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ARAKAN

Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO)



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The chairman's message

Greetings, Esteemed Readers,
We extend to you a warm welcome to the rejuvenated pages of the "Arakan" magazine, which represents the insightful voice of the Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO). We are thrilled to announce the resumption of our journey with you in January 2024 after a brief hiatus.

In this issue, we delve into the reasons why the Rohingya people put their lives at risk by undertaking perilous journeys. We also explore the diverse activities of ARNO, highlighting the significant strides taken in our relentless pursuit of justice and advocacy.

As we commence this revitalized chapter of "Arakan," we invite you to engage with the rich content presented within these pages. We implore you to join us in our mission to amplify the voices of the Rohingya community and support our endeavours for justice and equity.

Sincerely,
Nurul Islam
Chairman, Arakan Rohingya National Organisation



A calamity brews over the calm seas

By Tin Thein

As traffickers dupe people into making a wretched sea journey this season,
the Rohingyas will once again learn refugee life is perilous...

Under the cover of darkness, they run towards the sea, towards the boat they think will take them to a new prosperous life. At least, that's what the traffickers had promised them. In a few minutes, the only sign that more than scores of people have been hiding in the foliage overlooking the Bay of Bengal are the footwear they discarded as they made the run towards the new life. Little do they understand they have been tricked.

In 2017, many of them made a boat journey over the Bay of Bengal towards Bangladesh to escape the guns of the Tatmadaw.

At that time, the availability of a boat to take them across the Bay of Bengal or the river Naaf was the difference between life and death. Almost 25,000 unarmed Rohingyas were massacred in less than two months, and countless women faced gruesome sexual violence. Children also suffered the same fate as adults.

This time they are escaping poverty and going towards the lands where there is 'lots of money waiting for them'. Instead, what will follow is weeks of torture, possible rape, mistreatment, and the possibility their rickety boat will sink, leaving behind no survivors.

There are no figures on how many vessels have sunk in this perilous journey. Many who go by sea don't have communications with their relatives once they leave their homes, and it is very likely entire families perish on the voyage without leaving any information. The ferocious Bay of Bengal cools down somewhat during the late autumn and winter, but climate change makes those calculations more uncertain, there have been two cyclones this season, both of them during the season when refugees cross by sea into South East Asia.

For years, the sea-faring refugees had gone to Malaysia, with many ending up in the notorious jungle camps of Thailand, now the site of mass graves containing the bones of Rohingya refugees. At that time, many had little choice as an ongoing genocide in Myanmar left Rohingyas with no choice but to flee.

Now the situation is a bit different. The gang of notorious traffickers with international connections had evolved with the situation. Promising them a rich life abroad, they dismiss the realities of the sea journey as media misinformation. They target vulnerable families and, using their networks, convince them to make the journey by sea.



Weeks of sea journey with little food kills many and turns others into desperate people. The victims now landing in Indonesia no longer receive a warm welcome for which the Indonesian coastal villagers had distinguished themselves. Instead, they are met with protests and calls for them to be taken back. Once public support for Rohingya refugees was high in the world's most populous Muslim nation. As the victims of trafficking continue to come in the thousands, the public has changed their minds. The fishing villages that had earlier rescued straddled Rohingya victims from the sea are now afraid that their villages will become refugee camps.

The Bay of Bengal will remain calm for the next few months. It will not be easy for Bangladesh law enforcement to crack down on the traffickers. Even small slums are havens for anti-social elements. The Rohingya refugee camps, by comparison, are huge slums stretching for miles in a frontier area. Cracking down on criminals in such a terrain is very difficult.

Meanwhile, as more boats continue their journey through the grey sea, not only will more Rohingya refugees suffer, but the people of Indonesia, once ardent supporters of their fellow Muslims, will probably have a change of heart.

The situation in Indonesia will become more difficult in the next few weeks. Generally, the calm sea is a metaphor for peace and happiness. But in this season, the calm sea will bring another calamity for the Rohingya.

ARNO Activities

Burma Summit 2

hosted by the Congress of Nations and States and the Konar Center at Nazareth University
bit.ly/3v7cFt8

ARNO delegation with the US commission on international religious freedom, US Department of state.



