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Burma Security Forces Must Respect the Human Rights of Rakhine Villagers

London, UK -- The Burma Human Rights Network is alarmed by reports of Burmese military and police arbitrarily detaining ethnic Rakhine villagers following fighting between the Burmese military and the Rakhine ethnic armed group, the Arakan Army. Fears have also emerged that aid may be blocked to Rakhine villages suspected of aiding or sheltering Arakan Army fighters, as has been done in the past.

“Civilians are always those who suffer most from war and conflict, and it is imperative that the Burmese army respect the human rights of the Rakhine civilians in the areas they are operating in. The use of collective punishment and arbitrary detention by the Burmese Army is not only a violation of human rights but furthers resentment among civilians and will ultimately prolong the conflict,” Said BHRN’s Executive Director Kyaw Win.

On December 27th security forces entered Yae Gaung Chaung village in Rathedaung township, Rakhine State, following days of fighting between the Arakan Army and the Burmese security forces. Civilians were forced to enter a local monastery where they were questioned and several were detained. These skirmishes come after the Burmese Military unilaterally declared a ceasefire in the country but explicitly excluded conflict in Rakhine State.

On January 4th, Burma’s Independence Day, the Arakan Army attacked again, killing 13 members of the Burmese security forces. In response Burma has vowed to “crush” the insurgents and increased efforts to eliminate local support for them.

While the International Committee of the Red Cross said in a facebook post that they were able to access many of the villagers who fled the army, there is a legitimate fear among residents and activists that continued fighting will result in the blocking of aid to the region and further human rights violations against civilians.

BHRN calls on the Burmese Government to ensure aid remains available to civilians in conflict zones in Rakhine State and that the human rights of those living in these areas be respected. Burma must also work towards a ceasefire which is inclusive to all regions of the country that will help produce a more peaceful and equitable future for the country which also respects the rights and self-determination of the ethnic regions. The international community needs to increase their efforts, particularly through sanctions on the economic interests of the Burmese Military, to help the peace process in Burma which has been troubled since the country first became independent. While this conflict is in the interest of the Burmese military to maintain their political power, it is vital that the international community utilizes deterrents such as sanctions to clearly signal that conflict will negatively impact their economic interests.

Background on the Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN)

Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN) is based in London and operates across Burma/Myanmar works for human rights, minority rights and religious freedom in Burma. BHRN has played a crucial role advocating for human rights and religious freedom with politicians and world leaders.

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