even tackles sensitive issues like domestic violence and child marriage within the community, challenging traditional norms in the hope of building a safer, stronger future for Rohingya women. Despite facing resistance, Sharifah notes she refuses to back down. Her work is simply too important to be stopped by prejudice. In a society that has lost so many mothers and daughters to violence and despair, Sharifah is helping women reclaim their power, one lesson at a time.

In the refugee camps of Bangladesh, Razia Sultana similarly became a champion for Rohingya women. Razia was born in Myanmar and had trained as a teacher and lawyer, careers she balanced for 20 years while quietly advocating for women’s rights. But when the 2017 massacres struck, Razia’s life “turned upside down.” She left her job and threw herself into activism full-time. Wading into the makeshift shelters of Cox’s Bazar, she began documenting the stories of Rohingya women who had fled and what she found was horrific

Thousands came forward with accounts of sexual violence, torture, and lost loved ones. Razia realized that these women's voices had to be heard on the world stage. In April 2018, she herself became the first Rohingya to ever speak before the United Nations Security Council, bearing witness to her people's suffering. Everyone was shocked when I said, 'the Security Council has failed', Razia recalls of that courageous testimony. Speaking truth to power in that moment, she felt proud to tell the world what was really happening. Since then, Razia has traveled globally to advocate for Rohingya women, but she always returns to the camps to stay rooted in the community's needs. Her fearless activism has amplified Rohingya women's voices like never before, ensuring that their trauma and their strength won't be ignored by the international community.

Rohingya youth in the West are also stepping up as leaders. Imran Mohammad Fazal Hoque was once a stateless teenager adrift at sea, seeking asylum from Myanmar's oppression. He survived dangerous boat journeys only to end up imprisoned in Australia's offshore detention on Manus Island for years. Yet even in captivity, Imran refused to give in to despair. He taught himself English in the detention camp and began writing about his experiences. Eventually resettled to the United States, Imran grabbed every opportunity to educate himself and others. He is now a college student in New York, double majoring in social work and journalism. Beyond the classroom, he has emerged as a prominent young Rohingya voice in America -- a published writer, a human rights activist, and a community organizer. Imran served as a student government representative for thousands of students in Chicago and even became president of his college honor society. He also helps lead the Rohingya Youth Club in Chicago, mentoring refugee teens, and sits on the board of the Rohingya American Council, advocating for his community at the national level. From a detention center to a university podium, Imran's journey shows how far a Rohingya refugee's determination can go and how he now uses his success to empower the next generation of Rohingya Americans.

Even those who achieved professional success are channeling it back to their people. Dr. Anita Schug, for example, fled Myanmar years ago and built a new life in Europe. Against all odds, she and her two sisters pursued higher education: all three became doctors, a remarkable achievement for women from a community long shut out of schools. Anita chose the demanding field of neurosurgery, explaining simply that she "saw it as a challenge and went for it". But she never forgot her roots. Today Dr. Schug is a prominent advocate with the European Rohingya Council, lobbying governments and international bodies to remember the Rohingya's plight. For Anita, medicine and activism go hand in hand: her advanced skills are not only a personal triumph but a resource she pledges to use to serve "a community with endless needs". In her dual role as healer and human rights defender, she embodies the strength of the Rohingya diaspora: educated, capable, and unwaveringly committed to giving back.

Remarkably, hope and leadership persist even inside Myanmar, where most Rohingya who remain are still denied basic rights. In Yangon, a Rohingya man named Aung Kyaw Moe, 35,

works tirelessly to bridge divides between ethnic groups in a nation scarred by conflict. Having faced discrimination firsthand (his own government ID labels him as a foreign “Bengali”), Aung Kyaw Moe founded the Center for Social Integrity to foster dialogue and unity. “We’re a peace-building organization,” he explains, bringing together youth from different minorities for leadership training, running education projects in Rakhine State, and providing basic humanitarian aid across communal lines. His initiative aims to sow tolerance in a country that tried to erase his people. “I don’t want young people to go through my life,” Aung Kyaw Moe says simply he is determined to build a Myanmar where no one is ostracized for who they are. Amid a hostile environment, he remains a peacemaker and a beacon of the inclusive future Rohingya still dream of.

A Future Forged in Hope

Taken together, these stories paint a portrait of a people who refuse to be defined solely by their trauma. From the refugee camps of Bangladesh to the halls of international universities and parliaments, Rohingya individuals are turning exile into opportunity. Their achievements -- a thriving food stall, a completed education, a voice on the global stage -- are hard-won trophies of resilience, ingenuity, and courage. Each success story echoes far beyond one person: when a Rohingya woman entrepreneur prospers, an entire community eats a little better; when a Rohingya student earns a scholarship, hundreds of others dare to dream; when a Rohingya activist speaks out, millions find representation.

After enduring the darkness of genocide and displacement, the Rohingya are steadily reclaiming their narrative. They are educators, business owners, scholars, doctors, and activists – not just victims. There is still a long way to go, and enormous challenges remain for this persecuted minority. But the green shoots of progress are visible. Despite being stripped of rights and homeland, the Rohingya’s spirit remains unbroken. By rebuilding their lives and uplifting those around them, they are forging a future filled with hope and dignity a future where, one day, being Rohingya will stand not for suffering, but for strength.

Containing Arakan Army

A Security Imperative for Myanmar and Bangladesh

The Arakan Army (AA) an ethnic Rakhine insurgent group formed in 2009 has rapidly transformed from a guerrilla force into a de facto power in western Myanmar. As of late 2024, the AA controls 14–15 out of 17 townships in Rakhine State and virtually the entire 271 km Myanmar–Bangladesh border. In effect, it has replaced Myanmar’s military junta as Bangladesh’s immediate neighbor across the border. The AA’s political wing, the United League of Arakan (ULA), now runs a parallel administration called the Arakan People’s Revolutionary Government in these areas. This dramatic expansion achieved by routing Myanmar’s army outposts in Rakhine (for instance, capturing the strategic border town of Maungdaw in December 2024) has altered regional power dynamics. The Arakan Army’s ultranationalist ideology (the “Way of Rakhita” or the Arakan Dream of an independent Arakan) and military ambitions pose new challenges not only to Myanmar’s stability but also to neighboring countries, especially Bangladesh. For Bangladesh and the wider region, containing the Arakan Army’s advance has become crucial to prevent further insecurity and humanitarian crises.

Fallout for Civilians in Rakhine and Myanmar

The AA’s takeover of much of Rakhine has come at a heavy human cost for civilians. Caught between AA insurgents and Myanmar’s forces, communities in Rakhine face ongoing violence, displacement, and abuses. Notably, the AA’s relationship with the Rohingya, the Muslim minority in northern Rakhine, has turned hostile and deadly. Multiple human rights investigations indicate the AA has perpetrated grave abuses against Rohingya civilians, including targeted killings, arbitrary detentions, forced displacement, and even massacres. In August 2024, as the AA fought to seize Maungdaw (a Rohingya-majority border district), AA fighters allegedly attacked thousands of fleeing Rohingya with mortar fire and drones, killing over 100 men, women, and children along the Naf River as they tried to escape into Bangladesh. Rohingya eyewitnesses recounted how on August 5–6, AA troops shelled crowds of refugees and shot dozens of civilians attempting to cross the border. Earlier in May 2024, the AA was also accused of burning parts of Buthidaung town (another Rohingya-majority area), with U.N. reports noting several beheadings of Rohingya residents by AA fighters. These attacks coming on top of the Myanmar military’s 2017 genocide have triggered a new exodus of Rohingya refugees. Since late 2023, an estimated 65,000–150,000 additional Rohingya have fled Rakhine for Bangladesh, fearing AA reprisals and ethnically targeted violence. Many Rohingya now view the Arakan Army as a “Rakhine Buddhist supremacist” force bent on expelling them to Bangladesh.

Forced labor and conscription have further victimized civilians under AA rule. The Arakan Army has reportedly imposed travel bans and begun conscripting local youths in its territories. Rohingya who returned from refugee camps to Rakhine have been especially mistreated. Testimonies describe how dozens of Rohingya returnees and villagers were detained by AA authorities on fabricated charges and forced into labor camps. In mid-2025, one such group of 78 detainees including 20 women and 33 children were held for months in what survivors likened to a “*prison labour camp*” run by the AA near Maungdaw. Men and women were separated and made to toil in grueling conditions: cleaning drains, repairing roads and bridges, and even doing menial chores in Rakhine villages for six hours daily. At night they were locked up under guard. Eventually, AA officers gave these captives an ultimatum: *either accept years of imprisonment in Myanmar or be exiled across the border to the Rohingya camps in Bangladesh*. Such coercion shows the AA perpetuating the persecution of Rohingya effectively validating the false narrative that Rohingya “belong in Bangladesh” even as it claims to defend Rakhine people’s rights[18]. In short, unchecked Arakan Army expansion has meant continued suffering for innocent civilians: ongoing displacement, human rights abuses, and the prospect of *another wave of violence layered atop Myanmar’s long-running conflicts*.

The AA’s Narco-Terrorism and Kidnapping Racket

Beyond the battlefield, the Arakan Army has increasingly behaved like a transnational crime syndicate, funding its war effort through illicit enterprises that endanger civilians. Most notorious is the AA’s deep involvement in the narco-trafficking trade. Myanmar is a major global source of narcotics (from opium to methamphetamines), and the AA has eagerly tapped into this illicit economy. Security analysts note that the Arakan Army is “*frequently accused of drug smuggling to Bangladesh*”, moving shipments of heroin and meth (“yaba”) across the border[19]. In fact, Bangladesh’s Border Guard (BGB) has publicly named the AA as a key player behind the surging yabainflux. In September 2025, a BGB sector commander revealed that “*unscrupulous [Bangladeshi] people are bringing yaba from Myanmar’s Arakan Army into Bangladesh*,” often using Rohingya refugees as couriers. An estimated 80% of yaba pills entering Bangladesh now come via maritime routes from AA-controlled Rakhine, as traffickers evade tighter land border patrols. The AA’s complicity in this drug trade, effectively narco-terrorism, poses a grave threat to public safety: it fuels addiction and crime among youth, undermines Bangladesh’s anti-narcotics efforts, and funnels huge profits into the coffers of an armed group.



