

**Mission report of OHCHR rapid response mission  
to Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh**

13-24 September 2017



**UNITED NATIONS**  
**HUMAN RIGHTS**  
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

## **1. Summary of findings**

Credible information gathered indicates that the destruction of Rohingya villages in northern Rakhine State, and other serious human rights violations committed in the aftermath of the 25 August attacks, were executed in a well-organised, coordinated, and systematic manner. The information reveals that these human rights violations were committed against the Rohingya population in northern Rakhine State by the Myanmar security forces often in concert with armed Rakhine Buddhist individuals.

The manner in which the villages, home and property of the Rohingya across northern Rakhine State has been destroyed points to it being well-organised and coordinated, thereby challenging the assertion that it was merely collateral damage of the military security operations following the alleged attack against police outposts and on a regimental headquarters across locations in northern Rakhine State, allegedly by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA).

Credible information indicates that the Myanmar security forces purposely destroyed the property of the Rohingyas, scorched their dwellings and entire villages in northern Rakhine State, not only to drive the population out in droves but also to prevent the fleeing Rohingya victims from returning to their homes. The destruction by the Tatmadaw of houses, fields, food-stocks, crops, livestock and even trees, render the possibility of the Rohingya returning to normal lives and livelihoods in the future in northern Rakhine almost impossible. It also indicates an effort to effectively erase all signs of memorable landmarks in the geography of the Rohingya landscape and memory in such a way that a return to their lands would yield nothing but a desolate and unrecognizable terrain. Information received also indicates that the Myanmar security forces targeted teachers, the cultural and religious leadership, and other people of influence in the Rohingya community in an effort to diminish Rohingya history, culture and knowledge.

This report also highlights that prior to the incidents and crackdown of 25 August, a strategy was pursued to: 1) Arrest and arbitrarily detain male Rohingyas between the ages of 15-40 years; 2) Arrest and arbitrarily detain Rohingya opinion-makers, leaders and cultural and religious personalities; 3) Initiate acts to deprive Rohingya villagers of access to food, livelihoods and other means of conducting daily activities and life; 4) Commit repeated acts of humiliation and violence prior to, during and after 25 August, to drive out Rohingya villagers en masse through incitement to hatred, violence and killings, including by declaring the Rohingyas as Bengalis and illegal settlers in Myanmar; 5) Instil deep and widespread fear and trauma – physical, emotional and psychological, in the Rohingya victims via acts of brutality, namely killings, disappearances, torture, and rape and other forms of sexual violence.

## **2. Introduction**

In the framework of OHCHR's rapid response capacity, three OHCHR staff ("the Team") were deployed to Bangladesh from 13 to 24 September 2017. The mandate of the Team was to monitor the situation of the newly arrived Rohingya population as well as to establish the facts and circumstances in northern Rakhine in the aftermath of the 25 August 2017 attacks, with a specific focus on the Buthidaung, Rathedaung and Maungdaw townships, reportedly the most affected by the eruption of violence.

As of 8 October, an estimated 519,000 new Rohingya arrivals have been reported since 25 August 2017.

The Team met with victims and eyewitnesses to collect reliable information on allegations of human rights violations committed in northern Rakhine State, Myanmar in the following locations in Cox's Bazar District, Bangladesh, where the greater part of newly arrived Rohingya took shelter:

- i. Kutupalong and Nayapara registered refugee camp sites.
- ii. Balukhali, Kutupalong, Leda and Unchiprang makeshift settlements.
- iii. The two boat landing sites in Sabrang and Shamlapur.
- iv. In host communities located in the areas of Balukhali, Kutupalong, Leda, and Teknaf.

The 25 August attacks occurred after the reported killing of six ethnic Mro Buddhist villagers in Rakhine State in the weeks prior to 25 August, which caused an increased level of incitement of hostility and violence towards the Rohingya population. Calls were reportedly made for the local Rakhine population to take up arms.<sup>1</sup> On 11 August, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Myanmar expressed alarm over reports that an army battalion had flown into Rakhine State in western Myanmar to help local authorities boost security in the region.<sup>2</sup>

On 11 September 2017, following the continuation of “clearance operations” by the Myanmar military, non-cessation of violence against the Rohingya, and their flight into Bangladesh, the High Commissioner for Human Rights in his opening statement to the 36<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council stated that the situation seems to be a “textbook example of ethnic cleansing”.<sup>3</sup> He noted that the current situation was not fully assessed since Myanmar had refused access to human rights investigators. He called on the Government of Myanmar to end its current cruel military operations, with accountability for all violations that have occurred and to reverse the pattern of severe and widespread discrimination against the Rohingya population. The Secretary-General of the United Nations echoed these words a few days later.

