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GENOCIDE OF ROHINGYA MUSLIMS: A CLASSICAL MODEL OF ETHNIC CLEANSING¹

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Abstract

Considerable historical evidence affirms that the Rohingya Muslims are indigenous inhabitants and rightful citizens of Myanmar, who have been living in Rakhine State not for decades, but for centuries. The Myanmar government has been systematically eradicating the Rohingya people due to their Islamic religious identity. This analysis finds that the ongoing persecution on Rohingya Muslims is a manifestation of a classical model of ethnic cleansing. The disasters experienced in Rakhine State present a complete evidence of systematic, widespread and prolific human rights violations, including heinous crimes against humanity. This article presents an academic perspective on repeated incidents, based on authentic proofs to international community of ethnic cleansing committed by the Myanmar army. This research has been carried out through various types of sources, such as recent and previously published books, articles, local and international newspapers, TV channels, magazines, documentaries, human rights organizations' reports, and eye-witness accounts of the victims. Finally, it provides suggestions to resolve the rising problems, which may bring a permanent solution to the long-lasting humanitarian crisis in Rakhine State.

Keywords: Rohingya Muslims, Rakhine State, Genocide, Humanitarian Crisis, Citizenship.

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Introduction

Rakhine State is on the western coast of Myanmar (Burma), bordered by Chin State to the north, Magway Region, Bago Region and Ayeyarwady Region to the east. The Bay of Bengal is to the west, and the Chittagong Division of Bangladesh is to the northwest. Its geographical land area is 36,762sk (14,194 square kilometer and Sittwe is its state capital.² Currently, its community of Rohingya Muslims are one of the most persecuted ethnic groups in the world.³ Despite having had an independent state Rakhine, they are now distressed refugees throughout the globe, and many have lived in slavery-like conditions for decades. Statistical estimates vary, but indisputably thousands of them have been brutally killed by the Myanmar army and mobs of fanatical local Buddhists. They have lost their ancestral homes, villages, farmlands, and basic human rights and freedoms, and the Myanmar government has watched strangers take their homes and possessions. They have been targeted to be cleansed from their homeland due to their religious identity and economic and political opportunism. As a parable of an ethnic cleansing, Rohingya Muslims are a superlative example for the 21st century. In pursuit of the extirpation of Rohingya Muslims from Arakan, the Myanmar government has inflicted all types of torture upon them. Their citizenship has been denied, and their access to education, politics, religion, marriage, giving birth to children and all sorts of conventional citizens' rights have been terminated. As a result, the lucky ones are refugees throughout the world, frequently exploited, abused, and despised, while many more remain imprisoned under the hostile and brutal Myanmar regime. While the issue has become particularly acute since the 2000s, many Rohingya men, women, and children have been murdered in Myanmar for decades. In order to explore the applicability of the classical model of ethnic cleansing in Rakhine State by the Myanmar authorities, some crucial issues are addressed in this paper, such as the historical background

² The Republic of The Union of Myanmar, *The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census*, Rakhine State Department of Population Ministry of Immigration and Population May 2015 Census Report Volume 3 – K, 2016.

³ Monish Bhatia, *Media, Crime and Racism* (UK: The Library of Congress, 2018), 162.

of Rohingya Muslims, denial of citizenship, burning houses into ashes, rape and sexual harassment, mass killing, looting wealth and property destruction, barring humanitarian aid and journalists, and banning marriage and birth. Based on the findings, some suggested solutions to mitigate the crisis are presented, followed by the conclusion and bibliography.

Historical Background of Rohingya Muslims

The Origin of Word “Rohingya”

There are numerous etymological theories on the history of the term “Rohingya”. The first one is attributed to an apocryphal tale of some Arab merchants shipwrecked on the coast of Arakan in the eighth century CE. When sentenced to death by the local king, they pleaded for mercy (*Rahm* in Arabic) and subsequently named the area ‘Rahm-bri’, a portmanteau of Arabic and local terms meaning ‘the land of mercy’.⁴ An island called Rambri still exists, although there is no sign of mercy there nowadays.⁵ Another theory is that the ancient name ‘Arakan’, derived from the word “Rukun” from which the name ‘Arakan’ came into existence, and from the word “Rohan”, the name ‘Rohingya’ was originated”.⁶

Historically, Arakan was a tiny independent state in the south-east of Cox’s Bazar District of Bangladesh, surrounded by rivers, sea and hilly natural beauty, and called Rakhine Province, known as the “Switzerland of South-East Asia”. Most of the citizens of Arakan are Rakhine, thus it is known as Rakhine State. It is a majority Buddhist populated state. According to the pundits, from Sanskrit and Pali term *rokkha* (protection), the word “Rokkhain” or Rakhine came into existence. Based on their opinions, since they save their own religion and culture from evil forces they are called

⁴ A. F. K. Jilani, *A Cultural History of Rohingya* (Dhaka, 2001), 26.

⁵ Mohammed Ali Chowdhury, “The Advent of Islam in Arakan and the Rohingyas,” *Kalaaan Press Network*, October 22, 2006, <http://www.kaladanpress.org/index.php/scholar-column-mainmenu-36/36-rohingya/217-the-advent-of-islam-in-arakan-and-the-rohingyas.html>.