A young Arakan Army fighter carrying supplies through the remote border hills. The AA's growing presence along the Myanmar–Bangladesh frontier has enabled it to engage in cross-border crimes from drug and arms smuggling to kidnappings under the cover of its de facto territorial control.

Together with drug smuggling, the Arakan Army has also turned to kidnapping and extortion as a tactic creating a reign of fear for civilians in border areas. Over the past two years, AA gunmen have repeatedly abducted Bangladeshi nationals for ransom, in what has become a “forgotten hostage crisis.” According to Bangladeshi officials, more than 350 citizens mostly poor fishermen were kidnapped by the AA from border waters in just the 10 months between early 2025 and November 2025. These fishermen are typically seized along the Naf River or Bay of Bengal, often when they unintentionally drift into Myanmar-claimed waters near Teknaf and Saint Martin’s Island. The scale of this hostage-taking is staggering: by late 2025 the AA was still holding around 150–180 Bangladeshi hostages, rivaling or exceeding famous hostage crises like Entebbe or the Iran embassy siege. Families of the captives are left in anguish, scrambling to pay hefty ransoms that the AA demands for any chance of release. The Arakan Army has justified these abductions by cynically claiming the fishermen “violated Rakhine’s maritime boundary,” and it has extorted millions of Bangladeshi takas under this pretext. As legal experts point out, the AA’s acts are outright hostage-taking and war crimes under international law; a non-state group has no authority to enforce borders or detain civilians, making these kidnappings illegal and inhumane. Former captives recount being held in brutal conditions in AA camps, tortured and abused while their impoverished families sold assets to pay ransom. Tragically, the AA’s hostage racket shows no regard for innocent lives: it inflicts trauma and poverty on some of the region’s poorest fishing communities, even as the AA claims to champion the “liberation” of its own people. Such criminal behavior underscores why many now view the Arakan Army as “more a criminal outfit than a national liberation movement.”

Threat to the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Beyond

For Bangladesh, the spillover of AA’s militancy and crime has become a direct threat to national security and sovereignty. Nowhere is this more evident than in the country’s southeast borderlands from the Rohingya refugee camps of Cox’s Bazar to the rugged terrain of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). Bangladesh had long maintained a neutral,

non-confrontational stance toward Myanmar's internal conflicts, but the Arakan Army's aggressive cross-border activities are forcing a rethink. In recent years, the AA has committed several hostile incidents encroaching on Bangladeshi territory. In 2022, for example, stray mortar shells fired by AA and Myanmar forces landed inside Bangladesh during clashes, prompting Dhaka's protests. Arakan Army units have also fired on and seized Bangladeshi vessels, and even tried to levy "taxes" on Bangladeshi traders at the border. Most provocatively, AA fighters have illicitly crossed into Bangladesh on occasion. One such incursion during a local ethnic festival sparked public outrage and highlighted gaps in border surveillance. This porous border situation is compounded by the fact that Myanmar's junta has lost control -- the AA is effectively the new border guard on the other side, operating with impunity.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts, which adjoin Myanmar's Chin and Rakhine states, face a particularly delicate security situation. This region had its own historical tribal insurgency (the Shanti Bahini) that fought a two-decade guerilla war until a 1997 peace accord. Since then, the CHT remained relatively stable, although tensions between hill tribes and local residents persisted under the surface. Now, however, a new insurgent group called the Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF) has emerged in the CHT and evidence suggests the Arakan Army is a hidden hand behind it. The KNF, formed around early 2023 and drawing recruits from minor ethnic communities like the Bawm, launched attacks on Bangladeshi forces including IED ambushes, firefights, and even brazen bank robberies in Bandarban district. Dozens of people have been killed or injured in these incidents, shattering the peace of the hills. Security experts in Bangladesh quickly linked the KNF with Myanmar-based rebels. This was corroborated by intelligence: the KNF was found to be operating camps in the remote border jungles, likely with support and sanctuary from the Arakan Army just across the border in Myanmar's Chin State (Paletwa). Indeed, the AA now controls the Chin side of the Bangladesh border opposite Bandarban. Observers believe the AA is arming and training the KNF insurgents as a proxy, to exert leverage in Dhaka. In other words, the Arakan Army may be exporting armed unrest into Bangladesh's hill tracts -- a disturbing development that risks reigniting ethnic conflict in an area that had finally found fragile peace.

Bangladesh's security forces have responded by ramping up operations in the CHT to neutralize KNF camps and smuggling routes. In mid-2025, the Bangladesh Army mounted a month-long operation in Bandarban's Ruma region, busting a KNF training camp near the border and seizing weapons, uniforms, and bunkers. Dozens of KNF militants have been arrested or killed in joint forces raids since 2024. Nevertheless, the persistence of this insurgency underscores how AA's unchecked presence next door directly undermines Bangladesh's internal security. Dhaka cannot ignore that a powerful foreign militia is potentially stoking separatist violence on its soil. Containing the Arakan Army's reach is therefore essential to prevent the CHT's past ethnic unrest from exploding anew.

The Urgency of Containment

Given the above, it is vitally important to contain the Arakan Army's military expansion for the sake of innocent lives in Myanmar and the security of neighboring Bangladesh. In Rakhine and surrounding areas of Myanmar, halting the AA's advance (or at least restraining its behavior) is necessary to protect vulnerable communities like the Rohingya and other civilians. Every mile of territory the AA conquers without accountability has seen civilians pay the price – through displacement, forced labor, and violence. Containment does not mean endorsing Myanmar's abusive junta rather; it means preventing another armed group from inflicting atrocities under cover of war. Rohingya refugees have already endured one genocide allowing the AA to continue unchecked ethnic purges in Rakhine will only compound this tragedy and wreck any hopes for those refugees to someday return home safely. International attention and pressure are needed to hold the Arakan Army to account for war crimes just as the Tatmadaw is held accountable. Humanitarian access is also crucial: aid agencies must be able to reach civilians in AA-controlled zones so that desperate villagers are not left at the mercy of insurgent commanders.



Panoramic view of the sprawling Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

For Bangladesh, containing the AA is equally critical for national sovereignty and peace. The safety of border-area civilian fishermen, farmers, and tribal communities depends on curbing the Arakan Army's incursions and kidnappings. Dhaka has so far favored diplomatic and "soft" approaches, but a continuation of AA provocations could force a harsher response. To avoid a direct Bangladesh-AA confrontation (which could spark a wider conflict), the onus is on early containment. This includes strengthening border security (fencing, surveillance, and joint patrols) to prevent AA infiltration and illicit flows. Bangladesh's recent deployments of troops and technology (like drones and radars) along the border are steps in the right direction. At the same time, regional cooperation is needed. Myanmar's neighbors as well as international stakeholders should treat the Arakan Army's criminal exploits as a regional security issue, not an isolated ethnic rebellion. Joint efforts to disrupt the AA's drug trade and weapons supply lines will weaken its finances and pressure it to negotiate. Bangladesh, Myanmar, India, and ASEAN countries could enhance intelligence-sharing on the AA's transnational networks to bust the kidnapping and trafficking rings. Finally, the grievances that allow groups like the AA to gain local support must be addressed: this means pursuing a political solution in Rakhine that grants Rakhine civilians genuine autonomy and rights without resorting to violence against minorities. Only by addressing the root political issues and closing off the illicit funding streams can the Arakan Army's advance truly be halted.

In conclusion, containing the Arakan Army is not just important, but imperative. It is a fight to protect innocent civilians in Myanmar -- Rakhine Buddhists, Rohingya Muslims, and others -- from further bloodshed and abuse. It is also a necessity for safeguarding the security and sovereignty of southeast Bangladesh, where the fallout of Rakhine's war now threatens to ignite fresh turmoil. The AA's entanglement in narco-trafficking, kidnapping, and armed proxy warfare illustrates that without containment, a self-styled "liberation" army can quickly devolve into a source of regional chaos. Curbing the Arakan Army's military advance and criminal enterprises will require vigilance and cooperation on both sides of the border. But the reward will be measured in lives saved -- fishermen safe from abduction, youths safe from drugs and conscription, refugees spared from a perilous flight -- and in the preservation of a fragile peace in a region that has already seen too much tragedy. Stopping the Arakan Army's rise now is crucial to ensure a safer future for the people of Rakhine, the Rohingya community, and the citizens of Bangladesh's hill tracts alike.

Ending Digital Violence against Women and Girls



Photo Courtesy: Anna Dubuis/DFID

ARNO was pleased to join the Congress of Nations and States (CNS) in its first year joining the UNITE campaign to End Violence against Women and Girls. This year's theme was focused on ending digital violence against women and girls. The UNITE campaign was launched in 2008 by the UN Secretary General. The purpose of the campaign is to support civil society in leading 16 days of activism against gender-based violence around the world. Every year the theme for the campaign is different.

According to the UN Women, the statistics of digital hate show an alarming trend that must be curbed. For example, 1 in 3 women experience gender-based violence in their lifetime and 16-58% of women and girls face digital violence. Between 90-95% of deepfake videos are sexual images of women. Among the contributors to digital violence is the "manosphere" which contains misogynistic content and spreads abuse, disinformation, and hate. In addition, UN Women states that "inequality in access and power over technology" also increases the risk for some women and girls.

Rohingsya people are no strangers to digital violence. As the UN Fact Finding Mission on Myanmar stated in 2018 about Facebook, "It has ... substantively contributed to the level of acrimony and dissension and conflict, if you will, within the public. Hate speech is certainly of course a part of that. As far as the Myanmar situation is concerned, social media is Facebook, and Facebook is social media..." Years later, Facebook still has not paid reparations for its participation in the 2017 violence, despite requests from ARNO.

