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# RELIGIOUS CONFLICT BETWEEN THERAVADA BUDDHIST MONKS AND ROHINGYA IN MYANMAR: *A CALL TO RESPONSE*

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## CONTENT

- I. Introduction
- II. Religious Conflict: What is it?
- III. Christianity in Myanmar as Christocentric–pacifists
- IV. The Roots and Causes of Religious Conflict in Myanmar
  - A. Rohingya
    - i. *Religious Principles and Practices*
    - ii. *Major Historical Cases of Violence*
    - iii. *Existing Situations their Demands*
  - B. Theravada Buddhist Monks in Myanmar
    - i. *Religious Principles and Practices*
    - ii. *Influence toward the Government and Civilian*
    - iii. *Reason for Violence*
    - iv. *969 Movement and Anti-Conversion Bill*
- V. Responses toward Religious Conflict in Myanmar
  - A. External Responses
  - B. Internal Responses
    - i. *The Government Responses*
    - ii. *The Civilian Responses*
    - iii. *The Christians Responses*
- VI. Conclusion: Proposal

# “RELIGIOUS CONFLICT BETWEEN THERAVADA BUDDHIST MONKS AND ROHINGYA IN MYANMAR: A CHRISTIAN APPROACH”

## Introduction

Myanmar, consists of eight tribes, exists at the Southeast Asia. It is a multi-religious country. Since the last decades, “Theravada Buddhism” is practiced as the state religion. Statistically, the major religions such as “Buddhism is 75.2%, Christianity 8.8%, Islam 5.6%, and Hinduism 1.6%.”<sup>1</sup> Buddhism was introduced in Myanmar during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC,<sup>2</sup> and later from 11<sup>th</sup> century, Burmese King Anawrahta, who was converted by a Mon bhikkhu, Shin Arahana to Theravada Buddhism,<sup>3</sup> promoted Theravada Buddhism in Myanmar. Thus, the influence of Buddhism was dramatically increased, later, it became the cultural heritage for the Burmese. Primarily Chin tribes, Kachin tribes and Kayin tribes are known as Christian ethnic tribes in Myanmar. “Hinduism in Burma is practiced by about 840,000 people.”<sup>4</sup> Around 800,000 Muslim Rohingyas live in Burma and about 80% living in the western state of Rakhine. They have been fighting on and off since the 1940s to create an Islamic state in Western Burma.<sup>5</sup> As a result, particularly from 2012, the religious conflict between Theravada Buddhist monks who are identically conservative to their beliefs and Rohingya

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<sup>1</sup> “Country: Myanmar (Burma)”, Joshua Project, accessed February 10, 2015, <http://joshuaproject.net/countries/BM#Religions>.

<sup>2</sup> Ashoka not only helped in spreading the religion within India but outside India as well. The main reason for the spread of Buddhism into Southeast Asia was the support of the emperor Ashoka himself. Teams of missionaries were sent by him all over the Indian sub-continent, i.e. to Sri Lanka, Myanmar (Previous Burma), and other neighbouring areas so as to send the message of Buddhism. The missionaries sent by Ashoka to the other countries were well received by them and the conversions took place easily because of the influence and the personal power Ashoka exercised. “The Spread of Buddhism outside India,” Buddhist Tourism, accessed February 10, 2015, <http://www.buddhist-tourism.com/buddhism-information/spread-of-buddhism.html>.

<sup>3</sup> D. C. Ahir, *Buddha Gaya through the Ages* (Delhi: South Asia Books, 1994), 71.

<sup>4</sup> “Table: Religious Composition by Country, in Numbers,” Pew Research Center, December 18, 2012, accessed February 10, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/table-religious-composition-by-country-in-numbers/>.

<sup>5</sup> “Myanmar, Bangladesh Leaders to Discuss Rohingya,” AFP News, June 29, 2012, accessed February 10, 2015, <http://www.afp.com/en/search/site/%E2%80%9CMyanmar%2C%20Bangladesh%20leader%20%E2%80%98to%20discuss%20Rohingya%27%E2%80%9D/>.

Muslims emerged. Accordingly, this paper urges to identify the conflicts or violence between the two parties, in general, to identify the responses from the government, civilians and Christians; and finally to state the proposals.

### Religious Conflict or Violence: What is it?

“Religious violence is a term that covers phenomena where religion is either the subject or object of violent behavior.”<sup>6</sup> Religious violence is, specifically, violence that is motivated by or in reaction to religious precepts, texts, or doctrines. This includes violence against religious institutions, persons, objects, or when the violence is motivated to some degree by some religious aspect of the target or precept of the attacker.<sup>7</sup> These are the definitions.

Now, practically religious violence is practiced in Islam. An influential Islamic Republic of Ayatollah Khomeini said, “War is a blessing for the world and for every nation. It is Allah himself who commands men to wage war and to kill.”<sup>8</sup> But as for Christians, they are obligated to follow Christ. They are taught to be non-violence by loving their enemies and praying for them. Moreover, Theravada Buddhism is fundamentally a non-violence religion. They are taught not to join any act of violence and ultimately not to kill any living beings.

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<sup>6</sup> James K. Wellman, Jr. and Kyoko Tokuno, “Is Religious Violence Inevitable?,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43, no.3 (September 200): 291. (291-196)

<sup>7</sup> “Religious Violence,” Link TV World News, accessed February 10, 2015, <http://news1.linktv.org/topics/religious-violence>.

<sup>8</sup> If one allows the infidels to continue playing their role of corrupters on Earth, their eventual moral punishment will be all the stronger. Thus, if we kill the infidels in order to put a stop their (corrupting) activities, we have indeed done them a service. For their eventual punishment will be lost. To allow the infidels to stay alive means to let them do more corrupting. To kill them is a surgical operation commanded by Allah the Creator.... Those who follow the rules of the Koran are aware that we have to apply the laws of *qissas* (retribution) and that we have to kill.... War is a blessing for the world and for every nation. It is Allah himself who commands men to wage war and to kill. Source: Roger Scruton, *The West and the Rest: Globalization and the Terrorist Threat* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2002), 118.

## Christianity in Myanmar as Christocentric–pacifists

Political and religious conflicts occur in Myanmar from time to time. Religious persecutions arise since Buddhism became the state religion at 1966 and all missionaries were expelled by the Burmese government. Since then, religions apart from Buddhism are marginalized. Churches were burned. Promote in almost any departments as being Christians are denied. In 2007, “the military regime in Burma was intended on wiping out Christianity in the country.”<sup>9</sup> Though the country pursues Democratic path from 2011 under the leadership of President Thei Sein, it seems religious freedom is not fully implemented. And yet Christians seem silent to claim their rights.

Since the initial contact with foreign missionaries in Myanmar during 13<sup>th</sup> centuries,<sup>10</sup> Christians in Myanmar have faithfully proclaimed Jesus Christ as the ultimate way, life and truth for salvation. As stated earlier, Chin, Kachin, Karen and some of the Shan are known as Christian tribes and these Christians are devoted to the teaching of Christ<sup>11</sup> in which they are not to support violence. Generally, they are “Christocentric–pacifists” which literally means professing Jesus at the center of Christian theological and ethical position and also obliging the Old Testament to be

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Pattison, “Burma Orders Christians to be Wiped Out,” the Telegraph, January 21, 2007, accessed February 12, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1540121/Burma-orders-Christians-to-be-wiped-out.html>; see further: “Burma,” Persecution: International Christian Concern, accessed February 12, 2015, <http://www.persecution.org/category/countries/asia/burma/>.

