



ARAKAN

Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO)

Ethnic Armed Governance and the New Power Order



Stabilization Forces and the Future of Peace in Rakhine State

War Within Wars in Myanmar: Caught in the Fragments

Rohingya Youth and the Transformative Potential of Human Capital

Genocide Survivors and the Unseen Mental Health Emergency



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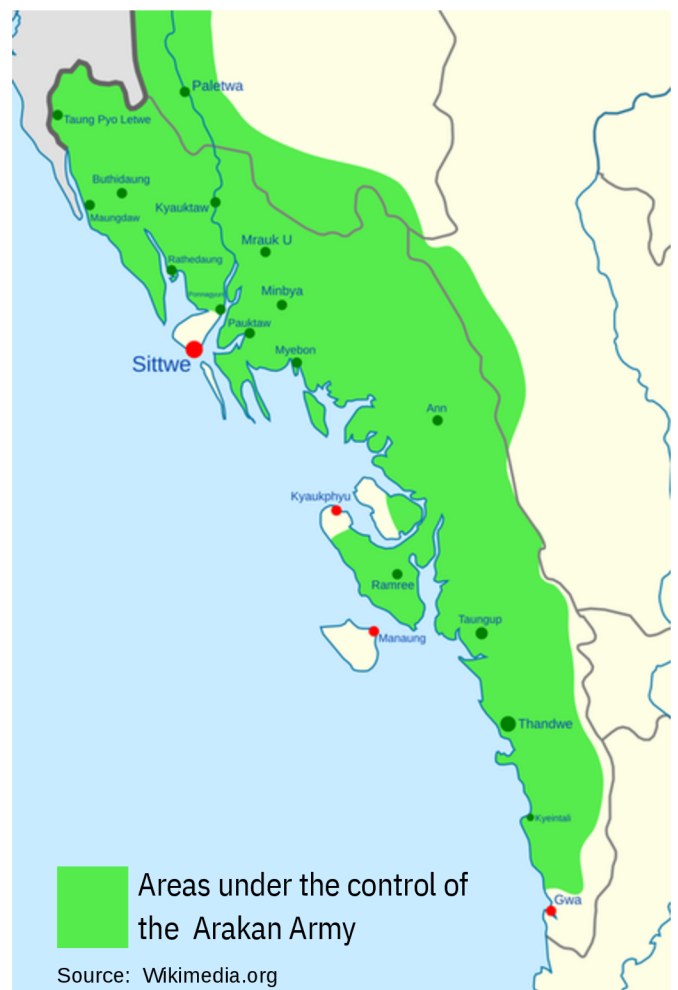
ANALYSIS

Ethnic Armed Governance and the New Power Order

Myanmar's political landscape has entered a decisive and transformative phase. What once appeared as a binary struggle between a centralised military state and pro-democracy forces has evolved into a far more complex, multi-layered reality.

Myanmar’s political landscape has entered a decisive and transformative phase. What once appeared as a binary struggle between a centralised military state and pro-democracy forces has evolved into a far more complex, multi-layered reality. Across large parts of the country, particularly in Rakhine State, authority is no longer exercised solely by the Union government or the Myanmar military. Instead, ethnic resistance movements and ethnic armed organisations have emerged as de facto governing authorities, filling vacuums left by the collapse of junta rule. This shift carries significant promise for many communities long marginalised by Naypyidaw, but it also creates new governance challenges that demand sober examination – particularly for the Rohingya. This new power order has profound implications for civilians. For the Rohingya, it is reshaping daily life, security, and survival in ways that demand urgent and sober examination.

Ethnic armed governance is not a new phenomenon in Myanmar. For decades, armed groups have exercised influence in borderlands neglected or contested by the state. What is new is the scale, confidence, and permanence of this authority. Since the 2021 coup, armed groups have transitioned from resistance movements into territorial administrators. Courts, taxation systems, policing mechanisms, recruitment structures, and population administration now operate outside the framework of the Union constitution, in many cases providing services that the central state long failed to deliver. While these parallel institutions reflect the legitimacy that resistance authorities have built among many local communities, they also raise important questions about transparency, civilian oversight, and the protection of minorities living under their administration. In Rakhine State, this transformation has accelerated and deepened faster than anywhere else.



The Arakan Army has consolidated control over vast rural and urban areas, reshaping governance through military dominance rather than political consensus. Checkpoints regulate movement. Administrative orders are enforced by armed cadres. Villages are required to meet labour demands, make food contributions, and cooperate on intelligence. While many ethnic Rakhine view this as a corrective to decades of Burman-dominated rule, the Rohingya experience the new order as a continuation of exclusion under a different authority.

Rohingya civilians interviewed by community reporters describe an environment of constant uncertainty. One resident from Maungdaw said, “Rules change overnight. One day, you are told to stay home, and the next day, you are punished for not registering. There is no authority to appeal to.” Such testimonies reflect a daily reality where armed governance offers no legal clarity, only compliance enforced by fear. Household registration drives and population verification campaigns have intensified under armed control. These measures echo the pre-2017 systems that laid the groundwork for mass atrocities. Rohingya families report repeated inspections, document seizures, and threats of punishment for perceived non-cooperation. In several townships, young men have been summoned for “security duties,” a term widely understood as forced recruitment. Those who refuse risk detention, fines, or expulsion.

The collapse of central authority has not created political space for Rohingya inclusion. Instead, it has replaced one system of repression with another form of unaccountable power. Statelessness magnifies every vulnerability. Without recognised citizenship, Rohingya have no institutional channel to challenge abuse, no legal status to claim protection, and no representation within emerging armed administrations.

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TESTIMONY FROM NORTHERN
RAKHINE

Humanitarian access has become deeply politicised. Aid delivery inside Rakhine is now subject to approval by armed authorities who determine which communities are prioritised. Rohingya villages are often the last to receive assistance, if they receive it at all. Community health workers report shortages of medicine, restrictions on travel to clinics, and delays in emergency response. Rohingya organisations such as the Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO) have warned that humanitarian isolation is becoming normalised under armed governance.

A Rohingya woman from Buthidaung described the impact in stark terms. “When my child became sick, we could not travel. The clinic was closed to us. Aid no longer reaches our village. We survive only because neighbours share what little they have.” Such accounts underscore how armed control transforms humanitarian need into a tool of political pressure.

Bangladesh bears the consequences of these dynamics. Renewed displacement from northern Rakhine continues quietly, driven by fear of forced recruitment, violence, and economic collapse. Camps in Cox’s Bazar absorb the fallout of governance failures across the border. Refugees arriving in recent months describe fleeing not only the military but also armed administrations that offered no safety or rights.

This reality challenges international assumptions about the conflict. Much global attention remains fixed on the Myanmar military junta, yet millions of civilians now live under authorities that operate entirely outside international legal norms. Ethnic armed groups are rarely subjected to the same scrutiny as state actors, despite exercising comparable power over civilian populations.

ASEAN’s response has been marked by caution and paralysis. The principle of non-interference has left civilian protection to chance. Diplomatic engagement has failed to address the fragmentation of authority on the ground. The Rohingya crisis now exposes the limitations of regional mechanisms when confronted with armed governance and contested sovereignty. At the global level, great power competition further complicates accountability. Strategic interests in the Bay of Bengal, infrastructure corridors, and security partnerships often outweigh human rights concerns. The Rohingya remain trapped in this geopolitical blind spot, acknowledged rhetorically but abandoned in practice.

Yet within this bleak landscape, Rohingya communities continue to assert agency in quiet but determined ways. Grassroots documentation networks record abuses at great personal risk. Women-led groups provide education, counselling, and food support in the absence of formal services. Rohingya journalists and activists use digital platforms to challenge erasure and speak directly to the world. A young Rohingya organiser working along the border described this resilience simply: “We know no one will protect us if we do not protect our story. Documentation is our resistance.” Such voices complicate narratives that portray the Rohingya solely as victims rather than political actors.

The future of Rakhine cannot be built on exclusion. Any post-war political settlement that legitimises armed governance without addressing Rohingya rights will institutionalise instability. Ethnic autonomy that reproduces the state's discriminatory practices will deepen conflict rather than resolve it. Legitimacy cannot rest on territorial control alone. It must be measured by how power is exercised and whose lives are protected. Ethnic armed organisations that seek recognition must confront historic injustice rather than inherit it.

The Rohingya issue is not peripheral to Rakhine’s future. It is central. Armed governance that fails to confront exclusion risks becoming another chapter in a long history of denial.

The question is no longer who rules Rakhine, but whether any emerging authority can break with the past. Without Rohingya inclusion, the new power order will carry forward the moral failures of the old.



OPED

Stabilisation Forces and the Future of Peace in Rakhine State

Rakhine State remains one of the most fragile conflict zones in Southeast Asia. Years of systematic violence, mass displacement, and institutional collapse have left civilian populations exposed to recurring cycles of abuse and insecurity.

The Rohingya genocide, followed by continued armed conflict between the Myanmar military and ethnic armed organizations, has eliminated trust in state-based security structures. In this context, the absence of a credible stabilization force has become one of the principal obstacles to peace, civilian protection, and the safe return of refugees.