Sadly, today Rohingya women and girls are still being targeted through social media platforms. Rohingya women who are advocating for the Rohingya cause are targeted and subjected to unwelcomed comments and criticism. These types of attacks can harm the mental health of the person being targeted. One way for everyone to help stop bullying and online attacks is to be an upstander. An upstander is a person who does something to make it right, whether it is reporting the event or helping the victim. Upstanders "do their best to support and protect their peers."

While the UNITE 16-day campaign has come to an end this year, it is important for civil society to continue to raise awareness in this important area.

[1] UN Women, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/get-involved/16-days-of-activism>

[1] The guardian,

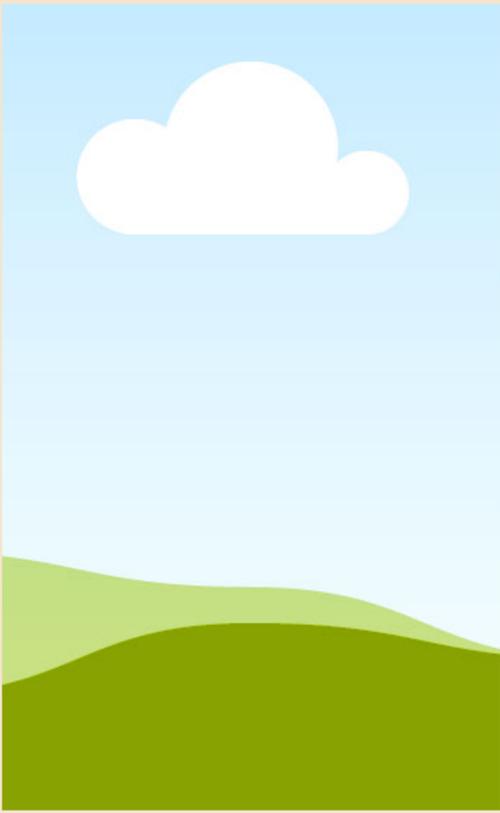
<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/mar/13/myanmar-un-blames-facebook-for-spreading-hatred-of-rohingya>

[1] New Lines Institute, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/displacement-and-migration/corporate-accountability-and-the-rohingya-genocide/>

[1] Rohingya Refugee News, <https://www.rohingyarefugee.news/p/mmisogyny-rohingya-women-activists>

[1] NIU,

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Myanmar's Election: Conflict, Exclusion, and a Crisis of Legitimacy

Myanmar's military regime, the State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC), is pressing ahead with plans for a national election even as the country remains engulfed in turmoil. The junta, which seized power in a February 2021 coup, portrays the upcoming polls (scheduled to begin in phases from late December 2025) as a step towards restoring "multiparty democracy" and national reconciliation. The political, diplomatic, and humanitarian challenges surrounding this election are immense. Key pro-democracy forces including the ousted National League for Democracy (NLD) have been excluded, ethnic minority groups remain marginalized, and there is no clear policy on including the long-persecuted Rohingya Muslim minority in the vote. Meanwhile, a raging civil conflict and widespread repression cast deep doubts on the credibility of any vote conducted under current conditions.

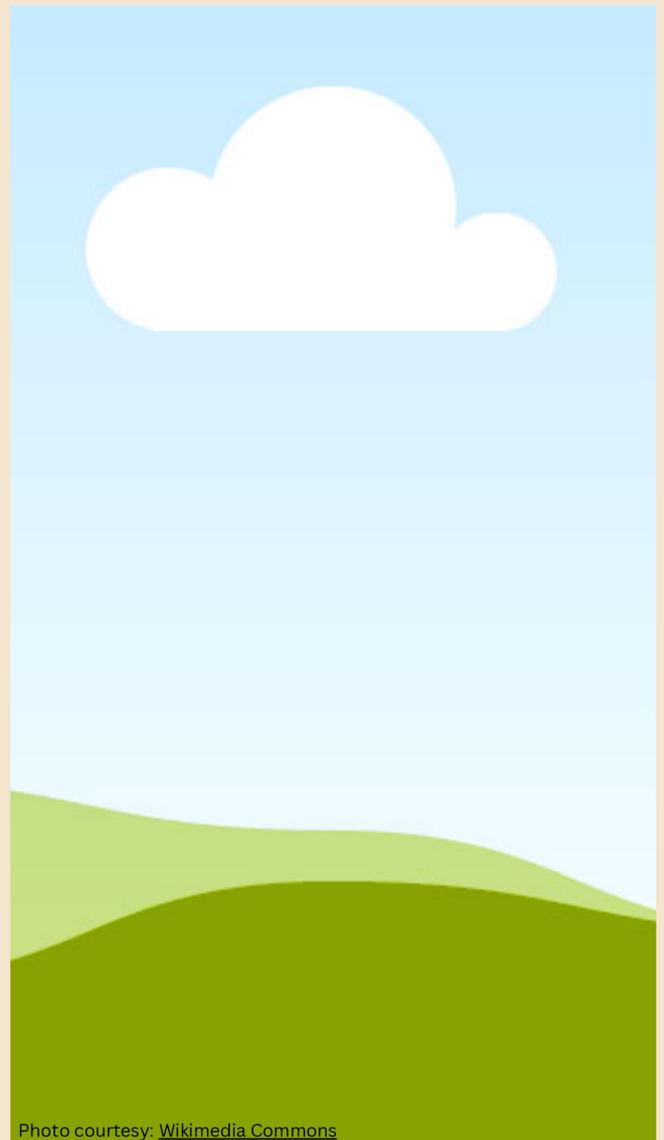


Photo courtesy: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

International observers are increasingly skeptical. Many in the global community view the planned election as a sham exercise designed to legitimize military rule rather than a genuine democratic transition. Within Southeast Asia, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has voiced strong misgivings insisting that peace and inclusive dialogue must come before any polls and as a bloc it has refused to endorse the junta's plans. In contrast, neighboring China and a few other states have signaled support for the regime's roadmap, prioritizing stability and their strategic interests. Western democracies, for their part, have outright rejected the legitimacy of a junta-run election under these conditions, warning that it cannot be free or fair. This analytical overview examines the array of challenges facing Myanmar's proposed election and the divergent responses from international actors, against the backdrop of Myanmar's ongoing political and humanitarian crisis.

A Poll Without Real Opposition, Political Exclusion and Crackdown

From the outset, the junta's election plan has been engineered in a way that sidelines Myanmar's main pro-democracy and ethnic political forces. After toppling the elected government of NLD in 2021, the junta moved to eliminate the NLD from the political arena. In March 2023, the junta-appointed Union Election Commission formally dissolved the NLD along with dozens of other parties, citing their refusal to register under a new, restrictive military-drafted election law. This purge targeted many of the country's most popular political forces: the NLD had won over 80% of the vote in the last free election (2020), and several ethnic minority-based parties were also disbanded. Western governments sharply condemned the dissolution of the NLD and others, with the United States, Britain, Japan, France, Germany, and Australia all denouncing it as "another step backwards" for Myanmar. As a U.S. State Department spokesperson put it, "any election without the participation of all stakeholders in Myanmar could not be considered free or fair." German officials likewise warned that excluding the NLD underscored that the regime's planned elections would be a "farce": neither safe, free nor fair under current conditions.

Indeed, the junta's actions have ensured that genuine opposition is absent from the upcoming poll. Senior NLD leaders remain imprisoned on trumped-up charges. Thousands of other activists and dissidents are jailed or in hiding. The military has outright banned key opposition groups and enacted new electoral laws that heavily favor the military's proxy party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). Under a new party registration law, for example, any party wishing to contest nationwide needed to enlist an enormous number of members, a condition practically impossible for the underground pro-democracy movement, but easily met by the junta-aligned USDP. The result is that 57 parties (mostly minor or newly formed ones) have registered for the election, while the NLD and other major forces are out of the picture. Only six parties plan to compete on a nationwide scale, and chief among them is the

USDP, the military's political vehicle. Reports from inside Myanmar as the campaign period begins indicate that only junta-backed parties are visibly active, while any remnants of the NLD or its ethnic allies have been driven underground.

This tightly controlled political environment undermines the credibility of the election before a single ballot is cast. Free media and open debate have been muzzled, independent newspapers and broadcasters have largely been shut down or forced into exile, and the regime recently made it a crime (punishable by prison or even death) to "defame" or protest the election. Human rights groups note that the junta has been arresting anyone critical of the poll, using draconian laws to silence dissent. Amnesty International warns that these "repressive tactics" mean the vote will take place in an atmosphere of fear. In short, voters will have no genuine choice at the ballot box. The most popular party (NLD) is outlawed, many other parties and candidates have been eliminated, and criticizing the process is literally illegal. Such conditions fall grossly short of even the most basic democratic standards.

Myanmar's generals claim the election will pave the way for "national reconciliation," but by excluding the very groups that won the last election and quashing dissent, the process appears instead as an attempt to entrench military rule via a hollow ballot. As many observers have pointed out, the junta's election is widely seen as a mere "means to legitimize the 2021 military takeover" that plunged Myanmar into its current civil war. With the political opposition decimated and the population under coercion, any vote conducted now would be one-sided. Even some officials in Myanmar's neighborhood have privately admitted that a general election without the NLD or other key stakeholders "is not inclusive" by definition. Thus, on political grounds alone, the planned 2025 vote faces a profound legitimacy deficit.

An Election with No Rohingya Voice

Perhaps the most glaring indicator of the election's exclusivity is the total absence of any plan to include the Rohingya, Myanmar's long-persecuted Muslim minority. The Rohingya -- roughly one to two million people, historically concentrated in Rakhine State -- have effectively been stripped of citizenship and political rights for decades. The military junta has provided no clarity or policy whatsoever on whether Rohingya people will be allowed to vote or run in the upcoming election. All signs indicate that they will remain disenfranchised, continuing a pattern of deliberate exclusion. In the regime's official statements about the polls, references to "all eligible voters" clearly exclude Rohingya; under Myanmar's discriminatory laws, most Rohingya are not even recognized as citizens, rendering them ineligible by default. The junta has given no indication it will reconsider this disenfranchisement of the Rohingya community. No registered party in Myanmar today, not even those representing other ethnic minorities, dares campaign

on restoring Rohingya rights, as any such stance would prompt the regime to swiftly disqualify that party or candidate. This deafening silence around Rohingya political participation shows that the issue is not merely ignored but actively erased from the national discourse.