<sup>10</sup> Myanmar had received religion-based education, namely, Buddhist monastery education as early as seven centuries before the introduction of Christian missionary education in the early twentieth centuries. Since 13th century A.D., Myanmar began to experience its earliest contact with Christian presence, most possibly of Nestorian Christians who accompanied the Tartar Chinese soldiers of Emperor Kublai Khan when they came to fight against the Burmans during the period of Bagan dynasties (1044-1287). These Nestorians seemed to be Christian artists as the painting of a Christian cross, painted with the Buddhist lotus in its middle on a brick wall inside King Kyansittas famous grotto in the ruined city of Bagan, has shown. Source: Samuel Ngun Ling, “Challenges, Problems, and Prospects of Theological Education in Myanmar,” CTC Bulletin, accessed February 12, 2015, <http://cca.org.hk/home/ctc/ctc06-01/ctc06-01e.htm>; and Ba Kin (Hanthawaddy), “Foreign Missionary Organizations in Burma” (Rangoon: Hanthawaddy Press, 1963), 11. There is no clear evidence that this painting was painted by Nestorian Christian soldiers. The painting itself no longer exists to be observable.

<sup>11</sup> Jesus appeared to teach pacifism during his ministry when he told his disciples: You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. (Matt. 5:38-39). Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. (Matt. 5:43-48, Luke 6:27-28). Put your sword back in its place...for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. (Matt. 26:52). Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. (Matt. 5:9). Source: Edgar W. Orr, *Christian Pacifism* (London: C.W. Daniel Co., 1958), 33.

understood in light of Christ. As a result of that Christians in Myanmar were somehow blamed for not joining the protest, for instance Saffron revolution.

## The Roots and Causes of Religious Conflict in Myanmar

### Rohingya<sup>12</sup>

Though there are obtainable etymological versions for the term Rohingya, “the term was absent in historical sources before 1950s.”<sup>13</sup> Rohingya is the self-identity and they were the descendants of the first Muslims who began migrating to northern Arakan (former name of Rakhine State of Myanmar) in the eight century.”<sup>14</sup> The majority of Muslims, and all Rohingyas in Myanmar are addressed as “*kala*” which literally mean “black.”<sup>15</sup> When the word “*kala*” is used, the Burmese identifies them as “*black people*.” Many of the “*kalas*” except the Rohingyas in Myanmar are Buddhists. Nevertheless, they often faced discrimination of being black in skin and called as “*kala*.” The Myanmar national broadcastings, movie dramas and “Anyeint”<sup>16</sup> often used the term “*kala or kala-mah*” for joking the physical appearance of the “*kalas*.”

Here the general timeline for a brief history of Rohingya in Myanmar,<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Under this title, some ideas of the research is based on: “Rohingya and the Persecution and Suffering they Endure in Myanmar,” Facts and Details, accessed February 23, 2015, [http://factsanddetails.com/southeast-asia/Myanmar/sub5\\_5d/entry-3057.html#chapter-5](http://factsanddetails.com/southeast-asia/Myanmar/sub5_5d/entry-3057.html#chapter-5); “Persecution of Muslims in Burma,” Wikipedia, accessed February 23, 2015, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution\\_of\\_Muslims\\_in\\_Burma](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Muslims_in_Burma); and “Crimes against Humanity in Western Burma: the Situation of the Rohingyas,” *Irish Centre for Human Rights, 2010*, Oxford Burma Alliance, accessed February 23, 2015, [http://www.oxfordburmaalliance.org/uploads/9/1/8/4/9184764/rohingya\\_report\\_2010.pdf](http://www.oxfordburmaalliance.org/uploads/9/1/8/4/9184764/rohingya_report_2010.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> James B. Minahan, *Ethnic Groups of South Asia and the Pacific: an Encyclopedia* (Ethnic Groups of the World) (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2012), 274.

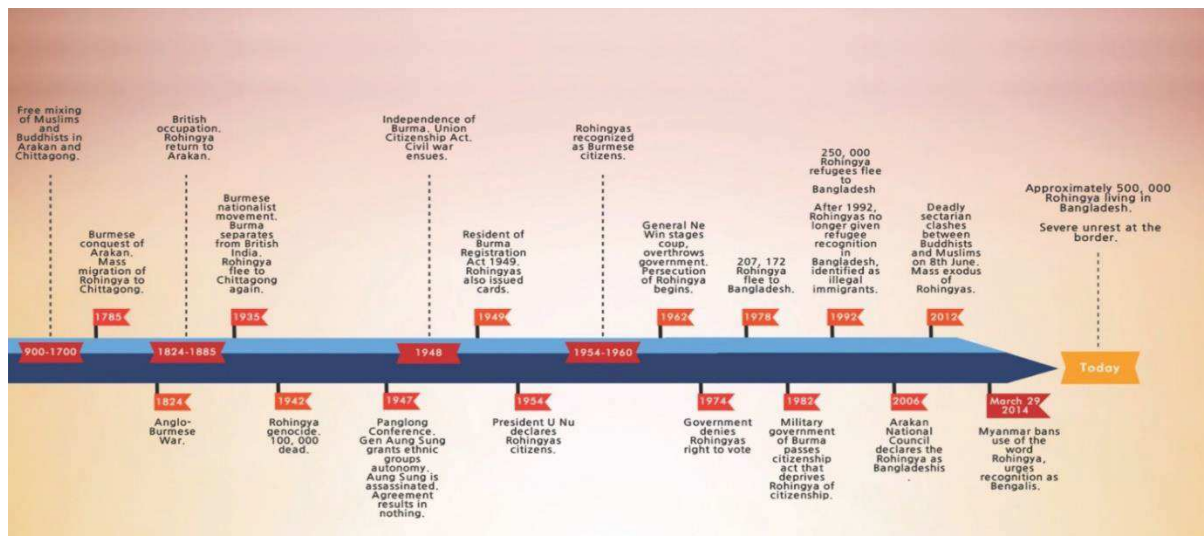
<sup>14</sup> Aris Ananta and Evi Nurvidya Arifin, eds., *International Migration in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2004), 267.

<sup>15</sup> It is not the Burmese word but Indian. For the Burmese worldview, it often associated with despised.

<sup>16</sup> Anyeint is a traditional Burmese entertainment form that combines dance with instrumental music, song, and comedy routines, in theatrical performances. Source: Donald M. Seekins, *Anyeint (Anyeint Pwe): Historical Dictionary of Burma (Myanmar)* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 77.

<sup>17</sup> Ahmad Ibrahim, “The Rohingya: A History of Persecution,” the Daily Star, June 09, 2014, accessed February 12, 2015, <http://www.thedailystar.net/op-ed/the-rohingya-a-history-of-persecution-27652>.





