

Physicians for Human Rights: Myanmar's Rohingya Continue to Suffer Systematic Extortion, Abuse

Report from Physicians for Human Rights Shows Severe Persecution Contributes to Cycle of Poverty and Despair Among Rohingya Minority

Despite significant advances in Myanmar, minority groups in the Southeast Asian country continue to face systematic and pervasive human rights violations. Today, Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) released a new report – [“Where There is Police, There is Persecution”](#) – documenting arbitrary and discriminatory restrictions on freedom of movement and a widespread pattern of abuse and extortion targeting the Rohingya minority group, considered one of the world's largest stateless populations.

“This report illuminates how authorities conduct raids, extort money, and single out Rohingyas for rights violations that are feeding a vicious cycle of poverty and persecution,” said PHR's director of programs, Widney Brown, a lead author on the report. “The progress in Myanmar has not helped the Rohingyas, who are still subjected to brutality and persecution by military and security forces. They can hardly leave their own homes or travel to the doctor without the fear of having to pay bribes that could bankrupt them. It's a system of repression that must end for there to be a just future in Myanmar.”

PHR interviewed 170 people in Myanmar's Rakhine State, where most Rohingyas live, as well as in the capital, Yangon, and in neighboring Bangladesh. Rakhine State, in western Myanmar, is among the country's poorest regions, and PHR found that systematic extortion, forced evictions, arbitrary detentions, and onerous restrictions on movement are only serving to exacerbate poverty and deprivation. As part of the report, PHR's team of investigators documented and mapped a network of 86 security checkpoints scattered across northern Rakhine State, where Rohingyas are routinely forced to pay bribes or face jail time and other types of brutality at the hands of security forces.

“These so-called security checkpoints are in fact places of extortion and humiliation, where Rohingya people are perpetually reminded of their marginalized status,” said PHR's Brown. “Freedom of movement is a right that facilitates other rights, such as the right to work and the right to health, and Myanmar authorities violate those rights with abandon throughout northern Rakhine State. While there are legitimate security concerns in the area, we found that these checkpoints rarely serve a security function; rather they are a further means for Myanmar authorities to persecute the Rohingya people.”

In addition to the system of checkpoints, PHR gathered evidence of raids and a pervasive surveillance system in Rohingya-populated areas, as well as instances of forced labor and arbitrary fines and detention. Combined with land confiscations and restrictions on movement, these conspire to create significant difficulties for Rohingyas trying to access health care and provide for their families.

“Land confiscation is one of the most detrimental economic weapons that’s been deployed against those who live in Rakhine state,” said PHR’s Brown. “For years, Burmese authorities have effectively evicted people—especially the Rakhine—in the name of progress, and those confiscations are ongoing. This has led to impoverishment of the Rakhine and a divide and conquer policy by the military that has led to both persecution of the Rohingya by the government and violence between the two groups.”

While Myanmar has made major strides toward democratization, the military continues to hold ultimate political authority and control over security services. The Rohingya people, a Muslim ethnic group of roughly one million, have been stripped of citizenship under the Burma Citizenship Law and omitted from the country’s list of “national races.” And while the plight of Rohingyas living in internally displaced person camps – as a result of inter-ethnic violence in 2012 – has received some international attention, most Rohingyas live outside these camps in areas where monitoring and humanitarian access is severely curtailed.

“Our report only touches the surface of what is a pernicious system of discrimination against the Rohingya,” said PHR’s Brown. “Unless and until citizenship laws are changed and military forces end their campaign of subjugation, there will be little hope for peace and development in northern Rakhine State and elsewhere in Myanmar. The government of Myanmar has persecuted the Rohingya for decades, and these abuses continue to wear away at the health and wellbeing of all Rohingya people.”

An earlier version of this press release said PHR documented land confiscation among the Rohingya in northern Rakhine state. In fact, PHR’s partners in the region—not PHR—have documented land confiscation and evictions of Rohingya and other groups by Burmese authorities.