

MARGINALIZATION OF THE ROHINGYA IN ARAKAN STATE OF WESTERN BURMA

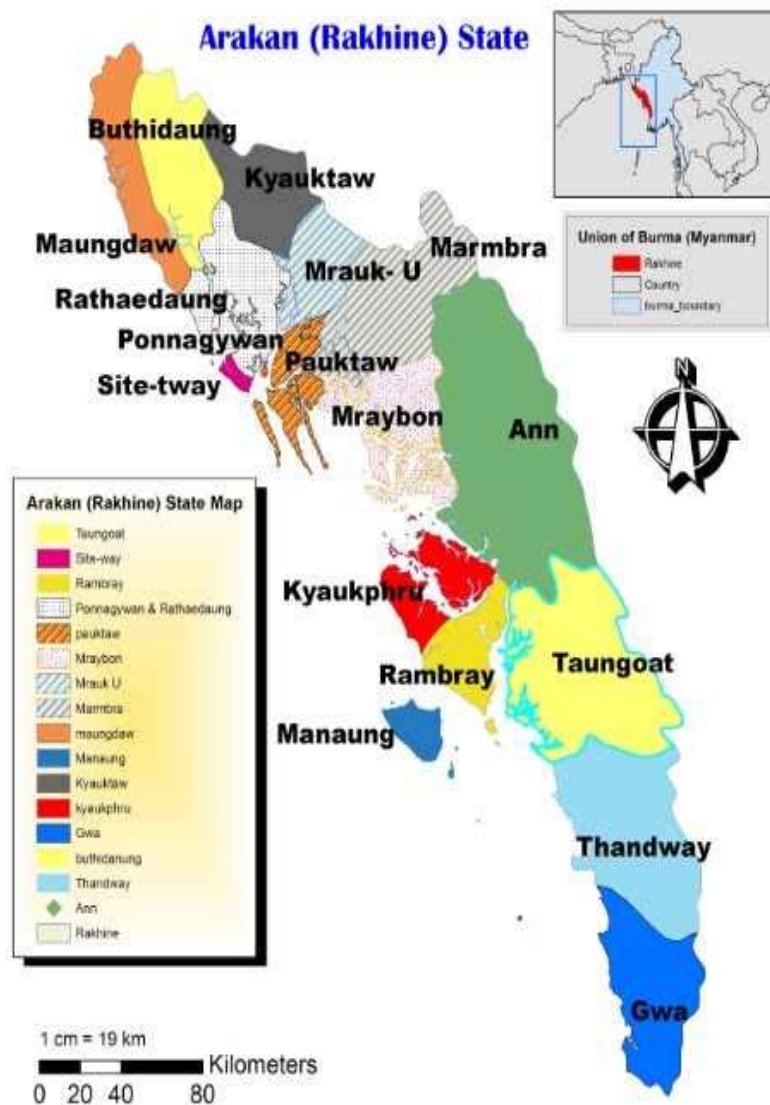
By Mohammed Ashraf Alam*

The Rohingya of Burma are the world's most persecuted and vulnerable ethnic minority. Due to their racial and religious differences with the Burman Buddhist-majority, they have been officially declared by Burma's ruling military regime as non-citizens of Burma, making them legally stateless people. They are treated not only as aliens, but also modern-day slaves in their ancestral homeland of Arakan.

Arakan (also known as Rakhine) State is a state of the Union of Myanmar. Situated on the western coast, it is bordered by Chin State to the north, Magway, Bago, and Ayeyarwady Divisions

to the east, the Bay of Bengal to the west, and the Chittagong Division of Bangladesh to the north-west. It is located between latitudes 17°30' north and 21°30' north, and longitudes 92°10' east and 94°50' east. The Arakan Yoma mountain range, which reaches to 3,063 meters at Victoria Peak, separates Arakan (Rakhine) State from Burma (or 'Myanmar') proper. Its area is 36,762 km² (14,194 sq. miles), and its capital is Sittwe (or 'Site-tway', formerly Akyab). Arakan (Rakhine) State consists of four districts: [Sittwe](#), [Maungdaw](#), [Kyaukphyu](#) and [Thandwe](#). Combined, these districts contain a total of 17 townships and 1,164 village-tracts. ¹

The official population in 2007 was 3,744,976, and in 2010 the population was estimated to be 3.83 million. ² The state is inhabited primarily by two major groups of people, the Rakhine ethnic group and the Rohingya ethnic group. According to Government Divisional Administration estimates, 10,33,212 Rohingya live in Northern Arakan State. The majority of the people of Arakan State are Buddhists, with the second-largest group being Muslims.