The Rohingya's exclusion from elections is tragically not new. It is the continuation of a long history of disenfranchisement. In 2010, some Rohingya were briefly allowed to vote using temporary "white card" IDs, but those documents were revoked before the 2015 polls, and Rohingya were barred from voting or contesting in 2015 and 2020 alike. This stems from the 1982 Citizenship Law and successive policies that falsely deem the Rohingya as "foreigners" (often labeled as "illegal Bengalis" by Myanmar authorities) despite centuries-old roots in Rakhine. By 2020, virtually all Rohingya still inside Myanmar had been removed from voter rolls, and none of the roughly one million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh or other countries could vote either. This deliberate state policy of exclusion remains firmly in place. Approximately 600,000 Rohingya continue to live inside Myanmar today (many confined to squalid internment camps in central Rakhine), but their lack of citizenship means they are barred from the political process entirely. Meanwhile, nearly one million more Rohingya refugees languish in camps in Bangladesh, Malaysia, and elsewhere, obviously unable to participate in Myanmar's elections while they are exiled and unsafe to return.

By keeping Rohingya people voiceless in this planned election, the junta undermines any claim that the exercise could promote national reconciliation or a "democratic" restoration. It is impossible to speak of an inclusive or representative political process when a whole ethnic minority -- one that has suffered genocide and mass displacement -- is categorically denied a vote. Any government formed without the Rohingya's participation will lack moral authority to address the community's grievances or to achieve genuine peace in Myanmar's fractured society. As the Rohingya themselves have noted, this election is shaping up as merely a reminder of their "invisibility" in Myanmar's statehood, rather than an opportunity to have a say in their country's future. For the Rohingya, the elections offer no hope of citizenship, no seat in parliament, and no protection from persecution; it is a continuation of the apartheid-like system they have endured.

The junta has tried to deflect international criticism on the Rohingya issue through token gestures. In early 2025, regime officials trumpeted an initiative to "verify" about 180,000 Rohingya refugees for possible repatriation from Bangladesh. However, this announcement (timed conspicuously a few months before the election) was met with deep skepticism by Rohingya themselves and international observers. In the refugee camps of Cox's Bazar, Rohingya families asked: "return to what?" -to live in isolated camps or ghettos back in Myanmar, under the same military that drove them out.

Without guarantees of citizenship, safety, and equal rights, such repatriation offers rang hollow. Rohingya activists were clear that going back “to die again” under the previous oppressive conditions was not an acceptable solution. In essence, the junta’s repatriation talk appeared to be a political maneuver aimed at mollifying regional pressure and creating an illusion of progress ahead of the polls. It sought to project an image of “reconciliation” to the outside world while avoiding any commitment to restoring Rohingya rights. No serious observer believes that the regime will suddenly enfranchise Rohingya in its election. On the contrary, the Rohingya question has been kept off the ballot entirely. This glaring omission fatally weakens the junta’s narrative that the election is a step toward a “united” or “peaceful” democracy. Any claims of national restoration ring empty if Myanmar’s most persecuted minority is wholly excluded from political life.

A Landscape Unfit for Elections

Compounding the issues of political repression and ethnic exclusion is the grim reality that Myanmar is in the throes of a multi-front civil war and humanitarian emergency. The country remains violently divided in the aftermath of the 2021 coup, raising fundamental questions about how any credible nationwide election can be held under such circumstances. Armed resistance to military rule has spread across Myanmar’s states and regions. A myriad of pro-democracy People’s Defense Forces (PDFs) and longstanding ethnic armed organizations now control significant swathes of territory, engaging the junta’s troops in daily clashes. By some estimates, the military effectively governs only about half of the country’s territory (primarily urban centers and parts of the lowlands), while resistance forces dominate the rest. Even Senior General Min Aung Hlaing himself acknowledged in a recent speech that large parts of Myanmar are outside the regime’s control. In 2022–2023, a nationwide census exercise (ostensibly to update voter lists) failed to reach nearly 19 million people -- roughly one-third of the population -- largely because vast rural areas were inaccessible due to conflict. These facts underscore the immense logistical and security barriers to holding a meaningful vote. Large parts of the country will simply not have polling at all if the junta proceeds as planned. Indeed, election officials have already ruled out voting in at least 121 townships for the first phase, mainly those engulfed by fighting. Even the subsequent phases are expected to exclude many “brown” or “black” zones where the military has limited or no control.

Myanmar’s junta proposes a staggered election with a first round of voting on December 28, 2025, in about 102 townships that are firmly under military control, and a second round in January 2026 covering another 170+ townships that include many conflict areas. This plan itself is an admission of the ongoing war. Holding a vote in active battle zones is both dangerous and absurd: communities in those areas are enduring artillery

shelling, airstrikes, and displacement, not organizing campaign rallies. The military has even imposed martial law across 60+ townships (many of them hotspots of resistance) as recently as August 2025. By the junta's own martial-law decree, normal civil rights are suspended in those places, hardly a conducive environment for free elections. Observers note that voting will not take place across large swathes of the country controlled by pro-democracy guerrillas and ethnic minority armies fighting the regime. In practice, millions of citizens in these resistance-held regions will be unable to vote, effectively disenfranchised by the conflict geography.

Even in areas under the junta's nominal control, widespread insecurity and repression cast a shadow over the election. Over 3 million people are internally displaced within Myanmar, many sheltering in forests or border areas after fleeing military offensives. These internally displaced persons (IDPs), along with more than 1 million refugees abroad, make up a huge portion of the electorate that is unlikely to participate in any vote. In regions like the central Sagaing and Magway Divisions, entire villages have been torched and depopulated during anti-insurgency sweeps, with over 1.3 million displaced in those areas alone. The humanitarian toll of the civil war means basic needs -- food, shelter, medical care -- are urgent priorities, not elections. Turnout in conflict zones (if voting is attempted at all) will be minimal and unrepresentative. Furthermore, the junta's harsh crackdowns continue unabated: reports abound of mass arrests of election critics, artists, and activists in recent weeks, under new laws that criminalize any speech "undermining" the election. In late October, for example, authorities arrested three artists for merely questioning the junta-organized polls, a sign of how intolerant the regime is of any dissent regarding its electoral charade.

The humanitarian situation also intersects with the Rohingya issue discussed earlier. The Rohingya humanitarian crisis remains one of the world's most dire, with over a million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar district dependent on shrinking aid, and around 600,000 Rohingya in Myanmar living in what Human Rights Watch has termed "open-air prisons" under apartheid conditions. Yet the junta's election plan offers no remedy for these crises. Refugees in Bangladesh have no voting rights in Myanmar, and those Rohingya still in Rakhine are mostly confined and right-less. More broadly, the ongoing conflict has driven needs to staggering levels: the UN estimates that nearly 22 million people (out of a ~54 million population) now require humanitarian assistance in Myanmar, as the economy craters and violence spreads. Amid such turmoil, holding a legitimate election would be challenging even for a good-faith government; for a military regime actively bombing its own people, it is virtually impossible. International election observers note that credible elections cannot occur in the middle of a civil war and state of emergency; normal electoral logistics (voter registration, campaigning, monitoring) cannot be carried out when combat operations and martial law are ongoing. As ASEAN's

chair Malaysia bluntly told the junta back in January 2025, “an election should not be [the] priority” right now: instead the priority must be ending the fighting and engaging in dialogue. The junta chose to ignore that advice. By plowing ahead with the vote amid warfare and a humanitarian meltdown, the junta is deepening doubts that this exercise is about restoring democracy at all. Rather, it appears aimed at rubber-stamping the status quo.

ASEAN’s Skepticism and Regional Pressure

Within its Southeast Asian neighborhood, Myanmar’s planned election has been met with intense skepticism and diplomatic strain. ASEAN, which Myanmar joined in 1997, has been grappling with how to respond to the post-coup crisis. Frustrated by the junta’s failure to implement the ASEAN “Five-Point Consensus” peace plan (agreed in 2021), the bloc has taken an uncharacteristically firm line since late 2021, ASEAN has barred Myanmar’s military leaders from high-level meetings and summits. As the election plan took shape, ASEAN collectively signaled that it does not consider conditions in Myanmar conducive to a valid poll. At an ASEAN Summit in October 2025, regional leaders issued a statement voicing “deep concern” over the ongoing conflict and the “lack of substantive progress” on the 5-point peace roadmap. Crucially, ASEAN emphasized that “the cessation of violence and inclusive political dialogue must precede elections.” In diplomatic language, this was a clear rebuke of the junta’s rush to hold a unilateral vote. The phrase underscores ASEAN’s view that peace and inclusivity are prerequisites for any credible electoral process. Given that neither condition is met in Myanmar today (violence rages and major stakeholders are excluded), ASEAN is effectively questioning the legitimacy of the junta’s election scheme.

In practical terms, ASEAN has refused to endorse or assist the military’s election. The regime extended invitations to all ASEAN member states to send election observers to lend credibility to the polls. But ASEAN as an institution could not reach consensus on doing so, a reflection of widespread discomfort. On October 27, 2025, diplomatic sources confirmed that ASEAN will not deploy any official observer mission to Myanmar’s election, dealing a blow to the junta’s quest for international legitimacy. “No ASEAN observers” sends a strong signal: the region is unwilling to validate the process under current conditions. (Individual ASEAN countries are technically free to send observers on a bilateral basis, but there was no agreement to do so under the ASEAN banner.) As one analyst noted, the lack of ASEAN observers means “there will be no credible evidence to suggest that free and fair elections were held” in Myanmar. The junta’s regional isolation was further highlighted by Malaysia’s Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, the 2025 ASEAN chair, who reiterated calls at the summit for an “immediate ceasefire” in Myanmar and de-prioritizing the election until dialogue occurs.

