



ARAKAN

Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO)



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Editorial

Equal Rights Between Rohingya and Rakhine are Imperative for Future ARAKAN



The assertion that equal rights for the Rohingya and Rakhine communities are prerequisites for a prosperous Rakhine is rooted in a broad understanding of social, economic, and political stability. Arakan (Rakhine) State, in western Myanmar, has long been plagued by ethnic violence and systemic discrimination, especially targeting the Rohingya Muslim minority. True equality involves ensuring that all individuals and groups have equal rights and opportunities, and this fundamental principle is crucial for building a sustainable peace not only in Myanmar but also in the region.

The Importance of Equal Rights

1. Promoting Social Cohesion: Equal rights help in building social cohesion and trust among different ethnic and religious groups. It ensures that all individuals, regardless of their ethnicity or religion, have the same opportunities and protections under the law. This fosters a sense of belonging and inclusion, which are essential for building social cohesion and trust between communities. It reduces the potential for conflict, which is essential for any region's peace and stability.

2. Preventing Conflict and Resentment: When certain groups are marginalized or denied basic rights, it can lead to resentment, tension, and even conflict. By ensuring equal rights for all communities, including the Rohingya and Rakhine, the underlying grievances that fuel intercommunal tensions can be addressed, reducing the likelihood of violence and instability.

3. Facilitating Reconciliation: Equal rights are essential for fostering reconciliation between Rohingya and Rakhine that have experienced conflict or division. By acknowledging past injustices, addressing disparities, and ensuring equal opportunities for all, reconciliation efforts can be advanced, paving the way for greater understanding and cooperation.

4. Encouraging Participation and Contribution: When individuals are denied equal rights, they are often excluded from participating fully in society, including in political, economic, and social spheres. By guaranteeing equal rights, all members of society, including the Rohingya and Rakhine communities, can contribute their talents, perspectives, and skills to the development and prosperity of the nation.

5. Building Trust in Institutions: Upholding equal rights strengthens trust in government institutions and the rule of law. When people believe that they are treated fairly and have recourse to justice, they are more likely to engage positively with state authorities and institutions, contributing to stability and governance effectiveness.

6. Promoting Sustainable Development: Equal rights are closely linked to sustainable development outcomes. When all members of society have equal access to education, healthcare, employment, and other essential services, the overall well-being and prosperity of the nation are enhanced, benefiting everyone, regardless of ethnicity or religion.

7. Upholding Human Dignity: Equal rights are a fundamental aspect of human dignity. Denying individuals their rights based on ethnicity, religion, or any other characteristic is a violation of their inherent worth and can lead to feelings of injustice and indignity. Respecting the rights of all individuals promotes a culture of dignity and mutual respect.



Challenges to Achieve Equal Rights

Achieving equal rights for the Rohingya and Rakhine faces significant obstacles. These include deep-seated prejudices, nationalistic policies, and the military's significant influence in Myanmar's politics. Additionally, there's a complex history of conflict between different ethnic groups in the region, complicating efforts to foster unity and reconciliation.

- **Myanmar's Denial:** The Myanmar regime has consistently resisted international pressure to recognize the rights of the Rohingya. Any move towards equal rights for the Rohingya would face significant political and military challenges within the country.
- **Regional Dynamics:** The Rohingya crisis has significant implications for regional stability, with over a million refugees currently residing in Bangladesh. Neighboring countries and regional organizations like ASEAN play a crucial role in the diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis.
- **International Support:** International advocacy and support are vital for the Rohingya's struggle for equal rights. However, geopolitical interests and international relations dynamics can complicate the level and effectiveness of this support.
- **Internal Unity:** For equal rights efforts to be successful, a unified vision among the Rohingya, representing the diverse opinions within the community, is crucial. This unity is essential for negotiating with the Myanmar authority and the international community.

Ensuring equal rights between the Rohingya and Rakhine communities is not only a matter of justice and human rights but also a prerequisite for achieving lasting harmony, stability, and development in Myanmar. It requires concerted efforts from all stakeholders, including the government, civil society, and the international community, to address disparities, promote inclusion, and uphold the principles of equality and non-discrimination.

