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# ARAKAN

Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO)



Photo courtesy: South Asian  
Institute of Policy and Governance



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## *Editorial*

# Severe Food Shortage Catastrophe Approaching in Rakhine



Rakhine State, a region marked by decades of political instability, is facing one of its most severe humanitarian crises in recent memory. The intensifying conflict between the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) and the Arakan Army (AA) has led to devastating consequences for civilians, particularly in terms of access to food and essential supplies. As these two forces engage in a power struggle, the people of Rakhine are caught in a dire situation, facing the threat of starvation and the rapid deterioration of their livelihood. The establishment of a humanitarian corridor has emerged as an essential solution to address this rapidly worsening situation, allowing safe passage for aid and relief to reach the civilians most in need.



Photo courtesy: Maggie Moore, USAID

## The Context of Conflict

The Myanmar military has historically maintained a heavy presence in Rakhine State, citing security concerns due to ethnic armed groups in the region. Among these groups, the Arakan Army has become increasingly prominent. Formed in 2009, the AA initially sought greater autonomy and rights for the Rakhine ethnic population but has, over the years, shifted toward a more direct confrontation with the Tatmadaw. Both the Arakan Army and Myanmar military's campaign against the Rohingya have triggered a severe humanitarian crisis in Rakhine, marked by widespread displacement and human rights abuses. These crises have led to acute food shortages and limited access to necessities like healthcare, clean water, and shelter, leaving vulnerable communities in dire conditions. Blockades, curfews, and restricted movement have left thousands without access to food, water, medical care, and other critical resources, pushing Rakhine toward a humanitarian breaking point.

The forced displacement of families, destruction of farmlands, and frequent clashes in populated areas have left vast stretches of the population dependent on external aid. However, given the insecurity and restrictions in the area, humanitarian agencies are often unable to deliver much-needed assistance.



# Factors Contributing to Food Shortages

1. Blockades and Restrictions on Movement One of the most critical factors behind the food shortages in Rakhine is the restricted movement of civilians. The Myanmar military, aiming to weaken the Arakan Army's support, has enforced strict checkpoints, curfews, and blockades across various parts of the state. These restrictions have limited the ability of farmers to cultivate their land, transport goods, or access markets. Additionally, the Arakan Army has also imposed its own blockades and taxes on local businesses, further hampering the flow of food and other essential items.

2. Destruction of Farmlands and Livelihoods Ongoing military engagements have led to the destruction of farmlands, irrigation systems, and storage facilities, pushing the local economy into a downward spiral. Many areas known for rice cultivation, a staple food in Myanmar, have been targeted in skirmishes or military strikes. As farmers flee their homes, vast stretches of arable land have been abandoned, reducing the state's food production capacity. Furthermore, livestock, essential for many families' sustenance, have been killed or lost as villagers are forced to evacuate.



Photo courtesy: K M Asad

3. Displacement and Its Consequences Tens of thousands of people in Rakhine have been displaced, seeking refuge in camps with limited resources. These makeshift camps are often overcrowded, lack adequate sanitation, and provide little in terms of food and medical care. As supplies dwindle, malnutrition has become rampant, particularly among children, pregnant women, and the elderly.

4. International Sanctions and Aid Restrictions Myanmar's worsening political situation has led to increased international sanctions, which, while targeting the military regime, have inadvertently affected the civilian population. Many humanitarian agencies face restrictions when attempting to deliver aid to Rakhine, either due to government-imposed regulations or fear of being caught in the crossfire. The shrinking presence of international organizations has resulted in a steep reduction in food aid for those most in need.

## **The Role of the Myanmar Military and the Arakan Army**

The conflict between the Arakan Army and Myanmar's military has devastated Rakhine State, with Rohingya villages frequently caught in the crossfire. This violence has caused a catastrophic humanitarian crisis, including acute food shortages and a lack of access to emergency healthcare and necessities. The situation has left thousands displaced and vulnerable, with aid efforts severely hampered by the ongoing conflict. The Myanmar military has been accused of using a "scorched earth" policy in its fight against the Arakan Army, destroying villages and blocking access to food and resources as a means of weakening the opposition. There have been reports of the military targeting civilian infrastructure, such as roads and bridges, as a tactic to limit the mobility of AA forces but which also severely impacts civilians' ability to access markets or flee to safer areas.