It should be noted that ASEAN is not monolithic: a few member states have been more sympathetic to Myanmar's military. Cambodia (under Hun Sen's leadership until 2023) often took a softer line, and Thailand's own military-tied government maintained backchannels with Naypyidaw. These differences explain why ASEAN stopped short of outright expulsion of Myanmar. Nevertheless, as a collective, ASEAN's stance going into 2024–2025 has been that the junta's election lacks legitimacy and could worsen the conflict. An ASEAN Ministerial meeting early in 2025 explicitly warned the junta that holding a vote amid civil war would not solve the crisis, urging them to focus instead on fulfilling the peace consensus. Even ASEAN's typically cautious statements now describe the junta's proposed vote as "not a priority" and unlikely to resolve Myanmar's turmoil. This regional pressure, while diplomatically phrased, reinforces the message that Myanmar's neighbors (almost uniformly, except China) doubt the credibility of the 2025 election process. Some ASEAN parliamentarians have gone further, saying failure to firmly reject the sham election would make ASEAN "complicit in the junta's crimes against humanity."

China's Endorsement and Strategic Interests

In stark contrast to ASEAN and Western skepticism, China has largely thrown its weight behind the Myanmar junta's political roadmap, including the election. Beijing's approach to Myanmar is driven by strategic and economic interests: Myanmar is a neighboring state where China has significant investments (oil and gas pipelines, mining, infrastructure) and a desire for stability to protect those projects. Since the coup, China has maintained close ties with the military regime, and it has refrained from criticizing the junta's repression. On the election issue, Chinese officials have provided diplomatic cover and encouragement to the Myanmar generals. Notably, in August 2025, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met Myanmar's junta Foreign Minister Than Swe in Yunnan and explicitly expressed support for the junta's proposed election timeline. According to junta media, Wang Yi even outlined "three goals" that should be achieved through the election: (1) domestic peace via cessation of hostilities and governance by the people's will, (2) national reconciliation and broad solidarity, and (3) social harmony and development to improve people's lives. While couched in positive rhetoric, these remarks signaled Beijing's endorsement of the election as a potential path forward. The Chinese Embassy's statements emphasized hoped-for outcomes like peace and reconciliation, implicitly treating the election as a legitimate mechanism toward those ends.

China's backing goes beyond words. The junta has actively courted Beijing's involvement – even inviting China to send its own observers for the polls. High-level engagements have increased: in late 2024, China invited Senior General Min Aung Hlaing to a regional summit (the Mekong-Lancang Cooperation summit), marking his first trip outside

Myanmar since the coup and allowing meetings with leaders from Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. This was widely seen as China helping Myanmar's isolated junta gain regional acceptance for its plans. Indeed, China, along with a handful of other states like Russia, India, Thailand, and Cambodia, has emerged as a core bloc supportive of the junta's election plan. All these countries have significant ties to Myanmar's military or strategic stakes in its outcome. Chinese President Xi Jinping reportedly conveyed support for the election during a meeting with Min Aung Hlaing in May 2025 (on the sidelines of an event in Moscow). Likewise, China's special envoy for Asian affairs, Deng Xijun, attended the junta's so-called "Peace Forum" in mid-2025 and backed the regime's political process.

Beijing's stance is that Myanmar's crisis is fundamentally an internal affair to be resolved through domestic processes (a view that aligns with its non-interference principle). Chinese officials have suggested that any election, even a flawed one, is preferable to open-ended civil war. China's priority is a stable Myanmar that can secure China's borders and projects, rather than a democratic Myanmar per se. To that end, China has even leveraged influence over certain ethnic armed groups along its border to reduce fighting ahead of the election. For example, under Chinese pressure, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (an ethnic militia in Shan State allied with China) halted its offensives and pulled back from positions in late 2024, ostensibly to calm the situation. Such moves indicate Beijing's tacit aim to engineer a lull in conflict to allow the junta's voting to proceed. Analysts describe China as "one of the few allies" propping up Myanmar's military rulers on the global stage. By reinforcing the legitimacy of the election, China hopes to legitimize the regime that will emerge from it -- a regime that China can work with.

This Chinese support stands in sharp relief against the condemnations coming from elsewhere. It has created a sense that China is enabling the junta's agenda. Critics warn that a "China-backed" election could yield only a "negative peace", a superficial stability that ignores Myanmar's internal political demands and humanitarian crises. Nonetheless, Beijing appears committed to seeing the SAC's plan through. It has repeatedly reiterated its support for the election, emphasizing stability and urging others (implicitly ASEAN and the West) to not interfere. For China, the upcoming Myanmar election aligns with its interests in having a friendly government next door, even if that government lacks democratic legitimacy. This puts China at odds with ASEAN's official line and squarely opposed to Western democracies' approach, showcasing a broader geopolitical divide in how global actors view Myanmar's future.

Western Condemnation: a "Sham"

The United States, European Union, and other Western democracies have been

unequivocal in denouncing the planned election as illegitimate under current conditions. From the moment the junta floated the idea of a new poll, Western officials and international human rights experts have warned that any vote would be a “sham” if it excludes Myanmar’s democratically elected leaders, occurs amid mass atrocities, and serves only to entrench the coup regime. In the wake of the NLD’s forced dissolution, for instance, the United States, UK, EU, Canada, Australia, Japan, and others issued statements of condemnation, making it clear that they would not recognize an election conducted by force. Washington’s position has been firm: the U.S. and allies have imposed waves of sanctions on Myanmar’s junta and its business interests since 2021, and they have indicated these punitive measures will remain or increase if the junta goes through with a fake election. As cited earlier, U.S. officials stated plainly that an election without the NLD and other stakeholders “cannot be considered free or fair.” The European Union has echoed this view. An EU Commissioner, Kaja Ollongren, said in October 2025 that the planned elections are “neither free nor fair,” and thus the EU will “not send observers to something that we don’t recognize as an election.” Many Western governments have adopted a policy of “zero legitimacy” for the junta, continuing to recognize the credentials of the National Unity Government (NUG, formed by ousted lawmakers) in certain international forums, and refusing to treat the SAC’s electoral exercise as anything other than a propaganda ploy.

Prominent human rights organizations and UN experts aligned with Western views have bolstered this stance. Tom Andrews, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Myanmar, has been particularly outspoken, urging all countries not to “legitimize the junta’s charade” by attending or endorsing the election. On the eve of ASEAN’s October summit, Andrews warned that recognizing the junta’s “fraudulent election” would mean “defending the indefensible”. The UN’s independent investigative mechanism on Myanmar, as well as the International Parliamentary Union and others, have all raised alarms that the election could escalate violence and diminish prospects for genuine dialogue. Western diplomats frequently mention that more than 17,000 political prisoners languish in Myanmar’s jails including the entire elected government of 2020 which by itself renders any notion of a free election absurd. They also cite the continued military atrocities (airstrikes on villages, burning of homes) as antithetical to any credible political process. In various international meetings throughout 2024 and 2025, Western nations have pushed for tougher measures: for instance, they supported resolutions at the UN General Assembly condemning the junta’s abuses and “urge the military to cease violence and engage all stakeholders, rather than pursue a sham electoral path.” Although these resolutions are non-binding, they reflect a broad international chorus (over 100 countries) calling the junta’s plans into question.

Notably, Western democracies have also highlighted the Rohingya exclusion as a critical

flaw in the junta's legitimacy. They argue that without addressing the Rohingya's political rights and the conditions for their safe return, the junta cannot claim any election as a step towards national reconciliation or democracy. Human Rights Watch, in a 2025 open letter to ASEAN and the East Asia Summit, explicitly urged governments to "deny support for the Myanmar junta's sham elections" on the grounds that the military lacks the credibility or capacity to conduct a democratic vote amidst its ongoing atrocities. The letter enumerated how repression – including the jailing of opposition politicians and the "dissolution and criminalization" of their parties – has created a climate of fear incompatible with real elections. It also noted the junta's own admission that it could only conduct a census in 145 out of 330 townships, highlighting the huge portions of the population effectively cut off from the process. Western officials often reference such impartial reports to justify their position that the SAC's election will resolve nothing and should not be recognized.

In summary, Western democracies are preparing to dismiss the 2025–26 Myanmar election as null and void. They have already coordinated to ensure that, for example, Myanmar's representatives in bodies like the UN remain those appointed by the NUG (not junta appointees), thereby refusing the junta the diplomatic recognition it seeks. Should the SAC proceed to convene a new parliament after the election, countries like the U.S., UK, and EU members are expected to maintain or heighten sanctions rather than engage with the regime's handpicked "civilian" government. Their stance sends a message of "no normalization without restoration of democracy." As a German Foreign Office spokesperson warned, the junta's moves dissolving parties and staging a farcical vote "threaten a further escalation of violence" and "a more rapid destabilization" of Myanmar. Far from conferring legitimacy, the election could trigger more unrest. Western governments have indicated that only a genuine political settlement -- one that includes the NLD, ethnic representatives, and addresses minority rights like those of the Rohingya -- would merit their recognition. In the meantime, they will treat the junta's elected façade as internationally illegitimate.