The Burmese government estimates that in Arakan State, 59.7% of the population (22,35,750 people) is [Buddhist](#), while 35.6% (13,33,212 people) follow [Islam](#), and 4.7% (1,73,014 people) is constituted of people of other religions. The Muslim Rohingya primarily live in the Arakan region of the country where they constitute around 30% of the total population of Arakan State and speak a dialect distinct from Burmese and Bengali. Myanmar (formerly known as Burma) has an estimated population of approximately 58 million, 15 percent of which is Muslim. The majority of the people of Myanmar are Buddhists.

In Arakan State, the majority-ethnic Rakhine reside mainly in the lowland valleys, including Lemro, Kaladan, and Mayu, as well as [Ramree](#) and [Manaung](#) (Cheduba) Islands. The Rohingya primarily live in the northern part of Arakan State. Other Muslim groups include Kaman Muslims (indigenous to Myanmar) and Rakhine Muslims (descendants of mixed marriages with Rakhine Buddhists). There are also a number of other ethnic minorities, such as the [Chin](#), [Mro](#), [Chakma](#), [Khami](#), [Dainet](#), and [Maramagri](#), who inhabit the hill regions of the state. The state's area is fairly sparsely populated, with very few large towns or cities. Sittwe is by far the largest city in the state, and also the centre of trade. Other notable towns include Maungdaw, Buthidaung, Rathedaung, Mrauk-U, Kyaukpru, Thandwe, and Tounggok. Otherwise, the population is primarily rural, living in the lowland valleys, hills, and forests, or along the seacoast and coastal islands of the Bay of Bengal. Arakan State is the country's richest region in terms of oil and natural gas deposits.

Arakan in Historical Perspective

Arakan found itself at the crossroads of two worlds: South Asia and Southeast Asia, between Muslim-Hindu Asia and Buddhist Asia, and amidst the Indo-Aryan and Mongoloid races. During its days as an independent kingdom until 1784, Arakan encompassed at times the Chittagong region in the southern part of today's Bangladesh. A past Chairman of the Burma Historical Commission, Col. Ba Shin, wrote: "Arakan was virtually ruled by Muslims from 1430 to 1531." ³ The heyday of Arakan began with the spread of Muslim civilization. This state survived for 350 years, until the Burman Buddhists put an end to Muslim rule by conquering Arakan in 1784.

The Rohingya are an ethnic group

The Rohingya constitute an ethnic group with *bona fide* historical roots in the region. Arakan sits on a line dividing Islamic and Buddhist Asia. The Rohingya reflect this geographic reality and are an ethnic mix of Bengalis, Persians, Moghuls, Turks and Pathan,⁴ and "have developed a culture and language which is absolutely unique to the region." ⁵ Rohingya speak a Bengali dialect similar to what is spoken in the Chittagong region of Bangladesh, mixed primarily with words from the Urdu, Hindi, and Arabic languages, but also from the Burmese and English languages.⁶ Thus they have evolved with distinct ethnic characteristics in Arakan as peoples of different ethnical background from the majority over the past several centuries. "Their settlements in Arakan date back to 7th century C.E." ⁷

The Rohingya's dilemma

Burma's military regime, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has rejected the status of Rohingya as a native ethnic group in Burma. The Buddhist Rakhine people also reject them as an ethnic group indigenous to Arakan. This unmerited view has greatly influenced even the opinions of many of the leaders of Burma's democracy movement and other ethnic peoples. Nearly all of them are reluctant to accommodate the Rohingya on democratic principles in their numerous alliances, thus excluding them from the country's political and democratic process.

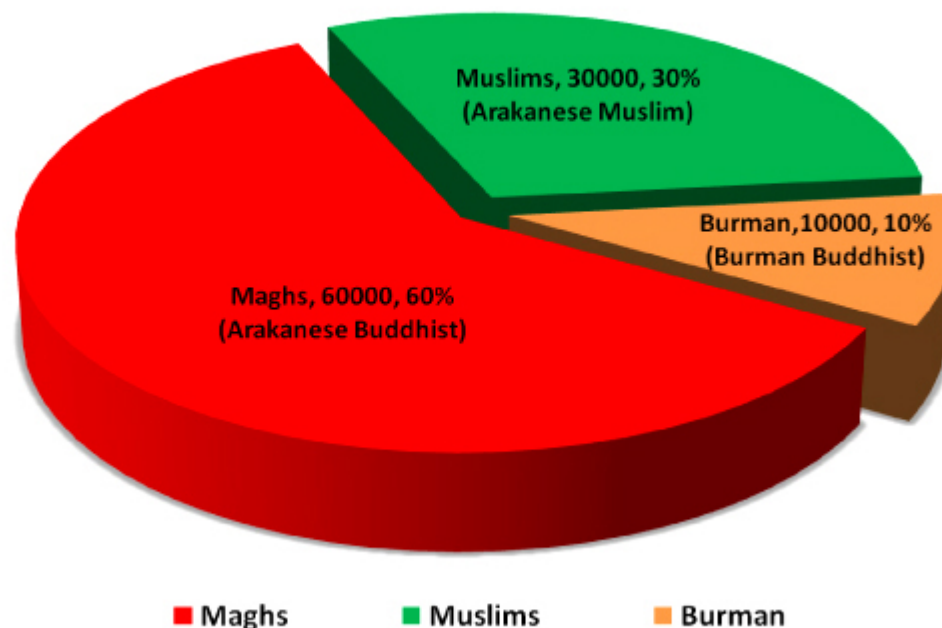
The term “Rohingya”