On the other hand, the Arakan Army has also played a role in exacerbating the crisis. In its attempts to establish control, it has set up unofficial checkpoints, imposed taxes, and at times restricted humanitarian access. Civilians are often forced to navigate a complex web of restrictions from both the AA and the Tatmadaw, which has left them with little means to secure food and other essentials.



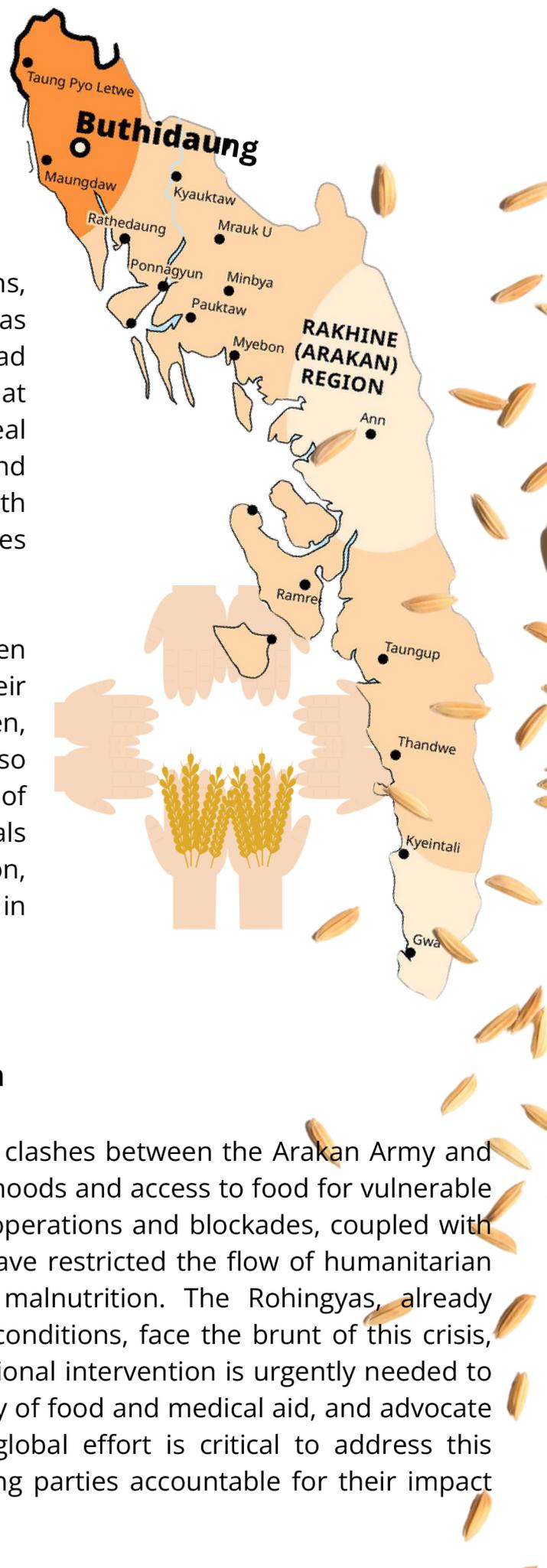
## Humanitarian Consequences: Malnutrition, Health Crisis, and Starvation

The convergence of conflict-related disruptions, blockades, and a lack of humanitarian access has created a situation ripe for widespread malnutrition and starvation. Reports indicate that many households are subsisting on just one meal a day, often lacking basic nutrition. Hospitals and clinics in Rakhine are struggling to keep up with the influx of malnutrition cases, with some families traveling miles in search of basic medical aid.

The situation is especially dire for young children and infants who require specific nutrients for their growth and development. Pregnant women, lactating mothers, and the elderly are also particularly vulnerable, with many showing signs of malnutrition-related illnesses. Health professionals have warned that without immediate intervention, Rakhine may face a catastrophic rise in preventable deaths.