As Myanmar's military regime forges ahead with its self-designed election, the enterprise stands widely condemned and fraught with fundamental flaws. Politically, the process is taking place under the shadow of guns with the country's most popular political party outlawed, its leaders jailed, and any real opposition crushed. The exclusion of the Rohingya and other minority groups means the election will do nothing to heal Myanmar's deep ethnic and religious cleavages; instead, it institutionalizes their disenfranchisement, undermining any claim that this is a step toward national reconciliation. On the ground, an active civil war rages, rendering vast areas ungovernable and millions of people displaced -- a context in which a free, nationwide vote is essentially impossible. Humanitarian suffering and ongoing military crackdowns further strip the exercise of credibility. Little wonder that independent observers call the

planned vote a “sham” and a mere performance of democracy orchestrated by a junta seeking to cement its power. International reactions reflect a growing consensus (bar a few holdouts) that the SAC’s election will lack legitimacy. ASEAN representing Myanmar’s closest neighbors has broken from its traditionally hands-off approach to warn that an election without peace and inclusion is untenable, pointedly declining to give the junta the legitimacy it craves. Leading ASEAN voices and parliamentarians have even urged a tougher line, fearing that acquiescing to a fraudulent vote would harm ASEAN’s credibility and Myanmar’s people. Western democracies have taken an even harder stance, preemptively rejecting the results of any such election and vowing not to lift pressure on the regime. Meanwhile, China’s embrace of the junta’s roadmap shows that geopolitical interests are trumping democratic principles in some quarters, creating a divided international response. This division could hamper a unified global strategy on Myanmar, but it does not erase the reality on the ground: an election under these conditions will convince few and resolve nothing.

The absence of meaningful Rohingya participation in particular lays bare the hollowness of the junta’s claims. You cannot have a “new democratic era” while one of the country’s largest ethnic communities remains voiceless and exiled. As one Rohingya advocacy group aptly concluded, if the world were to accept the junta’s election as legitimate, it would risk “making [the Rohingya’s] exclusion permanent.” It would effectively endorse a political apartheid. For Myanmar’s long-suffering population, especially those in the resistance and minority communities, the coming election offers no real hope it is poised to be an empty ritual that changes little on the ground. The generals may declare victory and don civilian garb, but without an inclusive political settlement, Myanmar’s conflict and crises will continue unabated.

In the end, Myanmar’s future stability and legitimacy cannot be achieved through a unilateral vote while guns are still firing, and prisons are full of political detainees. True national reconciliation would require the junta to halt its offensives, release political prisoners, and engage in earnest negotiations with the NLD, ethnic representatives, and yes, the Rohingya as well. Only a process that gives all of Myanmar’s people a voice can lead to a credible election and a government worthy of international recognition. Until then, the 2025 election conducted by a regime with blood on its hands and void of inclusive participation will remain gravely suspect in the eyes of both Myanmar’s citizens and the world. The broad doubts about this planned election’s credibility serve as a stark reminder that democracy cannot simply be decreed by those who destroyed it; it must be built through the consent and inclusion of the people themselves.

ROHINGYA FAMILIES IN MAUNGDAW PREPARE TO FLEE AMID FORCED CONSCRIPTION FEARS



Entrance signboard of Maungdaw, Rakhine State, Myanmar

Rohingya families in Maungdaw Township are preparing to flee their homes as fear spreads over forced conscription by local authorities. Residents report that Arakan Army soldiers have been going door-to-door, recording names and informing households that selected individuals must report for military training. This campaign -- effectively a forced recruitment drive - has caused daily life in Maungdaw to grind to a halt: streets that were once busy are now deserted, shops are half-closed, and many families stay hidden indoors. "They came to our street and wrote down names from every house," said one Rohingya man from Kanyin Tan Ward, describing the conscription raids. "My family is terrified. We do not know who will be taken next. If we get any chance, we will run to Bangladesh." According to local sources, members of the Arakan Army are compiling lists of residents for mandatory

service. The recruitment is reportedly happening through three main channels, namely:

- **Village Defense Forces:** Married men and women are being assigned to local "village defense" units and made to attend roughly 15 days of paramilitary training, after which they may be forced to perform security duties in their villages.
- **Fire Service Training:** Another group of residents is being dispatched for fire brigade training, though details about their intended role and conditions remain unclear.

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- **Full Military Conscription:** The most feared method targets unmarried youth, who are picked for full military training; families worry this will lead to their deployment on active frontlines.

Conscription lists have already been compiled in several neighborhoods of Maungdaw, including Ward Nos. 1, 2, 3, and 5, as well as Kanyin Tan, Myo Oo, and Latha wards. Residents believe those selected will soon be transferred to training camps in other townships, before being sent to fight in conflict areas near Kyaukphyu and Sittwe. The atmosphere in Maungdaw has markedly deteriorated under the conscription drive. "Maungdaw feels like a ghost town," observed a Rohingya shopkeeper, noting that people no longer gather even in usually bustling spots. Streets are empty and the central clock tower area, once a busy marketplace, is now eerily quiet. Out of fear, many families remain behind closed doors and avoid public places. Both Rohingya and ethnic Rakhine residents are gripped by anxiety, as normal community life has been paralyzed by the looming threat of forced recruitment.

Caught between the danger of conscription and the peril of flight, numerous families are quietly seeking ways to escape Maungdaw. Households from both the Rohingya and Rakhine communities are scouting for covert routes toward the Bangladesh border. Many say they feel they have no choice: it's either risk being forced into the military or risk the hazardous journey out. "My brother is only 18," shared a young Rohingya woman from Ward No. 3. "They told us he must join the training. We are afraid he will be sent to the battlefield. Every night we talk about how to escape before they take him." This sense of desperation is widespread; families are gathering what they can and making contingency plans to leave at a moment's notice.

Local residents warn that unless the situation changes, Maungdaw may soon witness another wave of displacement, as parents and siblings flee in silence to safeguard their loved ones. The current scenario is a tense mix of fear and uncertainty, with an entire town on the verge of exodus to avoid a fate they deem worse than flight.

Arakan Army Orders Rohingya to Surrender Household Registration Lists

In late December 2025, the Arakan Army (AA) issued an order in northern Rakhine State instructing Rohingya families in Maungdaw Township to turn in their household registration lists, the official family registries that serve as primary proof of residence and identity for Rohingya in Myanmar. The directive was first reported in Maungdaw's Ward No. 2, where local Rohingya residents were told to return the original household registration documents previously issued to them by authorities. No clear reason or explanation was provided by the AA for this sudden demand, and families were reportedly given a short timeframe (by early January) to comply. The lack of information and the prospect of surrendering these vital documents without any guarantee of replacement immediately raised alarms in the community.



An Arakan Army soldier in Maungdaw interacting with local residents.

The order initially centered on Ward No. 2 of Maungdaw, a Rohingya-populated neighborhood in the township. AA members and local administrators relayed instructions that every Rohingya household must submit their “family list” documents to the authorities. This occurred in the final week of December 2025, with deadlines set around the New Year for handing over the papers (the AA’s ultimatum was reportedly for early January 2026). While Ward No. 2 was highlighted, residents in other parts of Maungdaw grew concerned that the directive would extend to additional wards and villages as well. The demand came on the heels of other restrictive measures by the AA in northern Rakhine, part of a broader pattern of consolidating control over Rohingya communities. Household registration lists, also known as family lists, typically contain the names and details of all members of a family. By collecting these, the AA would obtain an updated tally of Rohingya residents and potentially identify families with missing members or those who have fled. Community elders noted that this tactic echoes past policies used by Myanmar authorities in the 1990s to tighten surveillance of Rohingya, adding to the atmosphere of intimidation.

The response among Rohingya families was one of anxiety and alarm. “We are gripped by fear after this order,” one resident of Ward No. 2 said, describing the community’s state of mind. For many, the household registration list is their only official document affirming their identity and home address. Handing it over to an armed group with no promise of return has left people feeling extremely vulnerable. Residents worry that once these documents are taken, they may never be returned, effectively stripping Rohingya families of recognition in their own homeland. Some suspect the AA could use the lists to single out individuals or to facilitate other coercive measures. “They came suddenly and asked for our family list,” recalled a Rohingya man from a nearby village, “They did not ask our opinion. They just wrote down the names.” This firsthand account illustrates how AA personnel have been collecting information without consent, fueling speculation that the lists might be used to impose new controls, such as forced conscription or taxation, on the Rohingya.

Local sources reported that fear quickly spread beyond Ward 2 as news of the order circulated. Shops in Rohingya neighborhoods closed early and gatherings dwindled, with families deliberating their next steps in hushed conversations. “Everyone is afraid of what will happen once we hand them over,” a community elder explained, noting that people have little choice but to comply. Some families have even discussed hiding or fleeing rather than surrendering their documents, though escaping carries its own perils. “Maungdaw feels like a ghost town,” one shopkeeper observed in the days following the order, “People do not gather anymore... Everyone is trying to leave quietly before anything worse happens.” Neighbors have begun watching out for one another, sharing whatever information they can get. However, official communication from the AA has been minimal, and this silence only deepens the uncertainty.

As of a report on December 28, 2025, Rohingya families remained on edge. Community leaders and activists have appealed (quietly, for their safety) for clarity on why the AA is demanding these lists. There is an underlying fear that this move is a prelude to further abuses, for example, identifying young men for forced labor or tracking families’ movements. So far, no incidents of violence related specifically to the document handover have been reported, but the psychological impact is severe. Many Rohingya in Maungdaw feel that their tenuous security is slipping away: “These papers are all we have,” one resident said, “If we lose them, we lose our last proof that we belong here.” The situation remains extremely tense, with humanitarian observers noting that trust between the Rohingya community and the AA has deteriorated even further due to this development.

In summary, the AA's order for Rohingya to submit their household registration lists has created a climate of fear and uncertainty in Maungdaw. The demands, affecting areas like Ward 2, came with a tight deadline and no justification, prompting residents to worry about the intent behind the order. Families have voiced grave concerns, noting that surrendering their family lists could leave them undocumented in an already hostile environment. The situation continues to evolve, but as of early January 2026, the Rohingya in Maungdaw remain caught between complying with the AA's directives and safeguarding their identity papers, a precarious position that exemplifies their overall vulnerability in Arakan (Rakhine) State.