The name “Rohingya” derives from Rohang/Roshang, an earlier name for Arakan. Dr. Michael W. Charney writes, “the earliest recorded use of an ethnonym immediately recognizable as Rohingya is an observation by Francis Buchanan in 1799. As he explains, a dialect that was derived from Hindi “...is that spoken by the Mohammedans, who have long been settled in Arakan, and who call themselves Roaingya, or native of Arakan”.⁸ He further writes, “it can be asserted...that one claim of the Buddhist school in Rakhaing historiography, that Rohingya was an invention of the colonial period, is contradicted by the evidence.”⁹

Demographic Development of Arakan People

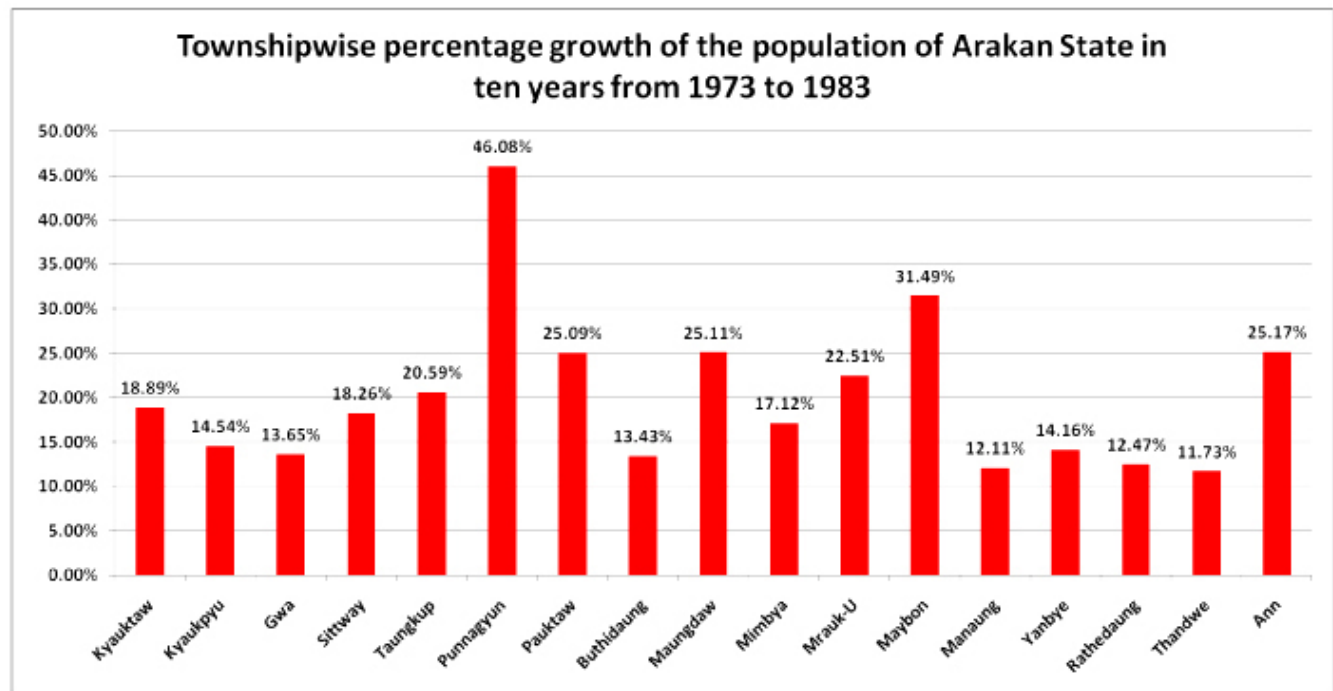
Mr. Paton, the British ruler of Arakan, in his report of 1825 stated that the total population of Arakan was:- Maghs 60,000, Muslims 30,000 and Burman 10,000.¹⁰ According to the report of British official, in 1825 the total population of Arakan was only one lakh, of which 30 thousand i.e. 30% were Muslims. As per Census of 1831, the total population of Arakan was 1,50,090. District-wise population are : Akyab District (95,090), Thandwe District (20,000) and Kyaukpyu District (35,000).¹¹

Total Population of Arakan in the year 1825 AD as shown
it in the report of Mr. Paton, The First British Ruler of Arakan



