

## Anti-Muslim violence

Anti-Muslim riots broke out in several places in Burma in March. More than 12,000 people were forced to flee their homes in one affected town, Meiktila, in the Mandalay Region. Estimates of those killed vary from around forty to more than a hundred.

The violence began on 20 March and is reported to have started with an argument in a gold shop in a market in Meiktila, which quickly escalated into widespread violence with crowds setting fire to business properties, religious buildings and houses.

Rioters predominantly targeted the Muslim community.

Attacks against Muslims spread to other areas in central Burma, including Okpho, Gyobingauk, and Minhla townships of Pegu region.

A curfew and state of emergency was imposed in four townships in Mandalay region.

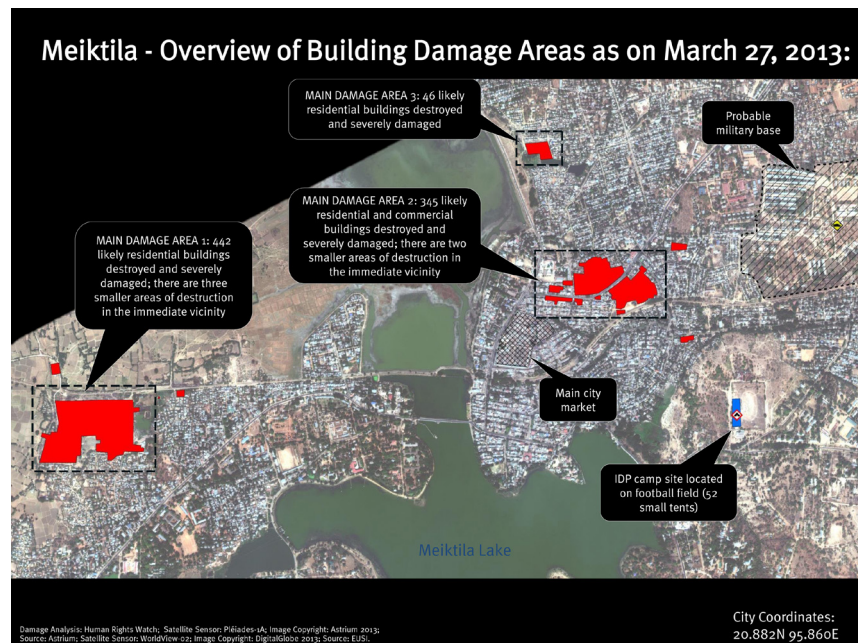
UN Special Rapporteur on human rights Tomás Ojea Quintana said “the Government has simply not done enough to address the spread of discrimination and prejudice against Muslim communities across the country” or to tackle the “organized and coordinated mobs” that are inciting hatred and violently attacking Muslim communities.

Burma Campaign UK has published examples of some of the anti-Muslim propaganda, which is being circulated in Burma. Leaflets inciting anti-Muslim hatred and violence have been circulated across Burma for many months. However, government authorities have taken no action to prevent the spread of anti-Muslim propaganda.

<http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/images/uploads/ExamplesofAnti-MuslimPropaganda.pdf>

A Burma Campaign UK briefing on the background to the growing religious violence in Burma and recommendations for the international community, ‘An international task force is needed to help tackle growing religious violence in Burma’ can be viewed here:

[http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/images/uploads/An\\_international\\_task\\_force\\_is\\_needed\\_to\\_help\\_tackle\\_growing\\_religious\\_violence\\_in\\_Burma.pdf](http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/images/uploads/An_international_task_force_is_needed_to_help_tackle_growing_religious_violence_in_Burma.pdf)



Satellite images published by Human Rights Watch show the scale of the destruction, with an estimated 828 buildings totally destroyed and at least 35 other buildings were partially destroyed.

## **Human Rights Council highlights international law violations in Burma**

The United Nations Human Rights Council passed a resolution on Burma by consensus on 21st March, highlighting serious human rights abuses which could violate international law.

These include ‘... arbitrary detention, forced displacement, land confiscations, rape and other forms of sexual violence, torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, as well as violations of international humanitarian law .... violence, displacement and economic deprivation affecting persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities... armed conflict in Kachin State and the associated human rights violations and allegations of international humanitarian law violations, desecration of places of worship, sexual violence and torture...’

In a blow for President Thein Sein, the Burmese government failed in its attempt to have Burma moved from Item 4 of the Council’s agenda, ‘Human rights situations that require the Council’s attention’, to Item 10, ‘Technical assistance and capacity building.’ Thein Sein also failed to persuade Council members not to renew the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Burma. The mandate was extended for a further year.

The Human Rights Council also repeated a call, made more than thirty times in previous Resolutions by the Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly, to ‘... take necessary measures to ensure accountability and end impunity, including by undertaking a full, transparent and independent investigation into all reports of violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law’.

The Council also called on the government of Burma to meet its international treaty obligations in relation to the ethnic Rohingya; ‘...to repeal and/ or amend laws that deny the Rohingya, inter alia, the right to birth registration, the ability to marry and freedom of movement, including equal access to citizenship, through a full review of the Citizenship Law of 1982 to ensure that it conforms to international obligations defined in treaties to which the Government of Myanmar is a party, including their right to a nationality.’