The timeline provides evidences that the Rohingya were the immigrants to Myanmar from Chittagong (Bangladesh) and according to the residents of Burma registration act 1949, the Rohingyas were also issued cards; and in 1954, the Burmese Government U Nu declared the Rohingyas as Burmese citizens. However beginning from 1962, it is stated that,

The Rohingya or Roh in Myanmar face strict laws. They are not allowed to travel freely from village to village. They may only marry other Rohingya. The government also restricts their educational options. In 2005, students at Sittwe University, Rakhine State's primary institution, were forced to discontinue their studies. Similar restrictions have now spread throughout Rakhine State. The Roh also face random taxation, confiscation of land and cattle and forced labor. Added to these miseries are economic insecurity and extreme poverty.<sup>18</sup>

### *Religious Principles and Practices*

Sunni Islam with elements of Sufi worship is practiced by 4%<sup>19</sup> or 980,000<sup>20</sup> of the population of Myanmar. Mosques and Madrasahs (religious schools) are present every quarter and village. "There are reported to be more than 5000 mosques in Burma, although the most

<sup>18</sup> "Rohingya of Myanmar," a People Loved, accessed February 12, 2015, <http://www.apeopleloved.com/myanmar/>.

<sup>19</sup> "East and Southeast Asia: Burma," The World Factbook, June 23, 2004, accessed February 12, 2015, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>.

<sup>20</sup> "Rohingya in Myanmar (Burma)," Joshua Project, accessed February 12, 2015, [http://joshuaproject.net/people\\_groups/11359/BM#religion](http://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/11359/BM#religion).

recent one was built in 1975.”<sup>21</sup> Customarily, men pray in congregations and women pray at home.<sup>22</sup> As for the religious principles, Sunni Islam has six articles of faith known as “the six pillars of Iman”<sup>23</sup> that all Sunni Muslims are united upon in belief.<sup>24</sup> Also they are obligated to uphold the “five pillars of Islam” in their daily lives.

Concerning violence, globally, “as of early 2008, 1,121 suicide bombers have blown themselves up in Iraq.”<sup>25</sup> Sunni suicide bombers have targeted not only thousands of civilians<sup>26</sup> but mosques, shrines,<sup>27</sup> wedding and funeral processions,<sup>28</sup> markets, hospitals, offices, and streets.<sup>29</sup> Sunni insurgent organizations include Ansar al-Islam.<sup>30</sup> But in Myanmar, the Rohingya Muslims (Sunni Islam) are powerless. Poverty is the serious concern for their livelihoods. Their legal rights for being the citizens of Myanmar are mercilessly rejected by the government. As a result, legitimately, they have no right to protest for their religious or ethnic freedom. Thus, they,

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<sup>21</sup> “Chronology for Rohingya (Arakanese) in Burma,” Minorities at Risk, accessed February 23, 2015, <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/chronology.asp?groupId=77501>.

<sup>22</sup> “Rohingya in Myanmar (Burma),” Joshua Project.

<sup>23</sup> 1) Belief in Allah, 2) Belief in the angels, 3) Belief in the revealed books, 4) Belief in the commissioned Messengers (peace be upon them), 5) Belief in the resurrection and the events of Qi amah, and 6) Belief in the predestination by Allah of all things, both the (seemingly) good and the (seemingly) bad. Source: “The Six Pillars of Iman,” Mission Islam, accessed February 12, 2015, <http://www.missionislam.com/knowledge/sixpillarsiman.htm>.

<sup>24</sup> Nancy Khalek, “Religion Library: Sunni Islam,” Patheos Library, accessed February 12, 2015, <http://www.patheos.com/Library/Sunni-Islam/Beliefs/Afterlife-and-Salvation.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Fisk, “The Cult of the Suicide Bomber,” Common Dreams, March 14, 2008, accessed February 12, 2015, <http://www.commondreams.org/views/2008/03/14/cult-suicide-bomber>.

<sup>26</sup> Barbara MacKinnon, *Ethics: Theory and Contemporary Issues, Concise Edition*, 8 ed. (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2015), 219.

<sup>27</sup> “Car Bomb Blast Near Iraq Shrine,” Aljazeera, April 14, 2007, accessed February 12, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2007/04/20085251415568701.html>.

<sup>28</sup> “Iraqi Funeral Procession Bombed; at Least 26 Killed,” CBC News | World, May 24, 2007, accessed February 12, 2015, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/iraqi-funeral-procession-bombed-at-least-26-killed-1.679220>.

<sup>29</sup> Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 203.

<sup>30</sup> “Country Reports on Terrorism 2005,” United States Department of State: Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, April 2006, accessed February 12, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/68049.pdf>.



wherever they can, search for shelters and helps. Finally, when Myanmar became a Democratic country, the Rohingyas starts voicing out their rights. Accordingly, the conflict between Rohingyas and Buddhist Monks began.<sup>31</sup>

### *Major Historical Cases of Violence*

Generally, the initial conflict toward the Muslim was in 11<sup>th</sup> century by the Burmese king Kyansittas when he assassinated “Yahman Khan (Nga Yamankan).”<sup>32</sup> Later Burmese kings such as Bayintnaung (1550-1589) banned the Islamic religious practices, king Alaungpaya (1752-1760) prohibited Muslims from practicing the Islamic method of killing cattle, and king Bodawpaya (1782–1819) arrested four prominent Burmese Muslim Imams from Myedu and killed them in Ava, the capital.<sup>33</sup> “In the 17th century, Indian Muslims residing in Arakan were massacred.”<sup>34</sup>

Maurice Collis stated that,

In 1930, anti-Indian riots were sparked by a labor issue at the Yangon port. After Indian workers at the port went on strike, the British firm Stevedores tried to break the strike by hiring Burmese workers. Realizing they'd lose their jobs, the Indian workers returned to work, and Stevedores then laid off the recently hired Burmese workers. The Burmese workers blamed Indian workers for their loss of jobs, and a riot broke out. At the port, at least 200 Indian workers were massacred and dumped into the river. Authorities fired upon armed rioters who refused to lay down their weapons, under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code. The riots rapidly spread throughout Burma, targeting Indians and Muslims.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Before 2012, the conflicts with Rohingya was not directly associated with the Buddhist monks.

<sup>32</sup> Nga Yamankan (1039–1084) was governor of Pegu (Bago) from 1077 to 1084, who raised an unsuccessful rebellion against Sawlu of Pagan Dynasty. He nearly succeeded. He captured and killed Sawlu. But he was driven out of Upper Burma by Sawlu's brother, Kyansittha and was killed while in retreat. Source: “Yamankan,” dbpedia, accessed February 23, 2015, <http://dbpedia.org:8890/page/Yamankan>.

<sup>33</sup> Moshe Yegar, *The Muslims of Burma: a Study of a Minority Group* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1972), 10-16.

<sup>34</sup> Yegar, *The Muslims of Burma*, 22-24.

<sup>35</sup> Maurice Collis, *Trials in Burma* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), xx. Also from “Persecution of Muslims in Burma,” Wikipedia, accessed February 23, 2015, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution\\_of\\_Muslims\\_in\\_Burma](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Muslims_in_Burma).

Moreover, “during World War II, the Japanese committed countless acts of rape, murder and torture against thousands of Rohingyas,”<sup>36</sup> and about 100,000 Rohingyas died in the genocide.<sup>37</sup> “Defeated, 40,000 Rohingyas eventually fled to Chittagong after repeated massacres by the Burmese and Japanese forces.”<sup>38</sup>

In 1962, when the General Ne Win came to power by asserting the military junta, Buddhism became the state religion of Myanmar and religious assertion “to be a Burmese is to be a Buddhist” was implemented. Hence, religious persecution was initiated. Churches were burned and Christian leaders were beaten and even killed. Foreign missionaries were expelled from the country. In addition, the stature of other religion particularly the Muslim was also changed. They lost their jobs just by being a Muslim as well as the Christian. Job promotion were denied. Some of them were expelled from the army. Religious gatherings, activities and practices except for Buddhist were denied. Christians and Muslims were treated as the outlanders.