⁶ MD. Mukhlesor Rahman, ed., *Arakan O Rohingya* (Dhaka: NRB Scholar Publication, 2013), 5.

Rakhine. The inhabitants of Arakan feel more interested to introduce themselves as Rakhine rather than Arakani, and the ancient names of Arakan included Rakhine Pre, Rowang, Rosang, Rowaon, Reng, Rong, and Rang etc., which are Burmese synonyms. The Rakhine people consider themselves as a more conservative nation and thus they also claim that the word “Rakhine” comes from “Rakkhonshil”, which means conservative.⁷ The Rohingya Muslims came to international attention in recent years as one of the most persecuted minority groups in the world.⁸ However, they have been subjected to deliberate cleansing for many years by the junta regimes of Myanmar.⁹ The history of Rohingya Muslims indicates that they are original citizens of the Rakhine State of Myanmar, and history shows that Islam first arrived from China c. 652-660 CE, and was later augmented by Arab merchants by the 9th century,¹⁰ when it was a transit port in the Arab maritime trading routes to China. In addition to the peaceful exchange of goods, Arab maritime trade was characterized by cosmopolitan ethnic exchanges, including intermarriage and religious propagation, between the ports and hinterlands of Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, Persia, India, Southeast Asia, and China.¹¹ Consequently, the Rohingya Muslim community is a natural and indigenous feature of Rakhine rooted in centuries of historical presence and development (analogous to Chinese minority communities in historical ports such as Melaka), and by 1941 the Muslim population was recorded to comprise 30% of the total population in Rakhine State, with a majority of up to 80% in particular districts such as Mongdo and Bothing¹². Myanmar has

⁷ Ibid., 11.

⁸ Smith, Nicola, “Who are the Rohingya Muslims? The Stateless Minority Fleeing Violence in Burma,” *The Telegraph News*, September 19, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WXor3fvxo_8.

⁹ Robert Mason, *Muslim Minority-State Relations: Violence, Integration and Policy* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 211.

¹⁰ S. B. Qanungo, *A History of Chittagong Volume 1: From Ancient Time Down to 1761*, (Dipankar Qanungo, 1988), 99.

¹¹ Mohammed Ali Chowdhury, “The Advent of Islam in Arakan and the Rohingyas,”

¹² MD. Mokhlesor Rahman, *Arakan O Rohinga*, 108.

232¹³ to 235¹⁴ tribal groups, of which 130 to 135 are officially recognized by the government,¹⁵ but Rohingya Muslims are not included among them, and are dubbed “Bengalis” by their enemies in Myanmar, including the government, in order to portray them as foreigners.¹⁶ While it is true they include Bengalis and other South Asian people among their ancestors, this is genetically true of the majority of people in Southeast Asia and Myanmar itself. Nevertheless, historically there was no hard border between Myanmar and India, and there was essentially a free flow of people and goods and two-way migration (in ancient history, India itself was the locus of Buddhist religion and pilgrimage). People from Rakhine State settled in Chittagong, in modern Bangladesh, while people from Chittagong and different parts of the Subcontinent settled in Rakhine, which was an independent state in the fifteenth and sixteen centuries and a cosmopolitan society including Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists. Avoiding the historical reality and strengths of Rakhine’s pluralistic society, modern Myanmar has seized on an insular and xenophobic mentality seeking to assert itself as a monolithic and exclusive Buddhist state, contrary to the precepts of Buddhism itself.¹⁷ In political terms, Arakan was annexed in 1433 by the Bangla Sultanate, and when the kings of Arakan lost authority over their lands several times due to foreign invasions or insurrections they took shelter in the courts of the Muslim sultans of Gour or Muggle. From the middle ages to the 18th century the local dynasty had cordial relations with Muslims, who were treated as an honored community, such as the poet Alaoul,¹⁸ Sayed Ashraf and others who were ministers of the Roshang Royal Court of Arakan. The historians of 14th century like Rashiduddin, the Turkish sailor Sidi Ali, Ain-e Akbari, Bahrstan Ghayebi, and Syarul Mutakharin also narrated the

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Mohammed Yunus, *A History of Arakan Past and Present* (Bangladesh: University of Chittagong, 1994), 5.

¹⁵ Ashley South and Marie Lall, *Citizenship in Myanmar, Ways of Being in and from Burma* (Thailand: Chiang Mia University Press 2018), 6.