"Gathering with members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) alongside colleagues from diverse Myanmar ethnic backgrounds."



ARNA Refugee Committee members' disc

ARNA Refugee Committee holds a meeting and urges patience and a proper moral code of conduct

Members of the ARNA refugee committee held a meeting on December 2 to discuss the prevailing situation in the refugee camps.

It was acknowledged that the situation of the Rohingya community remains grim and in the last six years, steps to return to the homeland have not yielded any success.

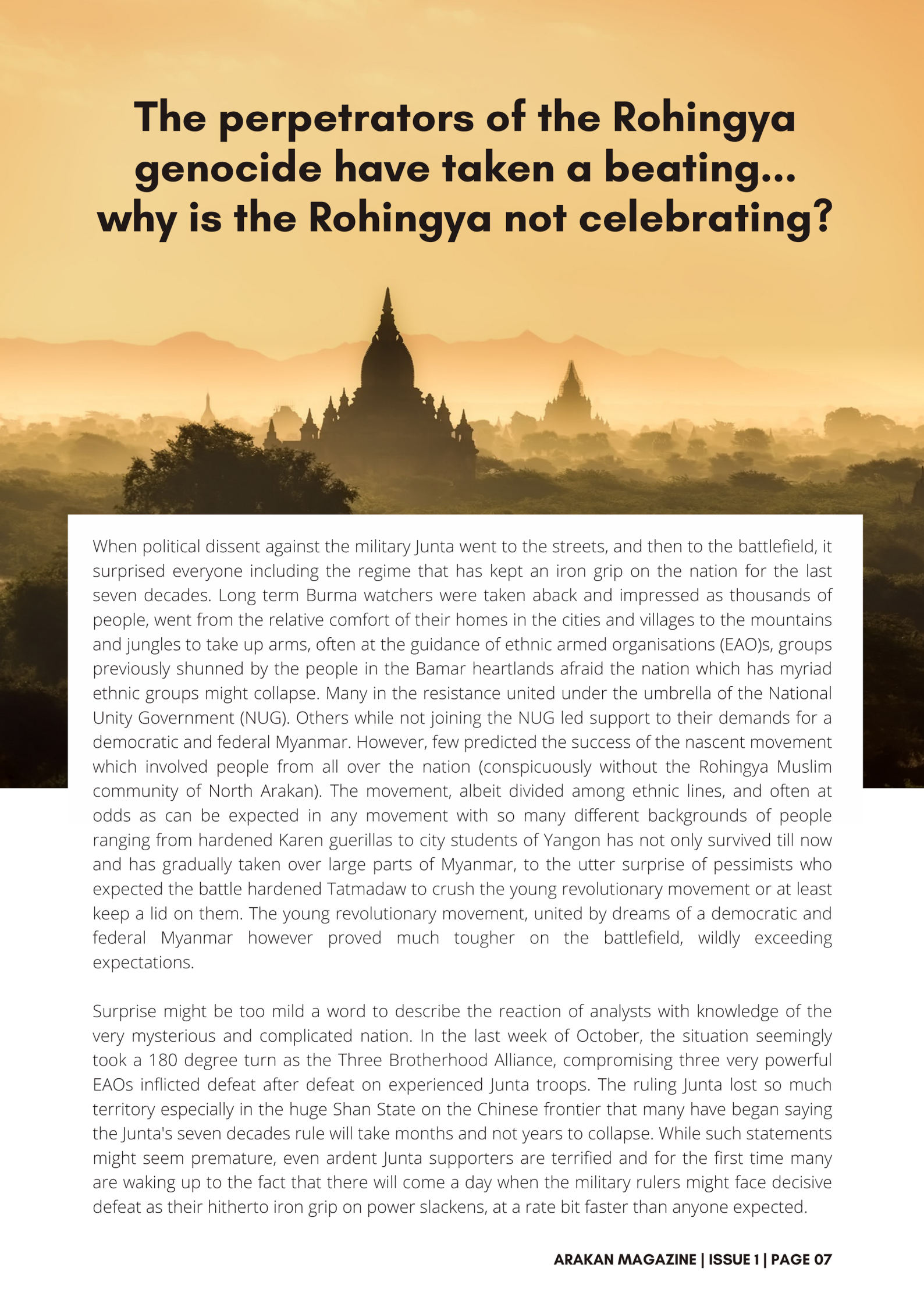
They also discussed the situation back home where Tatmadaw officials have warned around 40 prominent Rohingya elders not to cooperate with the Arakan Army and spread the message among the Rohingya community to not pass intelligence regarding the activities of the SAC. The AA has been swiftly gaining ground in Arakan and in Northern Myanmar where they are part of the powerful Kokang led three Brotherhood Alliance.