This article argues that the establishment of a neutral, deterrent-oriented stabilization force is essential to restoring balance, protecting civilians, and creating conditions for voluntary refugee return and reintegration. Such a force may take the form of a regionally mandated security mission, a hybrid international arrangement, or a well-trained and internationally supervised Rohingya-led protection force operating within a clear legal framework. Without a credible deterrent, peace initiatives in Rakhine will remain symbolic rather than transformative.

"Security precedes reconciliation. Civilians do not return because peace agreements are signed; they return when they believe violence will not recur."

POLICY CORE PRINCIPLE

Civilian Insecurity and the Collapse of Trust

The Rohingya crisis is not merely a humanitarian emergency but a long-term security failure. For decades, state security institutions have either directly perpetrated violence or failed to prevent it. As a result, civilians associate uniformed authority with fear rather than protection. The destruction of villages, arbitrary arrests, forced recruitment, and population control measures have made return unthinkable for most refugees.

In post-conflict environments, security precedes reconciliation. Civilians do not return because peace agreements are signed; they return when they believe violence will not recur. In Rakhine, this confidence does not exist. Armed actors continue to exercise coercive power, while civilians remain unarmed, unprotected, and politically excluded. The imbalance of power sustains instability.

Why a Stabilisation Force Is Necessary

A stabilisation force differs from traditional peacekeeping. Its purpose is not to freeze conflict lines but to deter violence, protect civilians, and enforce minimum security guarantees during political transitions. In Rakhine, such a force would serve four core functions.

First, it would deter large-scale violence against civilians through visible presence and enforcement capacity. Second, it would prevent forced recruitment, land confiscation, and collective punishment. Third, it would create security corridors for humanitarian access and early returns. Fourth, it would support transitional justice mechanisms by securing evidence, witnesses, and local institutions. Without an external or autonomous deterrent, armed groups face no meaningful constraint. Experience shows that armed actors rarely disarm voluntarily in the absence of countervailing power.

International law provides a clear basis for stabilisation mechanisms where states fail to protect their populations. The Responsibility to Protect doctrine affirms that when a state is unwilling or unable to safeguard civilians, the international community has a responsibility to act through peaceful or collective means. Additionally, international refugee law requires that the return be voluntary, safe, and dignified. Current conditions in Rakhine do not meet these criteria. A stabilisation force would directly contribute to fulfilling these legal obligations by reducing threats and enabling institutional rebuilding. Regional arrangements within ASEAN and broader multilateral frameworks enable cooperative security mechanisms in exceptional circumstances. While political sensitivities remain, regional leadership is preferable to prolonged instability that risks cross-border spillover.

The Case for a Rohingya-Inclusive Deterrent Force

One of the most controversial yet necessary components of stabilisation is the inclusion of the Rohingya in structured security roles.

History shows that excluding victimised communities from security arrangements perpetuates vulnerability. A well-organised, well-trained Rohingya protection force, operating under international supervision and strict rules of engagement, would address this gap. Such a force would not function as a militia but as a civilian protection and law enforcement body. Its legitimacy would stem from community consent, legal authorisation, and professional training. Properly structured, it would reduce reliance on irregular armed groups and enhance accountability.

Several post-conflict societies demonstrate the effectiveness of stabilisation forces. In East Timor, an international force restored order after the state's collapse and enabled refugee returns. In Kosovo, international security presence prevented renewed ethnic cleansing and supported institutional rebuilding. In Sierra Leone, a robust peacekeeping mandate helped dismantle armed groups and stabilise the country. While Rakhine presents unique challenges, these cases illustrate a consistent lesson: peace becomes possible when civilians are protected, and armed actors are deterred.

A successful stabilisation force in Rakhine must balance international credibility with local legitimacy. Regional participation can reduce perceptions of foreign imposition, while local involvement ensures cultural knowledge and trust. Hybrid models combining regional troops, international oversight, and local protection units offer the most realistic pathway. Clear mandates, civilian oversight, and time-bound objectives are essential. The goal is not permanent militarisation but the creation of space for political solutions.

Refugee return is a security-driven process. Housing reconstruction, citizenship frameworks, and reconciliation efforts cannot proceed while civilians fear renewed violence. A stabilisation force would enable phased returns, beginning with pilot zones under guaranteed protection. Over time, this would rebuild confidence and reduce dependency on camps.

Conclusion

The future of Rakhine State depends on addressing the fundamental imbalance between armed power and civilian vulnerability. Stabilisation forces are not a substitute for political solutions, but they are a prerequisite for them. Without credible deterrence and civilian protection, peace will remain unattainable and refugee return impossible. For policymakers, the choice is not between intervention and neutrality, but between managed stabilisation and perpetual crisis. A well-designed stabilisation force, whether regional, international, or Rohingya-inclusive, represents the most viable path toward durable peace, justice, and reintegration in Rakhine State.



INSIGHT

War Within Wars in Myanmar and the People Trapped Between Them

In a village near the Naf River, an elderly Rohingya man described how the sound of gunfire had changed over the years. "Before, we knew who was coming," he said quietly. "Now we don't know which group it is. We only know we must run."

His words capture the reality of Myanmar today. This is no longer a single confrontation between a military regime and a resistance movement. It is a dense landscape of overlapping wars in which armed actors fight the junta, fight each other, and govern in fragments. For civilians, the question is no longer who is right or wrong, but who controls the road, the checkpoint, or the village on any given day.

From Exclusion to Open Atrocity

To understand how Myanmar arrived at this point, it is necessary to look back to 2012. That year, violence between Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims tore through Rakhine State, displacing tens of thousands and hardening long-standing communal divisions. Entire communities were pushed into camps, their movement tightly restricted and their access to food, education, and healthcare systematically constrained. The notion that the Rohingya did not belong ceased to be mere rhetoric; it was converted into policy, and then into daily practice. Five years later, in 2017, this architecture of exclusion escalated into mass atrocity. Villages were burned, families were separated, and hundreds of thousands fled across the border into Bangladesh. The world called it genocide. Inside Myanmar, however, a quieter transformation was underway. Armed groups, especially in ethnic minority regions, were reorganizing, rearming, and preparing for a different kind of struggle that would eventually intersect with national politics in unexpected ways.

The Coup and the Brief Illusion of Unity

The 2021 coup upended Myanmar's fragile political order. It created a moment when long-standing ethnic armed organisations and newly formed resistance forces appeared to be moving in the same direction. For a time, there was a sense of strategic alignment: the military was under pressure, it was losing territory, and the idea of a coordinated national resistance seemed within reach. That moment was fleeting. As the military weakened in parts of the country, the nature of the struggle shifted. Armed groups began to look beyond immediate survival and toward the question of future authority. Who would govern these territories if the military collapsed? Who would collect taxes, control trade routes, or administer justice? These questions turned allies into competitors and injected a new layer of rivalry into an already complex conflict environment.

In northern Shan State, fighters who once shared trenches began to face each other across them. The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, both nominally part of the same alliance, clashed over territory and influence. What began as a coordinated offensive splintered into localised confrontations. Villagers who had welcomed resistance forces as liberators found themselves displaced yet again, this time not by the military, but by groups ostensibly on the same side.

Shan State has long been a mosaic of armed actors, but the current phase has made that complexity more volatile. Competing Shan factions, each with its own leadership, external ties, and political agenda, have fought for dominance. In some areas, civilians report paying taxes to more than one group, uncertain which authority will still be present the following week. The result is a form of layered governance in which no actor can credibly guarantee stability.

Further south, in Karen areas, the picture is no less complicated. The Karen National Union (KNU) remains one of Myanmar's most established ethnic political and military organisations, but it does not operate in isolation. Splinter groups, local militias, and shifting alliances have created friction on the ground. In some areas, disagreements over military strategy, political direction, and territorial control have escalated into armed confrontation. For villagers, this means navigating multiple authorities, each with its own demands, protection rackets, and risks. This internal fragmentation does not erase the KNU's long history of resistance, but it does constrain its ability to act as a coherent political actor. It also exposes civilians to competing claims of legitimacy that are settled not through dialogue, but through force.

In central Myanmar, where resistance proliferated rapidly after the coup, fragmentation has taken another form. People's Defence Forces (PDFs) emerged across towns and villages, often locally organised and loosely connected to broader resistance structures. Coordination remains uneven. In several areas, these groups have clashed or competed with local militias, including forces aligned with powerful local commanders such as Bo Nagar.

These tensions rarely reach international headlines, but they reveal a deeper structural problem: the absence of a unified command or agreed-upon rules of engagement. Resistance exists, but it is scattered. Chin State, frequently recognized as a bastion of anti-junta resistance, tells a similar story beneath the surface. Rivalries among Chin armed groups, particularly tensions involving the Chin National Army and other Chin defence forces, have led to armed clashes and political disputes. These divisions complicate governance in areas where the military has lost ground and introduce new uncertainties for communities that are already living under extreme pressure.