THE ONGOING ROHINGYA CRISIS: WORSENING HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCY AND CANADA'S RESPONSE

Remarks of John Packer, Neuberger-Jesin Professor of International Conflict Resolution, Faculty of Law, and Director, Human Rights Research and Education Centre, University of Ottawa (Canada), delivered at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights on 18 March 2024 (<https://www.uottawa.ca/research-innovation/hrrec/news/rohingya-people-canadas-response>).

It is a pleasure and an honour to contribute to this evening's event in support of the long-suffering Rohingya people. [...]

Despite being unaware of the existence of the Rohingya people for the first half of my life, in fact they have been suffering for my entire life. In 1992, as a United Nations Human Rights Officer, I was assigned to assist the first UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma/Myanmar and so I traveled in early 1993 to that country including to Rakhine/Arakan State in the North-East where I met with Rohingya who had been forcibly repatriated from Bangladesh following their mass exodus in 1992. That wasn't their first or last mass exodus. Already then, they had been subjected to decades of systematic persecution, in effect stripped of their nationality and rendered stateless, and having already earned the moniker as "the world's most persecuted minority". At the time, the majority of Rohingya still lived in their homeland and managed somehow to endure the manifold violations of their human rights and of systematic persecution. Today, perhaps half a million Rohingya remain in Rakhine/Arakan while the great majority (80% or more) of Rohingya have been forced over the years to flee, dispersed throughout the world, many clinging to life in Bangladesh. Also today in Rakhine/Arakan, the unrelenting persecution continues with new forms such as forced conscription and rapid deployment of young Rohingya men in effect to be used as human shields in the civil war between the State Administration Council (SAC, or junta) Myanmar Armed Forces and the Arakan Army. The destruction of Rohingya as a group and of their homeland continues every day.

Burma became independent as a State and admitted immediately to the United Nations on 4 January 1948, including Rakhine/Arakan and the whole population there (i.e. including Rohingya), whereafter Burma proudly voted on 10 December 1948 in favour of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, the next day, on 9 December 1948, adoption of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide which Burma subsequently signed in 1949 and ratified in 1956. Its persecution of Rohingya began not many years later.

The catalogue of human rights violations and other forms of oppression of the Rohingya has been abundantly reported and recorded for most of our lives and increasingly, as technology permitted, by all sorts of actors and entities not least by the United Nations over decades. Since that first report by the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar (which I drafted), the Genocide Convention has been repeatedly invoked. Yet little action was taken. Only after the most recent mass exodus, in August/September 2017, which we witnessed live on our TVs, did, eventually, a little and poor African country, The Gambia, have the temerity to bring, in November 2019, a complaint against Myanmar by submitting an application to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to commence action for breaches of the Genocide Convention. Canada heralded this and, with The Netherlands, pledged support and followed with a short public statement that it would (without specification) intervene in the case. Over four years later... that is pretty much where things remain. For its part, Canada has contributed substantially – almost two-thirds of a Billion Canadian Dollars [some USD440 million] for mainly humanitarian assistance... meaning, essentially, writing large cheques to the UN agencies, some humanitarian actors and substantially to defray costs of the Government of Bangladesh. The Rohingya continue to suffer. And the mainly men in black robes sitting at the ICJ in The Hague plod along... Worse, following the February 2022 coup d'état in Myanmar – as the current military junta removed the legitimate authorities and began its reign of terror against the people of Myanmar – in The Hague, stunningly, the junta unlawfully took the seats of the Government of Myanmar and have been confirmed and granted every courtesy, privilege and immunity in the now perverse charade of a legal theatre about and without the Rohingya themselves given voice or recognition. Canada has remained silent.

In sum, the “Rohingya crisis” has been “ongoing” for most of our entire lives... and for all of their lives. The “humanitarian emergency” we talk about this evening is only the latest and now acute manifestation of an inter-generational oppression. There is little new, and nothing we do not immediately recognise. What has always been striking to me is that the Rohingya are – and never have been – a threat to anyone. Essentially a small, agrarian and fisher-folk people seeking only to live in peace in their small corner of the world – in peace with themselves and with their neighbours. Yet they have been denied this and, instead, been targeted, dehumanized, even demonized... simply for existing.