### **3. Methodology**

This report is based on information gathered from approximately 65 interviews with Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, both with individuals and with groups.

The interviews with individual eyewitnesses and victims, including with key groups, were conducted in challenging situations. Group interviews were conducted with groups comprising 15-40 individuals. The Team adhered to the principal of confidentiality, and relevant information is only released with consent of the respondents concerned. All individuals interviewed had fled northern Rakhine after 25 August 2017. Additionally, information was corroborated by a host of respondents including members of UN agencies, local Bangladeshi authorities, the media, international NGOs, medical personnel, CSOs, aid organisations, and individual charities.<sup>4</sup>

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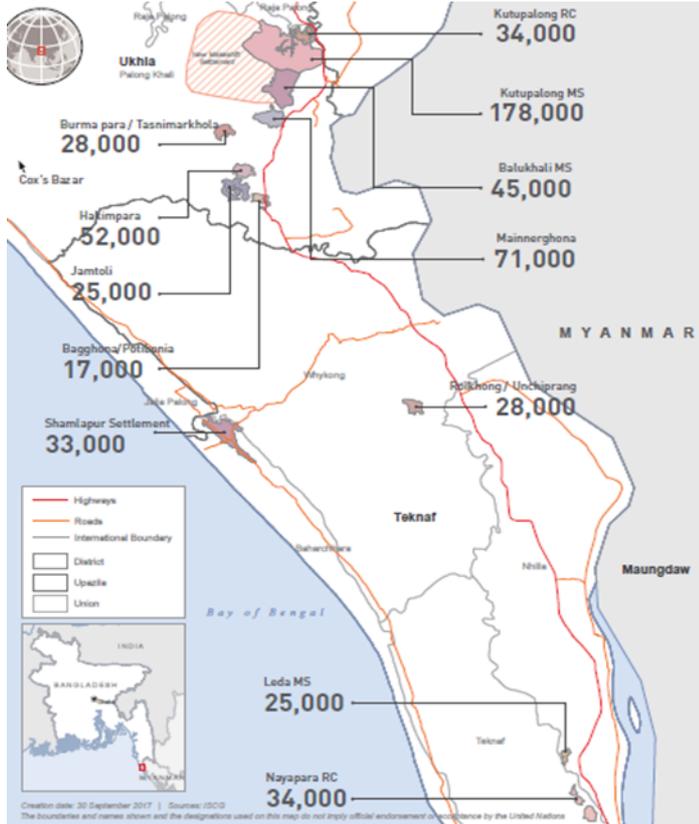
<sup>1</sup> A/72/382, report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, p.16.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21968&LangID=E>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22044&LangID=E>.

<sup>4</sup> The Team have received considerable amount of data from other trusted sources, both photos and videos, including geographical tagging (location and date).

The Team would like to express its sincere gratitude to the Government of Bangladesh, in particular the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for the extraordinary support provided before, during and after the mission. Particular thanks is due to the Resident Coordinator/Resident Representative UNDP in Bangladesh and the UN Country Team in Dhaka as well as UN agencies in Cox’s Bazar. The Team also met with the Deputy Commissioner and District Magistrate of Cox’s Bazar, the Director of the Cox’s Bazar Sadar District Hospital, representatives of the Bangladesh Border Guards and the Police.



Source: Inter Sector Coordination Group, Humanitarian Response Plan September 2017 - February 2018, 30 September 2017

**4. Key findings of patterns and trends of human rights violations**

***Forced displacement of Rohingyas, and destruction of property, livelihoods and futures***

An analysis of the information received indicates a well-organised, coordinated and systematic pattern of destruction by the Myanmar security forces (sometimes with the support of individual Rakhine Buddhist villagers) of the villages, homes and property belonging to Rohingya and the forced displacement of large sections of the Rohingya population from their dwellings and villages in northern Rakhine State from 25 August onwards.