In 1978 over 200,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh, following the ‘Nagamin’ (‘Dragon King’) operation of the Myanmar army. This military campaign directly targeted civilians, and resulted in widespread killings, rape and destruction of mosques and further religious persecution... Rohingyas were forced to work without pay by the Burmese army on infrastructure and economic projects, often under harsh conditions. Many other human rights violations occurred in the context of forced labour of Rohingya civilians by the security forces.<sup>39</sup>

In 1997, the tension toward the Muslim was associated by Burmese Buddhist monks. The conflict was concerned with political and religious causes. On March in Mandalay, “Buddhist monks went on a rampage and attacking eight mosques and starting street protests. On April, 18 mosques were destroyed and Muslim-owned businesses and property vandalized. Copies of the

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<sup>36</sup> Kurt Jonassohn with Karin Solveig Björnson, *Genocide and Gross Human Rights Violations in Comparative Perspective* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1999), 263.

<sup>37</sup> Ibrahim, “The Rohingya: A History of Persecution.”

<sup>38</sup> Syed Aziz al Ahsan, “Burma's Iron Hand towards Ethnic Minorities: The Rohingya Plight,” *Asian profile* 21, no. 4 (August 1993): 312. (311-316)

<sup>39</sup> “Rohingya and the Persecution and Suffering they Endure in Myanmar,” Facts and Details, accessed February 23, 2015, [http://factsanddetails.com/southeast-asia/Myanmar/sub5\\_5d/entry-3057.html#chapter-5](http://factsanddetails.com/southeast-asia/Myanmar/sub5_5d/entry-3057.html#chapter-5).

Koran were burnt.<sup>40</sup> In 2001, *Myo Pyauk Hmar Soe Kyauk Sa Yar* (or) The Fear of Losing One's Race and many other anti-Muslim pamphlets were widely distributed by monks.<sup>41</sup>

On May 15, 2001, anti-Muslim riots broke out in Taungoo, Pegu division, resulting in the deaths of about 200 Muslims, in the destruction of 11 mosques and the setting ablaze of over 400 houses. On May 15, the first day of the anti-Muslim uprisings, about 20 Muslims who were praying in the Han Tha mosque were killed and some were beaten to death by the pro-junta forces. On May 17, Lt. General Win Myint, Secretary No. 3 of the SPDC and deputy Home and Religious minister, arrived in Taungoo and curfew was imposed there until July 12, 2001.<sup>42</sup>

Due to the sectarian violence in Rakhine state in 2012, “As of 22 August, officially there had been 88 casualties – 57 Muslims and 31 Buddhists.”<sup>43</sup> More than 140,000 of the estimated 800,000 to 1.1 million Rohingya who lived in Myanmar’s western Rakhine State, they were pushed to dire displacement camps in 2012 during regional conflicts with the Burmese Buddhist monks. An estimated 100,000 Rohingya have since fled the country to escape violence and persecution.<sup>44</sup> They also said 31,884 displaced people are being sheltered at monasteries and schools. Of 2,528 houses that were burned down, 1,192 belonged to Rakhines and 1,336 belonged to Rohingyas.<sup>45</sup> In 2013, the “969 movement,” led by the Buddhist monk Wirathu who would accept to be called as the “Burmese Bin Laden,” forced a deliberate retaliation against the Rohingyas from the nation. According to the United Nations report in January

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<sup>40</sup> “Chronology for Rohingya (Arakanese) in Burma.”

<sup>41</sup> “Persecution of Muslims in Burma,” Hawaii Book Library, accessed February 23, 2015, <http://www.hawaiilibrary.net/article/whebn0010943601/persecution%20of%20muslims%20in%20burma>.

<sup>42</sup> “The Burmanet News,” Burma Library, July 16, 2001, accessed February 23, 2015, <http://www.burmalibrary.org/reg.burma/archives/200107/msg00034.html>.

<sup>43</sup> “The Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Ministry of Foreign Affairs,” Press Release, October 27, 2012, accessed February 23, 2015, <http://www.webcitation.org/6Bj9aSWM5>.

<sup>44</sup> Brian Pellot, “Why Won’t Aung San Suu Kyi Say the Word ‘Rohingya’? (COMMENTARY),” Religion News Service, December 4, 2014, accessed February 12, 2015, <http://www.religionnews.com/2014/12/04/wont-aung-san-suu-kyi-say-word-rohingya-commentary/>.

<sup>45</sup> “Myanmar Clashes: Muslim, Buddhist Communities Suffer Similar Damage,” The World Post, June 14, 2012, accessed February 23, 2015, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/14/myanmar-clashes\\_n\\_1596561.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/14/myanmar-clashes_n_1596561.html).

2014, “more than 40 Rohingya men, women and children were killed in Rakhine state in violence.”<sup>46</sup>

### *Existing Situations their Demands*

The Rohingyas<sup>47</sup> are the forgotten, stateless and unwanted people. The Rohingya along with hundreds of thousands of people in mainly ethnic minority border areas, who hold the documents ostensibly as part of a process of applying for citizenship. The United Nations in December 2014, urged Myanmar to grant the Rohingya access to citizenship.<sup>48</sup> Yet, they could be the only people on earth who do not have any human rights. “The Constitution of Myanmar states that any ethnic group that has lived within Burmese territory before 1823 are natives. It is strange, then, that Rohingyas are not included in this definition.”<sup>49</sup> Instead their requested-citizenships were rejected,<sup>50</sup> houses were burned, women were raped and children were mercilessly killed by the army and the Buddhists.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> “Why is There Communal Violence in Myanmar?,” BBC News Asia, July 3, 2014, accessed February 23, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-18395788>.

<sup>47</sup> Historically, the Rohingya have long been treated as “foreign” by the government and many Burmese, a situation that activists say has led to a deepening alienation from Rakhine’s Buddhists. They have been described as “invaders” and “terrorists” by Burmese using their newfound freedom of expression and easier access to the Internet to vent their anger on social networking sites and express anti-Rohingya sentiments that have simmered for decades. The government, many Burmese refuse to recognize the term “Rohingya”, referring to them as “Bengalis, and view them as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. Source: “Rohingya and the Persecution and Suffering they Endure in Myanmar,” Facts and Details.

<sup>48</sup> “Myanmar Cancels Rohingya Voting Rights,” Rohingya Vision, February 12, 2015, accessed February 23, 2015, <http://www.rvisiontv.com/myanmar-cancels-rohingya-voting-rights/>.

<sup>49</sup> Ibrahim, “The Rohingya: A History of Persecution,” the Daily Star.

<sup>50</sup> Myanmar will only consider providing citizenship to Muslim Rohingyas who meet certain “legal requirements” the government said Friday in response to a call from U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon to address the grievances of the stateless ethnic minority. Around 800,000 Muslim Rohingyas live in Rakhine state but most of them, according to rights groups, have been denied citizenship as they are considered by most in Myanmar and the government to be illegal immigrants. Most people in Myanmar call the Rohingyas “Bengali,” indicating that they have illegally immigrated from neighboring Bangladesh. Source: Khin Khin Ei, “Citizenship Only for Myanmar’s ‘Legal’ Rohingyas,” RFA, July 12, 2013, accessed February 23, 2015, <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/citizenship-07122013182036.html/>.