As per Census records of British officials, in Akyab District alone the Muslims (Mahamedan) population increased to 58,355 in 1872, 1,54,887 in 1901 and 1,78,647 in 1911 respectively. The 30 thousand Muslims of Arakan of 1825 were the descendants of early settlers of Arabs, Persian, Mughals, Bengalis and etc. But it is surprising to note that the numbers increased, in the 1911 Census also, the number of Muslims was only 33%. It means that not only Muslims increased but also the people of other religious groups also increased. Taken an over all view, the increased was not due to import of the Muslims by the British from Bengal. ¹²

According to 1983 Govt. Census, the total population of Arakan is 2.035 million and the township-wise population are Maungdaw (2,79,798), Buthidaung (1,85,263), Sittway (1,69,090), Kyauktaw (1,54,413), Mrauk-U (1,46,878), Minbya (1,26,436), Kyaukpyu (1,23,734), Rathedaung (1,07,275), Pauktaw (1,04,113), Thandwe (95,490), Yanbye (94,574), Taungup (92,949), Punnagyun (85,191), Maybon (79,360), Ann (75,942), Manaung (63,736), and Gwa (50,789). ¹³



Source: The Rakhine Paynay Prizin Thamine, Vol. 1 (History Section) Compiled by Rakhine State People's Council, Akyab, September 1984, Page48

As per record of Census of 1973 and 1983 the total population of Arakan were 17,00,506 and 20,35,031 respectively. Total increase in 10 year was 3,34,525 and the growth is 19.67%. Township-wise population growth are : the highest is Punnagyun (46.08%), Maybon (31.49%), Ann (25.17%), Maungdaw (25.01%), Pauktaw (25.09%), Mrauk-U (22.51%), Taungup (20.59%), Kyauktaw (18.89%), Sittway (18.26%), Minbya (17.12%), Kyaukpyu (14.54%), Yanbye (14.06%), Gwa (13.65%). Buthidaung (13.43%), Rathedaung (12.47%), Manaung (12.11%) and the lowest is Thandwe (11.72%).¹⁴

After 1983 Census, SLORC & SPDC Governments took Census in 1993 & 2003 but not release the Census finding to the public. According to the Govt. Divisional Administration sources, the total population of Arakan State in 2007 is 3.80 million (Estimated). The population of Sittway (Akyab) District is (16,03,432), Maungdaw District is (8,75,224), Kyaukpyu District is (8,11,778) and Thandwe District is (4,54,542). ¹⁵

Xenophobia against the Rohingya

The Rohingya are not tolerated by the majority in Burma because of their minority ethnicity and religion, and also because of their dark skin and South Asian-appearance. “Racist disdain for the Rohingya by the Burmese authorities was exemplified recently in Burmese diplomatic correspondence which characterized the Rohingya “as ugly as ogres”. This ought to be beyond the tolerance of international civil society.”¹⁶ Rakhine xenophobic academics have carried out systematic campaigns of vilification against the Rohingya, while distorting their historicity. For instance, Dr. Aye Chan (Japan) spitefully characterized the Rohingya as “influx viruses in Arakan”;

Dr. Aye Kyaw (USA) labeled them as “floating people”; and U Khin Maug Saw (Germany) referred them “illegal foreign Bengalis”.

Immediately after the Muslims lost political power in 1784, the Burmese Buddhists embarked on a policy of oppressing and even physically eliminating them. The country was then colonized by the British towards the end of the 1824. The anti-Muslim campaign waged by the Buddhists gained momentum in the twentieth century, culminating in a terrible massacre in Arakan in 1942, which resulted in the deaths of 100,000 Rohingya Muslims. Hundreds of thousands of others were either crippled or forced to flee their land.¹⁷

Amidst rampant human rights abuses in Burma, the Rohingya have for decades borne the brunt of one of the most inhumane policies and campaigns by the Burmese military government. The Burmese government denies them citizenship, rendering the majority of Rohingya stateless. In addition, the military government launched several "ethnic cleansing" campaigns, particularly in 1978 and 1991, killing many in the process of expelling Rohingya to Bangladesh. Many also died from starvation and disease.

In Burma, the Rohingya face brutal religious repression, extrajudicial killings, forced labor, and expropriation of property, and are often denied employment opportunities and access to education, trade, and restrictions on movement, all exacerbated by the draconian “Burma Citizenship Law 1982” that leaves the Rohingya stateless. The Burmese Military’s campaign of displacement, denial of culture and identity, restrictions on the right to marry and form a family, killings, rape, torture, and denial of food are a slow-burning genocide.

Almost 14 years have passed since the UN General Assembly recognized the suffering the Rohingya at the hands of Burma’s military regime under Resolution 47/144 of 1992. Yet Rohingya and other Muslims from Burma continue to be subjected to a widespread and systematic campaign of persecution and discrimination at home, and the denial of basic protection and fundamental rights in neighboring countries.