A Patchwork System of Power and Control

Across these diverse theatres, a common pattern emerges: a patchwork of control in which power is local, temporary, and fiercely contested. Civilians inhabit a landscape defined less by law than by continuous negotiation. A checkpoint manned by one group today may belong to another tomorrow. Rules change overnight. Loyalties are questioned. Survival depends on the ability to read shifting power dynamics and adjust in real time. For many families, this means moving multiple times in a single year as front lines advance or retreat. It means watching harvests spoil because a new checkpoint blocks access to fields. It means children growing up without a stable sense of which authority, which rules, or which future will shape their lives.

Nowhere are the consequences of this fragmentation more severe than in Rakhine State.

The Arakan Army (AA) has emerged as one of the most powerful armed actors in Myanmar, controlling large parts of the state and establishing itself as the de facto authority in many areas.

It runs checkpoints, administers territory, collects taxes, and enforces its own system of order, often replacing the junta's presence on the ground. For the Rohingya, however, this shift has not translated into safety. Instead, it has layered new forms of violence onto the old ones. Since 2023, reports from northern Rakhine describe killings during military operations, forced recruitment of Rohingya men, arbitrary detention, and severe restrictions on movement. Entire villages have been emptied as fighting intensifies. Some survivors recount being trapped between opposing forces and accused by each side of supporting the other. The conflict between the Arakan Army and the Rohingya armed groups has turned Rohingya areas into active battlegrounds. In these zones, civilians are not merely caught in crossfire; they are treated as integral to the conflict itself. Homes are destroyed, families are separated, and young men are taken for recruitment or detention. The line between civilian and combatant is blurred in ways that leave almost no room for protection.

Human rights observers have documented patterns of abuse that go far beyond isolated incidents. The scale and consistency of killings, forced displacement, and collective punishment point toward crimes against humanity. When read against the longer history of exclusion and violence dating back to 2012, aspects of the current targeting of Rohingya communities reflect elements consistent with genocidal intent.

Fragmentation and the Absence of Accountability

What is happening in Rakhine is not a deviation from the national pattern; it is its most extreme expression. Across Myanmar, armed groups are exercising power without a shared framework of accountability.

Each actor governs according to its own priorities, often anchored in defending its core ethnic constituency. Minority communities within these areas of control, whether Rohingya in Rakhine, Rohingya communities in northern Rakhine, Muslim communities in central Rakhine, and other minority groups across Shan, or smaller groups in mixed areas, can be marginalised, coerced, or treated as outsiders, especially under the stress of active conflict. This fragmentation has consequences that extend far beyond the immediate violence. It shapes the strategic trajectory of the war. While armed groups compete for territory, resources, and symbolic authority, the military benefits from their divisions. It faces less coordinated pressure. It can exploit rivalries, pit factions against one another, and present itself, however implausibly, as the only force capable of preventing the country's complete disintegration.

For civilians, the cost of this "war within wars" is immediate and deeply personal. It is the family that moves three times in a year as front lines shift unpredictably. It is the farmer who cannot access his land because a new checkpoint has appeared overnight, demanding payments he cannot afford. It is the child who grows up not knowing which curriculum, language, or flag will define their future or whether they will have one at all. More than a decade after the violence of 2012, Myanmar remains trapped in cycles of conflict that are becoming more fragmented, not less. The number of armed actors has increased, the lines between them have blurred, and the space in which civilians can live with any degree of safety has steadily shrunk. Ending military rule remains essential, but the experience of the past few years shows that removing one source of violence does not, by itself, create peace. Without coordination among armed groups, credible mechanisms of accountability, and a political framework that genuinely includes all communities, including those historically treated as expendable, fragmentation will continue to generate new conflicts even as old ones smoulder. The alternative is not simply regime change, but the construction of a political order that limits the power of all armed actors over civilian life.

For the man by the Naf River, these distinctions are not abstract. They are measured in the seconds it takes to gather his family and run. He no longer asks who is fighting. He listens only for how close the gunfire is. In Myanmar today, that is what war has become.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The Human Development Potential of Rohingya Youth for the Future of Rakhine State

Rakhine State stands at a historic crossroads. Decades of conflict, exclusion, and underdevelopment have left the state among the poorest and least developed regions in Myanmar. Yet within this challenging landscape lies an often-overlooked asset with transformative potential: the Rohingya population, particularly its overwhelmingly young demographic.

More than half of the Rohingya people, both inside Myanmar and across the diaspora, are under the age of 30. This youth cohort represents one of the largest concentrations of human capital in Rakhine State. If properly recognised, protected, and invested in, Rohingya youth could become a central driver of economic recovery, social stability, and long-term development across the state, benefiting all ethnic communities. This article argues that inclusive human development centred on Rohingya youth is not a charitable gesture but a strategic necessity. For policymakers and donors seeking durable solutions in Rakhine State, investing in Rohingya human capital offers one of the highest potential returns for peace, growth, and regional stability.

Demographic Reality and Comparative Advantage

Rakhine State's demographic structure differs significantly across ethnic groups. While Rakhine Buddhist, Mro, Khami, Maramagyi, and Thet communities face ageing populations, declining fertility rates, and sustained outmigration, the Rohingya population remains youthful and numerically robust. Prior to mass displacement, the Rohingya constituted a substantial share of the working-age population in northern Rakhine. Even after the 2017 expulsions, hundreds of thousands remain inside

Myanmar, while more than one million now reside in Bangladesh and other countries.

This demographic profile is not a liability; it is a development advantage. Countries and regions that successfully harness their youth populations often experience accelerated growth through expanded labour markets, innovation, and productivity gains. In contrast, regions that suppress or exclude youthful populations face long-term stagnation, rising dependency ratios, and persistent instability. Compared to other ethnic groups in Rakhine State, Rohingya youth possess a comparative advantage simply by virtue of scale, adaptability, and demographic momentum.

Education and Skills Potential

Despite systematic denial of formal education for decades, Rohingya communities have consistently demonstrated a strong demand for learning. In refugee camps and diaspora settings, Rohingya youth have pursued informal education, language training, digital literacy, and religious studies under extremely constrained conditions. Many have acquired proficiency in multiple languages, including Rohingya, Burmese, Bangla, English, Arabic, and Malay. This adaptability compares favourably with educational outcomes among other marginalised ethnic groups in Rakhine State, where access to secondary and tertiary education is also limited by geography and poverty.

The difference lies in scale and motivation. Rohingya youth, having experienced extreme exclusion, often show a heightened willingness to engage in skills training, online learning, and self-directed education when opportunities arise.

Targeted investment in accredited education pathways, vocational training, and digital learning platforms for Rohingya youth could rapidly produce a skilled workforce capable of contributing to agriculture, fisheries, construction, healthcare support, education, logistics, and small-scale manufacturing across Rakhine State.

Economic Contribution and Entrepreneurship

Historically, Rohingyas played a central role in Rakhine's rural economy, particularly in agriculture, fishing, cross-border trade, and small enterprises. Restrictions on movement and livelihoods dismantled these contributions, not for lack of capacity, but through deliberate policy choices.

Today, Rohingya youth continue to show strong entrepreneurial tendencies, especially in refugee settings. Informal micro-enterprises, online freelancing, remittance-based support networks, and community-run services have emerged even under restrictive conditions. Compared with other ethnic groups in Rakhine State, Rohingya youth exhibit greater exposure to cross-border markets, diaspora financing, and digital income streams.

With legal recognition, freedom of movement, and access to finance, Rohingya youth could significantly expand local economies. Donor-backed microfinance, startup grants, and cooperative models could unlock employment not only for Rohingyas but also for Rakhine Buddhists and other ethnic minorities through integrated value chains.

Diaspora Capital and Transnational Skills

One of the most underutilised assets linked to Rohingya youth is the global diaspora. Rohingya communities now exist across South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and North America. Many young Rohingyas in the diaspora have gained education, professional skills, and exposure to advanced labour markets. This transnational human capital surpasses that of most other ethnic groups in Rakhine State, whose populations remain largely localised. Diaspora engagement programs, skills transfer initiatives, and structured remittance channels could directly support reconstruction, service delivery, and institution-building in Rakhine. Policy frameworks that enable diaspora return, remote contribution, and investment would allow Rohingya youth to function as a bridge between Rakhine State and global networks of knowledge, finance, and technology.

Barriers to Unlocking Potential

The underdevelopment of Rohingya human capital is not accidental. It is the result of systematic exclusion through citizenship denial, movement restrictions, education bans, and economic marginalisation. These barriers have also harmed other ethnic groups by weakening the overall economy and deepening mistrust. Without legal status, Rohingya youth cannot fully participate in formal education or employment. Without security guarantees, donors remain hesitant to invest at scale. Without inclusive governance, development gains remain fragile.

Comparatively, while other ethnic groups in Rakhine face poverty and neglect, they are not subjected to the same level of structural exclusion. Addressing Rohingya marginalisation would therefore have a disproportionate positive impact on the overall development trajectory of the state.

Policy Pathways for Inclusive Development

For policymakers and donors, the question is not whether Rohingya youth can contribute, but whether the political and policy environment will allow them to do so. Key interventions include restoring legal identity and citizenship rights, ensuring freedom of movement, integrating Rohingya youth into state-wide education and training systems, and supporting youth-led enterprises.