<sup>51</sup> The readers should not misunderstand that all the Buddhists and armies are not associated with the violence toward the Rohingyas. There are many Buddhists, monks and army who against those riots.

Many of them died due to hunger, thirst for water and sickness. Due to the fear of Buddhist riots, “many Rohingyas have fled to ghettos and refugee camps in neighboring Bangladesh, and to areas along the Thai-Burmese border”<sup>52</sup> for taking shelters. Presently, “over one million Rohingya live as Refugees and migrants (most of them with no legal status) outside Myanmar.”<sup>53</sup>

### Theravada Buddhist Monks in Myanmar

#### *Religious Principle and Practices*



Moreover, in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis in May 2008, monks and lay people stepped into the breach left by the military regime. Monks provided shelter for survivors in the monasteries, and facilitated independent aid distribution.<sup>61</sup> Since monks come from the ranks of the people themselves, they comprehend the concerns and difficulties that the people are facing. As reported in Time magazine, the public perceives the monks to have been successful figures in supporting the cause for socio-political justice once they are imprisoned or killed. In this sense, monks are the impetus and inspiration for heightening dissent.<sup>62</sup>

### *Reasons for Religious Violence*

As mentioned earlier, monks are the promoter, educator and defender of Buddhist faith, they will not tolerate anyone who disdains the beliefs and practices of Buddhism.

The first traces of monks serving as a socio-political vanguard can be found during the British colonial period. Together with Buddhist activists from the Young Men's Buddhist Association, monks such as U Wisara and U Ottama led non-violent protests against the British for impoverishing the people and removing the monarchy that was a supporter of the Sangha and a symbol of social unity. These monks led non-violent protests, such as public speeches condemning British excesses and employed hunger strikes in prison that lasted until they perished.<sup>63</sup>

Carole Lisa Albyn said, "Once known as Burma, Myanmar was at one time the richest country in Southeast Asia. It was ruled by the British as part of India..."<sup>64</sup> However, particularly since the military junta ruled the country in 1962, religious persecution begun.

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<sup>61</sup> *The Role of Political Prisoners in the National Reconciliation Process*, 46.

<sup>62</sup> Syed Mohammed Ad'ha Aljunied, *Politics and Religion in Contemporary Burma: Buddhist Monks as Opposition*, in *Politics and Religion in Contemporary Burma* (Singapore: Nanyang Technological University, 2012), 44.

<sup>63</sup> Emily Hallgren, "Burma: A History of Repression and Resistance," *Manchester College Peace Studies Institute* (2007): 1; and Syed Mohammed Ad'ha Aljunied, *Politics and Religion in Contemporary Burma: Buddhist Monks as Opposition*, in *Politics and Religion in Contemporary Burma* (Singapore: Nanyang Technological University, 2012), 43.

<sup>64</sup> Carole Lisa Albyn and Lois Sinaiko Webb, *The Multicultural Cookbook for Students* (Canada: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2008), 196.



Social injustices and oil prices increased. “The catastrophic Burmese Way to Socialism had turned Burma into one of the world’s most impoverished countries.”<sup>65</sup> People lived in poverty and were no longer able to support the monastic order by proceeding with religious rites and offerings. To the monks, the military regime had violated pure doctrinal and sociological features of Burmese life. Monks therefore became motivated to oppose the military-run government’s mismanagement and excesses.<sup>66</sup> Consequently, a mass revolution burst out on 8 August 1988. It is also known as “the 8888 Uprising.” “Hundreds of thousands of ochre-robed monks, young children, university students, housewives, and doctors demonstrated against the regime.”<sup>67</sup>

In the 1990s, the death of a monk who was killed by the military led to situations where monks refused to perform rites for military officers... The military has been systematic in its use of violence against monks and all peaceful protesters. Monks were also arrested during raids on monasteries. Moreover, in the Buddhist doctrine, true Buddhists do not make use of the monastic order by corrupting monks and abbots in order to give credence to a repressive regime such as the SPDC. The military junta has crossed the ethical religious and socio-political boundaries of the Burmese conscience.<sup>68</sup>

Protests began on August 18, 2007,<sup>69</sup> when the people of Burma, whose annual per capita income is 170 dollars, woke up to a 500 percent rise in diesel oil prices.<sup>70</sup> Turning the begging bowl upside down and refusing alms is possibly the greatest insult to practicing Buddhists, for by accepting alms the monks permit the person to be a good Buddhist through their act of generosity. This non-violent tactic was employed against the military in both the

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<sup>65</sup> Mark Tallentire, “The Burma Road to Ruin,” *the Guardian*, September 28, 2007, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/sep/28/burma.uk>.

<sup>66</sup> Aljunied, *Politics and Religion in Contemporary Burma: Buddhist Monks as Opposition*, 46.

<sup>67</sup> Maureen Aung-Thwin, “Burmese Days,” *Foreign Affairs*, Spring 1989, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/44329/maureen-aung-thwin/burmese-days>.

<sup>68</sup> Aljunied, *Politics and Religion in Contemporary Burma: Buddhist Monks as Opposition*, 45, 48.

<sup>69</sup> It also is known as Saffron Revolution.

<sup>70</sup> Aljunied, *Politics and Religion in Contemporary Burma: Buddhist Monks as Opposition*, 47.

1988 movement and in the 2007 protests.<sup>71</sup> Subsequently, protests were held in all major cities. The demonstrations had three messages: the lowering the price of oil and other commodities, the release of political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi, and to engage in bilateral dialogue with the country's opposition party, the National League for Democracy.<sup>72</sup>

In the midst of political conflicts between monks and the government, the monks who are the defender of Buddhist faith, on the other hands, began to realize religious threat from the Muslim-Rohingyas. Burmese Buddhists resent Rohingya Muslims and see them as illegal immigrants from Bengal. They also fear that Muslims are growing in population so rapidly, that they will soon be overwhelmed and become the minority of Myanmar.<sup>73</sup> They also accused them as “terrorists.” On the other hands, “Many Muslims have joined armed resistance groups who are fighting for greater freedoms in Burma.”<sup>74</sup> On March 2011, Myanmar was born into Democratic path. Human right such as Religious freedoms, freedom of speech and peaceful protest were granted to the civilians. Thus, particularly, the clash primarily between ethnic Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims occurred at Rakhine State in 2012. Muslim Rohingya attacked Buddhist Rakhine communities in June 2012, and “More than 200 people were killed and around 100,000 were displaced.”<sup>75</sup>

On the other hand, on March 20, 2013, Burmese Buddhist monk Shin Thawbita was brutally assaulted and then his genitals were cut off and he was then burned alive by a

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<sup>71</sup> Emily Hallgren, “Burma: A History of Repression and Resistance,” *Manchester College Peace Studies Institute* (2007): 3.

<sup>72</sup> *Aljunied, Politics and Religion in Contemporary Burma: Buddhist Monks as Opposition*, 47.