I am glad that, in 2017, the Government of Canada responded clearly and substantially in their support – both materially and, initially, in pursuit of justice. The very few Rohingya who have been allowed to resettle in Canada (just one thousand, so I understand) have integrated quickly and well – even exemplary as individuals and as a small community, despite many challenges. I know they are grateful to Canada.

But I am disappointed that we – Canada – have not done much more... in terms of what was needed and, especially, what we could have done and could still do. In fact, we have not acted with vigour or even obviously in taking available steps at the International Court of Justice or otherwise (notably in terms of sanctions, counter-measures, and diplomatic pressure) much less creatively. Briefly, for a handful of months several years ago, we chaired a group of States on the Rohingya situation, before our interest waned and ceased. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau appointed a special envoy, Bob Rae, who eventually issued a well-received report... but few of his 17 recommendations have been implemented – including putting the Rohingya first in policy terms. And once Rae got a new appointment as Ambassador to the UN, the special envoy role simply died. More concretely, to my knowledge there has been hardly if any at all direct support for Rohingya leadership either abroad or even within Canada – despite their remarkable progress and great merit. And there is still today no dedicated programme or effort to facilitate the resettlement of Rohingya to Canada – much less something like a tailored programme with support for Rohingya youth together with higher education and training – where Canada could really lead, especially for Rohingya young women. Whither Canada’s vaunted Feminist Foreign Policy? Neither the Rohingya nor I know.

In conclusion, yes, the Rohingya crisis goes on, and the humanitarian emergency is real and urgent, and Canada’s response is... well, modest. Indeed, it has recently been announced that the budget for Rohingya assistance will be cut. So what then remains? I believe Canada can do better – even with limited funds. And I know the Rohingya need and merit better. After this evening, I hope you will agree and help ensure that the Government of Canada reconsiders its response and takes available steps to do better. Thank you.

Note: On 16 April 2024, Canada’s Finance Minister, Chrystia Freeland, delivered the 2024 Federal Budget in the House of Commons. This year, Rohingya are not mentioned, but it is understood that funds for the Rohingya will be reduced, and it remains unclear whether any Rohingya-led organisation (in Canada or abroad) will receive financial support for any purpose – resettlement, cultural maintenance, social or community organisation, humanitarian, political or otherwise.

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Panic in Arakan as AA detains Rohingya men and women, many feared dead, five corpses found in Maungdaw village

Five Rohingya men allegedly detained by the Rakhine insurgent outfit Arakan Army have been found dead in the Abuja Hamlet of That Yet Oak village tract in Maungdaw.

On April 17, the five men were ordered by village administrator U Tun Aye Maung to report to the local station which houses AA fighters. But after they went to meet the village administrator they went missing and their family members did not hear from them. The deceased have been identified as Abdul Amin (52), Mohammed Soyed (40), Abul Kalam (48) Md Islam (55) and his son Nur Malakim (25). Their corpses were found near the house of the village administrator U Tun Aye Maung five days later at around 10 am. The pictures of the dead bodies have become viral creating outrage as well as a sense of insecurity among Rohingya villagers left inside Arakan.

Activists and local sources point the finger of blame at the AA. There are also fears about the life of the photographer who had taken the pictures of the dead men with multiple sources claiming he has been taken away by the AA after the photos began circulating in social media platforms. The AA meanwhile rejected the allegation in a press statement claiming the dead men were not taken away by their forces and instead pointed the finger of blame at what they say are 'Bengali terrorist' groups.

In recent weeks, many men and even some women have been abducted by the AA. Many of their whereabouts are unknown and many are feared to have been killed and the women raped. Reports of arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances are creating panic among the Rohingya Muslim community along with fears that the AA will continue the brutal legacy of the Junta. The AA has been persistent in referring to the Rohingya Muslims as Bengalis implying the minority community are not indigenous to Arakan but are immigrants from neighbouring Bangladesh.