¹⁶ MD. Mokhlesor Rahman, *Arakan O Rohingya*, 16.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Thibaut D’ Hubert, *In the Shade of the Golden Palace, Alaoul and Middle Bengali Poetics in Arakan* (United States of America: Oxford University Press), 2018.

hospitality and acceptance Muslims found there. According to Dr. Mahfuzur Rahman Akand,¹⁹ Muslim fortunes began to decline as Arakan came increasingly under the authority of a single Burmese entity, with less autonomy, whereby the Muslims ceased to be prominent contributors to Arakan society and became Myanmar's most persecuted minority, a convenient "other". Two key events in this process were the Burmese occupation of Arakan by King Bodhopaya in 1784, and the British creation of Burma as an independent state in 1948.²⁰ Following the ascendancy of Ne Win in Arakan in 1962, the Rohingya Muslims gradually started to be stripped of their citizenship rights,²¹ and in 1982 they were declared "foreign",²² establishing the legal basis for the state and vigilante violence perpetrated against them since.²³ Through scanning the history of Arakan, several reasons were found behind the loss of Rohingya Muslims' citizenship as well as their authority over the Rakhine State. Firstly, although Rohingya Muslims played very crucial role in the royal court of Arakan, they could not produce any outstanding leadership. As a result, they lost the sovereignty over Arakan to the Burmese King Bodhopaya, whose regime deliberately killed the top leaders of the Rohingya Muslims. The rest of them fled to Bangladesh and remained there until the Anglo-Burmese war of 1826.²⁴ At that time, Sin Pyan and other Arakani leaders fought for liberation of own land, but because of various causes they failed. Rohingya Muslims who took shelter in Bangladesh and those were left in Arakan lacked effective leadership.

¹⁹ Associate Professor, Department of Islamic History and Culture, University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh.

²⁰ Azeem Ibrahim, *The Rohingyas Inside Myanmar's Genocide* (United Kingdom: C. Hurst and Co. Ltd., 2016).

²¹ Bina D' Costa, *Children and Violence: Politics of Conflict in South Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 224.

²² Myinth Thein @ Abdus Salam, *The Problem of Muslim Identity in Myanmar* (PhD thesis, International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilizations (ISTAC), IIUM, 2012), 4.

²³ Nehginpao Kipgen, *Democratization of Myanmar* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 159.

²⁴ Moshe Yegar, *Between Integration and Secession, the Muslim Communities of Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand and Western Burma/Myanmar* (United States of America: Lexington Books, 2002), 27.

British domination over Burma after 1826 resulted in the provision of some decisive privileges to Rohingya Muslims, allowing them to return to their ancestral land, where they flourished in business and agriculture alongside administrative roles in the colonial administration. At that time, most of the educated and leading class of Rohingya settled themselves permanently in Cox's Bazar and the Bandarban area of Bangladesh, without going back to Arakan itself, and those middle- and working-class Rohingya who did reestablish themselves there could not carve out any political role or presence in the burgeoning colonial framework and (subsequently) independent Burma. At this point, Rohingya became the conventional term to refer to the historical community of Muslims from Arakan, and by extension, Burmese Muslims in general, thus from this point onwards "Rohingya" can be understood as referring to "Rohingya Muslims". While the British were essentially favorable to the Rohingya after 1826, following 1857 they were intent on crushing the traditional Muslim elites whom they blamed for the "Mutiny", which extended to a divide and rule policy in Burma by prioritizing the employment of local Buddhists and excluding Muslims from educational opportunities and employment in the civil service, which was the forerunner to post-independence governments in South Asia. During British colonialism in Burma the attitude that the Rohingya were foreigners festered in the list of local grievances, and despite their support of Aung Sun against British occupation, post-independence elites seized on this issue to further stigmatize and blame the Rohingya for postcolonial socio-economic difficulties, stripping them of citizen and human rights, and ultimately driving them out of their state. Rather than being acknowledged as citizens, the Rohingya were recognized as mere inhabitants of Arakan.²⁵

A Classical Model of Ethnic Cleansing

In order to analyze the context of ethnic cleansing and genocide, the definition should be understood: "Genocide: Any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the

²⁵ MD. Mukhlesor Rahman, *Arakan O Rohingya*, 79.

group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group”.²⁶ Additionally, any of the following acts, when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack, constitute crimes against humanity: “(a) Murder; (b) Extermination; (c) Enslavement; (d) Deportation or forcible transfer of population; (e) Imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty in violation of fundamental rules of international law; (f) Torture; (g) Rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity; (h) Persecution against any identifiable group or collectivity on political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural, religious, gender as defined in paragraph 3, or other grounds that are universally recognized as impermissible under international law, in connection with any act referred to in this paragraph or any crime within the jurisdiction of the Court; (i) Enforced disappearance of persons; (j) The crime of apartheid; (k) Other inhumane acts of a similar character intentionally causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health”.²⁷

Denial of Citizenship

Although Rohingya have been living in Arakan state for centuries, and their forefathers played a formative role in its existence, they have currently lost citizenship in their own country. Based on the controversial Citizen Law of Myanmar, there are three categories of citizen: citizen, associate citizen, and naturalized citizen. Muslims are conventionally placed in the “associate citizen” category or required to apply for verification of their citizenship.²⁸ These three categories