The Team documented consistent accounts of the Myanmar security forces surrounding or entering villages or settlements, sometimes accompanied by Rakhine Buddhist individuals,<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> In several cases it was indicated that Rakhine Buddhist individuals were issued with uniforms and weapons. In these cases they were identified as the people they had been living side by side with— people they reportedly regularly met at the local market.

firing indiscriminately at Rohingya villagers, injuring some and killing other innocent victims, setting houses on fire, and announcing in other villages that the same would befall them if they did not comply with the order to immediately abandon their homes. In other instances, information collected indicates that houses were set on fire, after the Rohingya inhabitants fled out of fear.

A majority of the people interviewed by the Team reported the burning or destruction of their property and livelihood options by the Myanmar army. Several interviewees have indicated that a “launcher” (most probably a *rocket propelled grenade launcher*)<sup>6</sup> was used to set houses on fire. Based on their statements, the fire sometimes rapidly spread from house to house destroying entire settlements.

In a statement made on 19 September 2017, the Myanmar State Counsellor Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi claimed that the Myanmar security forces have not conducted any further “clearance operations” since 5 September 2017.<sup>7</sup> However, on 17 September 2017, the Team was able to identify columns of smoke rising across the Naf River in northern Rakhine State. Furthermore, satellite imagery indicates that the burning of villages continued weeks after 5 September 2017. Statements from the Bangladeshi Border Guards representatives and other actors present close to the border also indicate that explosions, shootings and burnings were heard and seen after 5 September 2017.

The Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement Minister has been quoted as saying that following the 25 August attacks, the re-development of Maungdaw region will be implemented according to the country’s Natural Disaster Management Law.<sup>8</sup> He stated that “according to the law, burnt land becomes government-managed land”. This law has been relied upon in the past by the Government of Myanmar to prevent the return of internally displaced people who were dislocated following the 2012 violence.

In addition to the destruction of property, homes and livelihoods, other human rights violations were committed against the Rohingya that contributed to their forced displacement through the establishment of a climate of intimidation and fear. Information received indicated that, a few days before 25 August, the Myanmar security forces imposed further restrictions on access to markets, medical clinics, schools and religious sites. Furthermore, Rohingya men aged between 15-40 years were reportedly arrested by the Myanmar Police sometimes as long as a month before the 25 August attack, without charges or arrest warrants, and several of those detained have reportedly not been heard from since.

A 60-year old woman from Buthidaung township, who recently arrived in the camp stated, *“The day of the big attack, the Myanmar army came and surrounded our house. They started to scream that we do not belong in Myanmar and that it is not our country. Then they started to shoot. We tried to hide in our house, but we could not escape the bullets that were everywhere. I took my family and we ran as fast as we could to the hills. We saw many dead bodies on the road - it was terrible. Women were raped in front of our eyes – some were even young female children – and sometimes they were hurt by several men in uniform. Men were severely beaten with rifle butts, knives, and machetes. At night from the hill side we saw our villages burning – one house after another”*.

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<sup>6</sup> Interviewees provided drawings or described the look of the weapons allegedly used by the security forces.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.president-office.gov.mm/en/?q=livestream/speech-sc-governments-efforts-regard-national-reconciliation-and-peace-19-9-2017>.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.globalnewlightofmyanmar.com/will-perform-duties-accord-law-putting-rule-law-forward-dr-win-myat-aye/>.

Several statements indicated that Rohingya victims ran to hide in the hills and subsequently found their houses burnt to the ground, and that, in some cases, the Myanmar security forces were attacking villagers who returned to their villages. Rohingya interviewees indicated that their family members were beaten up, even killed while attempting to retrieve personal belongings.

In some cases, before and during the attacks, megaphones were used to announce: *“You do not belong here – go to Bangladesh. If you do not leave, we will torch your houses and kill you”*.