## The Need for International Intervention

The ongoing conflict in Rakhine State, driven by clashes between the Arakan Army and Myanmar's military, has severely disrupted livelihoods and access to food for vulnerable communities, including the Rohingyas. Military operations and blockades, coupled with the Arakan Army's control over certain areas, have restricted the flow of humanitarian aid, leaving many at risk of starvation and malnutrition. The Rohingyas, already marginalized and confined to precarious living conditions, face the brunt of this crisis, with little access to essential resources. International intervention is urgently needed to break through these barriers, ensure the delivery of food and medical aid, and advocate for the protection of civilians. A coordinated global effort is critical to address this humanitarian emergency and hold the conflicting parties accountable for their impact on innocent lives.



Humanitarian agencies and rights groups are calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities, allowing unimpeded access for aid organizations to reach those most in need. Additionally, regional organizations such as ASEAN, along with global powers, need to increase pressure on both the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army to prevent further escalation of the crisis. Diplomatic efforts should focus on securing humanitarian corridors to allow food and medical supplies to reach the affected areas.

Rakhine State is on the brink of a severe food shortage catastrophe, one that could lead to massive loss of life if immediate action is not taken. The Myanmar military and the Arakan Army's ongoing conflict has trapped civilians in a web of violence, poverty, and hunger, exacerbating an already dire humanitarian crisis. Without international intervention and a cessation of hostilities, Rakhine could face an unprecedented disaster. It is imperative that all parties involved prioritize the lives and well-being of civilians to prevent the deepening of this tragedy and allow for the rebuilding of communities ravaged by war.



Photo courtesy: Free Malaysia Today

# ARNA CHAIR NURUL ISLAM



## JOINS NATIONAL DIALOGUE ON ROHINGYA IN BANGLADESH

On November 23 2024, Nurul Islam, Chair and Founder of Arakan National Rohingya Organization (ARNO) and Chair of the Arakan Rohingya National Alliance (ARNA) joined experts and government officials in Bangladesh for an event “National Dialogue: Working Towards a National Consensus on Rohingya Policy of Bangladesh.”

The National Dialogue on the Rohingya issue was convened by the South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG) of North South University at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIIS). The event was aimed at bringing together all political parties in Bangladesh to come up with a national consensus on the plight of the Rohingya, who are nationals from Myanmar that have sought refuge from the ongoing genocide taking place against them in Myanmar perpetrated mainly by the Tatmadaw. While many topics were raised during the event, some notable discussion points included:

The push for a UN Conference on the Rohingya in 2025. The failure of bilateral and trilateral solutions to bring about repatriation since 2017. Providing education to Rohingya children up to 10th class and imparting skills training before they are repatriated. Boosting trade between Myanmar and Bangladesh and enhancing border security. Improving relations among ethnic groups within the Arakan.

Nurul Islam was thankful for the invitation to participate on behalf of the Arakan Rohingya National Alliance (ARNA) at the meeting. He highlighted the long history of the Rohingya in the Arakan and the intolerance they bear by others in Arakan because of their ethnicity. He recounted the horrors which took place in the years up to and including 2017, including the devastation witnessed by children. He expressed his gratitude to Bangladesh for saving the Rohingya given the events and further stated that this is something that the Rohingya will never forget. Mr. Islam emphasized that the Rohingya be given the right to self-determination. He stated that the Arakan Army and the military junta have no political will to resolve this issue and asked Bangladesh to continue to help the Rohingya.



Photo courtesy: South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance



ARNO expresses its gratitude that Rohingya were represented by a senior leader in the Rohingya community and expresses its continued hope that the Rohingya will be included in future conversations, particularly the UN Conference on the Rohingya, so that Rohingya people continue to play an active role, not only in future repatriation efforts, but also in their future as a nation and peoples.

# ROHINGYA WIDOWS LEAD THE WAY

After the genocidal purge of 2017, over 50 percent of the Rohingya people who live in the refugee camps are women and girls. Among them, many are widows, who are the head of their households, because their husbands were murdered by the military and other factions in Myanmar. Many widows have shown tremendous resilience in the face of this terrible situation and have emerged as leaders.