At present much of the Rohingya community is living as refugees in South Eastern Bangladesh. In the years preceding the genocidal operation of 2017, Rohingya villagers have consistently refused to fill up identity cards referring to them as Bengalis. As the AA continues to use the same term as the Junta, there are fears the Rohingyas will continue to be regarded as immigrants and will find it difficult to return to their homeland in the future. Attempts by the Bangladesh government to repatriate Rohingyas back to their homelands have been avoided by the Junta. At present it looks like the AA will replace the Junta as the government of Arakan in most parts of the state, following a string of victories starting from November last year. While the AA rhetoric has promised equal treatment for all citizens of Arakan, including the Muslims, the use of the word Bengali along with recent detentions and disappearances are creating doubts that the AA's reign might mirror the reign of terror imposed by the Junta against the Rohingya since the military takeover of the 60s.

Arakan state is a tinderbox of ethnic tensions between the Rakhine Buddhists and the Rohingya Muslims.

UN warns of another Rohingya genocide amidst twin threats

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Voler Turk sounded warnings concerning a grave threat to the civilian population, specifically the embattled Rohingya Muslim community amidst fighting between Junta forces and the Rakhine EAO Arakan Army. Clashes since November have displaced approximately 300,000 people, according to UN estimates.

The top UN rights chief warned that while Rohingyas were the victims of a state-sanctioned genocidal operation in 2017, this time they faced a double threat. The second actor, the Arakan Army has broad support from the majority Rakhine population, traditionally hostile to the Rohingyas. On the other hand, the Myanmar military stands accused of perpetuating a genocide of Rohingya Muslims since the advent of military takeover more than six decades back.

“Rakhine State has once again become a battleground involving multiple actors, and civilians are paying a heavy price, with Rohingya at particular risk,” the High Commissioner said. “What is particularly disturbing is that whereas in 2017, the Rohingya were targeted by one group, they are now trapped between two armed factions who have a track record of killing them. We must not allow the Rohingya to be targeted again.”

The AA has followed a strategy of positioning mobile units along Rohingya villages, knowing well that the Junta’s artillery and air strikes would hit the civilian population in those settlements. Many Rohingya activists allege the AA strategy has the ultimate objective of killing as many Rohingya civilians as possible without dirtying their own hands, as the plight of the Rohingya has raised more awareness among the international community following the genocide of 2017. However, many Rohingya activists allege the AA is also involved in the direct persecution of Rohingya civilians, with arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances becoming increasingly common in recent days.

Meanwhile the UN rights chief also noted the Junta was forcing Rohingya men into the draft. “Facing defeat, the military has outrageously started to forcibly conscript, bribe and coerce Rohingya into joining their ranks. It is unconscionable that they should be targeted in this way, given the appalling events of six years ago, and the ongoing extreme discrimination against the Rohingya including the denial of citizenship,” Türk said. Incidentally many Rohingyas refusing the draft have been killed while hundreds have been arrested and taken to undisclosed locations.

Türk has directed the UN human rights office to investigate allegations the military has forced Rohingyas to burn Rakhine villages in an effort to sow ethnic and communal discord in the tense Arakan state. Observers have however warned any investigation into Arakan will be difficult as internet and telecommunications remain down amid a communication blackout in Arakan state.

The Junta’s policy of sowing divisions among the two major communities of Arakan is widely perceived as a last ditch attempt to stave off complete defeat in Arakan State as they hope Rohingyas and Rakhines will start a major conflict among themselves allowing an opening for Junta forces that have continued to lose ground to the AA following the start of fresh hostilities in November.

“The alarm bells are ringing, and we must not allow there to be a repeat of the past,” Türk said. “Countries with influence on the Myanmar military and armed groups involved must act now to protect all civilians in Rakhine State and prevent another episode of horrendous persecution of the Rohingya.”