The ongoing fighting between the Arakan Army and the Tatmadaw has left the few remaining Rohingyas in a state of fear and confusion as both sides threaten the Rohingyas not to cooperate with the other.

Meanwhile, ARNA expressed their desire to establish a permanent office in the camp premises and make subcommittees in all the camps.

The state of affairs in the refugee camp was discussed, and it was stressed that in the prevailing situation, ARNA members need to meet the situation with patience (sabr) and be morally upright.

The perpetrators of the Rohingya genocide have taken a beating... why is the Rohingya not celebrating?



When political dissent against the military Junta went to the streets, and then to the battlefield, it surprised everyone including the regime that has kept an iron grip on the nation for the last seven decades. Long term Burma watchers were taken aback and impressed as thousands of people, went from the relative comfort of their homes in the cities and villages to the mountains and jungles to take up arms, often at the guidance of ethnic armed organisations (EAO)s, groups previously shunned by the people in the Bamar heartlands afraid the nation which has myriad ethnic groups might collapse. Many in the resistance united under the umbrella of the National Unity Government (NUG). Others while not joining the NUG led support to their demands for a democratic and federal Myanmar. However, few predicted the success of the nascent movement which involved people from all over the nation (conspicuously without the Rohingya Muslim community of North Arakan). The movement, albeit divided among ethnic lines, and often at odds as can be expected in any movement with so many different backgrounds of people ranging from hardened Karen guerillas to city students of Yangon has not only survived till now and has gradually taken over large parts of Myanmar, to the utter surprise of pessimists who expected the battle hardened Tatmadaw to crush the young revolutionary movement or at least keep a lid on them. The young revolutionary movement, united by dreams of a democratic and federal Myanmar however proved much tougher on the battlefield, wildly exceeding expectations.

Surprise might be too mild a word to describe the reaction of analysts with knowledge of the very mysterious and complicated nation. In the last week of October, the situation seemingly took a 180 degree turn as the Three Brotherhood Alliance, comprising three very powerful EAOs inflicted defeat after defeat on experienced Junta troops. The ruling Junta lost so much territory especially in the huge Shan State on the Chinese frontier that many have began saying the Junta's seven decades rule will take months and not years to collapse. While such statements might seem premature, even ardent Junta supporters are terrified and for the first time many are waking up to the fact that there will come a day when the military rulers might face decisive defeat as their hitherto iron grip on power slackens, at a rate bit faster than anyone expected.

The Three Brotherhood Alliance consists of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA which despite its name is an overwhelmingly Kokang Chinese EAO), the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and the Arakan Army, made up of Rakhines from Arakan state. Surprisingly for many, especially those unfamiliar with the Kokang people, the de facto leaders of the alliance, this operation which has changed the ground equation with lightning speed has been made possible by the backing of China. Before the operations, this area, a part of the world associated with the primeval and mysterious Golden Triangle, had in fact become a hub of human smuggling victims forced to conduct sophisticated internet scams. The victims are mostly from China but there are cyber workers from all over the world, forced at gunpoint to perform these cyber scams which no doubt profited the Burmese regime, not a stranger to illicit business. The Burmese generals have long profited from the Yaba business into Bangladesh and Thailand and the income from the cyber scams was no different. Even when the country's main international backer China requested the regime to crack down on the human traffickers and the cyber scam, it responded with the usual insincere response generally reserved for countries like Bangladesh and Thailand, the former reeling not only from yaba but the burden of a million Rohingya refugees. Similarly, China, a mediator between Myanmar and Bangladesh on the issue of refugee repatriation can be expected to know Myanmar's diplomatic language. Unlike other neighbours, China, the second most powerful nation in the world did not hang back. China has huge influence among the Brotherhood Alliance and has given the groups huge logistical support. A baffled Junta found itself on the wrong side of China's traditional balancing act. Other rebels aided the operation and have seized the chance. PDFs all over the country have followed up on the victory of the Brotherhood Alliance capturing territory all over the country and there is new found positive energy among the rebels. However, as had happened so many times in Burma, one community, which has suffered the most at the hands of the Junta, does not share the positive energy of the rest of the country.