<sup>73</sup> Jeremy Liang, “Measures to Quell the Unrest between Rohingya Muslims and the Buddhist majority in Myanmar,” CISSMUN: The General Assembly 3rd Committee, November 2013, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://www.cissmun.org/cissmun/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/GA-3-Topic-4.pdf>.

<sup>74</sup> Asif Ahmed, “Burma: Planned Religious and Racial Riots against Muslims: A Historical Overview,” *dbsjeyaraj*, July, 25 2013, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/8539>.

<sup>75</sup> Kate Hodal, “Buddhist Monk Uses Racism and Rumours to Spread Hatred in Burma,” *the Guardian*, April 18, 2013, February 25, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/apr/18/buddhist-monk-spreads-hatred-burma>.

Muslim mob in Meikhtila.<sup>76</sup> In July a Facebook post emerged of a Buddhist woman being raped, supposedly by a Muslim man. In retaliation an angry, vengeful mob of 300 people started throwing stones and bricks at a tea stall. The mob went on to attack Muslim shops and vehicles and shouting slogans in Muslim residential areas.<sup>77</sup>

Finally, remarkable reason for conflict initiated by the Buddhist monks as defenders of faith to the Muslim-Rohingyas is “the nature of fears relate to the sense that Buddhism might lose its central place in the moral and social life of the country.”<sup>78</sup> One good reason also is that the Burmese’s claiming “to be a Burmese is to be a Buddhist,” they are intolerance that a certain Burmese would convert into Muslim or any other religions.

### *969 Movement and Anti-Conversion Bill<sup>79</sup>*

Ko Ko Gyi, the leader of the 88 Generation Students, once denounced that the Rohingya as a threat to national security.<sup>80</sup> However, predominantly the Buddhist monks’ conflict with the Muslim-Rohingyas was primarily ethno-religious conflict. The 969 Movement is a nationalist movement<sup>81</sup> opposed to what they see as Islam’s expansion in

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<sup>76</sup> “Monk Thawbita: Burned-Alive By Muslims in Meikhtilar,” Hla Oo's Blog, April 10, 2013, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://hlao1980.blogspot.ca/2013/04/monk-thawbita-burned-alive-by-muslims.html>.

<sup>77</sup> Gianluca Mezzofiore, “Wirathu’s Buddhist Woman Raped’ Facebook Post Stokes Anti-Muslim Violence in Mandalay,” July 2, 2014, February 25, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/wirathus-buddhist-woman-raped-facebook-post-stokes-anti-muslim-violence-mandalay-1455069>.

<sup>78</sup> “What is Causing Buddhist Violence Against Muslims?,” School of Public Policy, March 10, 2014, accessed January 26, 2015, <http://spp.ceu.hu/article/2014-03-10/why-are-buddhists-attacking-muslims-myanmar-and-sri-lanka>.

<sup>79</sup> The research idea is adapted from Wikipedia. “969 Movement,” Wikipedia, accessed February 25, 2015, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/969\\_Movement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/969_Movement).

<sup>80</sup> Sai Latt, “The Arakan Conflict and Nationalist Threats in Burma,” The Irrawaddy, July 24, 2012, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://www.irrawaddy.org/contributor/the-arakan-conflict-and-nationalist-threats-in-burma.html>.

<sup>81</sup> Alex Bookbinder, “969: The Strange Numerological Basis for Burma's Religious Violence,” The Atlantic, April 9, 2013, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/04/969-the-strange-numerological-basis-for-burmas-religious-violence/274816/>.

predominantly-Buddhist Burma.<sup>82</sup> It is a nonviolent movement devoted to supporting and defending the Buddhist religion. Primarily, the researcher recognizes that the movement intent to promote “Anti-conversion bill.”<sup>83</sup> Unlike the Burmese Buddhists’ feedback on the movement, it is somehow criticized internationally.

The three digits of 969 ‘symbolize the virtues of the Buddha, Buddhist practices and the Buddhist community.’ Across South Asia, Muslims represent the phrase “In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate and Merciful” with the number 786, and businesses display the number to indicate that they are Muslim-owned. 969’s proponents see this as a Muslim plot to conquer Burma in the 21st century, based on the premise that 7 plus 8 plus 6 is equal to 21. The number 969 is intended be 786’s cosmological opposite.<sup>84</sup>

Ashin Wirathu who is regarded as the movement’s highest protector said, “You can be full of kindness and love, but you cannot sleep next to a mad dog, to which he is referring to Muslims and he also said, “If we are weak, our land will become Muslim.”<sup>85</sup> Moreover, in order to counteract the financial and commercial jihad, Buddhist monks have requested Buddhists to shop only at outlets displaying the 969 sign, which authenticates them as jihad-free businesses.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Matthew J. Walton, “Buddhism Turns Violent in Myanmar,” Asian Times, April 2, 2013, accessed February 25, 2015, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\_Asia/SEA-01-020413.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/SEA-01-020413.html).

<sup>83</sup> The movement is seeking to draft a law that would forbid Buddhist women from marrying non-Buddhist men without the permission of local officials. Dhammapiya, a senior monk who helped write the original proposal for the laws, said they were meant to encourage peace between different faiths and to “protect” Buddhist women from being forced to convert to Islam when they married Muslim men. Government religious regulatory authorities, while supporting the protection of the Buddhist faith from perceived Islamic threats, reject the legal initiatives of the 969 movement and “prohibited the creation of formal organizations” based on 969 principles. Sources: “Buddhism v Islam in Asia: Fears of a New Religious Strife,” the Economist, July 27, 2013, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://www.economist.com/news/asia/21582321-fuelled-dangerous-brew-faith-ethnicity-and-politics-tit-tat-conflict-escalating>; and Jared Ferrie and Min Zayar Oo, “Myanmar Buddhist Committee Bans Anti-Muslim Organizations,” Reuters, September 11, 2013, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/09/11/us-myanmar-buddhism-idUSBRE98A0EP20130911>.

<sup>84</sup> Bookbinder, “969: The Strange Numerological Basis for Burma’s Religious Violence.”

<sup>85</sup> Kate Hodal and Christopher Symes, “Burma’s Bin Laden, the Buddhist Monk Who Fuels Hatred – Video,” the Guardian, April 16, 2013, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2013/apr/16/burma-bin-laden-buddhist-monk-video>; and Thomas Fuller, “Extremism Builds among Myanmar’s Buddhists,” The Seattle Times, June 21, 2013, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://old.seattletimes.com/text/20121235489.html>.

<sup>86</sup> “The 969 Movement of Buddhists in Burma (Myanmar),” kwelos.tripod.com, accessed February 25, 2015, [http://kwelos.tripod.com/burma\\_969.htm](http://kwelos.tripod.com/burma_969.htm).