The following points summarize abuse of ‘rights of vulnerable people’, including the Rohingya:-

1) Denial of the right to citizenship

The conflict in Arakan State is primarily about ethnicity and numbers. The starting point of today’s problems can be dated to the beginning of British rule. The Burmese government has identified 135 “national races” as indigenous to the nation. The Rohingya do not feature among them, even though the Kaman, also an Islamic group, have been recognised as one of the 7 “national races” of Arakan State. Disregarding historical facts, the Rohingya are treated as foreign residents who only recently settled in Burma during the British colonial period.

Recognition as an ethnic nationality of Burma would entitle the Rohingya to citizenship, but also to political participation and, by extension, to territorial claims. Viewed as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, their loyalty is questioned and they are deemed a threat to Burmese national security.

In addition, emphasis is also given to the Islamic faith professed by this population. The consensus of Burmese opinion is that Muslims can practice their religion, but they will be relentlessly barred from obtaining political representation on the basis of their religion.

Under the junta's 1982 citizenship law, more than one million Rohingya have been denied citizenship by the SPDC in Burma, with the authorities classifying them as "Bengali Muslims", effectively leaving them stateless.¹⁸ Some argue that the law, replacing the 1948 Act, was written with the specific intention of removing any Rohingya claim to citizenship that the previous law allowed.¹⁹

During 1991–92 Rohingya refugee crisis, on 26 February 1992, then Burmese Foreign Minister U Ohn Kyaw stated the following to the press in order to justify denial of Burmese citizenship to the Rohingya:

*"In actual fact, although there are (135) national races living in Myanmar today, the so-called Rohingya people is not one of them. Historically, there has never been a 'Rohingya' race in Myanmar. The very name Rohingya is a creation of a group of insurgents in the Rakhine State. Since the First Anglo-Myanmar War in 1824, people of Muslim Faith from the adjacent country illegally entered Myanmar Ngain-Ngan, particularly Rakhine State. Being illegal immigrants they do not hold immigration papers like other nationals of the country."*²⁰

Throughout the 1990s the Bangladeshi authorities repatriated 236,000 of the 250,000 Rohingya that fled to Bangladesh between November 1991 and June 1992 back to Burma, and by 2002 there were only 20,000 Rohingya remaining in camps.²¹

However, many of those repatriated to Burma have since returned to Bangladesh. New arrivals and returnees in Bangladesh now number 200,000 living outside of camps, not permitted to access the camps or to receive the protection of the UNHCR.²² Rohingya and Arakan Muslims, including children, are jailed in Bangladesh for violations of migration and employment law, and often remain in jail beyond the length of their sentences — some for as long as 12 years — waiting for the authorities to negotiate prisoner exchanges with the Burmese SPDC Government.²³

In Malaysia, the UNHCR office was closed to new registration in 2005, with the UNHCR promising to process the backlog of registrations and deliver outcomes to those that have been waiting in limbo for the longest length of time. Over 12,000 Rohingya have now been issued temporary protection since then, which finally offers them protection from arrest and deportation.²⁴

2) Restrictions on freedom of movement

"The sweeping restrictions on the movement of Rohingyas are disproportionate and discriminatory; they are imposed on all Rohingyas because they are Rohingyas, and not on members of other ethnic nationalities in Rakhine State. They are broad and indiscriminate in their application." —Amnesty International ²⁵

The Rohingya are subject to strict restrictions of movement. They are virtually confined to their village tracts. They need to apply for a travel passes, which they must pay for, even to visit a neighbouring village. Since February 2001, Sittwe has remained off-limits for the Rohingya of northern Arakan State. Their lack of mobility has had devastating consequences, limiting their access to markets, employment opportunities, health facilities, and higher education. The travel pass system is also used to prevent those who have overstayed their validity from returning to their village as their names are subsequently deleted from their family list.²⁶

Restriction on freedom of movement has effectively confined people to their villages. They are required to apply, state their reasons, and pay for a travel pass in order to leave their villages. To travel further requires more money and a lengthier application process.²⁷

Rohingya families are required to keep “family lists”, issued and maintained by the authorities. If a family member is not present during random population checks by local SPDC authorities, they can be deleted from their family’s list or fined.²⁸

3) Control of the economy through a monopoly system

Business monopolies are granted in exchange for licences obtained with high bribes. All economic sectors are controlled through a monopoly system based on licences, which totally forbids any free-enterprise initiatives. Anyone engaging in an economic activity must either sell his product to the licence holder below market price, or pay him a tax. As soon as a new income-generating endeavour appears, a new monopoly is installed. The authorities grant or revoke licences annually and always guarantee the monopoly to the highest bidder.²⁹