Long unrecognised by the vast majority of the country, accused of being illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, on the receiving end of many cruel racist discourse, the Rohingya Muslims, languishing in the refugee camps of Bangladesh, and even worse in the hellish IDP camps of North Arakan have found it difficult to share the positive spirit currently prevalent in Myanmar. In 2017, when the Junta unleashed some of their most brutal regiments in North Arakan leading to the first genocide of the 21st century, much of Myanmar, including the iconic leader of Burma's democracy movement Aung San Suu Kyi rejoiced. Victims of state propaganda since their early age, most thought of the unarmed and backward Muslim community as terrorists. Soldiers who had committed genocide were showered with flowers. There was relief in the country that the nation has been spared the scourge of Islamic terrorism thanks to the Tatmadaw. In three and a half years, the same people would feel the brutality of the Junta themselves. But by then, Rohingyas were already driven out of their homelands and languishing in overcrowded refugee camps across the border. While many Burmese after witnessing the brutality of the Junta expressed much belated solidarity with Rohingya survivors, and NUG recognised the Rohingya, old habits die hard and underneath the surface, racism remains. After decades of racism, the Rohingyas find it difficult to believe that someone has pressed a delete button on the institutionalised racism which has become inherent in the early years following the independence of Myanmar. With no representation among the PDFs, there is nothing to convince the Rohingyas their fortune has changed.



Also important is the fact that along with the MNDAA and the TNLA, the Rakhine insurgent movement AA had also taken part in the operation. The Rakhines, the majority community of Arakan had once had an amicable relationship with the Muslims but those are ancient stories. In recent decades, and especially after the riots of 2012 which killed and displaced thousands of Rohingyas, relations between the two communities have hit a historic low. In the state capital Akyab; whereas the Rakhines had a slim majority before 2012, the city is almost completely free of Rohingyas with the remaining population herded into the ghetto of Aung Minglar behind barbed wires. In all townships west of the Mayu river, Rohingyas were either forced into IDP camps, or forced to move west of the Mayu river, the precise area of operations conducted by the Tatmadaw in 2017.

Riots of this scale are seldom if ever not organised by vested quarters and this riot, albeit overshadowed in the international arena by the genocide of 2017 remains in the memory of the Rohingya and probably the Rakhine people as well. It is seen as a prelude to the operation of 2017 to drive out the Rohingya population from their homeland. At that time, the AA was a new force organising in Kachin state. However, at present it has huge popularity and can claim to represent the Rakhine population. It is doubtless one of the most powerful of the EAOs fighting the Junta. While at present the Junta might seem to be on the backfoot, over the long term it had played the divide and rule card very well. A common enemy has failed to unite the Rakhine and Rohingya. While the riots of 2012 were planned by the Tatmadaw, foot soldiers were from the Rakhine community and there is suspicion that many have infiltrated the ranks of the Arakan Army. A traumatised Rohingya community fears that the rioters of 2012 having infiltrated the ranks of the heavily armed AA, will not let the million plus refugee population return to their former homes.

So even as the perpetrators of the Rohingya genocide have taken an unprecedented beating, the mood among the Rohingya community is one of apprehension rather than celebration. In the complex land that is Myanmar, such contradictory emotions might be the order of the day and might continue to baffle outsiders.

— The ongoing Rohingya exodus – will it ever end?

By Habib Siddiqui



The United Nations has rightly described the Rohingya as “the most persecuted minority in the world.” Denied citizenship, they are also the largest stateless people in our time. They are the victims of a religio-fascist eliminationist policy that enjoys wide support within the Buddhist-majority Myanmar (Burma).