## A Story of Resilience

**\*\* names withheld for security reasons**



RK\*\* began a small business after the COVID 19 pandemic ended. She takes her money to invest in selling products in the market within the camp. She faced some hardships initially because she had to learn how to manage and keep track of the finances as well as her budget. She learned quickly that changes in the economy and competition from other stores affected her business and had to continue to adjust her business plans as a result of this. RK\*\* also feels that because she is a woman, she has to depend on the help of her sons to make her small business succeed. RK\*\* is thankful for NGOs such as Rohingya Women Welfare Society (RWWS) which has continued to provide training and support to allow her to be successful in her business. RK\*\* hopes that she can use her hard-earned money to provide her children with an education.

In 2011 the United Nations adopted Resolution 65/189 which created International Widow's Day to be observed on June 23rd every year. ARNO is a network partner of Widows for Peace through Democracy (WPD). WPD, founded by Margaret Owen OBE, works to ensure that widows of all ages, irrespective of religion, ethnicity, caste, age or nationality are protected from violence and marginalization and can enjoy their full human rights. WPD was one of the leading organizations that helped to push for UN General Assembly Resolution 76/252 "Addressing the Situation of Widows."

The purpose of the resolution is to bring the challenges that widows face into the mainstream dialogue of human rights, which includes putting widows into national action plans, Covid -19 recovery plans, and acknowledging the social and economic contributions made by widows. The international community must make efforts to also ensure that refugee populations, such as the Rohingya in Bangladesh, are not left behind in action plans or in efforts to help promote the resilience of widows.



Photo courtesy: UN Women/Allison Joyce



## **ARNO welcomes appointment of Julie Bishop as Special Envoy to Myanmar**

In 2017, the UN General Assembly established the mandate of the Special Envoy to Myanmar. The purpose of the role is to work on the challenges relating to Myanmar, particularly the Rohingya genocide and finding pathways to peace in Myanmar since the February 2021 coup.

Julie Bishop, former Minister of Foreign Affairs for Australia and Chancellor of Australian National University is the newest appointee to the role. On October 29, it is reported that Special Envoy Bishop had a meeting with Myanmar military junta leader in Naypyitaw and has called for an end to the conflict in Myanmar.



It is also reported that the Special Envoy met with the National Unity Government and ethnic armed groups. ARNO is also thankful to the special envoy for meeting Rohingya representatives both of ARNO and ARNA senior members.

# A new hope: Bangladesh High Representative urges safe and dignified Rohingya return



Photo courtesy: UN Women



Photo courtesy: EU Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid

Rohingyas in both the camps and diaspora have expressed optimism regarding a renewed Bangladesh initiative to rescue what many international observers are calling a forgotten conflict despite it being witness to one of the most brutal genocides of the 21st century. An imminent famine predicted to take place in 2025 means that such an initiative comes at a crucial time as thousands of people could die from food shortages created by fighting between the Tatmadaw and the Rakhine outfit Arakan Army. Both belligerents have been involved in the culling of Rohingya civilians. The Bangladesh initiative is spearheaded by Khalilur Rahman, a career diplomat, who was recently appointed as the 'High Representative on Rohingya Problem and Priority Issues Affairs' to chief adviser professor Muhammad Yunus.

The appointment of Khalilur Rahman and the rapid endeavors are seen by many as a serious attempt by the Bangladesh government to raise the issue in international forums and come up with a realistic policy to eventually end the Rohingya crisis, which has spilled over the border to neighboring Bangladesh after Tatmadaw-led forces launched a crackdown that killed tens of thousands and sent most Rohingyas over the border. The Myanmar regime and many Rakhine nationalists regard the Rohingyas as illegal Muslim immigrants from Bangladesh despite centuries of Muslim presence in Arakan.

Earlier, since 2019, Bangladesh diplomatic strategy regarding the Rohingya was heavily dependent on the involvement of global and regional giant China as the main interloper. The strategy was quietly criticized by the Rohingyas. It was hoped from the Bangladeshi side that China, the country with the most influence in Myanmar would pressure the Tatmadaw to accept the Rohingyas.