4) Construction of model ‘Natala’ villages

The establishment of “model (or ‘Natala’) villages” to resettle Buddhists (Rakhine and Burman) onto Muslim land has been ongoing since the 1950s. Such demographic engineering is designed to alter the ethnic composition of the region. The building of model villages reportedly intensified after the formation of the Nasaka (Burma Border Security Forces) in 1992. There are currently more than 40 such model villages of about 100 houses each in northern Arakan State. These model villages are built largely with the forced labor of Rohingya people. In addition, the villagers have to provide money, rations, generators, cattle, and construction materials for the newcomers. In addition to land confiscation and forced labour, these programmes contribute to the exacerbation of inter-communal tension.³⁰

5) Extortion and arbitrary taxation

Taxes and bribes such as ‘paddy taxes’,³¹ sales and trade licenses, fees for the observance of cultural and religious festivals and ceremonies, fees for participation in sporting activities, and extortion for corporate and military infrastructure are particularly prevalent and more diligently extracted in Arakan State, in particular in border area’s controlled by the Naska border authorities.³² Those not able or willing to pay bribes face arrest and imprisonment.³³ Arbitrary arrest is often employed to extract bribes from Rohingya and other Muslims.

Additional extortions unique to the experience of Rohingya and Muslims relate to fees required for traveling and forming a family.³⁴

6) Access to employment

Requirements to apply and pay for travel permits seriously limits abilities to trade or seek employment outside a person’s village.³⁵ Not holding citizenship excludes Rohingya from public service positions. Arbitrary extortion, taxes, and seizures of land and property stifle entrepreneurship and overwhelm small businesses. Forced labor takes people away from their regular employment, destroying businesses and ruining crops when harvests are impacted.

7) Forced labor

In March 2003 when the ILO reported that forced labor in large infrastructure projects had decreased in Burma, they noted that it continued with no change in northern Arakan State. Most work involves the maintenance, security, building, and supplying of military camps and infrastructure projects linked to state-enterprise projects and their international partners. Because

it is possible to pay a bribe to authorities for exemption, those most affected are those most at need of earning a regular income. The army continues to be guilty of imposing forced labor on Rohingya villagers and children. Since October 17, 2009, Burma's Border Security Force (the Nasaka) has been using forced labor of Rohingya villagers in Maungdaw Township to build a Buddhist pagoda in the Baggon Village Tract of Nasaka area No. 7.³⁶

8) Confiscation of land and property

Land owned by Rohingya families is confiscated by Nasaka personnel, and much formerly arable land has reverted to jungle. There are also settlement programs moving non-Rohingya peoples onto lands confiscated from Rohingya into "model villages" for retired SPDC officers and their families (built with labor extracted from the Rohingya population).³⁷

Forced laborers and their communities are often required to provide their own construction materials to the projects where they are compelled to work.³⁸ The growing presence of the Nasaka since its formation in 1992 has increased the amount of confiscations—whether for military camps, or for unique projects such as the leasing back to the original owners. In 2002 the Nasaka began to implement land use policies that expel families living "residentially" on areas previously allocated as agricultural.³⁹

9) Food Security

Burma's historical importance as a producer of rice is well-known. While this importance has faded, the country still manages to produce a net surplus of rice.⁴⁰ Despite this, those living in northern Arakan State experience food insecurity, with 60% suffering from malnutrition because the regime confiscates, forcibly sells, or prevents rice and other essential commodities from being traded.⁴¹

Villagers are obliged to provide food to supply military troops.⁴² Additionally, forced labor prohibits villagers from taking care of their crops, and harvest periods are compromised.

NGOs have been attempting to tackle the food security situation of the poorer strata of this population by implementing income-generation projects and other development activities. However, food security continues to deteriorate steadily. Over the last year, increased pressures through arbitrary taxation, tighter control of the local economy as the licence system extends to new commodities and activities, as well as restricted access to forest resources, have led to a crisis, which can only be stopped if direct food assistance is immediately delivered to the most vulnerable segment of the population, estimated to be one-third of the total population of northern Arakan State.

Controls on the delivery of humanitarian aid allow the regime to dictate to agencies where their assistance is provided. The World Food Program has complained that restrictions on the delivery of food aid had left Rohingya communities starving and prevented more than 90% of food and rice aid from being delivered through of permit requirements, checkpoints, local taxes, and other restrictions.⁴³

Despite these shortcomings, the presence of international NGOs and UN agencies has been crucial in providing some degree of protection to the Rohingya, and somewhat alleviates their conditions. UNHCR's presence is vital since it is the only international agency with a protection mandate. Without the programmes of UN agencies and international NGOs, it is likely that a new exodus of refugees could not be averted.