The Naga Min Operation of 1978–79 saw the exodus of 300,000 Rohingyas to Bangladesh. The Pyi Thaya Operation of 1991–92 saw the forced exodus of some 2,68,000 Rohingyas to Bangladesh. Violent clashes in the Rakhine (Arakan) state continued in 2012 and 2015, displacing more Rohingya.

In October 2016, following an attack on some members of the Myanmar border police, the military started a crackdown on Rohingya, blaming them for the rebellion. This sent about 87,000 Rohingya rushing to Bangladesh for refuge.

In August 2017, armed attacks, massive-scale violence, and serious human rights violations forced hundreds of thousands of Rohingya to flee their homes in the Rakhine State. Entire villages were burned to the ground, and thousands of Rohingya were killed. Rape was used as a weapon of war to terrorize the minority community. Many walked for days through jungles and undertook dangerous sea journeys across the Bay of Bengal to reach safety in Bangladesh.

According to the UNHCR, now, more than 960,000 people – 52% children and 51% females – have found safety in Bangladesh, with a majority living in the Cox Bazar region – home to the world's largest refugee camp. They face difficult living conditions and are under constant threat from natural disasters. The camps are overcrowded, lack sufficient sanitation and hygiene, and are poorly lit. Heavy monsoon rains have often triggered landslides and flash floods in the refugee camps, displacing thousands of Rohingya. Since 2021, to decongest the 33 camps in Cox's Bazar, nearly 30,000 refugees have been relocated to Bhasan Char island by the Government of Bangladesh.

Rohingya refugees have also sought refuge in other neighbouring countries like Thailand and India (21,000), with smaller numbers settling in Indonesia, Nepal and other countries across the region.

According to the UN, some 600,000 Rohingyas remain inside the apartheid state of Myanmar, where they continue to face unfathomable persecution. As I have noted elsewhere, the Rohingyas are persecuted and denied their rights to citizenship simply because of their "otherness" in religion, race and ethnicity. Due to the decade-long 'slow-burning' genocide, more Rohingyas now live as refugees outside their ancestral home of Arakan. It is feared that if the forced exodus is not stopped, there may not be too many Rohingyas left inside their ancestral homes of Arakan.

In their suffering, the Rohingya may find a parallel of sorts with those of the early Muslims of Arabia. In the early years of the Prophet Muhammad's (S) prophethood of Islam, the small nascent community of Muslim believers in Makkah were violently persecuted by the pagan Arabs. Consider, e.g., the case of Bilal ibn Rabah (RA), a slave of Umayyah bin Khalaf, one of the sworn enemies of the Prophet (S). He would be dragged into the desert in the boiling heat of midday, and a large rock was placed on his chest as he was told to give up his faith in Islamic monotheism and submit to the idols - Lat and 'Uzza. To Umayyah's dismay, Bilal only replied, "Ahad! Ahad!" (One! One!). As reported in Tabaqat by historian Ibn Sa'd, a rope was tied around Bilal's neck, and Umayyah ordered children to drag him in the streets of Makkah. 'Ammar and his parents, Sumayyah and Yasir (RA), were three of the early converts. 'Ammar's parents were tortured to death, making them the first martyrs in Islam. Subsequently, 'Ammar himself was tortured, so much so that he had no choice but to verbally renounce Islam to the polytheists. Abdullah bin Mas'ud (RA), a new convert, was beaten so badly for reciting the verse of the Qur'an in the grand mosque of Ka'ba that he bled profusely. Khabbab bin al-'Arat (RA), an early convert, said, "One day, I found myself in a situation where I had been seized by a group of people. They lit a fire and threw me onto the burning coals. One of them threw me onto the burning coal, and another placed his feet on my chest. It was only my back that saved me from the burning ground." "... there was nothing to put this fire out other than the flesh on my back."

Despite such abuses, the Muslim community grew in numbers, which increased the frequency and intensity of persecution and torture at the hands of the polytheists. Even the prophet Muhammad (S) was subjected to such abuse. One day, while he was praying near the Ka'ba, Uqba ibn Abu Mu'ayt, a polytheist, threw the entrails of a sacrificed camel over him. His own uncle Abu Lahab's wife Umm Jamil would regularly dump filth outside his door and placed thorns in the path to his house.