Inclusive development frameworks should be designed to benefit all ethnic communities, avoiding zero-sum narratives. Joint training programs, mixed economic zones, and shared service delivery models can reduce tensions while maximising economic returns. Donors should prioritise long-term investments in human development over short-term humanitarian aid. Education, skills, and livelihoods are the foundation of durable peace.

>50%

**ROHINGYA DEMOGRAPHIC SHARE
UNDER THE AGE OF 30**

Conclusion

Rakhine State cannot achieve sustainable development while excluding one of its largest and youngest populations. Rohingya youth represent a strategic asset whose potential far exceeds the costs of inclusion. Compared to other ethnic groups, their demographic scale, adaptability, diaspora connections, and entrepreneurial drive position them as a critical engine for recovery and growth. For policymakers and donors seeking stability, prosperity, and reconciliation in Rakhine State, investing in Rohingya human development is not optional. It is essential. The future of Rakhine depends on whether its youngest generation, across all communities, is empowered to contribute. Among them, Rohingya youth stand ready, if given the chance.



HUMAN RIGHTS

Powerlessness Has Become a Great Power in the Rohingya's Moral Authority

In independent Burma (1948–62), the Rohingya were officially citizens. Prime Minister U Nu repeatedly hailed them as an "indigenous ethnic community" with equal rights. But after General Ne Win's 1962 coup the pendulum swung.

By 1982, a new citizenship law excluded the Rohingya entirely, rendering a century-old community stateless in the land they'd long called home. Overnight a people once counted among Burma's ethnic groups became "foreigners" in their own villages a complete denial of the equal rights they'd briefly held.

Ethnic Cleansing and Genocide in Modern Times

In August 2017, Myanmar's military unleashed a brutal campaign in Rakhine State. Villages were burned and women raped; Human Rights Watch describes it as "massacres, rape, and arson". Over a million Rohingya fled for their lives into neighbouring Bangladesh, streaming into Cox's Bazar in search of safety. The United Nations has since called the Rohingya "the most persecuted minority in the world". In 2019, The Gambia asked the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to rule on Myanmar's crimes, and in January 2020, the ICJ ordered Myanmar to "prevent all genocidal acts" against the Rohingya, a landmark admission of the community's plight. These facts, hundreds of thousands forced from ancestral villages and an ICJ case alleging genocide, show a wholly defenceless people under existential threat.

A Nation in Exile

Bangladesh's refugee camps bear witness to the Rohingya's power in suffering. Today nearly 1.4 million Rohingya live in Cox's Bazar.

According to UN reports, over 75% of these refugees are women and children, many of them orphans and trauma survivors. Stripped of citizenship, Rohingya in exile are officially stateless: as the UN notes, they "lack legal status and livelihood opportunities" in the camps. With no right to work or travel, they roam mud roads and squalid shelters as human symbols of injustice. This statelessness is the very definition of powerlessness, yet it has forced the international community to confront the aftermath of mass atrocity.

Caught Between Two Armies

The Rohingya who remain in Myanmar are now caught in a new war. In late 2023, the Arakan Army (AA), a Rakhine Buddhist insurgent force, seized much of northern Rakhine. But rather than providing relief, the AA has treated the Rohingya as a security problem of its own. Human Rights Watch reports that the AA "imposed severe restrictions and committed grave abuses" on Rohingya in the captured areas. Interviews with survivors paint a grim picture: Rohingya were not allowed to work, fish, farm, or even move without permission. Life under the AA rule "feels painfully similar" to the junta's oppression. The AA even refuses to recognize the Rohingya identity referring to them only as "Bengalis" or "Muslims" and has banned basic livelihoods like fishing and farming.

"The Rohingya, though lacking armies or ambassadors, wield the purest currency in global affairs: truth. Their refugee trails are testimony that global commitments remain hollow unless acted upon."

MORAL LEGACY OF WITNESS

In other words, the Rohingya's lot is largely unchanged: they remain effectively powerless, deemed outsiders by any ruler. Meanwhile, Myanmar's military has not relented. It has conducted airstrikes and resumed operations in Rakhine, even using Rohingya villagers as "cannon fodder" in its battles. The toll is devastating: from late 2023 through 2025, some 400,000 more Rohingya were uprooted, many fleeing to Bangladesh. In just one year, this defenceless community lost homes and farms, and the world barely flinched.

Echoes of History

The Rohingya's ordeal evokes painful precedents. In past decades, powerless minorities like the Armenians in 1915, the Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica, and the Rwandan Tutsis in 1994 saw the world promise "never again" and yet watched genocide unfold. Each time history repeats itself, the powerless remind us of our moral failure. The Rohingya, though lacking armies or ambassadors, wield the purest currency in global affairs: **truth**. Their rubble-strewn villages and refugee trails are a testament to the fact that the world's commitments to human rights and "never again" remain hollow unless acted upon. In this sense, the Rohingya possess a stubborn power of witness. It is up to international leaders and citizens now to heed that witness and rewrite history's refrain.

What Must Be Done

- Recognise the Rohingya's rights in Myanmar. Ultimately, long-term justice requires changing Myanmar's laws and attitudes. The government should formally recognise the Rohingya, whom U Nu once called fellow citizens, and restore their rights. At a minimum, the Rohingya of Rakhine State should be granted autonomy and legal citizenship, reversing the 1982 exclusion. Only then can Rohingya families rebuild homes in the land of their birth.
- Enforce justice. The ICJ's January 2020 order requires Myanmar to prevent genocide against the Rohingya. Governments should rally behind this ruling and support prosecutions (at the ICC or a UN tribunal) of those who planned the 2017 atrocities. Travel bans and asset freezes on Myanmar generals (as in recent international sanctions) must be sustained. As Human Rights Watch urges, the world cannot let the military's "cycles of abuses and impunity" continue.
- Support humanitarian relief. Bangladesh now hosts by far the largest Rohingya refugee population. Donors and aid agencies must maintain and even increase funding for the camps. Nearly one-third of Cox's Bazar residents are now Rohingya, placing immense strain on schools, hospitals and infrastructure. Humanitarian aid must cover food, shelter, education and healthcare for all refugees (three-quarters of whom are women and children) as well as support for the local host communities.

The Rohingya today embody the "power of the powerless." Their survival, despite assault and exile, speaks to all of us. For policymakers and citizens alike, the choice is stark: will the world finally honour the centuries-old promise of equal rights, or will it turn away once more as history repeats its darkest chapters? The Rohingya's story demands that we choose action and accountability lest "never again" be remembered only as a phrase, rather than a reality.

A Rohingya mother and child at a refugee camp in Bangladesh (June 25, 2024). They fled Buthidaung, Myanmar, after armed attacks on their village. Today the Rohingya are caught between Myanmar's military and the ethnic Rakhine (Arakan) Army. Both have persecuted them: the Arakan Army has "imposed severe restrictions and committed grave abuses", while the junta's forces even used Rohingya as "cannon fodder" in recent clashes.



MENTAL HEALTH

The Silent Wound of Genocide and the Unseen Mental Health Emergency of Rohingya Survivors

For more than a decade, the Rohingya community has endured one of the most systematic and brutal campaigns of violence in the modern world. Since 2012, and with escalating military operations in 2016 and 2017, Rohingya civilians were subjected to mass killings, widespread sexual violence, village burnings, forced displacement, and collective punishment.

Carried out by Myanmar's military and allied armed actors, including the Arakan Army. Entire families were wiped out in front of surviving relatives. Children watched their parents being executed. Mothers fled with infants after witnessing their villages reduced to ashes.

Zero

**FORMAL PSYCHIATRIC SUPPORT
STRUCTURES INSIDE CONTESTED
ENCLAVES**

While the physical destruction and displacement of more than one million Rohingya have been widely documented, a far deeper and less visible crisis continues to unfold: a severe and prolonged mental health emergency among genocide survivors. This crisis is most acute among those who lost immediate family members through murder, rape, or torture. Today, most of these survivors live in overcrowded refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Others remain internally displaced within Myanmar under severe restrictions or scattered across Southeast Asia and the Middle East with little access to protection or care. This mental health crisis is not a temporary humanitarian concern. It represents an intergenerational threat to survival, dignity, and recovery for an entire people.

Children who witnessed killings or lost caregivers often display long-term developmental and emotional consequences. These include persistent nightmares, bedwetting, speech regression, inability to concentrate, emotional numbness, aggression, and social withdrawal. Many children grow up carrying vivid memories of violence without the language or support to process them. Adults face chronic psychological distress manifested through insomnia, panic attacks, flashbacks, irritability, memory loss, and emotional detachment. Men frequently report deep feelings of shame and helplessness linked to their inability to protect their families. Women who survived rape or sexual violence often experienced the killing of their husbands or children immediately before or after the assault, compounding trauma with grief and fear. In Cox's Bazar, humanitarian workers describe a widespread condition of "functional survival." People eat, queue for aid, and care for children, yet remain psychologically frozen in the moment of loss. Trauma is continuously reactivated by camp conditions, uncertainty about the future, and the absence of justice.