Rohingya Men and Women Forced to Join Armed Group in Maungdaw



Photo Credit: www.rohingyakhobor.com

In late December 2025, Rohingya residents in Maungdaw Township, northern Rakhine State, reported a new wave of coercion as the Arakan Army ordered both Rohingya men and women to join its armed forces. The incident took place in Kyauk Hla Ka village, where AA members summoned villagers to a meeting at a local school and instructed each household to provide at least one person for military service. The order reportedly left families with no room for refusal. Residents said AA fighters warned that noncompliance would lead to serious consequences, including accusations of supporting rival forces. One Rohingya villager told the outlet, “They said clearly that if there is no man in the house, a woman must go. Everyone was terrified. No one dared to speak.”

Local sources stated that the forced recruitment extended beyond adult men, with women and, in some cases, youths also being pressured to join. During the same operation, AA members allegedly collected household registration lists, further deepening fears that civilians were being systematically identified and monitored. For Rohingya families, these lists are often the only remaining proof of identity and residence, making their confiscation particularly alarming. A resident described the situation by saying, “We are civilians. We have nothing to do with fighting. But they told us if we refuse, we will be treated as enemies.”

Alongside forced recruitment, restrictions on movement have reportedly intensified. Villagers said they now require official permission letters to travel even short distances, including for medical treatment, and that such letters can cost between 10,000 and 20,000 kyats. These controls have further disrupted daily life and livelihoods in an area where Rohingya communities have already endured years of

violence, displacement, and deprivation. Many families remain indoors, avoiding public spaces out of fear of being targeted again.

The cumulative effect of forced conscription, document seizures, and movement restrictions has created an atmosphere of acute fear in Maungdaw. Several residents told Rohingya Khobor that families are quietly discussing escape routes toward Bangladesh, despite the dangers involved. "Life here is getting worse every day," one young Rohingya man said. "We survived past violence, but now there is no safety left for us." The report highlights growing concern that these practices may trigger another wave of displacement from northern Rakhine State, as remaining Rohingya civilians face increasing pressure to choose between forced participation in armed conflict and the risks of fleeing their homes.

Fire Tears Through Rohingya Camp in Cox's Bazar, Injuring Three Children and Destroying Dozens of Shelters



On the night of December 28, 2025, a fire broke out in Camp 24 of the Rohingya refugee settlement in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, spreading rapidly through the tightly packed makeshift shelters and tearing through the community. The blaze began at around 10 pm and quickly engulfed adjacent structures made of bamboo, tarpaulin, and other highly flammable materials, reflecting the persistent fire risks in these crowded camps. Residents and volunteers reported that three children were injured as families fled their homes to escape the flames. The injured were taken to a nearby camp medical center for treatment. No deaths were reported, but the emotional impact on families was clear, with parents describing children running in panic as the fire spread. About 50 shelters were destroyed in the blaze, leaving dozens of households without roofs over their heads, and annihilating food supplies, household items, and important documents. Two learning centers and several schools were also damaged, interrupting daily life and education for children in the camp. Community volunteers, youth groups, and emergency responders worked into the night to contain the fire and prevent further spread to nearby blocks. Survivors described scrambling to

Survivors described scrambling to put out flames with limited resources while supporting one another through the chaos. One camp resident said that fires like this happen every year; families suffer similar losses repeatedly and urgently need safer shelters and improved cooking systems to reduce the risk of future disasters. Affected families were left homeless and in need of emergency shelter, food, and medical support as they waited for humanitarian aid to arrive. The incident underlines the fragile conditions in Cox's Bazar's camps, where overcrowding and unsafe construction materials make fire a recurring threat. Humanitarian sources emphasize that ongoing support is crucial to help displaced families recover and rebuild after such events.

ARNO Welcomes UN Third Committee Resolution on Rohingya Rights, Demands Accountability for Armed-Group Abuses

Nov 23, 2025 | ARNO Press Release

The Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO) welcomes the adoption of the United Nations General Assembly Third Committee resolution A/C.3/80/L.32/Rev.1 on the “Situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar.” This resolution, adopted by consensus on November 19, 2025, reinforces the global community’s commitment to the rights of the Rohingya people and other minorities in Myanmar, and calls for a durable, rights-based solution including a safe, voluntary, and dignified repatriation to Rakhine State. ARNO views this as a significant step forward. The resolution reaffirms the need for international monitoring, promotion of accountability and protection of civilians, and places renewed emphasis on the responsibilities of both state and non-state actors in Myanmar.

ARNO also stresses that the resolution’s promise must be matched with concrete action. In particular, the organisation highlights the role of the ethnic armed group Arakan Army (AA) and its affiliated armed units in northern Rakhine State, which continue to commit serious human rights violations against Rohingya communities. These include killings, the burning of Rohingya villages, forced displacement and restrictions on movement. For instance, in May 2024 the Arakan Army carried out a massacre in Htan Shauk Khan village in Buthidaung, and in August 2024 its drone strikes and shelling killed dozens of Rohingya civilians as they tried to escape the fighting. The expansion of AA territorial control has increasingly placed Rohingya populations under the dominance of a force that treats them as second-class communities, denies their identity, restricts their basic freedoms and imposes collective punishments. These actions reflect patterns of persecution, echoing previous campaigns against the Rohingya and amounting to a refusal of rights recognised by the UN resolution.

ARNO calls on the international community including the UN Human Rights Council and member states to ensure that all perpetrators of international crimes are held accountable, regardless of affiliation. The AA cannot remain outside the scope of justice simply because of self-framing. Impunity for military and non-state actors encourages escalation of violence and undermines prospects for peace. ARNO urges states to consider referral of the situation in Myanmar to international justice mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court, and for all states to continue to uphold obligations under the UN Genocide Convention.

The resolution also underscores the urgent need to protect Rohingya civilians caught between the military junta and armed groups. ARNO emphasises that without effective protection and humanitarian access, the conditions for safe and voluntary repatriation cannot exist. ARNO commends Bangladesh’s ongoing hospitality and appeals to the international donor community to increase support for both host communities and new arrivals. ARNO also urges humanitarian actors to press for full and unhindered access into all affected areas in Rakhine State, including those under AA control.

The Rohingya, along with other persecuted minorities in Myanmar, urge the UN Security Council to institute a durable and enforceable end to all military offensives in the country, consistent with its commitments to fostering peace in other global contexts. Further, ARNO emphasizes that the international community must reject the sham elections that the Myanmar military junta plans to hold, as any signal of legitimizing such actions will embolden the junta to continue to its campaigns of violence.

Looking ahead, ARNO remains committed to working with governments, UN agencies, civil society and Rohingya communities to turn the resolution's commitments into reality. The Rohingya cannot wait. There must be a genuine shift from diplomatic language to implementation: full citizenship rights, freedom of movement, equal access to justice and livelihood opportunities in their homeland.

For more information, please contact:

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Arakan Rohingya National Alliance Condemns Deadly Bombing of Hospital in Rakhine

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The Arakan Rohingya National Alliance (ARNA) strongly condemns the December 10, 2025, airstrike on Mrauk-U General Hospital that killed at least 33 people and injured dozens more, including Rohingya patients, medical staff, and caretakers. The attack was carried out by the Myanmar military junta in the evening of International Human Rights Day and struck a clearly marked civilian medical facility.

This bombing represents a stark violation of international humanitarian law and basic human dignity. Hospitals and health workers must be protected in all circumstances, and attacking people seeking and providing care is unacceptable. The loss of civilian lives in this strike is particularly unconscionable given that medical facilities are essential lifelines in a region already suffering ongoing conflict and chronic shortages of care.

Among those killed were women, children, and caregivers. Local reports confirm that Rohingya patients and their families were among the dead and wounded. The trauma inflicted on survivors and the broader Rohingya community will endure long after the rubble has been cleared.

ARNA calls on the international community to take immediate and decisive action to protect civilians across Myanmar and to ensure accountability for this and other attacks on non-combatants. We urge international bodies, including the United Nations and human rights institutions, to investigate this attack and pursue justice for the victims. Medical facilities must never be targeted in any conflict.

Our thoughts are with the families and communities devastated by this tragedy. The people of Rakhine, including the Rohingya, deserve safety, access to healthcare, and respect for their rights. We renew our call for a lasting end to violence and for real, inclusive dialogue to address the deep humanitarian and political crises in Myanmar.

Detailed Report on the UN High-Level Conference on the Rohingya Crisis

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Overview

The UN High-Level Conference convened to address the protracted and worsening crisis affecting Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar. Over a million Rohingya remain displaced in Bangladesh and within Myanmar, facing escalating violence, statelessness, and humanitarian deprivation. The conference aimed to galvanize international political will, humanitarian support, and legal accountability to advance protection, justice, and durable solutions.

Key Conference Outcomes and Highlights

- Reinforced urgent global commitment to protect Rohingya communities from violence and persecution in Myanmar's Rakhine State and refugee camps.
- Calls for safe, voluntary, dignified repatriation are linked to Myanmar's restoration of citizenship rights and political reforms.
- Strong emphasis on deploying UN-mandated international civilian protection forces in Rakhine State to monitor human rights and ensure security.
- Pledges for increased humanitarian aid despite challenges of shrinking funding and restricted access, especially in Bangladesh and Myanmar.
- Heightened focus on international judicial accountability through ongoing cases at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and International Criminal Court (ICC).
- Endorsement of targeted sanctions and arms embargoes against Myanmar's military and allied armed groups.
- Advocacy for sustained international cooperation, burden sharing, and support for host countries bearing humanitarian costs.

Statements and Pledges from Key Actors

ASEAN

- Underlined the importance of regional cooperation and called for stronger global support to countries hosting the Rohingya.
- Reaffirmed support for the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus, emphasizing cessation of violence and inclusive political dialogue in Myanmar.
- Raised concerns about trafficking and irregular migration risks linked to the crisis.

P5 Countries (US, UK, France, Russia, China)

- United States: Pledged \$60 million in aid focusing on refugees in Bangladesh and emphasized human rights protection and accountability.
- United Kingdom: Committed \$36 million for humanitarian and protection needs, including healthcare and livelihood support.
- France, Russia, China: Emphasized political solutions inside Myanmar, humanitarian access, and regional stability, with China stressing dialogue and peaceful resolution without sanctions.