The condition for the nascent community of believers in Islam became so unbearable that a small group of Muslims chose to seek asylum in Abyssinia (today's Ethiopia), which was ruled by Negus, a Christian king. When the chiefs of Makkah came to know that some Muslims had gone to Abyssinia, they sent their emissaries to drive out the asylum-seekers. They claimed that the Muslims in Abyssinia were not refugees from persecution but rather fugitives from justice and law and requested that the king extradite them to Makkah. The Muslims were brought to the king by his emissary, and it was Ja'far ibn Abi Talib (RA), the cousin of the Prophet (S), who eloquently defended the Muslims, saying thus:

"O King, we were a people in a state of ignorance and immorality, worshipping idols and eating the flesh of dead animals, committing all sorts of abomination and shameful deeds, breaking the ties of kinship, treating guests badly, and the strong among us exploited the weak. We remained in this state until God sent us a Prophet, one of our own people whose lineage, truthfulness, trustworthiness, and integrity were well-known to us. He called us to worship God alone and to renounce the stones and the idols which we and our ancestors used to worship beside God. He commanded us to speak the truth, to honour our promises, to be kind to our relations, to be helpful to our neighbours; to cease all forbidden acts, to abstain from bloodshed, to avoid obscenities and false witness; to not appropriate an orphan's property nor slander chaste women. He ordered us to worship God alone and not to associate anything with Him, to uphold prayer, to give charity and to fast in the month of Ramadan. We believed in him and what he brought to us from God, and we follow him in what he has asked us to do, and we keep away from what he forbade us from doing. Thereupon, O King, our people attacked us, visited the severest punishment on us to make us renounce our religion and take us back to the old immorality and the worship of idols. They oppressed us, made life intolerable for us and obstructed us from observing our religion. So, we left for your country, choosing you before anyone else, desiring your protection and hoping to live in Justice and peace in your midst."

The Negus was impressed and convinced of the authenticity of this religion, and said to the Makkan delegates, "Go. For, by God, I will never surrender them to you."

The polytheists did not cease to make their case. The next day, 'Amr ibn al-'As, one of the Makkan delegates, returned to the king and declared that the Muslims reject the divine nature of Christ. The king asked for Ja'far once again, and after being asked about Islam's view of Christ, Ja'far replied, "Our judgment of Jesus is the same as that of God and His Messenger, viz., Jesus is God's servant, His Prophet, His Spirit, and His command given unto Mary."

The Negus liked Ja'far's (RA) answer and allowed the Muslim asylum seekers full protection in his country.

Muslim refugees spent many years in Abyssinia before they could return to Madinah, where the Prophet (S) had migrated after withstanding thirteen years of brutal persecution in Makkah.

Will the diaspora Rohingya community have a similar fate enabling them to return safely to their ancestral home?

ARNO Press Releases

ARNO condemns military build-up in Arakan, led by Myanmar Junta

09 November, 2023

The Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO) has learned that the Myanmar military junta is deploying forces all over the Rakhine (Arakan) state in Burma. ARNO is not surprised that barely a week after visiting Bangladesh to assess the feasibility of repatriation of Rohingya nationals, the military is now creating – what appears to be – a volatile situation with the Arakan Army.

Over the last few decades, the Rohingya people have become witnesses to coordinated offenses by the junta which inevitably lead to the death and murder of Rohingya people and innocent civilians. Media reports indicate that police officers are being arrested and that preparations are underway for a war. ARNO has been informed by Rohingya people in the Arakan that groups are claiming to protect them, however, we know this is false and misleading information. The Rohingya remain completely defenseless and unprotected, once again.

ARNO calls upon:

- The UN Security Council demands that the military junta of Myanmar stop all acts of violence within the country of Myanmar, particularly targeting ethnic minority groups. The violence in Myanmar has continued to spill into the borders of Thailand, India, and China which will only lead to regional instability.
- The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) condemns these maneuvers in the Arkan, consistent with the 5-point Consensus, given what is likely to be coordinated and wanton violence, which will inevitably target innocent Rohingya people.
- For Bangladesh, India, China, Thailand, who will be impacted by the violence and potential refugees, to demand that Myanmar and the Arakan Army cease any plans for violence and all possible escalation of violence.