Gendered Trauma and Silenced Suffering

The mental health burden among Rohingya women and girls is particularly severe. Sexual violence was used systematically during military operations as a tool of terror and ethnic cleansing. Survivors live with deep psychological scars, including depression, post-traumatic stress, anxiety, and chronic fear. Social stigma often prevents women from seeking help. Disclosure of sexual violence may lead to social exclusion, marital abandonment, or violence. As a result, many women internalise trauma in silence, leading to long-term psychological and physical consequences. Men and boys also face silenced trauma. Cultural expectations of strength and emotional restraint discourage men from expressing grief or fear. Many suppress their symptoms until they manifest as anger, substance use, domestic violence, or self-harm. These patterns weaken family structures and community cohesion.

Cultural Barriers and Misunderstanding of Mental Health

Mental health remains poorly understood within Rohingya society, not due to indifference but because of historical marginalisation and survival under repression. Psychological suffering is often interpreted through religious or moral frameworks, described as fate, spiritual weakness, or a test of faith. There is limited vocabulary in the Rohingya language to describe mental health conditions, and few trusted mental health professionals from within the community. Seeking psychological care is sometimes viewed with suspicion or fear, particularly when services are delivered by outsiders unfamiliar with Rohingya culture and trauma history. These barriers are intensified in displacement, where privacy is scarce and community surveillance is high. Silence becomes a coping mechanism, but over time it turns into a source of harm.

Life in Refugee Camps and Prolonged Trauma

The environment in refugee camps significantly worsens mental health outcomes. In Cox's Bazar, families live in overcrowded shelters with little privacy, constant noise, and frequent exposure to distressing events such as fires, floods, violence, and deaths. Educational and livelihood opportunities are extremely limited, leaving many survivors idle and trapped in cycles of rumination and despair. Fear of forced repatriation, lack of legal status, dependency on humanitarian aid, and uncertainty about the future reinforce a sense of powerlessness. For many survivors, trauma is not a past memory but a continuous lived experience. For Rohingya who remain internally displaced inside Myanmar, the situation is even more difficult. Movement restrictions, food shortages, surveillance, and ongoing threats from armed actors perpetuate fear and psychological distress. Access to any form of mental health or psychosocial support is virtually nonexistent.

Neglect by Donors and the International System

Despite extensive humanitarian engagement, mental health remains one of the most underfunded and neglected sectors of the Rohingya response. Funding is often short-term, fragmented, and focused on immediate survival needs, leaving psychosocial care marginal and inconsistent. Mental health programs are frequently understaffed, lack trained Rohingya counsellors, and rely on brief interventions without long-term follow-up. Specialised care for survivors of extreme trauma, including sexual violence and child bereavement, is limited. Regional and international actors acknowledge trauma rhetorically but rarely integrate mental health into education, protection, justice, or repatriation frameworks.

This neglect risks producing a generation of survivors whose untreated trauma undermines social stability, leadership development, and long-term recovery.

Pathways to Healing

Addressing the Rohingya mental health crisis requires sustained, culturally grounded, and survivor-centred action.

First, mental health must be recognised as a core humanitarian and protection priority. Donors should allocate dedicated, multi-year funding for mental health and psychosocial support programs, including specialised trauma services.

Second, community-based care models must be expanded. Training Rohingya teachers, religious leaders, women facilitators, and youth volunteers as para-counsellors can reduce stigma and extend reach. Services should be delivered in the Rohingya language and embedded within trusted community structures.

Third, survivor-specific services are essential. Confidential and gender-sensitive care must be provided for survivors of sexual violence. Child-focused trauma therapy, grief counselling for bereaved families, and referral systems for severe psychiatric cases must be strengthened.

Fourth, mental health must be integrated across sectors. Education programs should adopt trauma-informed approaches. Child-friendly spaces and safe spaces for women should include structured psychosocial support. Livelihood and skills programs should address dignity, purpose, and recovery.

Fifth, policymakers must recognise the link between justice and mental health. Continued impunity reinforces trauma. Supporting accountability mechanisms, documentation efforts, and survivor participation in justice processes contributes to psychological healing.

Finally, Rohingya survivors must be placed at the centre of program design and leadership. Healing requires restoring agency, dignity, and voice to those who have been silenced.

Conclusion

The mental health crisis among Rohingya genocide survivors is not invisible because it is small. It is invisible because it has been ignored. Behind every statistic is a child who watched their parents die, a mother who lost her children, and a community forced to grieve in silence. Without urgent and sustained action, this crisis will continue to erode lives and futures. With commitment, resources, and respect for survivor voices, healing is possible. The responsibility now lies with donors, humanitarian organisations, healthcare providers, and policymakers to move beyond managing survival and invest in recovery, dignity, and long-term human resilience.

INVESTIGATION

Narco War Fueling Genocide Against the Rohingya

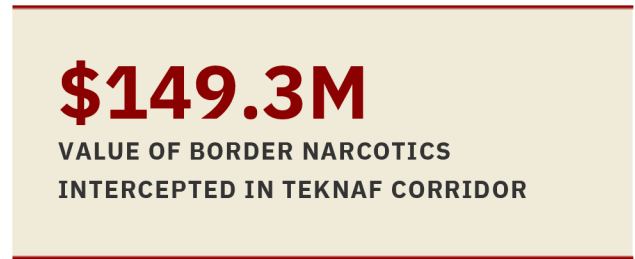
At fifty years old, Fatima was residing in the Balu Khali refugee camp in Ukhia when the Rapid Action Battalion entered her shelter. During their search, they found 112,463 yaba tablets concealed among her personal belongings. Having survived the tragic events of the 2017 genocide, Fatima's situation highlights the complex challenges faced by individuals in vulnerable environments.

Fatima is not a drug lord. She is a genocide survivor, a stateless woman exploited by criminal networks that have turned the world's most vulnerable people into disposable couriers for one of Asia's most lucrative narcotics empires.

Fatima's story is not an anomaly. It is a symptom of a crisis that stretches from the opium fields of Myanmar to the teeming refugee camps of Cox's Bazar, and onward to the streets of Dhaka, Kuala Lumpur, and beyond. At its centre sits a narco-economy that generates billions of dollars, funds armed groups committing genocide, and tears apart the social fabric of Bangladesh and the broader region. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported that a record 236 tonnes of methamphetamine were seized across East and Southeast Asia in 2024 alone -- a 24 per cent increase from the previous year. That staggering figure represents only what law enforcement managed to intercept. The actual volume reaching markets is believed to be far greater. Most of this poison originates in Myanmar, where the civil war that erupted after the 2021 military coup has created what the UNODC calls "favourable conditions for the expansion of drug production".

Myanmar is now the world's top opium producer, with poppy cultivation rising 17 per cent to over 53,000 hectares in the past year.

But it is the methamphetamine trade, the yaba tablets and crystal meth flowing through the infamous Golden Triangle, that generates the most devastating revenue streams for armed groups waging war against the Rohingya.



The Arakan Army's Narco Empire

Among the armed groups enriching themselves through this narco-economy, the Arakan Army stands out for the scale and sophistication of its drug operations and for the genocide it is perpetrating against the Rohingya with the resulting profits. The AA, through its political wing, the United League of Arakan, now controls more than 90 per cent of Myanmar's Rakhine State, including the entire 271-kilometre Bangladesh-Myanmar border. This is not merely a territorial conquest. It is the establishment of a narco-state apparatus that systematically extracts revenue from the drug trade to fund military operations, civil administration, and most horrifyingly a campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya.

The evidence is overwhelming. In September 2025, Myanmar authorities seized narcotics linked to the AA worth approximately 195.85 billion kyats (over \$54 million), including 1,439 kilograms of crystal methamphetamine and 2,198 kilograms of ketamine destined for Rakhine State and Malaysia. Among the 16 arrested suspects were AA operatives, customs officials, and logistics coordinators operating under the cover of legitimate businesses. A month later, an even larger haul was uncovered: 4,000 kilograms of crystal methamphetamine worth 120 billion kyats, seized in a warehouse in Patheingyi, Ayeyawady Region. Among those arrested was Khin Tun, identified as the AA's supply and logistics coordinator.

These are not isolated incidents. The Singapore-based S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies documented that the AA has established at least 20 specialised drug syndicates. The AA both operates its own smuggling networks and charges other trafficking groups "protection fees" for safe passage through its territory. Primary trafficking routes run from Shan State through Mandalay, Yangon, and the Ayeyawady coast before reaching Rakhine and onward to Bangladesh and Malaysia. The Bangladesh Defence Journal's detailed investigation described the AA's model as a "drugs-for-weapons economy," where profits from yaba and crystal meth sales are directly used to purchase weapons and sustain military campaigns. Between 2020 and 2025, authorities in Bangladesh's Teknaf region alone seized 358.95 million yaba tablets and 149.9 kilograms of crystal meth valued at over \$149.3 million.