However, among the Rohingya community, such an initiative was seen as a Tatmadaw strategy to waste time till the world forgot about the mass killings and rape of 2017.

The giant neighbor has never made overtures to the Rohingya in the same way as it had approached some other ethnic minorities with whom they had maintained cordial relations, despite such ethnic groups being the Tatmadaw's nemesis for decades. In the absence of such a relationship, Rohingyas suspected China would not serve interests of the Rohingyas. Bangladesh hopes also proved misleading as behind the scenes, the deep-seated mistrust between Beijing and Naypyidaw is known to most diplomats. Rohingya cynicism proved true as the Chinese never made any communications with the Rohingya and ultimately brought little to the table, while Naypyidaw did their best to push the issue onto the international backburner. As war broke out in Europe and the Middle East, the international media's attention moved away from Arakan. Meanwhile another important player, the anti-Junta Rakhine armed outfit Arakan Army with xenophobic hatred for the Rohingya community multiplied in power and influence. Currently the group controls much of Arakan.

The situation disappointed Rohingyas as many were optimistic as the previous Bangladesh government had raised hopes with proposals of a safe zone solution in the United Nations General Assembly. However, this very useful proposal was quickly buried and in exchange, a clumsy attempt at repatriation was made which involved convincing Rohingyas to settle into territory controlled by hostile forces. It was little surprise when this never made much headway and only fueled suspicions that the Tatmadaw was up to its time honored tactics of wasting time while global attention moved onwards to a new conflict elsewhere in the world.

However, amidst renewed diplomatic initiatives by Bangladesh, the issue might be back in the limelight of the international community with a high level session taking place as early as January in the United Nations General Assembly. The ultimate objective of Bangladesh as spelled out by the Bangladesh High Representative is not only to bring the issue to the attention of the international community but also to come up with a permanent solution which involves a respectable return of the Rohingyas to their homeland in Arakan.

Rohingyas have been urging for their safe return to Arakan for years, but such demands have not been seriously addressed. On the contrary repression against the Rohingyas has only increased with the Rakhine nationalist Arakan Army continuing the genocidal policies of the Tatmadaw, with at least 3000 Rohingya civilians being killed in 2024. Reports regarding closed door sessions by the Arakan Army has indicated that they intend to settle Rakhines on Rohingya lands which will only make repatriation solutions even harder and might open the doors to decades of conflict. Amid highly disturbing reports coupled with fear of famine, Rohingyas are pleased that the Bangladesh High Representative's objectives align with the long cherished dream of the Rohingya people to return home with safety and dignity.

# ICC seeks arrest warrant for Myanmar junta leader

In a major development, ICC Prosecutor Karim AA Khan has issued an application for the arrest warrant of Myanmar President and Commander in Chief Min Aung Hlaing for crimes against humanity for persecution and deportation of Rohingya Muslims. The application comes following testimony from hundreds of victims of the 2017 genocide currently residing in the overcrowded refugee camps of Bangladesh. The application will now be issued for the judges of the ICC who will now decide on whether to issue an arrest warrant for Min Aung Hlaing. There is no deadline for the issuance of arrest warrant. If the warrant is issued, ICC member states will be legally obligated to arrest and transfer Min Aung Hlaing to the court if he enters their territories. However, the ICC does not allow trials to be held in absentia.



Of course, this also means that even if an arrest warrant is issued, there won't be any trial of Min Aung Hlaing. The embattled general is unlikely to enter ICC states once such a warrant is issued unless it is done by coercion, a scenario which remains unlikely. As a result, some premature reports that Rohingyas will get justice through the trial of Min Aung Hlaing are misleading at least in the current scenario. The ICC seeks to prosecute individuals for international crimes while the ICJ seeks state responsibility. Till date, no one has been arrested or indicted for the 2017 genocide. However there is no disputing the fact that this is a major diplomatic success for the long suffering Rohingya who have had little to celebrate in the last few years, if not decades.