A 12-year-old girl from Rathedaung township informed the Team that, *“the [Myanmar security forces and Rakhine Buddhist individuals] surrounded our house and started to shoot. It was a situation of panic – they shot my sister in front of me, she was only seven years old. She cried and told me to run. I tried to protect her and care for her, but we had no medical assistance on the hillside and she was bleeding so much that after one day she died. I buried her myself. There were helicopters in the air – and they used “launchers” to try to attack us when we were in the hills. My mother was outside the house with my four brothers. I do not know where they are now. My father was jailed a month before this. We do not know why and we don’t even know whether he is dead or alive”*.

A large number of the interviewees confirmed that they witnessed the burning of their homes and villages and some confirmed that the Myanmar army set their houses on fire. As the houses were set alight witness statements report the chanting of phrases such as *“You are Bengali! This is not your home, you do not belong here”*.

Additional information received indicated that local authorities in some cases warned the Rohingya in advance that their homes would be attacked and burnt to the ground indicating that the attacks were planned. As a result, people fled out of fear for their life and many families were separated from each other.

A 35-year old Rohingya woman from Maungdaw township said, *“The Myanmar security forces came in the middle of the night. They were using megaphones announcing that we are “Bengalis” and ordered us to leave, and if we didn’t they will burn our houses. My husband was in the hills that day to collect wood so I was alone when they came. They started to shoot and then a bomb blast occurred, following which our house started to burn. Many people were running away. I saw many people killed or badly hurt (by gunfire and knives). The people who accompanied the Myanmar security forces were Buddhist people from neighbouring villages. I have seen them several times in the market”*.

A few witnesses mentioned that some Rohingya individuals a few days prior to 25 August were taken to town halls and questioned about their engagement with the ARSA regarding allegations of providing shelter to these “fighters”, and that if they did not tell the truth, there would be serious consequences.

A 60-year old father of four children from Buthidaung township stated that, *“They wanted to get information but we did not know anything. We tried to tell them so but they got more and more angry and started to shoot bullets which went flying in all directions. Why do they hold us responsible for something that we have no knowledge of? Myanmar is our birthplace. We did not do anything wrong. We are not criminals. What crime have we committed? The Myanmar authorities have denied us the right to live in peace; they order us to leave our land - the same land generations of our families have called home. The big issues started with the ID cards: the Myanmar government through the Myanmar army wanted us to hand in our old*

*ID cards and accept ID cards for us the “Muslims” – it means that we would agree that we are not from Myanmar, that instead we come from Bangladesh, but this is not true. Why should we accept this?”*

It was also highlighted that specific attacks particularly targeted the educated in the Rohingya society such as teachers, business men, religious and community leaders – people with influence. They were reportedly arrested and transferred to unknown places. Several eyewitnesses stated that people were completely taken by surprise when the attack on their villages occurred and that the operations often started after midnight or just after lunch time.

A 26-year old mother mentioned, *“I woke up 3 a.m. and my house was on fire. There was chaos, everyone was running everywhere, they were shooting to kill us, they took women and dragged them away to rape them. They did not spare anyone – even children were beaten and tortured. I fled from my house with my seven children and my husband, before they could attack us. I have tried for a long time to live in peace, even during difficult times, but this attack was horrible. The Myanmar army were telling us “you are not the people of Myanmar – you are the people of Bangladesh. If you do not leave your home now, we will torch your houses. Before this day, the Myanmar army have made our lives difficult. They blocked us from buying and selling property. We could not go to the markets without permission and we could not conduct any business. They were screaming that we are Muslims, we do not belong on their soil, and we should go to Bangladesh”.*

## **5. Other reported human rights violations**

### ***Extrajudicial and summary executions***

Several victims reported the killing of close family members by random gunfire or referred to the Myanmar security forces surrounding villages at some distance and then shooting indiscriminately at houses and individuals alike. While describing the situation, several witnesses recalled the presence of the Myanmar security forces accompanied by mobs of Rakhine Buddhist individuals, sometimes in groups of up to 100-150 individuals. In some cases, prior to being killed, victims were reportedly accused of supporting “terrorists”. Almost all testimonies indicated that people were shot at close range and in the back while they tried to flee in panic.