Ethnic tensions find fuel in Buthidaung fire

In an attempt to sow ethnic clashes between the Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims, Junta forces have burned down the houses of the majority community and forced many kidnapped Rohingyas to do the same. The incident has caused massive outrage and UN Human Rights Chief has called for an investigation amid warnings the Rohingyas are at risk of genocide not only from the SAC but also their rivals in Arakan State, the Arakan Army.

The arson incidents have started happening since April 12. The Junta has categorically denied the allegations and indirectly shifted the blame to Rohingyas, whom they say are alarmed at the actions of the Arakan Army.

Earlier, Rohingya boys were forced to demonstrate against the Arakan Army in a programme arranged by SAC officials and their Rohingya collaborators.

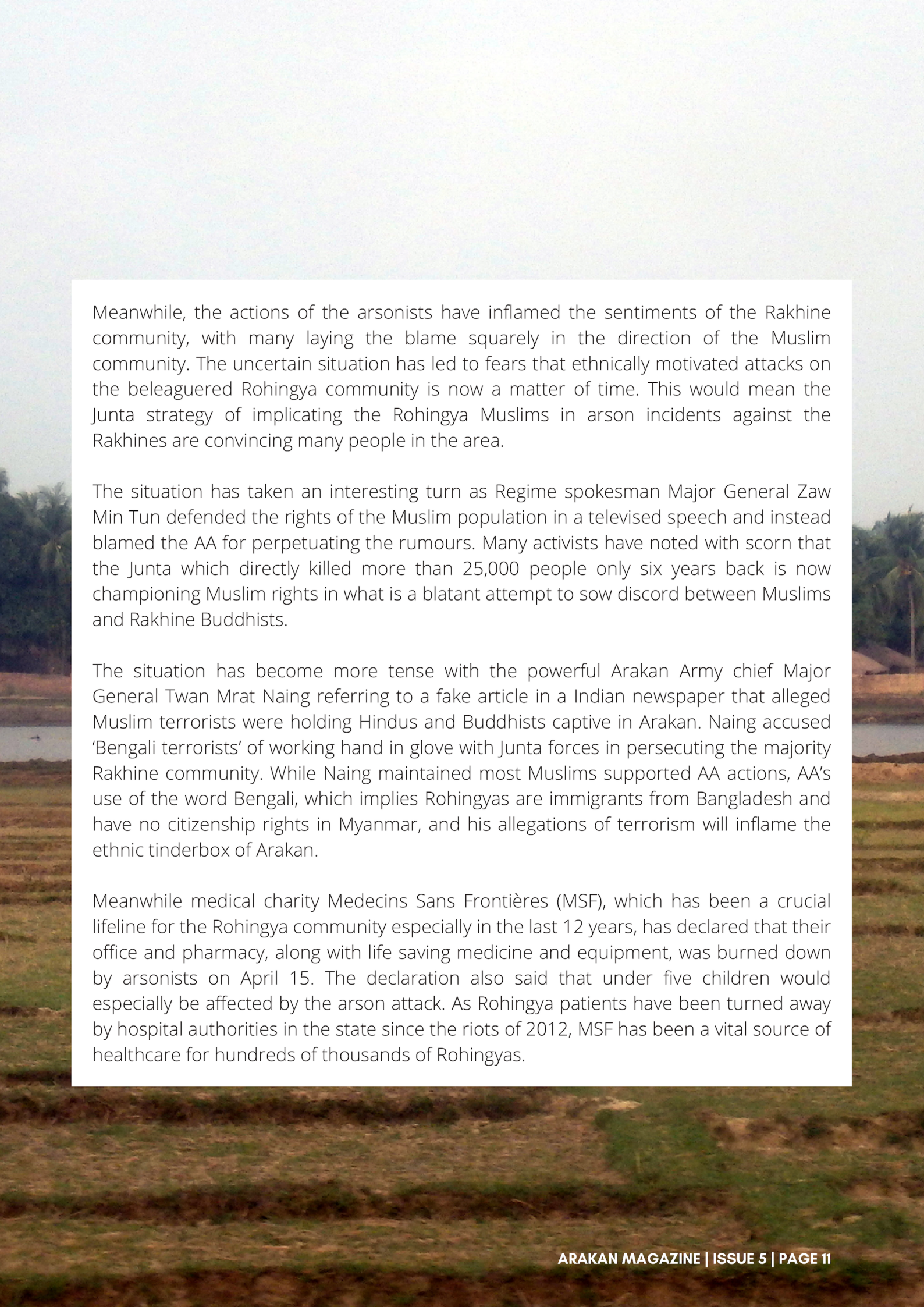
Since February, thousands of Rohingya men have been forcefully drafted into the army amidst a nationwide conscription programme. Many Rohingyas who refused have been taken to undisclosed locations and they have not been heard of since then. Some have been killed.