²⁶ Bearing Witness Report, “They Tried to Kill Us All”: Atrocity Crimes Against Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State, Myanmar (Washington DC: United States Holocaust Museum, 2017), 15.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Graeme Swincer, “Citizenship and Discrimination Issues of Muslims in

of citizens have been explained slightly: (a) “Citizen” means a fully fledged, *bona fide* citizen of Myanmar; (b) “Associate Citizen” means someone with conventional citizen status but subject to other legal prescriptions and reservations; and (c) “Naturalized Citizen” means a citizen prescribed by this Law who has become a citizen of Myanmar by legal assent.²⁹ The discrimination of the Myanmar government against the citizenship rights of Rohingya is well known, and has been expounded by organizations such as Human Rights Watch (HRW), whose report illustrates that the Myanmar Citizenship Law effectively denies Rohingyas the possibility of acquiring a nationality. Despite being able to trace Rohingya history to the eighth century, Myanmar law does not recognize the ethnic minority as one of the national races. Many Rohingya families emigrated to and built houses in Arakan during the British colonial period, which would immediately exclude them from citizenship (*ex post facto*), and in reality even Rohingya whose families settled in the region before 1823 find it nearly impossible to secure citizenship. Rohingya who cannot provide “conclusive evidence” of their lineage or history of residence find themselves ineligible for any class of citizenship.³⁰ This is the legal foundation by which the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya has been vehemently perpetrated by the state of Myanmar, its armed forces, and vigilante mobs with the tacit support of the government have been deprived of their due rights. They have been deliberately merged into foreigners in their own lands by the narrow-minded conspiracy of Junta government of Myanmar.

Burning Houses into Ashes

One common tactic used by Buddhist mobs, led by monks and implicitly supported by the military and government, was burning the houses of the Rohingya to drive them out of Rakhine State. Trees, mosques, homes, and whole villages were pillaged and burnt.³¹ The

Myanmar,” 2016, www.bmrsg.org.au/.../Citizenship-and-discrimination-of-Muslims-in-Myanmar.pdf.

²⁹ *Burma Citizenship Law*. Chapter I - Title and Definition.

³⁰ “Discrimination in Arakan,” *Human Rights Watch*, accessed December 20, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/burma/burm005-02.htm>.

³¹ A. F. K. Jilani, *The Rohingyas of Arakan: Their Quest for Justice* (Chittagong:

BBC's South-East Asia correspondent Jonathan Head said that he was part of a group of journalists invited by the Myanmar government to see the situation on the ground in Maungdaw. The conditions for them to join that trip were that they had to stay in the group and were not allowed to go off independently, and they were taken to places the government chose for them. Their interest in visiting of other territories was rejected due to insecurity. Nevertheless, they noticed burnt out, smoking remnants of Muslims houses near a town called Al Le Than Kyaw. The police claimed it was the Muslim residents who burned their own homes, although most of them fled after militants from the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army attacked the police post in the town on 25 August. The journalists saw evidence of further conflagrations nearby and heard sporadic automatic weapons fire³². In late October 2017 more than 2,600 houses were burned down in Rohingya-majority areas in a single week.³³ To escape the responsibility of such persecution burnings in the eyes of the international community, which was lauding the First State Counsellor (i.e. Prime Minister) Aung San Suu Kyi as a champion of enlightenment and democracy, the Buddhist army claimed that Rohingya themselves burnt their own homes in order to portray the Myanmar army negatively. Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh reported that the Myanmar army carried out the campaign of arson and killings to drive them out.³⁴

Raping and Sexual Harassment

The catalogue of sexual assaults inflicted on Rohingya women and girls by Myanmar soldiers³⁵ is extremely shocking and horrible.³⁶ Its

1999), 385.

³² "A Muslim Village was Burning," *BBC News*, September 7, 2017, www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41189564.

³³ "Rohingya Muslims Flee As More Than 2,600 Houses Burned In Myanmar's North," *HuffPost*, September 3, 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/2017/09/02/rohingya-muslims-flee-as-more-than-2-600-houses-burned-in-myanmars-north_a_23194916/

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ "EXCLUSIVE: New Allegations of Myanmar Security Forces Raping Rohingya Women," *IRIN*, July 4, 2017, <https://www.irinnews.org/news/2017/07/04/exclusive-new-allegations-myanmar-security-forces-raping-rohingya-womennew-allegations-m>

pragmatic scenario is clearly perceived by the interview of one of victims, Ayesha, who had arrived in Bangladesh less than a week previously, by an Al Jazeera journalist, Annette Ekin. Ayesha was eating dinner with her four sisters-in-law in their village of Tami in Myanmar's Buthidaung Township when army troops attacked the hamlet. Soldiers entered their home and forced the women into a room. They ripped Ayesha's baby from her arms and kicked him like a football, while others stripped the women naked; "A soldier held a knife to her throat and began to rape her. Twelve soldiers took turns to rape the women over the course of what she believes was several hours. Ayesha said, she felt like they would kill her. She was afraid that her child was dead".³⁷ According to the official UN report, dozens of Rohingya women have been reportedly been aggressively raped and sexually assaulted by the Burmese security officers. It further describes that a total of eight medical professionals working in Bangladesh reported having treated 25 women since late August who had physical injuries consistent with sexually violent attacks. UN doctors also treated hundreds of women with such injuries in October-November 2017. The UN's International Organization for Migration (IOM), found that sexual attacks were more aggressive against women, including evidence of beatings, forced penetration, and lacerations to the vagina.³⁸ As part of this widespread and systematic campaign of rape, girls as young as 11 were gang raped by Burmese security forces. On October 9, 2016, the Myanmar army entered the Northern Rakhine state and for the following four months they detained women and children whom they

yanmar-security-forces-rapin.