Blood on Every Tablet

Every yaba tablet that crosses the Naf River carries the blood of Rohingya civilians. The connection between the drug trade and genocide is not metaphorical; it is direct and documented.

The Arakan Rohingya National Organisation has catalogued atrocities that "mirror, and in some cases exceed, the horrors of 2017". In August 2024, Rohingya families fleeing Maungdaw township were targeted by AA drone strikes and shelling as they tried to cross the Naf River to safety. Over one hundred civilian men, women, and children were killed in a single day. UN human rights experts condemned the attacks as "tragically reminiscent" of the mass atrocities of 2017.

In the massacre at Htan Shauk Kan village, nearly 600 Rohingya civilians, including pregnant women, small children, and persons with disabilities, were slaughtered after the AA seized control. Many bodies were burned or disposed of, in a grim echo of the Myanmar military's tactics eight years earlier. Between April and May 2024, the AA burned 48 Rohingya villages in Buthidaung township alone, displacing over 70,000 people and killing more than 4,000 civilians. Human Rights Watch confirmed that on May 17, 2024, Arakan Army forces "shelled, looted, and burned Rohingya neighbourhoods during their capture of Buthidaung town". By 2025, the AA had begun imposing financial penalties on Rohingya for basic movements, charging fees ranging from 2,000 to 10,000 Myanmar kyat simply for travelling between villages and extracting payments of 300,000 to 500,000 kyat to facilitate border crossings into Bangladesh. It is documented by several Rohingya advocacy groups how the AA uses starvation and forced labour as "tools of erasure," deliberately depriving Rohingya communities of food, medicine, and humanitarian access. Over 100,000 Rohingya have been newly displaced from Rakhine State during recent operations, and more than 150,000 have fled to Bangladesh, adding to the 1.4 million refugees already straining that country's resources. This is genocide funded by narcotics -- a killing machine that runs on methamphetamine profits.

Bangladesh Under Siege

Bangladesh is not a bystander in this crisis. It is a victim. The Rakhine war has imposed devastating economic costs on Bangladesh, a fact that, as The Diplomat recently noted, "has so far remained understudied". Bilateral trade between Bangladesh and Myanmar has collapsed, plummeting from a peak of \$223.22 million in 2018-2019 to just \$90.1 million in 2024. The AA's control of border checkpoints and its ban on vessel movements in the Naf River have strangled legitimate commerce, while simultaneously fueling a thriving shadow economy of drugs and contraband. The human cost is staggering. The largely uninterrupted flow of narcotics into Bangladesh has turned more than 8.3 million people into drug addicts, triggering a cascade of socio-economic problems, poverty, violent crime, and family disintegration. Bangladesh reportedly loses \$481 million annually due to drug trafficking, and the indirect economic costs are far higher.

Nearly 80 per cent of the drug trade now moves through maritime routes, with four to five trawlers departing daily from Cox's Bazar and Chattogram for AA-controlled areas of Rakhine. These vessels carry rice, fertiliser, medicine, and construction materials to the AA and return loaded with yaba and crystal meth. Impoverished Rohingya refugees, trapped in camps with no legal right to work and entirely dependent on shrinking international aid, are recruited as couriers, exploited by the very forces that drove them from their homes. The Border Guard Bangladesh confiscated nearly 1 million methamphetamine tablets from drug smugglers in Cox's Bazar. In February 2026, the BGB recovered 980,000 yaba pills in two separate drives along the Hnila-Whykong border. These seizures, while significant, represent merely the tip of a vast narco-iceberg.

Beyond drugs, the AA has expanded its predatory economics to include kidnapping Bangladeshi fishermen for ransom and seizing their vessels, effectively turning the Naf River and the Bay of Bengal into "Rakhine lakes" and depriving Bangladesh of the opportunity to exercise its economic rights in its own territorial waters.

"Impoverished Rohingya refugees, trapped in camps with no legal right to work and entirely dependent on shrinking aid, are recruited as couriers exploited by the very forces that drove them from their homes."

BORDER SECURITY BRIEFING

Rohingya Trapped Between Genocide and Exploitation

The Rohingya people occupy a unique and devastating position in this narco-terrorism nexus. They are simultaneously the primary victims of the violence the drug trade funds and the unwilling foot soldiers of the trafficking networks themselves.

In the refugee camps of Cox's Bazar, home to approximately 1.4 million Rohingya, armed groups and criminal networks compete for territorial control. Gang rivalry has led to violent clashes, further destabilising the already precarious conditions. For the Rohingya, the choices are impossibly cruel. Denied citizenship in Myanmar, barred from legal employment in Bangladesh, and dependent on international aid that has been dramatically cut, they face what the International Organisation for Migration described as conditions ripe for exploitation.

Women and girls are lured into forced labour and sexual exploitation. Men and boys are trafficked for dangerous work. Families, desperate for any income, send their children into situations that amount to modern slavery.

Children in the camps speak openly about their fear of being kidnapped from their tents at night. They travel in groups to reduce the risk. They avoid the latrines after dark. These are children who survived genocide, now living under the daily threat of being snatched by traffickers or recruited as drug mules. Meanwhile, the 2025-2026 Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya humanitarian crisis requires \$934.5 million to reach 1.48 million people. The plan must now account for an additional 50,000 confirmed new arrivals who fled fighting in Rakhine State, with another 50,000 believed to be living in camps and awaiting identification. As funding shrinks and needs grow, the vulnerability of the Rohingya to narco-trafficking networks only deepens.

A Regional Crisis Demanding Regional Action

This is not a crisis confined to the Myanmar-Bangladesh border. It is a regional emergency with global implications. CNN-News18 reported that intelligence inputs from India indicate that Rohingya trafficking routes and narco-terror financing networks represent "a major national security threat" to India itself. Regional agencies estimate that 90 to 95 per cent of Southeast Asia's methamphetamine originates in Myanmar before moving through Rakhine and into Bangladesh via Cox's Bazar. The trafficking corridors deliberately overlap with human trafficking routes, mixing drug carriers with desperate migrants.

The New Lines Institute warned that Myanmar's methamphetamine crisis poses significant challenges to strategic interests across the Indo-Pacific, as trafficking networks demonstrate "remarkable agility" in countering law enforcement efforts and exploiting new infrastructure, including China's Belt and Road projects, to reach new markets. The crisis has expanded trafficking routes through Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

The AA's drug network extends far beyond Bangladesh. Its foreign markets reach Malaysia, the Middle East, and Western countries. The August 2025 arrest of 13 members of a narco-gang linked to the AA, along with 21.8 million amphetamine pills, 5,614 kilograms of crystal meth, and 1,899 kilograms of ketamine worth \$71.4 million, exposed a trafficking pipeline that stretches across continents.

A Call to the Conscience of Nations

Eight years have passed since the world watched in horror as the Myanmar military drove 723,000 Rohingya from their homes in the genocidal campaign of 2017. The international community vowed, "Never Again." That vow has been broken not once, but daily, with every drone strike on fleeing families, every village burned, every child exploited as a drug courier. The Rohingya are the only major ethnic group in Myanmar without an organised armed force or autonomous zone to protect them. Unlike the Kachin, Karen, Chin, and Rakhine communities, who maintain armed resistance forces, the Rohingya have been "systematically disempowered and left at the mercy of hostile forces". This asymmetry is not accidental. It is the product of decades of deliberate marginalisation that now enables their destruction.

ARNO has called for targeted sanctions against the Arakan Army leadership, a referral of Myanmar's situation to the International Criminal Court, and UN Security Council action demanding an immediate end to attacks on Rohingya civilians. The organisation has also appealed to ASEAN and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation to take leadership in resolving the crisis.

These are not unreasonable demands. They are the minimum requirements of a civilised international order.

To the neighbouring countries: Bangladesh, India, Thailand, and the nations of ASEAN, the narco-economy destabilising the region will not remain contained. The 8.3 million drug addicts in Bangladesh today will be tens of millions across the region tomorrow if the pipeline is not severed. The trafficking routes that carry methamphetamine today will carry weapons, extremism, and instability tomorrow. Self-interest alone demands action.

To the international community: the United Nations, the European Union, the United States, and every nation that has signed the Genocide Convention, the obligation is clear and legally binding. Every state has a responsibility under international law to prevent and punish genocide. Selective outrage and geopolitical considerations must not shield the Arakan Army from accountability. The narco-terrorism funding this genocide must be named, targeted, and dismantled.

To humanitarian organisations: aid must be protected from diversion, and the conditions that make Rohingya refugees vulnerable to trafficking must be addressed. Legal livelihoods, education, and freedom of movement are not luxuries. They are the barriers that stand between genocide survivors and narco-exploitation.

The Clock Is Running

Somewhere in a refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, a Rohingya mother is weighing an impossible choice: let her family starve on diminishing rations or allow her teenage son to carry a package across the border for men who smile like friends and pay like employers. She does not know, or perhaps she does, and the knowledge destroys her: that the money her son earns will become bullets fired at Rohingya families still trapped in Rakhine State.