## Responses toward Religious Conflict in Myanmar

### External Responses<sup>87</sup>

*Organization of Islamic Cooperation* – On 15 August, a meeting of the OIC condemned Myanmar authorities for violence against Rohingyas and the denial of the group's citizenship, and vowed to bring the issue to the United Nations General Assembly.<sup>88</sup>

*Bangladesh* – Neighboring Bangladesh increased border security in response to the riots. Numerous boat refugees were turned aside by the Border Guard.<sup>89</sup> *Pakistan* – Foreign Ministry spokesman Moazzam Ali Khan said during a weekly news briefing: “We are concerned about the situation, but there are reports that things have improved there.” He added that Pakistan hoped Burmese authorities would exercise necessary steps to bring the situation back to control.<sup>90</sup> *Saudi Arabia* – The King Abdullah ordered \$50 million of aid sent to the Rohingyas, in Saudi Arabia's capacity as a “guardian of global Muslim interests.”<sup>91</sup> Council of Ministers of Saudi Arabia says that it “condemns the ethnic cleansing campaign and brutal attacks against Myanmar's Muslim Rohingya citizens” and it urged the international community to protect “Muslims in Myanmar.”<sup>92</sup> *United Kingdom* – Foreign

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<sup>87</sup> The Research Idea is Adapted from Wikipedia. “2012 Rakhine State riots,” Wikipedia, accessed February 25, 2015, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2012\\_Rakhine\\_State\\_riots#International](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2012_Rakhine_State_riots#International).

<sup>88</sup> “Islamic Summit will Take Myanmar's Rohingyas Issue to UN,” The Express Tribune with the International New York Times, August 16, 2012, February 25, 2015, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/422894/islamic-summit-will-take-myanmars-rohingyas-issue-to-un/>.

<sup>89</sup> “UN Decides to Relocate Staff from Burma's Rakhine State,” BBC News Asia, June 11, 2012, February 25, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-18392262>.

<sup>90</sup> “Pakistan Expresses Concern Over Myanmar Violence,” The Express Tribune with the International New York Times, July 26, 2012, February 25, 2015, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/413266/pakistan-expresses-concern-over-myanmar-violence/>.

<sup>91</sup> “Saudi Arabia Gives \$50 mn Aid to Myanmar Muslims,” The Express Tribune with the International New York Times, August 12, 2012, February 25, 2015, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/421139/saudi-arabia-gives-50-mln-aid-to-myanmar-muslims/>.

<sup>92</sup> “Saudi Accuses Myanmar of Ethnic Cleansing of Rohingya Muslims,” The National, August 7, 2012, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/asia-pacific/saudi-accuses-myanmar-of-ethnic-cleansing-of-rohingya-muslims>.

Minister Jeremy Browne told reporters that he was ‘deeply concerned’ by the situation and that the UK and other countries would continue to watch developments closely.<sup>93</sup> *Tibet* – the 14th Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibet in exile, wrote a letter in August 2012 to Aung San Suu Kyi, where he said that he was “deeply saddened” and remains “very concerned” with the violence inflicted on the Muslims in Burma.<sup>94</sup> Finally, *United State* – In May 2013, President Thein Sein visits Washington. President Obama praises Myanmar’s political and economic progress, but criticizes violence against Rohingya Muslims.<sup>95</sup>

### Internal Responses

#### *The Government Responses*

According to Human Rights Watch, the Burmese government has denied citizenship to any Rohingya persons who cannot prove their ancestors settled in the country before 1823.<sup>96</sup> Concerning the violence with Rohingya, the government is accused to being soundless not to responding the needs of the victims from the violence, particularly the helpless Rohingyas. On the other hands, “Burma’s government is objecting to a Time Magazine article critical of an extremist monk who has been attacking Islam. Authorities deny they are defending the monks...”<sup>97</sup> Instead, Burmese President Thein Sein has defended the monk Wirathu, saying the report undermined efforts to rebuild trust between faiths and

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<sup>93</sup> “Burma Violence: Tension high in Rakhine State,” BBC News Asia, June 11, 2012, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-18391013>.

<sup>94</sup> Phayul, “The Dalai Lama Expressed Concern Over Violence in Burma to Suu Kyi,” Phayul, August 23, 2012, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=31974&t=1>.

<sup>95</sup> “Myanmar Profile,” BBC News Asia, February 18, 2015, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-12992883>.

<sup>96</sup> “The Government Could Have Stopped This,” Human Rights Watch, August 2012, accessed February 25, 2015, [http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/burma0812webwcover\\_0.pdf](http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/burma0812webwcover_0.pdf).

<sup>97</sup> Daniel Schearf, “Burma Objects to Time Magazine Criticism,” VOA News/Asia, June 24, 2013, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://www.voanews.com/content/burma-objects-to-time-magazine-criticism/1687888.html>.

that the monk's order was striving for peace and prosperity.<sup>98</sup>

Due to the media pressures, the June 2012 violence, President Sein seemed to confirm that the rights of the Rohingya would not be reconciled with their continued presence in Myanmar when he stated "the solution to this problem is that they can be settled in refugee camps managed by UNHCR and UNHCR provides for them. If there are countries that would accept them, they could be sent there."<sup>99</sup> Following on August 2012, President Thein Sein sets up commission to investigate violence between Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims in the west, in which dozens have died.<sup>100</sup> In February 2014, the government ordered Doctors without Borders, the Rohingya's main health care provider, to stop providing its services to them.<sup>101</sup> However, it is also known that the Government provided shelters and camps for the victims.

As for the Noble Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi was asked to explain her

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<sup>98</sup> "Burmese Leader Defends 'Anti-Muslim' Monk Ashin Wirathu," BBC News Asia, June 24, 2013, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-23027492>.

<sup>99</sup> Rachel Vandenbrink, "Call to Put Rohingya in Refugee Camps," Radio Free Asia, July 12, 2012, accessed February 26, 2015, <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/rohingya-07122012185242.html>. Concerning the acceptance for Myanmar citizenship, in a recent interview with Australia Network's Asia-Pacific Focus program, President Sein gave this response to a question about citizenship for the Rohingya: JIM MIDDLETON: You mentioned the trouble in Rakhine State. Many Rohingya, their families have lived here for generations, they are not new arrivals. Will you review the law which stops many of them becoming citizens? Will you review whether the 1982 law meets international norms? THEIN SEIN (translation): To answer your question properly, I will have to explain some of Rakhine's State's history. Rakhine [sic] was a kingdom ruled by a Rakhine king, and it was only the Rakhine people living in the state. But when Myanmar became a British colony, the British brought farmers from other parts of the world into Rakhine because of its climate and arable land. Most of those farmers did eventually leave after the work was done but some stayed. According to the British Gazette of 1948, they brought in around 50,000 farmers to be employed in Myanmar. Now the population of Bengalis in Rakhine who have an Islamic faith have risen to between 400,000 to 500,000 people. Some of these are the descendants of the original farmers who were brought here by the British, so these people who have been born in Myanmar will be able to take up citizenship according to the Myanmar citizenship law of 1982. But there are other illegal immigrants who came later, and they will have to be dealt with under international law. In the case of these late comers, they may be taken care of by the UN or repatriated or sent to other countries. But those who were born in Myanmar, they will be able to become citizens here. Source: J Middleton, "Thein Sein Rejects Aung San Suu Kyi's Demand," Asia-Pacific Focus, ABC television, transcript, June 9, 2013, accessed February 26, 2015, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-06-09/thein-sein-rejects-aung-san-suu-kyi-demand/4742796>.

<sup>100</sup> "Myanmar Profile," BBC News Asia.

