The [United Nations Human Rights Council](https://www.hrw.org/topic/united-nations/human-rights-council) on March 24, 2017, took a key step toward preventing future abuses and bringing justice for victims in [Burma](https://www.hrw.org/asia/burma) by adopting a strong resolution condemning violations and making significant recommendations, Human Rights Watch said today.

The resolution authorizes the council president to urgently dispatch an independent, international fact-finding mission to Burma. The mission would establish the facts and circumstances of alleged [recent human rights violations](https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/02/24/human-rights-council-should-adopt-strong-resolution-human-rights-situation-myanmar), particularly against Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State, to ensure “full accountability for perpetrators and justice for victims.”

“The Human Rights Council’s authorization of an international fact-finding mission is crucial for ensuring that allegations of serious human rights abuses in Burma are thoroughly examined by experts, and to ensure that those responsible will ultimately be held accountable,” said [John Fisher](https://www.hrw.org/about/people/john-fisher), Geneva director. “Burma’s government should cooperate fully with the mission, including by providing unfettered access to all affected areas.”

The fact-finding mission will examine allegations of arbitrary detention, torture, rape and other sexual violence, and destruction of property by Burmese security forces during “clearance operations” against ethnic Rohingya Muslims in northern Rakhine State. The “clearance operations” followed an [October 9, 2016 attack](https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/10/28/burma-invite-un-assist-rakhine-inquiry) by Rohingya militants on border guard posts that reportedly killed nine police officers. The mission will include expertise in forensics as well as on sexual and gender-based violence.

Human Rights Watch, along with other groups, has documented [widespread and serious abuses](https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/01/12/burma-government-forces-implicated-killings-and-rape) against Rohingya by Burmese military and police in Rakhine State, including extrajudicial killings, [systematic rape](https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/02/06/burma-security-forces-raped-rohingya-women-girls), and the [burning](https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/12/13/burma-military-burned-villages-rakhine-state) of numerous Rohingya villages. The UN estimates that more than 1,000 people died in the crackdown, from October through December.

The resolution also says that Burma should continue to address systemic and institutionalized discrimination against the Rohingya and other ethnic and religious minorities, amend or repeal all discriminatory legislation and policies, and take measures for the safe return of all internally displaced people and refugees. Approximately 120,000 Rohingya remain displaced in Rakhine State as a result of [violence in 2012](https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/04/22/burma-end-ethnic-cleansing-rohingya-muslims). About 100,000 of them are in [closed camps](http://www.politico.eu/article/eu-risks-complicity-in-crimes-against-rohingya-myanar-burma/) near Sittwe, the state capital, where they are living in squalid conditions, many of them in rice fields prone to seasonal flooding. The violence since October has created an additional 25,000 internally displaced people in Burma and led to the flight of 74,000 more to neighboring Bangladesh.

The resolution also addresses other important human rights concerns in Burma. These include the use of criminal defamation laws against journalists, politicians, students, and social media users in violation of their [right to free expression](https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/06/29/burma-dismantle-infrastructure-repression); restrictions on peaceful assembly; and the continued use of child soldiers by both state and non-state actors. The Human Rights Council also cited the recent killings of constitutional expert and National League for Democracy advisor [U Ko Ni](https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/01/30/burma-loses-key-voice-tolerance), environmental activist [Naw Chit Pan Daing](http://karennews.org/2016/11/community-groups-demand-justice-for-murdered-karen-women-activist-and-her-killer-caught.html/), and journalist [Soe Moe Tun](https://cpj.org/killed/2016/soe-moe-tun.php). It called on Burma to reform all laws restricting the rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association; release all remaining political prisoners; and ensure thorough, impartial, and independent investigations into the recent killings.

“The violations occurring in Rakhine State threaten to undo Burma’s hard-won progress toward a more rights-respecting and democratic future,” Fisher said. “Burma’s government should make full use of the Human Rights Council resolution to address the major human rights challenges ahead.”