Eyewitnesses reported to the Team that Rakhine Buddhist individuals wielded knives or machetes as they entered Rohingya settlements. The Team collected personal details of the victims allegedly killed. In some cases victims were allegedly deliberately targeted and while in other cases they were killed through explosions, fire and stray bullets. The data gathered by the Team from local government and clinics in the different camp sites and makeshift settlements in Cox’s Bazar, and from international and domestic NGOs, corroborates the findings related to injuries sustained by gun shots.

Witness accounts attest to Rohingya victims, including children and elderly people, burnt to death inside their houses. The Team heard several accounts of elderly Rohingya being left behind by their families as the latter fled in panic. In one case it was highlighted that a victim was deliberately trapped inside a house by the Myanmar security forces and burnt alive. Children were not spared by the security forces, nor by Rakhine Buddhist individuals. There were accounts of severe beatings, stabbings or killings during the attacks.

The Team received information from the Bangladesh Police of 100 bodies of Rohingya victims (20 male, 38 female and 42 children) that were collected floating down the Naf River

from Myanmar into Bangladesh territory in the period 31 August to 20 September 2017. Several of the bodies recovered had signs of gunshot wounds on different parts of their bodies. Several Rohingyas mentioned burying their loved ones at the border as they had died of the injuries suffered either during the armed attacks on their villages or during the journey to the border with Bangladesh.

### ***Disappearances***

A woman, aged 50 years from Maungdaw township stated, *“My son was imprisoned by the Myanmar army. The army came to our house and arrested him but we do not know why – they just arrested him and took him away. They visited our house earlier and issued threats saying that we do not belong to Myanmar, but this time it was different, this situation was extreme – they were extreme. I am so worried about my son, we do not know if he is dead or alive. I am not worried about my property but I only want my son back. I want to know if he is dead or not. I cannot tolerate this anymore – the pain is too much. It is better for him to die than to be tortured”*.

It was further alleged that the “most beautiful girls” in the village who were unmarried were rounded up, separated from their families and taken away to unknown destinations. A majority of the interviewees believed that those who were handpicked by the security forces are no longer alive. The Team collected information related to the names and age of the disappeared females.

### ***Rape and other forms of sexual violence***

Well into the course of the mission, more and more information began to be shared both by girls and women who had survived rape or other forms of sexual violence. Information was collected related to girls as young as five to seven years of age who had been raped, often in front of their relatives, and sometimes by three to five men taking turns, all dressed in army uniforms.

Witness statements indicated that some previously abducted girls returned with vaginal bleeding, which continued for days. One statement indicated that a knife was used during a gang rape of a female victim. Another statement, received by an extremely credible source, referred to a woman whose stomach was slit open after she was raped. Witnesses stated that her “unborn baby” was killed by the alleged perpetrator with a knife and her nipples were cut off. Personnel in community clinics in registered camps and makeshift settlements, in a clinic run by an international NGO, as well as personnel at the Bazar Sadaar District Hospital in Cox’s Bazar corroborated the information that female Rohingya victims were being treated by their medical staff for injuries received through sexual and gender-based violence.

A young woman of 25 from Buthidaung township stated, *“I came here [to the camp] 12 days ago. I came by foot through the hills, and we walked for five days. We did not have any water or food; we left all our belongings in the house as we ran from the fire, and the shooting. It was a massacre. Women were collected and taken away – they were raped in front of us – in front of their families. The [four men] in uniform took my sister when we were hiding in the hills; they raped her in front of us as we were hiding behind the trees. She was crying but my father could not help her, as we had to be quiet so they did not notice us. It was horrible and she had pain and was bleeding for many days. Now in Bangladesh, she has received medical care but her dignity is destroyed”*.

Testimonies also indicate that many women, even ones who were pregnant, were raped. In several cases, women and girls were reportedly raped in their homes and at police stations, and at other times in full view of family members, including children; anyone trying to protect their female kin was dealt with severely by the perpetrators.

### ***Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment***

Testimonies collected from victims and witnesses revealed that physical assault, including beatings, by Myanmar security forces, was widespread following the outbreak of violence on 25 August. Victims reportedly included Rohingya men, women and children of all ages, sometimes as young as four to five years old. Rifle butts were allegedly used to hit sensitive areas of the human body such as stomach and head. Several testimonies mentioned that male members of the household were targeted by the military, sometimes jointly with Rakhine Buddhists individuals, as they tried to flee. Collected testimonies refer to broken legs, arms and ribs. The Myanmar security forces and supporting Rakhine Buddhist individuals reportedly forced victims, including small children, to watch as torture was inflicted on their loved ones. In certain cases, individuals were allegedly severely beaten, raped or otherwise sexually abused, and even killed in front of their relatives, which had the effect of inflicting often severe mental anguish, and instilling fear.