However, sources have said many men who are known operatives of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) also known as Al Yakin have been actively collaborating with the military junta in carrying out attacks against the Rakhines.

Attacks on remote outposts in August 2017 were used as a pretext by the Junta to carry out genocidal operations that killed approximately 25,000 Rohingyas and drove almost a million people to seek sanctuary in neighbouring Bangladesh where they continue to live in overcrowded refugee camps.

While ARSA had once imposed a reign of terror in the refugee camps of Bangladesh, they have been subsequently absent from any actions inside Myanmar till now.

Many Rohingya activists have long alleged that ARSA is in cahoots with the military Junta, as the 2017 attacks were timed to coincide with the report by the Kofi Annan commission and gave the Junta the pretext it needed to ensure a huge segment of the Myanmar population could be convinced by the propaganda of 'Islamic terrorism' disrupting the life of Buddhist people in Arakan.



Meanwhile, the actions of the arsonists have inflamed the sentiments of the Rakhine community, with many laying the blame squarely in the direction of the Muslim community. The uncertain situation has led to fears that ethnically motivated attacks on the beleaguered Rohingya community is now a matter of time. This would mean the Junta strategy of implicating the Rohingya Muslims in arson incidents against the Rakhines are convincing many people in the area.

The situation has taken an interesting turn as Regime spokesman Major General Zaw Min Tun defended the rights of the Muslim population in a televised speech and instead blamed the AA for perpetuating the rumours. Many activists have noted with scorn that the Junta which directly killed more than 25,000 people only six years back is now championing Muslim rights in what is a blatant attempt to sow discord between Muslims and Rakhine Buddhists.

The situation has become more tense with the powerful Arakan Army chief Major General Twan Mrat Naing referring to a fake article in a Indian newspaper that alleged Muslim terrorists were holding Hindus and Buddhists captive in Arakan. Naing accused 'Bengali terrorists' of working hand in glove with Junta forces in persecuting the majority Rakhine community. While Naing maintained most Muslims supported AA actions, AA's use of the word Bengali, which implies Rohingyas are immigrants from Bangladesh and have no citizenship rights in Myanmar, and his allegations of terrorism will inflame the ethnic tinderbox of Arakan.

Meanwhile medical charity Medecins Sans Frontières (MSF), which has been a crucial lifeline for the Rohingya community especially in the last 12 years, has declared that their office and pharmacy, along with life saving medicine and equipment, was burned down by arsonists on April 15. The declaration also said that under five children would especially be affected by the arson attack. As Rohingya patients have been turned away by hospital authorities in the state since the riots of 2012, MSF has been a vital source of healthcare for hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas.

Junta targets fleeing Rohingyas: 25 killed in Buthidaung, two babies injured in Akyab grenade attack

A grenade thrown by Junta soldiers injured two babies in Ohntawgyi IDP camp in Akyab (Sittwe) township on April 13. The boy and a girl child sustained injuries in their back and abdomen, and were taken to a nearby hospital. Their families have since not been able to contact them.

Sources say the grenade was thrown when two men in their 30s ran away from Junta soldiers when they were forcibly drafted to fight the AA. Many of the Rohingyas forcibly conscripted to fight the AA have been given low quality weapons without training and have been used in a capacity as human shields. Rohingya activists allege more than a hundred Rohingya men drafted against their will to fight the AA were killed in the battle of Rathedaung. The forcible conscription of the Rohingyas as human shields and slave soldiers are used by the Junta to create new tensions between Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims. While the policy of 'Divide and Conquer' has long been practised by Burmese nationalists and later the Junta to keep control of the restive Arakan State, the defeat and near expulsion of the Junta forces by the AA has given new impetus to the procedure. Rohingya Muslims have been coerced to act against Rakhines, and there are mass kidnappings with many deaths, arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances carried out by Junta forces against those who refuse.