³⁶ Jammille Bigio and Rachel Vogelstein, *Countering Sexual Violence in Conflict* (Council on Foreign Relations, Center for Preventive Action Women and Forging Policy, 2017), https://cfrd8-files.cfr.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/Discussion_Paper_Bigio_Vogelstein_Sexual_Violence_Conflict_OR_1.pdf

³⁷ "Rohingya Refugees Share Stories of Sexual Violence," *Al Jazeera News*, September 19, 2017, www.aljazeera.com/.../rohingya-refugees-share-stories-sexual-violence-17092909590.

³⁸ "Doctors Report Horrifying Gang Rape Attacks on Rohingya Women," *Independent*, September 25, 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/doctors-un-rohingya-muslim-women-refugees-burma-rape-sexual-violence-a7965251.html>

raped repeatedly, murdering some of them afterwards, and this phenomenon alone is sufficient to substantiate crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing.³⁹ Innumerable incidences of abuses and crimes by the Myanmar security forces have been reported by reputed organizations and international news reports.⁴⁰

Mass Killing

The most rudimentary tactic of Myanmar's army to cleanse the Rohingya from Rakhine State is mass killing.⁴¹ Thousands of Rohingya have been brutally killed by the Myanmar army, most of them young Muslims and community leaders who dared to speak out against the oppression and injustice of the Buddhist mobs and the army.⁴² They killed thousands of Muslim Imams and activists to silence the voice of the community, including a prominent Islamic scholar of Rakhine State, the *Muhaddith* and Principal of a Deobandi Dawraye Hadith Madrasah, namely Mawlana Ahmad Hossain, who was 90 year old. In Rakhine State there are 20 Dawraye Hadith madrasah [i.e. private religious institutions for teaching *Hadith* or Prophetic traditions]. Similarly, they killed Imams, *Muazzins* [who calls for Five times prayers a day] and other individuals who were involved with religious teachings. Last year they killed 10 people of Jamaat e Tabligh, dragging them out from a moving bus, and burning any Islamic buildings they could find.⁴³ Common methods of murdering Muslims in Myanmar include killing young women after raping them, burning whole families alive in their homes, drowning them in the sea, physically torturing them in cells, and shooting

³⁹ "Mass Sexual Violence Leaves Rohingya Women Traumatized and Stateless," *News Deeply, Women and Girls*, June 8, 2017, <https://www.newsdeeply.com/womenandgirls/.../mass-sexual-violence-leaves-rohingya>.

⁴⁰ "Burma: Security Forces Raped Rohingya Women, Girls," *Human Rights Watch*, accessed December 6, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/.../burma-security-forces-raped-rohingya-women-girl>.

⁴¹ A. F. K. Jilani, *Human Rights Violations in Arakan* (Chittagong, 2001), 137-148.

⁴² MD. Mokhlesor Rahman, *Arakan O Rohingga*, 79.

⁴³ "Thousands of Ulama are killed in Arakan, Hundreds of Mosques are Burned Down," *Digonta.Net*, September 21, 2017, www.dailynayadiganta.com/detail/news/253661.

them.⁴⁴ *The Independent* newspaper in the UK reported that local Buddhist mobs were inspired to join the anti-Muslim crusade in 2017 after seeing the success of the army in the same (and not vice-versa; thus the armed forces, and by extension the state, have precipitated and led the persecution of the Rohingya).⁴⁵ There are numerous substantiated media reports in reputable media, including an account to *The Guardian* describing the horror of people gunned down by rifles, while babies and infants were thrown into rivers to drown. Most reports are from over 160,000 of Myanmar's 1.1 million ethnic Rohingya minority who managed to flee to Bangladesh, bringing with them stories describing ethnic cleansing, but the situation of those who remain in Myanmar is deliberately obscured by the regime and largely unknown to the outside world.⁴⁶ Among the reliable first-hand reports, HRW explains how Myanmar soldiers killed several dozen Rohingya in Maung Nu village on August 27, 2017, and they beat, sexually assaulted, stabbed, and gunned down villagers who gathered for safety in a house. HRW said that it could not verify the total number of killed people. Phil Robertson, Deputy Asia Director at HRW, stated that Myanmar soldiers have undoubtedly committed crimes against humanity.⁴⁷ *The Independent* reported that in a single day the army murdered 400 Rohingya.⁴⁸ Over 500,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh by late 2017,⁴⁹ and many

⁴⁴ "Burma Soldiers 'Burning Bodies of Rohingya Muslims' to Conceal Evidence," *Independent*, September 4, 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/burma-rohingya-muslims-genocide-soldiers-burn-bodies-massacre-evidence-crackdown-minority-a7927981.html>

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ "Massacre at Tula Toli: Rohingya Recall Horror of Myanmar Army Attack," *The Guardian*, September 7, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/07/massacre-at-tula-toli-rohingya-villagers-recall-horror-of-myanmar-army-attack>

⁴⁷ "Burma: Military Massacres Dozens in Rohingya Village," *Human Rights Watch*, accessed November 12, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/.../burma-military-massacres-dozens-rohingya-village>.