Rohingyas are regarded as the most persecuted group in the world but their genocide has had little impact inside Myanmar where a pro-democracy resistance, and myriad ethnic groups have taken up arms against an increasingly beleaguered military regime. However, unlike other ethnic groups, the Rohingyas have no substantial armed group or alliances capable of resistance against powers that seek to destroy them.

As a result, Rohingyas have in the last few years found themselves increasingly dependent on the international community which often has little understanding of the complex ground situation. The application for an arrest warrant will mean the international community has taken a great step forward in recognizing crimes against Rohingyas.

The Myanmar military is already an international pariah and there is unlikely to be major implications for them. For the Rohingya however this is a diplomatic success which they can count on in their continued quest for recognition in a country they have always regarded as their homeland. Of course, Rohingyas need to recognize the extent of ICC's influence and the limitations of its enforcement mechanisms and recognize the ICC victory as a diplomatic foundation.



Photo courtesy: Free Malaysia Today

# **ARNA Welcomes ICC Prosecutor's Application for Arrest Warrant Against Min Aung Hlaing**

**November 28, 2024**

## **ARNA Welcomes ICC Prosecutor's Application for Arrest Warrant Against Min Aung Hlaing**

The Arakan Rohingya National Alliance (ARNA) welcomes the recent statement from the International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan KC regarding his application for an arrest warrant against Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Acting President of Myanmar and Commander-in-Chief of the Myanmar Defence Services, in the situation in Bangladesh/Myanmar.

The Rohingya community has waited decades for justice to prevail, and this development marks a significant step toward holding perpetrators accountable for the atrocities committed against the Rohingya people. The full statement by the ICC Prosecutor is available [here](#).

### **Background**

The Rohingya, an ethnic minority in Myanmar, have faced decades of systemic discrimination, statelessness, and violence. In 2017, over 700,000 Rohingya were forced to flee to Bangladesh due to a brutal military campaign widely described as ethnic cleansing and genocide. The atrocities included mass killings, sexual violence, and the destruction of villages.

The ICC has been investigating alleged crimes under its jurisdiction in the situation of Bangladesh/Myanmar, including deportation, persecution, and other inhumane acts against the Rohingya population. The ICC Prosecutor's latest move underscores the international community's commitment to ensuring accountability and delivering justice to the victims of these heinous crimes.

### **Statement from ARNA**

"We commend the ICC Prosecutor for this landmark action," said Nurul Islam, Chairman of ARNA. "Justice and accountability are essential for healing and rebuilding trust. Recognizing the Rohingya as an ethnic group, ensuring their safe repatriation to their places of origin in Myanmar with ethnic and citizenship rights as per other people of Myanmar, and providing reparations for the immense suffering endured by our people are critical components of a sustainable solution. We urge the ICC to continue its investigation with unwavering resolve and to work closely with Rohingya civil society in its pursuit of justice."

### **Call for Continued Action**

ARNA encourages the Prosecutor's Office to maintain its collaboration with Rohingya civil society organizations and affected communities to ensure their voices are central to the pursuit of justice. We also call on the international community to support the ICC's work and pressure Myanmar's authorities to cooperate with investigations.

The Rohingya deserve more than justice in name—they deserve recognition, restitution, and the restoration of their fundamental rights. This moment offers hope for a future grounded in dignity and accountability.

## *Press Release*

# **Heartfelt Congratulations on the Appointment of Khalilur Rahman**

**November 23, 2024**

The Arakan Rohingya National Alliance (ARNA) extends its warmest congratulations to Khalilur Rahman on his prestigious appointment as the High Representative on Rohingya Problem and Priority Issues Affairs to Chief Adviser Professor Dr. Muhammad Yunus.

This appointment comes at a pivotal moment when the world is seeking urgent and sustainable solutions to the ongoing challenges faced by the Rohingya community. Mr. Rahman's extensive expertise and unwavering dedication to human rights and humanitarian advocacy make him an exceptional choice for this vital role.

Under the visionary leadership of Nobel Laureate Professor Dr. Muhammad Yunus, this appointment signifies a renewed commitment to innovative and comprehensive approaches to addressing the complex and pressing needs of the Rohingya people.

We are confident that Mr. Rahman's leadership will inspire hope, mobilize international cooperation, and bring tangible progress in alleviating the suffering of the Rohingya people.