The situation has been further inflamed as men known to be in the service of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and the Arakan Rohingya Army (ARA) have willingly joined forces with the SAC against the AA. There have been allegations by many activists that ARSA has been in cahoots with the Junta providing the latter with the pretext for the 2017 genocide. It is not known whether these groups are acting on their own or have instructions from their own organisations. Nevertheless their actions are expected to further the wedge between the two communities of Arakan State.

Meanwhile in Buthidaung, 25 Rohingyas trying to escape fighting were killed when Junta artillery targeted boats in the water carrying thousands of escaping civilians. Thousands of people are fleeing the area as the two sides are engaged in battle, which many fear might be the precursor to ethnic conflict. A communications blackout means information from the area is hard to come by. Local media outlets in South Eastern Bangladesh reported there are hundreds of Rohingyas awaiting the chance to cross the border. Jet fighters also dropped bombs in the U Hla Hpay village and military forces shelled the village for two and a half hours. It is reported ARSA fighters also joined alongside the Junta but once again they used Rohingya civilians as human shields and bombed their village as they were escaping.

Junta forces also attacked civilians fleeing fighting in Maungdaw township.

ARNA Press Releases

ARNA Extends Congratulations to H.E. Julie Bishop, New UN Envoy for Myanmar

6 April, 2024

On behalf of the Rohingya people of Arakan in Myanmar, the Arakan Rohingya National Alliance (ARNA) would like to convey its heartiest congratulations to H.E. Julie Bishop on being appointed as the UN Envoy for Myanmar.

We would also like to extend our heartfelt appreciation to H.E. Julie Bishop for her robust advocacy for the Rohingya and Myanmar democracy movement during her tenure as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Australia from 2013 to 2018. We would also like to express our sincere gratitude to the Government of Australia for its generosity in providing Humanitarian Assistance for the Rohingya refugees both in Bangladesh and in Myanmar.

Since the February 2021 failed military coup and prolonged state of emergency, the military regime has compounded the human rights and humanitarian crisis in Myanmar. The coup, ongoing hostilities and a lack of trust complicate the prospects for safe, dignified and voluntary repatriation of Rohingya refugees and victims of the 2016-17 genocide from Bangladesh.

However, we are confident that, under her vigorous leadership and experiences, H.E. Julie Bishop shall be able to pursue a durable and sustainable solution for the plight of Rohingya and the entire people of Myanmar. We also hope and pray that under her initiative we would be able to carry out a voluntary, dignified, secure and sustainable repatriation of the Rohingya refugees to their original places in their ancestral homeland of Arakan, Myanmar.

We would like to assure H.E. Julie Bishop of our utmost cooperation and shall remain obliged.
Arakan Rohingya National Alliance

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Statement of the Arakan Rohingya National Alliance on the Current Situation in Arakan/Rakhine State, Myanmar

25 April, 2024

Arakan Rohingya National Alliance (ARNA) expresses its serious concern over the simmering tensions between ethnic Rohingya and Rakhine communities, being fuelled by the Myanmar military and Arakan Army (AA).

The Rohingya people, who have long been subjected to crimes against humanity and genocide, perpetrated by the Myanmar military, its partners or non-state actors, are now trapped in limbo as the fighting between Myanmar military and Arakan Army intensifies in Northern Arakan. Moreover, there are other minor factions involved in the conflicts making the ground situation more complicated.

The military is trying to further divide the Rohingya and Rakhine on ethnic and religious lines setting one people against the other. In some places of Arakan the military has forced the ordinary Rohingyas to stage public protests against AA in order to exploit the situation when it is facing defeat.