10) Limitations on access to Education

The official literacy rate in Burma as given by the SPDC is nearly 90%.⁴⁴ While this figure is highly unlikely to be accurate, the fact that literacy rates in Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh have been measured at 12% indicates that Rohingya experience particular barriers to accessing basic education.⁴⁵

Most Rohingya children do not speak the Burmese language in which public education is taught.⁴⁶ Most village tracts have one primary school (initial 4 years), but in remote areas monsoonal rains prevent children from attending even this basic level. Rohingya, not allowed to hold citizenship, cannot be employed as teachers. There are considerable gaps in the number and quality of teachers available. Additionally, extreme poverty means that many children need to work to support their families.⁴⁷

Schooling beyond primary levels is more difficult to access outside of bigger towns. Rohingya are simply excluded from studying at university. Sittwe has the only university in the state, and a travel ban has been enforced on all Rohingya since February 2001. Distance education at university level is theoretically possible, but students face many challenges in meeting requirements and passing their exams.⁴⁸

11) Persecution of political and community leaders

Leaders in exile are deeply divided on the solutions to the current situation. Rohingya and other non-Rakhine organizations are excluded from membership in the umbrella organization, the Arakan National Council (ANC).⁴⁹

The actions and policies of the SPDC in Arakan State have successfully pitted two oppressed communities against each other. Tensions between ethnic Rakhine and Rohingya run high.⁵⁰ Religious riots occur sporadically between Buddhist and Muslim, Rohingya and Rakhine groups, with reports often blaming authorities for working to stir up community unrest.⁵¹

One of the issues dividing communities in Burma is the Rohingya claim to status as a distinct ethnic group — ‘ethnic’ in Burma implying a claim to indigenous status, as opposed to having distinct cultural, racial, or linguistic characteristics. Other Muslims in Burma, totaling around 6 million in number, also experience discrimination and persecution, especially those living in Arakan State. Some Rohingya avoid identifying themselves as such, aware of the political and personal ramifications of the label.

Rohingya were permitted to vote and stand as candidates in the 1990 elections. The Rohingya candidate in Sittwe was arrested and put in jail during the elections. Despite this, the Rohingya-supported party, the National Democratic Party for Human Rights (NDPHR), won four seats. However, the elected parliament was never allowed to convene. The party was deregistered in March 1992. U Kyaw Min, a Rohingya Muslim MP of NDPHR and a member of Committee for Representing People’s Parliament (CRPP), was arrested on 17 March 2005, and was later given a 47-year jail term. He is currently languishing in the notorious Rangoon Insein Jail. Moreover, his wife Mrs. Khoteeza, their two daughters and a son were arrested on March 20, 2005 and each given 17 years for allegedly breaking the national identity and immigration laws.⁵²

12) Torture and Physical extermination

Successive military campaigns or operations are carried out in the name of census check almost every year since the 1970s. Serious crimes like arbitrary arrest, torture, summary execution, and mass punishment to entire villagers if some undesirable incident takes place, severe beatings to the point of physical exhaustion, kidnapping and releasing on payment of huge sum of ransom, extortion of different kinds, bribe taking in different ways, forced labour with degrading inhuman treatment, gang-rape and molestation of women have been carried out by the Burmese security personnel, local Rakhines and Burman goons from Natuala villages. ⁵³

The military operations also carried out forcible evictions, internal relocations and other human rights abuses are freely carried out in Rohingyas areas. In 1978 King Dragon operation was launched triggering exodus of more than 300,000 Rohingyas from Arakan. Again in 1991-92 in the wake of Pyithaya operation more than 250,000 Rohingas left Arakan. But more awful is the fact that rape of Rohingya women in detention camps or training centers, is an official military strategy to depopulate Rohingyas from their ancestral homes. Arbitrary arrest is used to extract bribes, particularly through falsely accusing and arresting Rohingya in border areas. ⁵⁴

13) Religious and cultural freedoms

Although Burma has no official state religion; the military authorities have since their inception promoted Theravada Buddhism, and marginalized other religions including Islam, the religion of Muslim Rohingyas. Islam is widely practiced mainly in Western parts of Burma, and particularly in Arakan State, where it is the main religion of the Rohingya ethnic minority. Successive military regimes have used Buddhism as a political weapon and as a tool to suppress its non-Buddhist opponents. Muslims, including Rohingya, living in Northern Arakan State are forced to pay “fees” to conduct Eid-ul-Adha and Eid-ul-Fitr. Traditions such as praying in open prayer grounds are restricted. Friday sermons are restricted. Times of pilgrimage coincide with further tightening of restrictions and the extraction of maximum bribes. ⁵⁵