This is the narco-terrorism cycle that the world must break. Not next year. Not after the next massacre. The Rohingya have survived two genocides. They should not have to survive a third, especially one funded by the poison flowing through their own shattered communities. The question is no longer whether the international community has the capacity to act. It is whether it has a conscience. The clock is running. The bodies are accumulating. The drugs are flowing. And every day of inaction makes the next day's reckoning more terrible.

NARCO WAR FUELING GENOCIDE AGAINST THE ROHINGYA







Key numbers and human impact from the supplied article

THE POISON PIPELINE

KEY NUMBERS

 236 tonnes Methamphetamine seized across East & Southeast Asia in 2024	 24% Increase from the previous year	 53,000+ hectares Myanmar poppy cultivation after a 17% rise
 358.95 million Yaba tablets seized in Teknaf region, 2020–2025	 149.9 kg Crystal meth seized in Teknaf region, 2020–2025	 \$149.3 million+ Estimated value of those Teknaf seizures
 8.3 million People in Bangladesh described in the article as drug addicts	 \$481 million/year Estimated annual loss to Bangladesh from drug trafficking	 \$934.5 million 2025–2026 Joint Response Plan requirement

HUMAN IMPACT

 VIOLENCE Killings, village burnings, shelling, displacement, and forced movement are described in the article.	 EXPLOITATION Refugees in camps face recruitment as couriers, trafficking, forced labor, and sexual exploitation.	 VULNERABILITY No citizenship in Myanmar, no legal work in Bangladesh, and shrinking aid deepen the risk of exploitation.
 1.4 million Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar	 150,000+ fled to Bangladesh during recent fighting	 100,000+ newly displaced inside Rakhine State

DESPATCHES FROM ARAKAN

Fear and Silence Deepen in Buthidaung After Deaths of Two Rohingya Girls

The names were Fatema, seventeen years old, and Nur Begum, eighteen years old. They were among eleven Rohingya girls reportedly taken from Oo Hla Phay village in Buthidaung Township on February 20, 2026. Neither would return home alive.

According to local sources cited by Rohingya Khobor, Arakan Army members detained the group of young women and brought them to an AA camp in northern Rakhine State. Community members allege the two teenagers died while in custody. The precise circumstances of their deaths remain unknown; no official explanation has been issued by the Arakan Army, and independent verification on the ground is not possible given severe access restrictions in the area. Yet the silence from armed authorities has done little to quiet the fear spreading through Rohingya villages across the township.

"Every night we worry that our daughters could be taken next," one Buthidaung resident told Rohingya Khobor. It is a sentence that speaks volumes not only about one family's anguish, but about the collective dread now woven into daily life for Rohingya civilians living under Arakan Army control. Community members have alleged that Fatema and Nur Begum may have suffered torture or sexual violence prior to their deaths.

These allegations, while unverified, echo a broader pattern of reported abuses documented by rights advocates in northern Rakhine State, a region where arbitrary arrests, movement restrictions, property

seizures and intimidation have become increasingly commonplace since the Arakan Army consolidated territorial control. The tragedy in Buthidaung did not occur in isolation. It is the latest episode in a worsening human rights situation that has drawn mounting concern from Rohingya civil society organisations and international advocacy groups. With no independent monitors permitted access and no functioning accountability mechanisms in place, the communities most affected are left with little recourse beyond speaking, often at great personal risk, to outlets willing to listen.

Human rights defenders warn that this institutional vacuum is precisely what enables abuse to persist. When armed actors face no oversight, no investigations, and no consequences, the conditions that allow violence against civilians, particularly women and girls, to go unreported and unpunished become entrenched. For Rohingya families in Buthidaung, Fatema and Nur Begum are not statistics. They are daughters of a community that has endured displacement, dispossession, and mass atrocities across generations. Their deaths have intensified urgent calls from activists and rights organisations for international attention, civilian protection mechanisms, and independent investigations into alleged abuses committed in Arakan State.

Nearly a decade after the catastrophic violence of 2017, the cycle of fear, impunity, and silence continues, and in the villages of northern Rakhine State, two more families are now grieving in it.

Despatches from Arakan

Survivors and Rights Groups Accuse Arakan Army of Killings, Abuse, and Terror Against Rohingya Civilians

As fighting intensified across Rakhine State during the first quarter of 2026, international human rights organisations and media investigations documented growing allegations of killings, abuse, and intimidation carried out against Rohingya civilians by the Arakan Army. Survivors fleeing conflict zones described burned homes, executions, disappearances, and widespread fear spreading across Rohingya communities already scarred by years of genocide and displacement.

Human Rights Watch and international investigators warned that civilians in northern Rakhine were facing increasing violence from multiple armed actors as Myanmar's civil war deepened. Reports described incidents in which Rohingya villagers were detained, beaten, accused of spying, or executed without trial in areas affected by military clashes. Refugees interviewed in Bangladesh said civilians were often punished simply for living in contested areas.

One Rohingya survivor who crossed into Bangladesh in early 2026 reportedly described seeing bodies left near roads after clashes between armed groups. Another witness said entire families fled villages overnight after hearing reports of men being taken away and later found dead. Humanitarian workers operating near the border stated that fear had become so widespread that many civilians no longer trusted any armed group operating in the region.

International reporting in 2026 has continued to document grave abuses against Rohingya civilians in northern Rakhine. In May 2026, Human Rights Watch released a 56-page investigation, "Skeletons and Skulls Scattered Everywhere," concluding that the Arakan Army committed war crimes in the Hoyyar Siri (Htan Shauk Khan) massacre in Buthidaung Township, in which at least 170 Rohingya; including roughly 90 women and children; were killed or remain missing, with survivors detained in a makeshift camp and denied freedom of movement, food, and medical care. In the same month, the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK published findings documenting an emerging pattern of sexual violence, arbitrary detention, and forced recruitment of Rohingya women and girls in Maungdaw and Buthidaung townships under Arakan Army control. Open-source monitoring through early 2026 has further recorded continued junta airstrikes on villages in Minbya, Kyauktaw, Mrauk-U, and Ponnagyun, alongside renewed destruction of Rohingya villages near Maungdaw such as Say Maw and Saing Chon Dwein, where satellite imagery from February to April 2026 shows flattened buildings and burned settlements. Survivors continue to describe fleeing bombardments while carrying children, elderly relatives, and wounded family members, sometimes walking for days without food before reaching safer areas.

The violence unfolding in Rakhine during early 2026 underscored a painful reality for many Rohingya families: despite years of international promises and global outrage following the 2017 genocide, civilian suffering continues with little protection on the ground. International analysts warned that unless meaningful accountability mechanisms are enforced for all armed actors, Rohingya communities may continue facing cycles of violence regardless of who controls territory in Rakhine State.

For displaced Rohingya families in refugee camps, the reports arriving from their homeland only deepened trauma and uncertainty. Many now fear that even if the war ends, the possibility of returning home safely and with dignity is becoming increasingly distant.



Read the full report:
https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2026/05/myanmar0526web_0.pdf

HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH

“Skeletons and Skulls Scattered Everywhere”

Arakan Army Massacre of Rohingya Muslims in Hoyyar Siri, Myanmar

ROHINGYA DIASPORA NEWS

Rohingya Refugees in Pekanbaru Face a Future Without Horizons

Nearly a decade after escaping genocide, mass atrocity, and systematic persecution in Myanmar's Arakan State, some Rohingya refugees living in Pekanbaru, Indonesia, remain stranded in a purgatory of statelessness and neglect. A recent investigative report has cast a renewed spotlight on the deteriorating humanitarian conditions inside the city's refugee settlements, where hope, once a survival mechanism, is quietly running out.

They came by boat across the treacherous Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea, fleeing military crackdowns, communal massacres, and the systematic erasure of their identity. Indonesia offered temporary refuge. For many Rohingya families, that "temporary" arrangement has stretched into years, and now threatens to become permanent exile. Today, families crowd into overcrowded shelters with inadequate sanitation, minimal privacy, and healthcare services stretched far beyond capacity. Parents describe the daily anguish of being unable to feed their children. Community elders speak of a people slowly being forgotten, not by circumstance, but by policy.

International funding for refugee assistance programs in Indonesia has been sharply curtailed, leaving already vulnerable communities dangerously exposed. Because Indonesian law does not permit refugees to seek formal employment, Rohingya families have no legal pathway to self-sufficiency; they depend entirely on humanitarian aid distributions that are shrinking by the month. The consequences are tangible and severe. Hunger, deepening poverty, and the erosion of community support networks now define daily life.

Refugees interviewed in the report describe not a fear of what might happen, but anguish over what is already unfolding around them.

Perhaps the most devastating toll of prolonged displacement is borne by Rohingya children and young people. Many have spent the better part of their formative years inside crowded shelters, denied access to formal schooling, recreational opportunities, or any realistic vision of the future. Those who fled as children are now entering adulthood without citizenship documents, employment rights, or eligibility for higher education. Women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities face compounding layers of hardship: minimal healthcare, virtually no mental health support, and inadequate protection mechanisms. Community leaders warn that hopelessness is becoming epidemic. "We fled death," one resident was quoted as saying. "But here, we are dying slowly in a different way."