In this situation, the military has horrendously abducted and forcibly recruited more than 1,000 Rohingya youths from across the Arakan since February 2024, particularly from the townships of Kyaukphyu, Sittwe and Buthidaung. Most recruits were picked up through night raids from IDP camps such as, South Ohn Taw Gyi, North Ohn Taw Gyi, Baw Du Pha I, Baw Du Pha II, Hman Si Taung, Thea Chaung, and Thet Kay Pyin. These unfortunates are being used as human shields in the frontlines and a number of them have been killed, maimed or injured.

There are reports that the military is forcing the Rohingya recruits or villagers to burn Rakhine homes, buildings or villages, and Rakhine villagers have allegedly responded in kind by burning Rohingya villages. This is particularly disturbing!

Forcing protected persons to serve as human shields is a war crime according to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, the 1977 Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions, and the 1998 Rome Statute. We strongly condemn the Myanmar military for forced conscription of Rohingya men and boys, and demand that it ceases its attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Conversely, AA has now conscripted about 100 Rohingya youths and ordered the terrified villagers to provide them with at least one person from each household, apparently for using as human shields. Rohingya are in a particularly worrisome predicament as the AA often positions itself in and around their villages, effectively inviting military attacks, shelling or airstrikes on civilians. AA fighters have threatened the Rohingya villagers either to comply with their demands or leave for Bangladesh.

AA continues to deny 'Rohingya' ethnic identity as evident in the statements or communications of AA's responsible leaders, including the recent interview of the AA Commander-in-chief Gen. Twan Mrat Naing, calling the Rohingya people 'Bengalis', the term used by the military. It is objectionable that he has spread disinformation and propaganda on social media. A false piece of news published in The New Indian Express on April 15 alleged that "Islamic terrorists" had taken 1,720 Hindus and Buddhists hostage, thus fostering hatred or causing untoward effects among the communities.

In recent months, AA carried out sporadic killings and detained several Rohingya villagers in North Arakan. On the evening of April 17, AA arrested 5 innocent Rohingya civilians from the Abuja hamlet of Tha Yet Oak village tract in Maungdaw Township. They were all killed, and on April 22, the villagers found their dead bodies near a shrimp farm close to the residence of the village administrator U Tun Aye Maung. We condemn all unlawful killings.

Time and again the AA's spokesperson U Khine Thu Kha has warned that except for AA no armed organisations will be allowed to operate on the soil of Arakan. This announcement is absurd when Arakan is a home to diverse peoples. It is shocking that good sense does not prevail yet in the minds of the Rakhine leadership; they should come up with a clear policy towards Rohingya people in the interest of peaceful coexistence in Arakan, which is "a living together in peace rather than in constant hostility".

Since January 23, 2020, when the International Court of Justice (ICJ, World Court) ordered Myanmar 'to take all measures within its power' to protect the Rohingya — whom the Court described as 'extremely vulnerable' — as a part of the ongoing genocide case brought by The Gambia against Myanmar, there have been continual breaches of the order over the past four years. The Court recalled that the State's obligation to prevent and punish the crime of genocide apply at all times, including in situations of internal armed conflict.

The UN Human Rights Chief Volker Türk has rightly said: "Rakhine State has once again become a battleground involving multiple actors, and civilians are paying a heavy price, with Rohingya at particular risk,"... "What is particularly disturbing is that whereas in 2017, the Rohingya were targeted by one group, they are now trapped between two armed factions who have a track record of killing them. We must not allow the Rohingya to be targeted again."

We remind the warring parties that they have a responsibility to distinguish between combatants and civilians in accordance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL). "Anyone who is not a member of the armed forces of a party to the conflict is a civilian, and the civilian population comprises all persons who are not combatants... They shall remain immune from military attacks."

We urge the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army (ULA/AA) to begin dialogue in order to maintain peace and security in Arakan, to develop mutually beneficial cooperation between Rohingya and Rakhine, and to forge a better, brighter future for all peoples of Arakan, including ethnic Chin, Mro, Khami, Kaman, Dainnet and Hindu etc.

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Photo Courtesy of [UN Women](#)

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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