⁴⁸ "Burma: 400 killed Amid 'Massacre' of Rohingya Muslims, Army Says," *Independent*, September 1, 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/urma-rohingya-muslims-killed-massacre-highlands-armed-forces-army-soldiers-terror-a7924411.html>

⁴⁹ "Massacre at Tulatoli: Rohingya Recall Horror of Myanmar Army Attack," *Daily Digital News*, September 8, 2017, Retrieved from <https://dailydigitalnews.com/>

died of starvation or were killed if they could not flee due to their physical, economic, and other weaknesses such as lack of transportation. Some sources report that the Rohingya are fleeing a scorched-earth military campaign against militants that the UN has described as a “textbook example” of ethnic cleansing.⁵⁰ Based on the most recent estimate, there are over a million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh alone, with smaller in Southeast Asia.⁵¹

Looting Wealth and Destruction of Property

While the looting and destroying of Rohingya property pales in comparison to the murders and rapes of the military and vigilant mobs in Arakan, there are also significant grievances in this area, including seizing property, and imposing restrictions upon business, cultivation, and animal husbandry, forcing the Rohingya into poverty as the most disadvantaged and economically suppressed people in Myanmar. It was a phenomenon noted by HRW that displaced Rohingya routinely reported that they lost all their belongings to arson by Buddhist mobs, including their clothes and all worldly possessions.⁵² One woman recalled abandoning her house and belongings to evade capture, rape and death when her village outside Sittwe was invaded by an armed Buddhist group on 10th June 2012, indicating the long-term nature of this ethnic cleansing project.⁵³ A month later another Rohingya female aged 38 survived a violent attack by Buddhist terrorists who invaded her home; while some were beating her and her family, others were stealing all of her possessions.⁵⁴ She later sought refuge with family in Aung Mingala, the last standing Muslim quarter of Sittwe, and then fled to the

single-article-view.php?article=186294.

⁵⁰ “Rohingya Crisis: Refugee Exodus Leaves Behind Unharvested Fields, Torched Villages in Myanmar’s Rakhine,” *FIRSTPOST*, November 14, 2017, www.firstpost.com/.../rohingya-crisis-refugee-exodus-leaves-behind-unharvested-fiel.

⁵¹ “The Number of Registered Rohingya Muslims in Bangladesh Exceeded 1 Million,” *Excellent Bangla News*, January 17, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fLL8g0GSaRw>.

⁵² “The Government Could Have Stopped This,” *Human Rights Watch*, June 2012, <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/burma0812webwcover.pdf>.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

outskirts of town, and did not know if her house still existed. HRW documented that the Burmese security forces stole and looted Rohingya property during the violent raids, systematically raiding houses from door to door, and taking valuables like gold jewelry and cash in waiting trucks.⁵⁵

Barring Humanitarian Aid from Entering Rakhine State

When military forces are unleashed upon civilian populations one expects outrages of the kind all too familiar from the case of the Rohingya and others, but only the most callous systems subsequently actively prevent the provision of humanitarian aid to those suffering under such oppression; the Myanmar military has deliberately blocked humanitarian aid to the Rohingya,⁵⁶ including all United Nations aid agencies, who were forbidden from delivering vital supplies of food and other essentially to thousands of displaced Rohingya. UN and other aid agencies have also faced difficult decisions in safeguarding their own personnel due to the conflict. The UN stopped distributing aid in northern Rakhine state due to reprisals against civilians by the military after militants bombed state forces on August 25, 2017. The UN resident coordinator in Burma said deliveries were postponed due to the insecurity, and government field-visit restrictions prevented the distribution of food and other necessary assistance.⁵⁷

Rakhine Buddhist fanatics claim that international NGOs (INGOs) are helping the Rohingya to Islamize the globe, and that all the INGOs are driven by Muslim countries coming to implement their agendas in Arakan, which is the populist rationale for barring them. Obviously in reality INGOs and the UN are not agents of global Islamization, but humanitarian organizations seeking to alleviate the worst impacts of conflict. Nevertheless, the prevalence of such populist tropes among the Buddhist masses and the blanket fanatical support for the oppression of the Rohingya is indicative of