The situation in Pekanbaru is not an anomaly; it is a symptom of a broader and systemic regional failure. Across Southeast Asia, countries that once opened their doors to Rohingya refugees have offered only temporary shelter, never durable solutions. Safe return to Myanmar remains a dangerous illusion: Arakan State continues to be torn by violence, ethnic persecution, and political instability. International resettlement quotas remain painfully limited. For those living in Pekanbaru's settlements, life does not represent safety or recovery; it represents the continuation, in a different geography, of the same statelessness and the same unanswered question: Where do we belong? As global attention drifts toward newer crises and humanitarian budgets are reallocated, the Rohingya crisis risks becoming one of the most quietly neglected tragedies of our time. The people of Pekanbaru are not statistics. They are survivors and they are still waiting for the world to remember that.

DESPATCHES FROM ARAKAN

Women and Children Drawn into Fear and Forced Recruitment in Maungdaw

In the towns and villages of northern Maungdaw, a new wave of fear is spreading through Rohingya communities already exhausted by years of violence, displacement, and political uncertainty. Local residents report that the Arakan Army has begun compiling military recruitment lists that include not only adult men but also women and children under 18.

According to testimonies from residents in areas such as Shwe Zar village and Latha ward, armed personnel reportedly moved door to door demanding household registration documents and recording names without consultation or consent. Families say they were given no explanation regarding where recruits would be taken, how they would be used, or whether refusal was even possible. In homes where no adult male was present, women's names were allegedly added instead.

The reports have intensified anxiety among civilians who already live under severe movement restrictions. Residents say travel between different parts of Maungdaw now requires official authorisation, even for funerals, medical emergencies, or urgent family matters. Local sources describe a system in which travel permits are difficult to obtain and often require unofficial payments that are beyond the means of many impoverished families.

What makes the situation particularly alarming is the inclusion of women and minors in the reported recruitment drive.

Community elders and local residents interviewed by regional media say the policy signals a deeper militarisation of civilian life in areas now under the control of the Arakan Army following its capture of Maungdaw and the Myanmar-Bangladesh border in late 2024.

For many Rohingya families, the developments revive painful memories of previous cycles of persecution in northern Arakan, where civilians faced arbitrary arrests, disappearances, forced labour, village destruction, and displacement during successive military operations. Human rights organisations have already documented patterns of forced labour and coercion against ethnic minorities in areas controlled by armed actors in Rakhine State.

The growing pressure on civilians in Maungdaw also reflects the broader collapse of law, protection, and accountability across western Myanmar. As armed groups consolidate territorial control amid the country's wider civil war, vulnerable populations increasingly find themselves trapped between competing military forces, shrinking humanitarian access, and the absence of meaningful international protection.

For Rohingya civilians in Maungdaw, the immediate reality is stark: families fear that remaining at home could lead to forced recruitment, while movement outside their villages has become heavily restricted. In a region scarred by decades of statelessness and violence, many now fear that another dangerous chapter is unfolding quietly behind closed checkpoints and silent village roads.

Despatches from Arakan

Rohingya Villagers Describe Fear and Disappearances as Arakan Army Recruitment Expands in Northern Rakhine

A new wave of fear is sweeping across Rohingya villages in northern Rakhine State as reports of forced recruitment by the Arakan Army spread through Maungdaw, Buthidaung, and nearby townships. Families who had already survived years of persecution, displacement, and war now found themselves facing another terrifying reality: young men disappearing from villages after armed fighters arrived demanding recruits, labourers, or military support. International media outlets and humanitarian observers have reported that Rohingya civilians increasingly felt trapped between the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army as conflict intensified across western Myanmar. Refugees arriving in Bangladesh described nights filled with panic as armed men entered villages, called meetings with community elders, and demanded lists of able-bodied youths. Some villagers said families hid their sons in forests or sent them away to avoid forced recruitment. A January 2026 UK government policy assessment cited allegations that Rohingya civilians were being forcibly recruited by both the junta and the Arakan Army, with some reportedly used as human shields or frontline labourers. Rights monitors warned that civilians refusing recruitment faced intimidation, beatings, or accusations of cooperating with rival forces.

In refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, stories from newly arrived families painted a grim picture. One Rohingya father told humanitarian workers that his teenage son disappeared after being taken for "security duty" near a frontline area. Another refugee described seeing armed men enter villages and order local leaders to provide a specific number of recruits.

"People are afraid to sleep at home," one displaced Rohingya man reportedly said. "If they come at night, they take whomever they want."

International rights groups stressed that the growing militarisation of Rohingya communities represents a dangerous escalation in the conflict. Many Rohingya civilians already face severe restrictions on movement, limited access to food and medicine, and constant insecurity. Humanitarian agencies warned that armed recruitment of vulnerable civilians could deepen trauma among communities already devastated by years of violence and displacement.

The allegations also complicated the broader political narrative surrounding the conflict in Rakhine State. While the Arakan Army has portrayed itself internationally as a revolutionary force fighting Myanmar's military dictatorship, Rohingya civilians and rights organisations are increasingly accusing the group of imposing abusive control over minority communities living in areas under its authority.

For many Rohingya families, the fear is painfully familiar. Nearly a decade after the 2017 military crackdown drove hundreds of thousands into exile, many say they once again feel powerless before armed actors controlling their villages and lives. As the conflict in Rakhine continues to intensify, civilians remain caught in a brutal struggle where survival often depends not on law or protection, but on the decisions of those carrying weapons.

Policy Brief

Rohingya Rights, Accountability, and the Reality in Myanmar

In April 2026, the Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO) released a policy brief titled "Rohingya Rights, Accountability, and the Reality in Myanmar," offering a framework grounded in international law and the lived realities of Rohingya communities.

The brief warns that the Rohingya crisis is evolving rather than resolving, and that international engagement built on outdated assumptions risks doing more harm than good. Its central message is direct: protection, governance, and accountability in Rakhine State must be reassessed in light of the dramatic changes in the political and territorial landscape.

A Changed Political and Territorial Landscape

The brief underscores a fundamental shift in Myanmar's political and territorial order. The military authorities are attempting to project legitimacy through a controlled electoral process, yet conditions on the ground remain defined by fragmentation, instability, and continued violations against Rohingya communities. Large parts of Rakhine State are no longer under the military's unified control. This produces a complex environment in which questions of civilian protection, local governance, and accountability can no longer be understood through the binary frameworks of the past. For ARNO, recognising this reality is the necessary first step toward any credible policy response.

Identity and Citizenship at the Core

ARNO reaffirms the legal and historical status of the Rohingya as an integral part of Myanmar's population. The brief insists that the continued denial of identity, citizenship, and basic rights remains at

the very core of the crisis, not a secondary concern to be deferred. Any meaningful policy response, it argues, must confront this denial directly. Solutions that sidestep the citizenship question treat the symptoms of the crisis while leaving its root cause intact, ensuring that vulnerability and statelessness persist across generations.

Accountability Must Not Be Sidelined

A central warning in the brief is that efforts to normalise relations with the authorities through controlled political processes risk entrenching impunity and undermining international legal obligations. ARNO stresses that accountability mechanisms, including those linked to the Genocide Convention and ongoing international legal proceedings, remain essential and must be sustained rather than traded away for the appearance of stability. Superficial political normalisation, the brief cautions, would reward perpetrators and signal that atrocities carry no consequences.

Repatriation Only on Verifiable Conditions

On the question of return, the brief is unambiguous: any discussion of repatriation must be grounded in verifiable conditions on the ground. These include genuine safety, dignity, the restoration of rights, and credible protection mechanisms.

Without such guarantees, return processes risk failure and further harm to an already devastated population. Premature or politically motivated repatriation, ARNO argues, would expose returnees to the same dangers they fled.

ARNO’s Call to the International Community

The brief calls on the United Nations, individual states, regional actors, and humanitarian partners to align their engagement with the realities on the ground rather than with diplomatic convenience.


ARNO sets out four priorities for responsible engagement:

- Maintain sustained pressure for accountability for past and ongoing crimes against the Rohingya.
- Reject superficial political normalisation that would legitimise authorities while violations continue.
- Ensure independent access to affected areas for monitors, investigators, and humanitarian actors.
- Place Rohingya rights at the centre of all policy decisions affecting Rakhine State and its people.

Conclusion

ARNO presents this policy brief as a framework to support informed decision-making and more effective engagement toward justice, protection, and sustainable solutions. Its underlying conviction is that durable peace in Rakhine State cannot be built on impunity, denial, or unverified promises of return. It can only be achieved through accountability, the restoration of Rohingya identity and citizenship, and a policy approach that places the rights and lived realities of the Rohingya people at its heart.

Policy Brief Rohingya Rights, Accountability, and Reality in Myanmar



April 2026

**Arakan Rohingya National Organisation
(ARNO)**



Read the full report:
https://www.rohingya.org/?sdm_process_download=1&download_id=2078



About ARNO

The Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO) emerged in 1998 as a broad-based organisation of the Rohingya people with a pledge to promote 'Rohingya unity' and to realise the hopes and aspirations of the Rohingya people.

www.rohingya.org

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