Religious personalities are subjected to crimes like shaving and plucking out of beard, abusing and humiliation; giving speeches offending Islam, entering into mosque wearing shoes and drinking wine in the mosque, restriction on religious activities, destruction of mosques and *madrasahs*, (religious schools), prohibition to build or repair mosques and *madmarassahs*, turning grave yards into playgrounds and forced marriage by Buddhists etc. have been practiced as state policy. Centuries old Islamic monuments are being demolished and hundreds of thousands of Buddhist pagodas and monasteries are being built in the Muslim area to change the face of Arakan. As per SPDC military campaigns in 2002, local authorities listed to demolish of nearly 40 mosques and religious community centers (Madrasas) in Arakan. SPDC military orders have included prohibitions against repairing religious buildings and the destruction of mosques and Madrassa. But, 13 mosques were destroyed before the authorities called a halt at the request of the UNHCR. ⁵⁶

14) The right to marry and have a family

Since 1988, Nasaka has imposed marriage restrictions to the Rohingya community. A series of measures has been imposed to control birth and to limit expansion of the Rohingya population. Unlike other peoples of Burma, the Rohingya must apply for permission to get married, which is only granted in exchange for high bribes and can take up to several years to obtain. Sometimes, getting the permission could take one or two years. Polygamy has been prohibited, and widows must wait at least 3 years to remarry. To register their children's birth, parents are charged fees

that have significantly increased over the past year. In several areas, women's dignity is greatly offended, as they have to declare their pregnancy to the Nasaka. Sometimes they are forced to expose their belly. Moreover, building a new house, extending existing dwellings, and even maintenance and repairs also require authorization, resulting in overcrowded and precarious living conditions. Marriage restriction is also an attempt to reduce and control Rohingya birth rates.⁵⁷

All households require a family list, and any changes—births, deaths, marriages, addresses, even cattle acquisitions and sales—must be reported with a required fee. The charge for a birth or death can vary in cost from 1,000 to 8,000 kyat, must be declared within a week, and can also vary in the local authority's arbitrary requirements. Sometimes a scarce item such as fuel is required to be paid in place of the usual fee. The report of a birth to be delivered in person by the recovering mother within one week has also been required.⁵⁸

Rohingya living in northern Arakan State are required to ask for permission to marry. Women are required to be at least 18, and men 24.⁵⁹ Since 2003, the demanding of large amounts in bribes—between 50,000 and 300,000 kyat—for permission to marry has become universal. Marriages can be delayed for up to three years, and require several visits to Nasaka camps. There is a huge backlog of couples waiting for permission, and sometimes young couples travel to Bangladesh to try to get married at great risk of not being able to return to their homes in Burma.⁶⁰

Regulations were further tightened in December 2005, requiring three guardian signatories, the bridegroom and guardians to be cleanly shaven, certificates of clean health, recommendation letters from a religious organization and from the village chairman, the couple to commit to having no more than three children and not to seek a divorce in the future, the submission of family lists, and a declaration of the dowry. The fee was fixed at 3,000 kyat, but reports continue that the fee varies widely from place-to-place.⁶¹

15) A slow-burning genocide of the Rohingya

Since 1992, “the torture and arbitrary execution, continued detention of a large number of persons for political reasons, the existence of important restrictions on the exercise of fundamental freedoms, and the imposition of oppressive measures” that so concerned the UN have continued, forcing new movements of people and waves of refugees that place a burden on the limited resources of Bangladesh and Burma's other neighbors.⁶²

The campaign of displacement, denial of culture and identity, restrictions on the right to marry and form a family, killings, rape, torture, and denial of food are a slow-burning genocide - “deliberately inflict[ing] on the group [Rohingya and Arakan Muslims] conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part”.⁶³

Solution to the Rohingya problem

The long-standing Rohingya problem is an issue of “religious, ethnic and political persecution”. The Rohingya are denied citizenship and have become actual or potential victims of massive atrocities and crimes against humanity. Even though the Rohingya were allowed to exercise their right of franchise and elect their representatives to the Constituent Assembly, Parliament/Hluttaw, and different levels of Councils in all elections held in Burma from 1936 to 2010 including 7th, November 2010 Elections (they were even allowed to participate in SPDC's sham constitutional referendum in 2008), the military regime has declared them non-nationals, rendering them “**de facto stateless**”.

The Rohingya are an integral part of Burmese society. Their problem is a man-made tragedy with political and humanitarian ramifications. As responsible citizens they wish to be of contribution to the well-being of the nation. It is imperative that the democratic and political process in the country be “all-inclusive” and that the Rohingya be a part of it. They should be able to co-exist as equal residents of Arakan State, and as an ethnic group their rights and privileges should be ensured on par with other national groups of the Union of Burma.

In conclusion, until the military-led government stops committing human rights violations such as land confiscations, discriminatory restrictions on employment and education, access to forest resources and arable land, together with tighter controls of local economies, and arbitrary taxes, the problems of poverty, food insecurity, and crimes against humanity will continue. ###

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FOOTNOTES:-

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