

UN condemns “gross violations of human rights” and “complete impunity” in Arakan State one year after the violence

In June, the President of the UN Human Rights Council issued a statement expressing “deep concern at the gross violations of human rights against Muslims in Myanmar, including against Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State”. The statement also urged the government in Burma “to grant full citizenship rights, in keeping within a transparent due process, to Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State, including by reviewing the 1982 Citizenship Law.”

It is now a year since violence erupted in Arakan (Rakhine) state, with communal violence between Buddhist Rakhines and Muslim Rohingya soon escalating into systematic attacks against the Rohingya population. The violence of June and October 2012 resulted in countless deaths, large-scale destruction to property, thousands of people displaced and segregation within Arakan state. The UN estimates that approximately 140,000 people remain in camps. The root causes and on-going humanitarian and human rights concerns remain largely unaddressed.



A village in flames while a soldier stands by in Arakan State, June 2012. © 2012 HRW

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Myanmar, Tomás Ojea Quintana, also condemned human rights violations being committed against the Rohingya in Rakhine State, which he said are “widespread and systematic and there continues to be absolutely no accountability for what is occurring there.”

He cited the example of the fatal shooting of three Rohingya women participating in a peaceful protest in Rakhine State in early June as the latest “shocking example of how law enforcement officials operate with complete impunity there.”

The women died on 4 June when the police reportedly fired indiscriminately into a crowd of Rohingyas who were demonstrating against the proposed location of new shelters in Pa Rein village, following the destruction of their homes during the violence last year.

Quintana said he had received consistent and credible allegations of a wide range of human rights violations being committed against the Rohingya and wider Muslim population in Rakhine State. “Allegations include ‘sweeps’ of Muslim villages where men and boys are arbitrarily detained, tortured in detention and then denied their due process rights, including access to legal counsel and a fair trial. Muslim women in these villages are left increasingly vulnerable to rape and sexual violence by security officials conducting these ‘sweeps’ as the men seek to escape arbitrary detention,” he said.

Over 70 civil society organisations worldwide issued a statement one year after the start of violence to express deep concern that human rights and humanitarian concerns remain unaddressed and calling for action from the international community. The statement can be viewed here:

<http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/index.php/news-and-reports/news-stories/one-year-after-violence-in-rakhine-state-humanitarian-and-human-rights-conc/149>

Two years since Kachin ceasefire broken and still no peace or justice

June 7 marked the 2nd anniversary of military attacks by the Burmese government against the Kachin Independence Army and Kachin civilians, breaking a 17- year ceasefire. 60 Kachin community organisations and Burma campaign groups worldwide in 21 countries took part in a Global Day of Action to mark the anniversary.

The Global Day of Action highlighted the human rights abuses in Kachin areas, including widespread sexual violence against ethnic women used as a weapon of war. The Burmese government continues to restrict access for humanitarian aid to thousands of Kachin refugees. International humanitarian aid is still needed for the IDPs through local relief organisations.



Although there have been some peace negotiations, there has been little progress from the government to commit to a genuine ceasefire and negotiate on the political root causes in a meaningful way.

“The root cause of the conflict in Kachin State is the lack of national equality based on the current constitution. Without a political solution which is the formation of a federal democratic Burma that guarantees self-determination for the Kachin and all ethnic nationalities, there can never be a durable peace in the country”, said Gawlu La Awng from the Foreign Department of the Kachin Independence Organisation.

More peaceful protestors arrested

The harassment, arrest and detention of activists has continued throughout Burma, particularly in connection with the Letpadaung copper mine.

Activist Aung Soe and two farmers, Ko Soe Thu and U Maung San, were sentenced to prison terms on 1 June. Aung Soe was sentenced to one and a half years in prison for 3 different charges and his trial will continue for 5 remaining charges.

His trial was closed without any lawyer allowed to defend his case. He is serving his prison sentence in Shwe Bo prison in central Burma, which is more than 480 miles away from his family in Rangoon. He was arrested in April 2013 for his part organising protests with farmers to plough land which had been confiscated by the Burmese government for the Letpadaung copper mine project.

The Letpadaung project is a joint venture between China's Wan Bao Company and the military-owned Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Ltd. The project resulted in land confiscations and environmental degradation. Protests started in June 2012 by a group of farmers who demanded compensation for confiscated land and suspension of the activities of this copper mine in Monywa, central Burma.

On 12 June, seven protesters were jailed for demonstrating without permission. U Sein Aung, U Aye Thein and U Win Swe Myint were arrested in August 2012 after staging a peaceful demonstration against streets vendors' relocation in Mandalay. They were charged under the Peaceful Demonstration and Gathering Act. They were denied bail and spent 177 days in prison, including two days in solitary confinement.

Four villagers were arrested in Kan Bae village near Inle Lake after they ploughed land that had been confiscated for a hotel project. In addition, three social network activists were arrested and detained after showing support for farmers who ploughed land confiscated by the police and military in Pegu Division. They are now facing charges under the Unlawful Association Act.

Nobel Peace laureates call for UN investigation

Twelve Nobel Peace laureates, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Shirin Ebadi, Muhammad Yunus, Tawakkol Karman and Jody Williams, have called for an immediate end to the violence against Muslims and other ethnic minorities in Burma and for a UN investigation into the deaths of Muslims in Burma, as well as to investigate on-going violence against the Kachin, the Shan and other ethnic minorities.

Their statement marks one year since the violence in Rakhine state and two years since government forces broke the ceasefire agreement with the Kachin.

Archbishop Tutu, who visited Burma earlier this year and was deeply troubled by high levels of violence against ethnic minorities, said that he “left Burma with a heavy heart.”

Two women jailed for “insulting religion”

On 5 June, two Muslim women were sentenced in connection with an incident in April that allegedly triggered anti-Muslim attacks in Okkan, central Burma. They were convicted for “insulting religion”, one of them by bumping into a Buddhist monk. Both were sentenced to two years in prison with hard labour.

Although the vast majority of victims of the violence over the past year have been Muslims, most of those convicted of serious offenses in connection with the violence have been Muslims.

ILO lifts remaining restrictions on Burma

On 18 June, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) passed a resolution to lift its remaining restrictions on Burma. Last year the ILO lifted some restrictions to allow Burma to receive ILO technical cooperation and assistance.

On 12 June, the European Union also reinstated its Generalised System of Preferences for Burma, which means that Burma can now benefit from lower duties on exports.

The restrictions were imposed by the ILO in 2000 because of Burma’s widespread and systematic use of forced labour. Burma’s military-backed government has signed an agreement with the ILO to end the use of forced labour by the end of 2015. However, forced labour remains a major problem in Burma, particularly in ethnic states where villagers are still used for forced labour by the Burmese Army.

Burma non-compliant in plan to end child soldier recruitment

One year since the Burmese government signed a joint action plan with the UN to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers, the Burmese government has failed to meet a range of commitments under the action plan.

The Burmese military has released only 66 children since the action plan was signed. There are an estimated 5,000 children in the Burmese Army. Recruitment and use of children by the Burmese military continues, with new cases being reported in 2013. Children continue to be deployed in areas of armed conflict, notably in Kachin State.

The Burmese Army continues to refuse the UN Country Task Force unrestricted access to all military sites, thereby preventing the monitoring of the processes of age verification and demobilization.

While the Burmese government appears to have taken some steps to strengthen recruitment procedures to end the future recruitment of children, the Burmese Army has repeatedly resisted providing the UN Country Task Force access to recruitment centres, making it impossible to assess the implementation of recruitment reform.

The joint action plan is yet another example of the Burmese government signing an international commitment and gaining international praise but without following through on effective implementation.

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