### ***Attacks on places of worship and religious intolerance***

Information received by the Team refers to the burning of mosques and the destruction of the Holy Quran, which was burnt and torn apart in front of villagers.

A 55-year old man from Buthidaung township mentioned an attack on their local mosque a few days before the 25 August, *“The Myanmar security forces came during prayer time. They set the mosque on fire, took our holy books and tore them apart in front of us, yelling “Where is your Allah now, will he come and save you? You are Muslims and you do not belong here. We want a state only for us”.*

## **6. The flight to Bangladesh**

A 20-year old woman from Rathedaung township said, *“I fled from my village 8-10 days ago and arrived in the camp two days ago. We walked for five days to get to Bangladesh, without any food or water. I walked for days in the hills while in an advanced stage of pregnancy and delivered my child on the hill side without any medical support – he is very sick but we are safe”.*

Several of the statements collected indicate that once the Myanmar security forces entered villages, chaos broke out and family members were separated due to panic. Often families fled with their lives, without any personal belongings or identification documents other than what they were able to hastily collect and carry.

One 12-year old girl from Buthidaung township said that, *“everyone lost someone, many children were looking for their family members – it was total chaos, and I thought we were safe the moment we reached the border but then [the Myanmar army] came from all directions and starting shooting at us - many people ran into the nearby jungle but some old people died in front of my eyes”.*

The Team estimates that the journey from the villages to the border with Bangladesh took from 2-16 days, and that most people were forced to pay between 5,000-10,000 Taka per

person to cross the river by boat. Many without any means had to walk across to the border. In several reported cases, people who did not have cash bartered jewellery, such as gold bracelets, earrings and nose pins to pay for the crossing. Several who could not afford to pay were left behind, and in some cases, boatmen took pity and allowed unaccompanied minors in particular to board the boat without payment. In Sabrang, the Team was informed that faith-based organisations pay for transportation of some Rohingyas from a transit island (Shapori Island) in Bangladesh to mainland Bangladesh. During the visit, the Team witnessed the arrival of a boat with 26 Rohingyas on board, mainly women and children. The passengers were received by men carrying stacks of cash which was offered to the arriving Rohingya (100-500 Taka/person). Furthermore, Rohingyas received a voucher each for staple food and basic personal items by representatives of faith-based organisations including a local mosque.

Arriving by boat was an 11 year-old boy, with a gunshot wound on his thigh, who said, *“I belonged to a group of 25 people attempting to cross the border. Myanmar military started to shoot at us and 8 people got injured. My father was killed earlier during our journey from our village to the border, and I was separated from my mother”*.

A 34-year old woman from Buthidaung township found her sister’s children abandoned at the border in Myanmar: *“I managed to escape with my two children. I do not know how I managed to reach the border. I was so scared. I lost everything. My husband was killed in front of me. We had no water or food but people helped me and they cared for my children. For eight days we were hiding in the jungle – when we came to the border I found my sister’s [12-year old] daughter. She was shot three times, once in the back and twice in her leg. My sister’s [4-year-old] son had a gun injury on the right side of this leg. Every time he hears the word ‘military,’ he cries. I care for these children because if I don’t, who will?”*

Fleeing Rohingyas hid along the hillsides during day time and walked towards the border with Bangladesh at nightfall out of fear of detection and assault. Individuals indicated that they went to abandoned villages to find food and water before they finally fled the country for safety. Several testimonies referred to ongoing attacks in the border area with Bangladesh while waiting for transportation.

A single mother of six children from Buthidaung township arrived on the shore in Bangladesh: *“I have nothing, I was so scared for my life, the only thing that I focused on was to save the lives of my children, I do not know where to go, I do not have a plan, and I don’t know what the future will bring. Please help me”*.