## **Over 1,000 flee Burma Army attacks in Shan State**

The Shan Human Rights Foundation has reported that new Burmese Army operations in Shan State forced more than 1,000 villagers to flee their homes in March.

Since February, thousands of Burmese troops and artillery have been deployed to pressure the Shan State Army - North (SSA-N) to withdraw from its territories along the Salween River, near Tangyan. Burmese troops have been laying land mines and committing human rights violations against local civilians, according to The Shan Human Rights Foundation.

In March 2011 the Burma Army broke a 22-year ceasefire with the SSA-N, displacing over 30,000 civilians. SSA-N signed a new ceasefire agreement with the government in January 2012, but this is now being breached by the current Burmese military operations.

## **Committee to review Constitution to be set up**

Burma’s parliament has approved a proposal to set up a committee to review the 2008 Constitution. The proposal was tabled by the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP).

It is not clear who will be on the committee and what the terms of the review will be.

Burma’s Constitution was drafted by the military dictatorship and voted on in a rigged referendum in 2008, just days after Cyclone Nargis hit Burma. The dictatorship claimed 94% of people voted in favour.

The Constitution has many undemocratic clauses and hands ultimate power to the military. The military are guaranteed 25% of seats in the Parliament and the military remains completely unaccountable, above both the President and the Parliament, and constitutionally able to veto anything the President or Parliament does.

There are also restrictions on presidential candidates, which effectively prevent leader Aung San Suu Kyi from becoming President.

The Constitution also denies ethnic groups greater autonomy and ethnic rights.

## **Parliament approves defence budget**

Burma’s parliament has approved the state budget for 2013-2014, which is reported to allocate around 21% on military spending, more than five times the 3.9% spent on health.

There is still no real transparency on the government budget and military spending. However, reports indicate that it is likely that military spending is actually increasing given the overall size of the government budget.

## **Thein Sein visits Europe**

President Thein Sein made his first visit to Europe in March, visiting Norway, Finland, Austria, Brussels and Italy. He also visited New Zealand and Australia later in March.

His trip focused on encouraging trade and investment deals as well as lobbying the EU to lift all sanctions on Burma.

Despite continued attacks by the Burmese army in Kachin State, Thein Sein claimed during a press conference in Austria that there was “no more fighting all over the country.”

Thein Sein also said he has ‘no plans’ to revise the 1982 Citizenship Law, stating ‘the law intends to protect the nation’.

European governments were criticised for failing to challenge Thein Sein about serious human rights abuses that continue to be committed. The Norwegian government faced particular criticism for its failure to speak up for the Rohingya. Both the Norwegian prime minister and foreign minister stated that the issue of Rohingya citizenship should be an internal Burmese issue.

The Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide stated that a nation is “not obligated to give citizenship to everybody who is living there ... This is not something we are going to demand. Some critical voices talk as if all nations would have received people from neighbouring nations and made them citizens.”

By referring to people from neighbouring countries, the Norwegian Foreign Minister is effectively agreeing with Burma’s military-backed government that the Rohingya are immigrants from a neighbouring country when all the evidence shows that Rohingya have lived in Burma for centuries.



Norwegian Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide greeting President Thein Sein in Oslo.  
Photo: Utenriksdepartementet

## **Official Letpadaung copper mine report released**

On 11 March, the investigation commission, established by President Thein Sein and chaired by Aung San Suu Kyi, released its report on the Letpadaung copper mine.

The Letpadaung project is a joint-venture between China’s Wan Bao Company and the military-owned Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Ltd. It has resulted in land confiscations and environmental damage, and peaceful protestors have been harassed and arrested.

The report acknowledged that the mine lacks strong environmental protection measures and would not create more jobs for local people. It also recognised that farmers were forcibly evicted from their land to make way for the project and had not been properly compensated. The report recommended greater compensation should be paid. However, it said that the copper mine project should continue.

The report also confirmed that police had used smoke bombs containing phosphorus during their crackdown on peaceful protestors at the mine in November last year. However, it did not recommend that action should be taken to hold the police accountable for the abuses.

Local villagers, farmers and activists who have been protesting against the mine rejected the report’s recommendations and said they would continue to protest against the project.

After the release of the report, Aung San Suu Kyi visited the villages affected by the project to explain the findings of the commission. She called on people to accept the report’s recommendations. However, she was greeted by angry villagers who were disappointed that the report did not recognise their demands.

## **Parliamentary report finds massive land confiscation by military**

The parliamentary Farmland Investigation Commission submitted its report on land confiscation to the parliament in March.

According to the report, between July 2012 to January 2013 the commission received 565 complaints that alleged that the military had forcibly confiscated almost 250,000 acres of land from villagers.

However, the report only investigated land confiscated directly by the military and does not include land confiscation by military businesses or

others, for example the land confiscation associated with the Letpadaung copper mine, which is a joint venture with the military-owned Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Ltd (UMEH).

There has been a big increase in reports of land confiscation during the past two years. The 2008 Constitution turned all land for which there was no registration over to the government, allowing those in power to confiscate land from civilians without compensation.

The new Farmland Law passed last year has also increased concern about land confiscation. According to the Asian Legal Resource Centre, “far from reducing the prospects of land grabbing, the Farmland Law opens the door to confiscation of agricultural land on any pretext associated with a state project or the ‘national interest’.”

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**for Human Rights, Democracy  
& Development in Burma**