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ “Myanmar Blocks All UN Aid to Civilians at Heart of Rohingya Crisis,” *The Guardian*, September 4, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/04/myanmar-blocks-all-un-aid-to-civilians-at-heart-of-rohingya-crisis>.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

the success of the state in mobilizing the general population against an oppressed minority. This enables politicians, the military and fanatical ringleaders to override general objections to withholding humanitarian aid, from within Myanmar or among the international community. In one interview, a Buddhist mob member expressed his anger about humanitarian agencies, and berating the UN General Secretary Ban Ki-Moon for using the word “Rohingya” at the ASEAN Summit. He felt that, as a representative of the UN, Ban Ki-Moon should not have added to the conflict (i.e. the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya) by daring to name them, and he claimed that the word “Rohingya” was a neologism invented by enemies of Myanmar, and as the Rohingya are not listed among the 135 ethnic groups recognized by the government, the Rohingya evidently do not exist.⁵⁸ A common theme that enables the barring of humanitarian aid is that INGOs and the UN were trying to give citizenship to illegal Bengali immigrants by creating pressure on the government. Due to these causes, people are hostile to UN and other INGOs. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is particularly accused of supporting the Rohingya through NGOs. According to the popular discourse, Muslims who have genuinely been living in Rakhine State for centuries are able to apply for citizenship under the Citizenship Act of 1982. They have created their own problem by trying to circumvent the law by creating a Rohingya identity, which will bar them from applying for citizenship under the 1982 Act, regardless of the meddling and interference of the global community.⁵⁹

Due to such populist hatred being mainstream opinion in Myanmar, the government is able to ignore calls from NGOs and the UN demanding the immediate access of humanitarian aid in Rakhine State so that food and other daily necessities can reach the Rohingya, and the authorities have succeeded in severing communication between the Rohingya and humanitarian aid agencies (and the outside world in general). HRW has expressed much concern over

⁵⁸ Penny Green, Thomas Macmanus, and Alicia de la Cour Venning, *Countdown to Annihilation: Genocide in Myanmar* (London: Queen Mary University of London, 2015), <http://statecrime.org/data/2015/10/ISCI-Rohingya-Report-PUBLISHED-VERSION.pdf>

⁵⁹ Ibid.

the issue, noting the obligations under international law for the Myanmar government and its military to facilitate and assist humanitarian aid in reaching civilians in northern Rakhine State. Nevertheless, government security forces have cut off aid to hundreds of thousands of people and compelled them to flee. The UN and donor communities also vainly call on the Myanmar authorities to assure aid agencies can reach those in necessity.⁶⁰ Emboldened by their government and army's illegal activities, Buddhist mobs have even blocked international aid ships seeking to dock in Arakan.⁶¹ The government claimed it would allow the resumption of humanitarian work as early as 2016, yet this has not occurred, despite the continuation and intermittent escalation of the conflict, and the ever worsening refugee situation.⁶²

Barring Journalists from Collecting News

As mentioned previously, the government is intent on severing any connection between the Rohingya and the outside world, and in claiming to be wholly innocent in the international community, thus it seeks to protect and condone the Myanmar military and local Buddhist mobs and their crimes against humanity. A key part of this position is preventing journalists from accessing and reporting on the ongoing ethnic cleaning. This is achieved by formal prohibitions on travelling to conflict areas (usually on the grounds of “security”) and arresting journalists who earnestly attempt to criticize the regime. This included Lau Hong Meng from Singapore and Mok Choy Lin from Malaysia, who were sentenced to two months’ imprisonment while reporting for Turkish Radio and Television, along with their local interpreter and driver, Aung Naing Soe and Hla Tin, for flying a

⁶⁰ “Burma: Aid Blocked to Rakhine State,” *Human Rights Watch*, October 21, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/10/21/burma-aid-blocked-rakhine-state>.

⁶¹ “Myanmar Protesters Try to Block Aid Shipment to Muslim Rohingya,” *Reuters*, September 21, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-rohingya-aid/myanmar-protesters-try-to-block-aid-shipment-to-muslim-rohingya-idUSKCN1BW0D1>.

⁶² “*We Are at A Breaking Point*”: *Rohingya: Persecuted in Myanmar, Neglected in Bangladesh*, (London: Amnesty International, 2016), 32, https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/amnesty_myanmar_bangladesh_report.pdf

drone over the Parliament in Naypyitaw on October 27, 2017.⁶³ The main concern of journalists is to document the serious and worsening conditions faced by the Rohingya, by rushing to the spot and interviewing victims, in order to inform the world of the situation. Al-Jazeera described the bitter experiences of a local Arakani journalist who was severely persecuted and targeted by the Myanmar authorities for his reporting as editor of the Rakhine Investigative Agency. His monthly magazine that included political news was forced to reduce its coverage of Rohingya incidents in western Maungdaw.⁶⁴

Ban on Getting Married and Giving Birth to Children

In order to extirpate the Rohingya from Arakan State, the Myanmar government imposed huge restrictions upon their marriages, with some reports even describing a ban. Obviously when one wishes to destroy a people, biological solutions are the ultimate guarantor. Myanmar seeks to prevent Rohingya from reproducing by placing extensive restrictions on Muslims getting married, such as requiring permission from Na-Sa-Ka or governmental agencies, otherwise penalties are imposed, as reported by human rights organizations, researchers, Rohingya political leaders, and journalists. At least five couples had been penalized and jailed for getting married without the permission of the local authorities, and no official marriage permissions have been issued to the Rohingya since March 2005, rendering all subsequent marriages void (*de jure*) under Myanmar's law. Anyone found to have got married is liable to 10 years' imprisonment – thus all of those who have conducted marriages, who can be identified by co-habiting or having children together, may legally be imprisoned for a decade on the whim of local officials, which has facilitated massive corruption, whereby the Na-sa-ka army

⁶³ “Myanmar Sentences Reporters to Jail for Flying Drone,” *The Washington Post*, November 10, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/.../myanmar...reporters...flying-drone/.../1ca744dc-c5e>.