In one of the group interviews with 42 new arrivals in Shamlapur originating from Maungdaw township in Myanmar, a majority of whom were women (including five women with 23 children) described how the Myanmar security forces had entered their homes telling them to look outside their windows where neighbouring villages were on fire, and warned that if they did not leave they would all be burnt inside their houses.

A recently arrived 19-year old girl from Buthidaung township, whose father was allegedly killed by the Myanmar security forces in front of her and her mother, and who was lost in the crowd said: *“I am alone; I do not know where to go, or what to do. I have my four siblings [they are 6, 9, 12, 13 years of age] and I don’t know how to feed them or how to comfort them. I cry at night so they cannot see. I hide my face so they cannot see the pain or the fear I feel”*.

## *Use of landmines*

The Team received credible information that an estimated 11 Rohingya victims had suffered severe injuries including missing limbs following mine incidents. The defused landmines have been identified as anti-personnel mines.

The Team was informed that until 23 August 2017, the Myanmar and Bangladesh border guards conducted joint patrols along the international border between Bangladesh and Myanmar and that it was therefore highly unlikely that mines were planted before 23 August due to the likelihood of real danger for army personnel of both sides that they would step onto such an explosive device.

On the basis of the information received, the Team believe that the mines were deliberately planted by the Myanmar security forces after 23 August 2017 along the border in an attempt to prevent the Rohingya refugees from returning to Myanmar. Information received by the Team referred to the use of landmines and to incidents of people stepping on mines whilst fleeing, or attempting to return to Myanmar to check on other missing family members from 25 August onwards. They were either killed instantly, or suffered serious injuries. The Cox's Bazar District Hospital and other medical facilities confirmed the treatment of mine injuries.

## **7. Conclusions and upcoming risks/challenges**

The vast majority of those interviewed suffered multiple human rights violations. Many reported having been first internally displaced, sometimes moving between several villages, before trying to cross the border into Bangladesh (attacked by the Myanmar security forces in the abandoned villages or on hillsides). The majority of eyewitness accounts referred to violations allegedly perpetrated by the Myanmar security forces often through joint operations with Rakhine Buddhist individuals. Testimonies referred to apparently well-organised and coordinated action, where first the Myanmar security forces came into a village followed by the Rakhine Buddhists individuals using knives or machetes to inflict death, injury or damage.

The “clearance operations” started before 25 August 2017, and as early as the beginning of August. The apparently well-organised, coordinated and systematic nature of the attacks carried out by the Myanmar security forces against the entire Rohingya population across northern Rakhine State has led to a mass exodus of more than 500,000 people fleeing to Bangladesh.

The testimonies gathered by OHCHR indicate that the attacks against Rohingya villages constitute serious human rights violations. As recalled by many victims, the security forces and the Rakhine Buddhist individuals incited hatred, violence and killings against the Rohingya population within northern Rakhine State through extremely derogatory abuse based on their religion, language and culture and ethnic identity.

There are indications that violence is still ongoing at the time of writing this report. Several Rohingyas expressed fear for their life and grave reservations over the possibility of return to their homeland in Myanmar. The information gathered also indicates however that some sections of the Rohingya population currently present in Bangladesh might be willing to return to their villages despite widespread destruction, provided the following conditions are met by the Government of Myanmar: 1) Provision of Myanmar citizenship; 2) Respect for civil, political, economic, cultural and social rights; 3) Compensation for loss of livelihood; 4) Accountability for human rights violations suffered; and 5) Deployment of UN peacekeeping operations to ensure the safety of the Rohingya people in Myanmar. A few interviewees also

mentioned the need for the implementation of recommendations made by the Kofi Annan-headed Advisory Commission on Rakhine State.

The Rohingya population continues to face severe challenges in the camps in Bangladesh. Despite untiring efforts on the part of the Bangladesh government and aid agencies, the burden of the Rohingya mass exodus is too heavy to bear in the immediate future. There are serious protection concerns regarding the immediate needs of the most vulnerable, and it is important to establish a permanent presence at the boat landing sites as part of the immediate humanitarian response. The health and sanitation conditions are critical and described by on-site medical doctors as ‘a perfect storm in the making’. There are concerns that unaccompanied minors and single female heads of families might become victims of trafficking and sexual violence.

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