ARNO reminds the military junta that the limits of tolerating blanket impunity has been reached by the people of Burma. ARNO reminds the military junta and all other parties in the Arakan of the Provisional Measures ordered by the International Court of Justice, the pending International Criminal Court investigation, and the universal jurisdiction cases in Argentina, Germany, Turkey, and the Philippines.

For more information, please contact:

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Landmark visit by Ethnic and Religious Minority Groups from Burma

23 October, 2023

Representatives of a diverse cross-section of Burmese ethnic and religious minority groups, including representatives of the Rohingya, Burmese Muslim, Kachin, Chin, and Karen communities, concluded an important diplomatic visit to New York as part of their intensified engagement with the international community. The visit covered a series of meetings, including with the UN Security Council, the Office of the UN Special Envoy, ASEAN members Malaysia, Indonesia, and Myanmar, the EU, and OIC, to discuss the urgent situation on the ground in Myanmar and the consequences of the Rohingya genocide.

The visit occurred on the eve of the heinous bombardment that took place on the Mone Lai Khat IDP camp in Kachin State, which resulted in the death of 29 innocent civilians, including children. The bombardment was the latest brutal act by the military junta since its unlawful military coup of February 2021. To this end, the visit to New York was framed in the context of the leading role of Burma's multiethnic and religious minority representatives in bringing about a political end to the conflict. Against this backdrop, the delegation used their meetings to urge the international community to:

1. Keep the Burma crisis on the agenda. Despite efforts to portray the Myanmar crisis as a protracted conflict, the facts on the ground are that ethnic groups are expanding their terrain, while the Junta is struggling to enforce its control. The crisis is overspilling into the region and requires greater international focus and political will to address its root causes. The situation will only worsen with ever greater humanitarian consequences.
2. Demonstrate UNSC leadership to create an environment conducive for a political solution. The Security Council should take action to stop, limit, and impose a cost for the Junta's increasing use of indiscriminate air attacks. While Security Council resolution 2669 (2022) was an important milestone, implementation has remained a challenge. The Security Council must now set out a new enforceable resolution that protects civilians on the ground. The prohibition of aviation fuel is a necessity. If a new resolution cannot be agreed by the Security Council, then Member States must take steps unilaterally to save lives in Myanmar.
3. Increase coordination towards shared goals in Burma. There remains a disconnect between the regional and wider international community on how to address the crisis. A piecemeal approach only benefits the Junta. There is an urgent need for greater alignment between the like-minded Member States of ASEAN and Western allies to focus on coherent action to leverage the Junta and to ensure the protection of civilians. This includes credible policy options to increase sanctions against the military and its financial networks in the region, pressure on the EU to revoke its trade agreement with the Junta, greater support to civil society and governance structures in areas not under the Junta's control, and increased delivery of cross-border aid. International law is very clear that aid must be delivered to those in need through the most direct routes.

Underpinning the diplomatic engagements in New York is the role and importance of the inclusion of Burma's ethnic and religious minority communities. Burma's recent history of marginalization of these key voices is evident to all, starting with the genocide of the Rohingya. Burma's ethnic and religious minority communities can no longer be ignored in order to enable an inclusive political process that finally leads to a credible and lasting democratic transition.

The Signatories

- Kyaw Win, Spokesperson and Head of International Relations of Muslim of Myanmar Multi-ethnic Consultative Committee (MMMCC) and Founder and Director of the Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN).
- Dr Habib Ullah, Member of the Convening Council of the Congress of Nations and States, Chair of the Burma Dialogue and General Secretary of Arakan Rohingya National Organisation.
- Rosalinn Zahau, Chin Human Rights Organization.
- Naw Hser Hser, Representative of the Women's League of Burma in the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) and Advocacy Director of the Karen Women's Organization (KWO).
- Moon Nay Li, Joint General Secretary of Women's League of Burma and Spokesperson of Kachin Women's Association Thailand.





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. ARNO is a diplomatic and advocacy organization made up of Rohingya leaders.

rohingya.org

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