On behalf of ARNA, we wholeheartedly congratulate Khalilur Rahman on this remarkable achievement. We extend our unwavering support for his mission and look forward to witnessing impactful and lasting solutions that will transform the lives of the Rohingya community.

Nurul Islam

Chair, Arakan Rohingya National Alliance (ARNA)

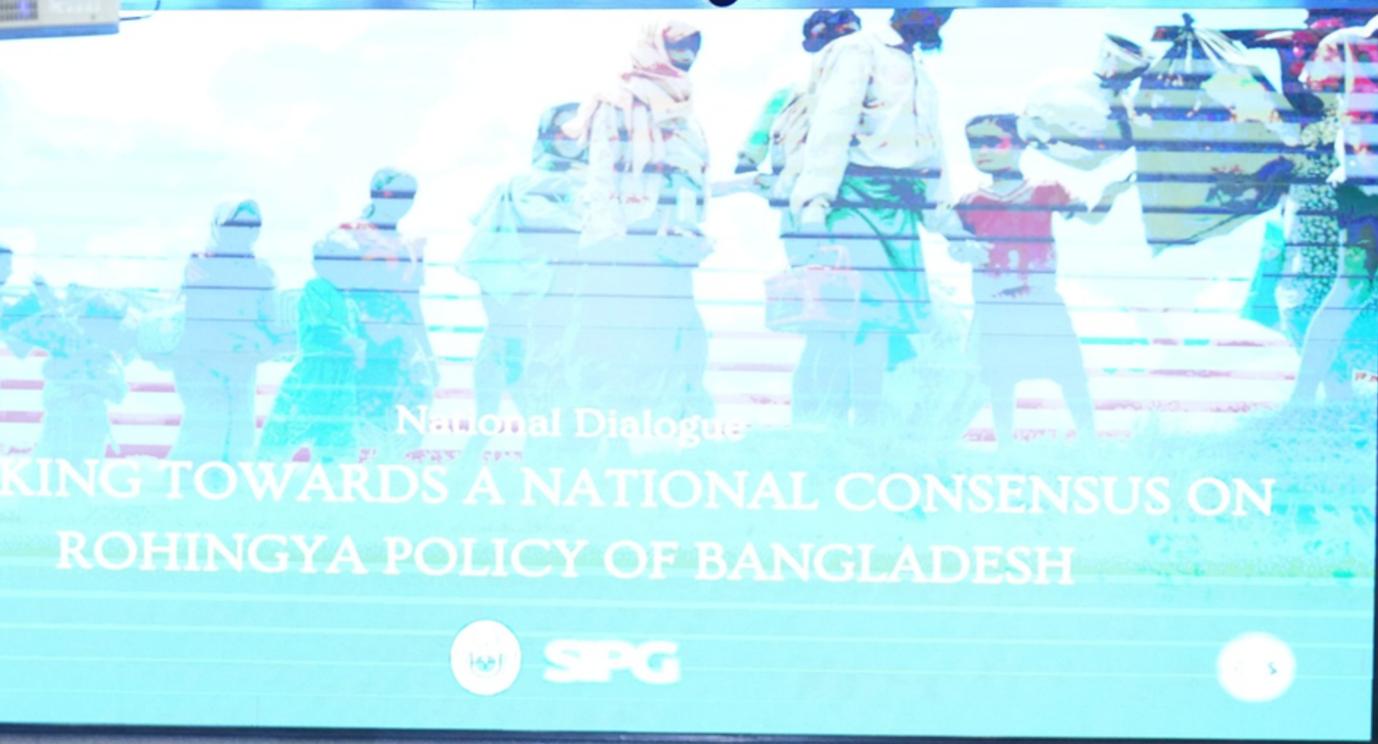


Photo courtesy: South Asian  
Institute of Policy and Governance

## 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](http://www.rohingya.org)**

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For more information, please contact:  
Dr. Mohammad Habib Ullah  
Email: [arno@rohingya.org](mailto:arno@rohingya.org)  
[info@rohingya.org](mailto:info@rohingya.org)