<sup>101</sup> "Rohingya and The Persecution and Suffering They Endure In Myanmar," Facts and Details.



serenity on Rohingyas, she answered that she wanted to promote reconciliation between the Buddhist and Muslim communities, and she said, “But don’t forget that violence has been committed by both sides. This is why I prefer not to take sides. And, also I want to work toward reconciliation between these two communities. I am not going to be able to do that if I take sides.”<sup>102</sup> For the time being, the Government withdraws temporary voting rights from Muslim Rohingyas ahead of proposed constitutional referendum, following street protests by Buddhists.<sup>103</sup>

### *The Civilian Responses*

There are many civilians who are helping and providing foods and shelters for the victims. In spite of religious differences, many of the citizens in Myanmar do consider that the violence associated by the spiritual religious leaders (the Buddhist monks) was immoral by refereeing the Buddhist ethic, whether they termed it as “defending the faith” or “peaceful revolution.” They felt that it against their Theravada Buddhist’s doctrine particularly the “five precepts” and against regulations of the organization of *Sangha*. Some people even doubt that Ashin Wirathu to be the “ex-military man turn fake monk or getting paid well for doing this”<sup>104</sup> since it has been felt the Rohingyas are treated mercilessly.

On the other hands, as for the Buddhists, as stated earlier they also see a religious threat of the Muslim’s presence in Myanmar.<sup>105</sup> Regarding the law to protect the 969 and

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<sup>102</sup> Anjana Pasricha, “Aung San Suu Kyi Explains Silence on Rohingyas,” VOA News/Asia, November 15, 2012, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://www.voanews.com/content/aung-san-suu-kyi-explains-silence-on-rohingyas/1546809.html>.

<sup>103</sup> “Myanmar Profile,” BBC News Asia.

<sup>104</sup> Lawi Weng, “Monks’ Convention in Burma Calls for Restricting Buddhist-Muslim Marriage,” The Irrawaddy, June 13, 2013, accessed February 25, 2015, <http://www.irrawaddy.org/conflict/monks-convention-in-burma-calls-for-restricting-buddhist-muslim-marriage.html>.

<sup>105</sup> The reason is they still believe that Myanmar is or must be a Buddhist Country. And they still want to claim “to be a Burmese is to be a Buddhist.”

“*Amyo, Baata, Taatana*”<sup>106</sup> proposed by the monks stated that,

Any Buddhist woman seeking to marry a Muslim man to first gain permission from her parents and local government officials. It also requires any Muslim man who marries a Buddhist woman to convert to Buddhism. Those who do not follow these rules could face up to 10 years in prison and have their property confiscated, according to the draft law.”<sup>107</sup>

Nevertheless, this draft law is been condemned by the citizens of Myanmar including the Buddhist women by proclaiming their “right” for choosing partners. Above all, the citizens of Myanmar crave for freedom and peace that will be initiated by the Government not by the monks who should be the spiritual leaders, and yet they aware of the treat what the Muslim could perform.

### *The Christian Responses*

Christians in Myanmar are known as peaceful people. The researcher calls them as Christocentric–pacifists. Although they had suffered persecutions and ethic discriminations in the past peculiarly under the military junta, they have never protested against the oppressors but praying for them. They responded conflicts in the light of Christ their Savior. Thus, somehow they were blamed, particularly not joining the Saffron revolution in 2007.

Concerning the heartbreaks of Rohingya, “Christian Aid assists a ministry that works among the Rohingya and other tribal groups in the Rakhine state of Burma.”<sup>108</sup> There are Christians, as a group or individual, who are doing holistic ministry among the Rohingyas. Also, some Christians, secretly, helped the victims of Rohingyas through the NGO and UNHCR. However, the majority of Christians often remain actually inactive to protest for the lawful change. Fear, for some Christians, would be the cause of their impassiveness.

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<sup>106</sup> Here is the writing in Myanmar အမျိုး ဘာသာ၊ သာသနာ. It means “nation, religion and mission.”

<sup>107</sup> Weng, “Monks’ Convention in Burma Calls for Restricting Buddhist-Muslim Marriage.”

<sup>108</sup> “Rescuing the Rohingya,” Christian Aid Mission, October 16, 2013, accessed February 26, 2015, <http://www.christianaid.org/News/2013/mir20131016.aspx>.

## Conclusion

### Proposals

Though the country embraces Democratic pathway, in Burma violence and discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities is increasing. Laws and policies discriminating against Muslims, particularly Rohingya Muslims<sup>109</sup> are increasing, and the persecutions of Christians also continue. Christian Churches are still not allowed to be built freely and some have been closed.<sup>110</sup> Thus, it is clear enough to grip that almost all the religious laws proposed by the Buddhist monks are to promote the Buddhism alone and to discriminate Muslim first, and later other religions. They should know that Buddhism is not the state religion anymore.

If religious freedom is not fully exercisable, human right is denied and ethnic discrimination is still in practiced; then, what is the condition of claiming Myanmar as a Democratic country and what is the profit of living under such a Democratic government. The government should reconsider these issues. Unless these issues are solved, conflicts or violence are unavoidable.

As Aung San Suu Kyi has mentioned that the violence between Buddhist monks and Rohingyas was committed by both sides, the world and Medias, then, are pressuring too much on the government of Myanmar to promote reconciliation. They should also investigate well enough that there are many types of Ashin Wirathu in Rohingyas. In order to promote reconciliation and peace, the Buddhist monks should go back to their monasteries and leave

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<sup>109</sup> The laws against them are harsh and highly discriminatory, including: a Rohingya cannot be a citizen of Burma, a Rohingya needs permission to marry, a Rohingya needs permission to have more than two children, a Rohingya must inform authorities if they want to travel outside of their villages (even in cases of medical emergencies). Sources: Tun Khin and Nay San Lwin, "Rohingya Organisations Condemn Religious Discrimination in Burma," Burma Campaign UK, February 5, 2015, accessed February 26, 2015, <http://burmacampaign.org.uk/rohingya-organisations-condemn-religious-discrimination-in-burma/>.

<sup>110</sup> Khin Lwin, "Rohingya Organisations Condemn Religious Discrimination in Burma."

the Rohingyas' issue to the government. They should not join the politics and marital issues of the citizens. They should not devoid their religious professions.

If the monks are spiritually truthful in words and actions, their influences will surely reach to the people who profess Buddhism, and Muslim will never have the power to take over them. Let the Buddhist parents teach their children in the light of Buda's doctrine. On the other hands, the Rohingyas, as the immigrants, should follow the demands of the Burmese government. They should not response their angriness with violence. And as for the Burmese government, they should sensibly inspect what the monks should or shouldn't be undertaking in national conflicts, and they should graciously reconsider the best way to help the victims.

Finally, as a Christian researcher, Christian should never be silent to response for any violence. Prayer in faith is great and effective. But "faith without action is dead."<sup>111</sup> We should have voices in love for our brothers and sisters from any backgrounds or religions. We are to be 'Good Samaritans' to our neighbors. By being soundless in the past, the Christians in Myanmar are not truthful enough to the command of Jesus. We are to love anyone and response anything in love, but not to seek violence unlike the Buddhist monks or the Christian crusaders in the past. We all are to learn from our mistakes. We have been praying for our government, for the monks and for the Rohingyas, but we should also be reprovig the mistakes what the monks has done (authorizing 969 movement, anti-conversion bill and anti-Muslim riots). We should encourage our government for making the right decision. Moreover, we should feed the hungry. We should stand with the weak. We should provide shelter for the homeless. But most importantly we should be wise when and how to do holistic ministry in such hazard situations.

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<sup>111</sup> "James 2:26," Bible Gateway, accessed February 26, 2015, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James%202:26>.

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