⁶⁴ “Myanmar Journalists 'Harassed' for Reporting on Rohingya Crisis,” *Al Jazeera*, October 16, 2017, www.aljazeera.com/.../myanmar-journalists-harassed-reporting-rohingya-crisis-17101.

extorts bribes from couples who wish to remain free.⁶⁵ Those who attempt to follow the official procedures face exorbitant bureaucratic fees and bribes, and many years of delays. Simultaneously, as a conservative Asian/ Buddhist society, the local administration bans any kind of sexual relation outside wedlock.⁶⁶

Between 2004 to 2008, there were at least 10,000 pending marriage applications.⁶⁷ Likewise, many Rohingya were severely beaten by the Na-sa-ka army because of getting married. These circumstances certify that in order to remove the shade of Rohingya from the landscape of Arakan, the Myanmar government is prepared to employ every tool at its disposal. That is why millions of Rohingya had to leave their own homes and lands during many periods, abandoning their ancestral civilization.

Suggestions to Solve the Rising Problems in Rakhine State

- The report of Kofi Atta Anan, former Secretary General of the UN (1997-2006), “Towards a Peaceful, Fair and Prosperous Future for the People of Rakhine”, published in August 2017, should immediately be implemented. As one would expect, it is a highly practical and universally beneficial solution.
- As they are used as the scapegoat for banning humanitarian work in Rakhine, the Muslim countries of the OIC should impose collective pressure upon Myanmar to take back the displaced Rohingya who are passing a distressful life in many countries throughout the world. If they do not intend to rehabilitate them in their own lands, Muslim countries should be united in leading the international community in calls for the achievement of a Rakhine State independent from Myanmar, providing all possible cooperation and facilitation for such a prospect. Serious initiatives

⁶⁵ “Myanmar Muslims Barred from Getting Married,” *The DAWN*, December 11, 2005, <https://www.dawn.com/news/169375>

⁶⁶ Chris Lewa, *The Arakan Project 2008: Issues to Be Raised Concerning the Situation of Stateless Rohingya Women in Myanmar (Burma)* (submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. For the Examination of the 2nd Periodic State Party Report-Myanmar, 2003), 5.

⁶⁷ “Myanmar Muslims Barred from Getting Married,”

in this regard would probably cause the government of Myanmar to reconsider its position and cease its crusade against the Rohingya.

- In addition, all Muslim countries should extend the hands of assistance towards the sustainable development of Rakhine State, which can be in terms of education, infrastructure development, agriculture, electricity, technology and other equipment for resource and human development.
- Should Myanmar continue to deny the Rohingya the right of return and resettlement, the international community should censure and increasingly boycott and penalize it. Muslim countries including Bangladesh, Iran, Malaysia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey can play a very effective role in this, including in steering initiatives through the UN.
- If efforts to convince the government of Myanmar to behave humanely and in accordance with international law are successful, and the government allows the Rohingya to return to their homes, all kinds of citizen rights should be restored and conferred on the community, including access in education, administrative affairs, the defense sector, politics, religious practices and other rights. There should not be any remaining restriction preventing them from moving freely throughout the whole country, enabling them to contribute to the future socio-economic and cultural development and enrichment of Myanmar and the world.

Conclusion

The crisis that Rohingya have been facing for many decades is not only the crisis of Rohingya but also it is the crisis of the whole Muslim nations throughout the globe. Whenever a Muslim brother or sister is attacked by any miscreant without any valid reason in Myanmar, the expected brotherhood and support by other Muslims are generally non-existent. While the Muslim Ummah appears powerless to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinians, it does at least pay lip service to solidarity with them; conversely, the Rohingya have been largely ignored and are beneath the radar of most of the world. If a Muslim does not feel pain observing the sufferings of his other brothers in faith, he can never be a real believer; as the Prophet

(ﷺ) said, “Nu’man bin Bashir reported that Muslims are like one body of a person; if the eye is sore, the whole-body aches, and if the head aches, the whole-body aches”.⁶⁸ Thus, based on this Islamic precept, it can be said that if we do not help the persecuted Rohingya and strive to rescue them from the suppression of Myanmar army and its miscreants, our claims of Islamicism are baseless. It is incumbent upon all of us to do whatever we can to alleviate the humanitarian crisis, and to prevent the wanton oppression and extirpation of other Muslim minority groups worldwide. For the wellbeing of the entire Ummah and the world, Muslims should come forward to solve this crisis and to lead sympathetic international consensus on addressing the plight of the Rohingya.

⁶⁸ *Sahih Muslim. The Book of Virtue, Enjoining Good Manners, and Joining of the Ties of Kinship.* Hadith. Sahih Muslim 2586 d. Book 45, Hadith 87. Book 32, Hadith 6261. (Sunnah.com).

AL-SHAJARA

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