India

- Highlighted the security implications of the crisis and expressed support for Bangladesh hosting refugees.
- Called for sustainable solutions based on political dialogue and cooperation with Myanmar.
- Urged balanced regional engagement to prevent destabilization.

Bangladesh

- Presented a seven-point plan prioritizing security, humanitarian aid, and pathways to repatriation with citizenship restoration.
- Called for urgent international support to sustain refugee-hosting capacities amid severe financial and social strain.

Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

- Turkiye, representing OIC, emphasized the protection of Rohingya Muslims' rights and voiced strong condemnation of violence and discrimination.
- Called for immediate humanitarian assistance and political solutions respecting minority rights.

Turkey

- Highlighted their commitment to Rohingya welfare through humanitarian aid and advocacy at the international level.
- Supported calls for safe return and protection guarantees.

Gulf States

- Represented primarily by Kuwait and other GCC members, pledged assistance focusing on humanitarian relief to refugees, supporting education, healthcare, and shelter programs.
- Reiterated calls for international responsibility sharing and respect for human rights.

Office for the High Commissioner on Human Rights

- Volker Turk, High Commissioner for Human Rights, emphasized the need for justice and accountability. He called upon the UN Security Council to refer the entire matter of Myanmar to the International Criminal Court.
- He emphasized the need for a cessation of violence, unhindered access to humanitarian aid, and a serious response to human rights violations taking place in Myanmar.

ARNA's Role

ARNA's representative, Dr. Habib Ullah, attended the conference, reinforcing the Rohingya's demands for justice, citizenship restoration, international protection, and a rights-based political solution aligned with the principles of the Dhaka Declaration. ARNA's presence helped place Rohingya voices at the center of international discourse.

Conclusion

The UN High-Level Conference successfully drew renewed attention to the Rohingya crisis, solidifying international consensus around humanitarian action, accountability, and political reform inside Myanmar. While funding pledges by key countries offer hope for stabilizing refugee support, fundamental political solutions and protections remain critical to enabling safe and dignified return. Regional actors, including ASEAN, the OIC, and Gulf States, alongside global powers, are committed to cooperation, though challenges persist.

Sustained diplomatic pressure, combined with coordinated humanitarian and legal efforts, will be necessary to end this unprecedented crisis and secure lasting justice and peace for the Rohingya people.

Kill Them All

A Summary of the Htan Shauk Khan Massacre and Sexual Violence Against Rohingya Civilians

Background and context: Kaladan Press Network's September 2025 report documents a brutal assault on Rohingya civilians in the village of Htan Shauk Khan (Hoyya Siri) in Buthidaung township, northern Rakhine State. Prior to May 2024, this farming village (population mostly Rohingya) had become a refuge for displaced families fleeing nearby fighting. In mid-April 2024, for example, the Myanmar Army forcibly recruited about 100 Rohingya men from Htan Shauk Khan to train as local militia against the Arakan Army (AA). In the weeks before the massacre, heavy fighting around Buthidaung drove thousands of Rohingya from neighboring villages to take shelter in Htan Shauk Khan and nearby hamlets, believing proximity to the army's bases would protect them. According to eyewitness testimony collected by the report's investigator, Razia Sultana, on the morning of May 2, 2024 a column of Myanmar Army troops arrived from the north and warned residents to leave before fighting broke out. Hundreds of villagers began fleeing northward. Shortly thereafter, several hundred AA fighters entered Htan Shauk Khan and also ordered residents out of their homes, splitting evacuees into different groups. In one large group at the village's eastern road, AA soldiers even forced the villagers to hand over two armed Myanmar Army soldiers who had been sheltering among them.

Mass killing with direct orders: The Kaladan Press Network report provides chilling evidence that AA commanders issued a direct execution order during this operation. A survivor recalled that after the villagers were made to sit in rows with bowed heads, a radio-order rang out: "Ah-lone that pit laik!" (Kill them all!). In the very next moment, AA troops opened fire with machine guns and rifles. One young man witnessed his entire family – parents and five young siblings – shot dead before his eyes. He survived only by lying motionless under his mother's bloody scarf when the soldiers came checking the bodies[5]. The report notes that "hundreds of Rohingya civilians were massacred by AA troops acting on direct orders from their superiors". Some AA fighters even threw grenades into the fleeing group, and any villagers who tried to escape were caught and killed. This testimony confirms that the killings were not the result of chaotic crossfire, but a deliberate, systematic massacre ordered by AA leadership.

Destruction of homes and forced displacement: As the killing unfolded, AA fighters torched nearly all of Htan Shauk Khan. Eyewitnesses reported that AA units set fire to most houses in both the northern and southern sections of the village as people ran for their lives[8]. By nightfall, only a few structures remained: four houses and two mosques in the southern part, and a single shop and toilet block in the north. With their village razed and families slaughtered, surviving Rohingya had nowhere safe to shelter. Many fled west toward the neighboring hamlet of U Hla Pe (about 2 km away). Arriving in U Hla Pe, the refugees were immediately confronted by AA soldiers. The report describes how the newcomers were stopped at gunpoint, stripped of valuables and mobile phones, and briefly bombarded by Myanmar junta air strikes overhead before being allowed to take shelter in a valley.

Afterward, AA forces guided roughly 200 villagers including this group into the village madrassa for detention. There, male villagers were made to sit with heads bowed as the AA checked “who among them had been trained by the Myanmar Army”. Those who raised their hands including several young men formerly enlisted by the Myanmar Army were taken away by AA fighters and never seen again. An old woman later described how AA forces then set up multiple checkpoints around U Hla Pe (some 50 soldiers each) and forbade all displaced families from leaving. The detainees received no humanitarian assistance and had to fend for themselves with only a single ration of rice (13 kg) and oil provided weeks later.

Sexual violence during the attack: The report devotes substantial detail to the systematic sexual violence accompanying the massacre. Multiple female survivors gave harrowing accounts of girls and women being raped or abducted by AA fighters. One 30-year-old survivor described how, during the flight northward, AA troops captured a 25-year-old mother carrying her two small sons. The soldiers dragged her into tall grass, and she heard the woman screaming for help. The next day, returning villagers found the woman’s body: she had been brutally killed, her lower body mutilated with a knife from crotch to stomach, and intestines exposed. Nearby lay the beheaded corpses of her two young sons. They also discovered three more bodies of young women along the same escape path, each showing clear evidence of sexual assault. In another chilling episode, a young Rohingya woman who returned two weeks later reported finding four young women’s corpses naked or half-naked in the fields. Even an 18-year-old cousin of hers, eight months pregnant, was said to have been caught while fleeing and was subsequently raped and murdered by AA fighters. These accounts illustrate that rape and murder were used deliberately as part of the attack.

Sexual slavery and assaults after the massacre: Further testimony reveals that AA fighters kept abducted Rohingya women as sex slaves. Three Rohingya refugees identified twelve girls and young women (ages 15–30) who had been seized on May 2 and taken into the captured LIB 551 army base. Ten of the women were from Htan Shauk Khan, and witnesses later saw some of them inside the LIB 551 compound washing clothes and cooking under guard^[19]. Local collaborators reported that these women were being held as sex slaves by the AA, and that four of them died in captivity. In one instance, an 18-year-old survivor sneaked back to Htan Shauk Khan months later with others, only to be ambushed by AA soldiers. Two young women in her group were captured; the survivor later found them badly beaten and visibly raped. Another Rohingya woman, from the distant village of Nyaung Chaung, described how AA soldiers had repeatedly abducted her 23-year-old daughter to rape her. The Nyaung Chaung woman also testified that other attractive girls in her village were regularly taken to the AA camp for sex. One young woman was so severely assaulted that she collapsed; AA troops then dragged the dying girl into the road and shot her dead, even in the genitals. These stories indicate that sexual violence was widespread and systematic, extending beyond Htan Shauk Khan to other Rohingya communities.

Concealment of evidence: The report documents AA efforts to hide the scale of the atrocity. Two days after the massacre, AA commanders ordered dozens of Htan Shauk Khan survivors from U Hla Pe to return to the village under guard, ostensibly to gather fodder. Those laborers found four massive piles of corpses near the village road, each roughly two meters high and five meters across, covered by tarpaulins. The piles emitted an overpowering stench, a grim

testament to the scale of the killings. In addition, the AA tightly controlled refugee movements. All those fleeing toward Bangladesh were required to obtain written permits from AA officials, often through bribes or “agents.” A Rohingya teacher recalled paying about 275,000 taka (US\$2,250) to secure exit permission for his family. Crucially, the AA forced him to hand over his original household list and land tax receipts essentially all documentary proof of his family’s origins in Buthidaung. This systematic collection of identity papers suggests an intent to erase ties between the survivors and their homeland and to deter legitimate claims to their property and rights.

Calls for justice and accountability: In its conclusion, Kaladan Press Network emphasizes the urgent need for accountability. The report “provides strong evidence that AA troops deliberately killed hundreds of Rohingya civilians, including men, women and children,” under direct orders from commanders. It documents not only killings but also “systematic sexual violence” against Rohingya women and girls. KPN explicitly calls on the Arakan Army to acknowledge and take responsibility for these crimes. Its recommendations include demanding that AA leaders investigate and punish those responsible for the killings, rapes and arbitrary detentions, immediately release all Rohingya civilians still detained, and take concrete steps to protect civilians. The report urges the AA to uphold any laws it claims to enforce by cooperating with independent monitoring and justice mechanisms. By spotlighting these eyewitness accounts, Kaladan Press Network underscores the devastating human impact of the Htan Shauk Khan massacre and makes a forceful plea for justice for the Rohingya survivors.

Sources: This summary is based on Kill Them All: The Htan Shauk Khan massacre and sexual violence by the Arakan Army in Buthidaung township (Kaladan Press Network, September 2025). All evidence and quotes are drawn from that report’s collected testimonies and findings.



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.

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