

# **JOINT STATEMENT**

Date: September 17, 2020

## **Rohingya groups stand in Solidarity with Rakhine people suffering from Burmese military crimes**

We, the undersigned groups from the Worldwide Rohingya Organisation, express our deepest sympathies with our Rakhine brothers and sisters who are suffering from abuses by the Tatmadaw (Myanmar military). During the escalating conflict in Rakhine State, the Myanmar military has killed, injured and arbitrarily arrested Rakhine civilians, subjecting them to the similarly brutal tactics that Rohingya have suffered under for decades.

The conflict in Rakhine State between the Tatmadaw and the Arakan Army has intensified this year, taking a devastating toll on civilians. According to the United Nations, at least 137 civilians were killed and 368 wounded during the first five months of the year, including both Rakhine and Rohingya victims. The number of civilian victims during the first three months of 2020 may already have surpassed the number for the whole of 2019.

During the conflict, the Tatmadaw has committed war crimes and atrocities against civilians. There are credible reports of soldiers opening fire indiscriminately on villages, including in Mrauk-U township on 29 February. Schools, religious sites and ordinary people's homes have been targeted in various ways including shelling, by the Tatmadaw. Scores of people have been arbitrarily arrested. On 8 September, two children and at least two adults were killed when the village of Nyaung Khet Kan was hit by artillery shells.

For us Rohingya, these crimes are horrifically familiar. The Myanmar military has subjected us to genocidal violence for decades in a deliberate attempt to wipe us out as a people. In August 2017, the Tatmadaw launched a brutal campaign in Rakhine State when thousands of Rohingya were killed, whole villages burned to the ground, and hundreds of thousands forced to flee into Bangladesh.

As representatives of the Rohingya people across the world, our groups will do everything we can to end the atrocities by the Myanmar military against anyone in Myanmar, whether Rohingya, Rakhine, Shan or Kachin. Our fight for justice is a fight for everyone that has been killed, injured or abused by the Tatmadaw – we stand in solidarity with our Rakhine brothers and sisters.

We welcome the fact that momentum for international justice efforts is building. In November 2019, the Gambia brought a case against Myanmar for violating the Genocide Convention at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Hague. The Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK (BROUK) has petitioned courts in Argentina to open a universal jurisdiction case against Myanmar's civilian and military leadership for genocide and crimes against humanity. The International Criminal Court (ICC) has furthermore opened an investigation against Myanmar for crimes against humanity against the Rohingya.

Last week, it was revealed that two deserters from the Tatmadaw are currently in the custody of the ICC, and have confessed to atrocity crimes against Rohingya. The two soldiers said they were ordered to kill Rohingya indiscriminately and commit sexual violence. They have apparently named other perpetrators of violence, including senior commanders. These confessions add to the mountain of evidence against the Tatmadaw in the ongoing genocide against the Rohingya. We wish to express our gratitude to everyone who has made possible the transfer of the two deserters to the Hague. This evidence is invaluable in the fight for justice for human rights abuses in Myanmar.

We condemn the Myanmar authorities attempts to silence peaceful protests about the situation in Rakhine State. The charges against the three Rakhine students who were arrested on 10 September during a demonstration in Sittwe must be dropped immediately, and all others detained simply for voicing their opinions must be released.

We urge the international community to act immediately to prevent the Tatmadaw from committing further crimes, whether against Rohingya or Rakhine people. International governments must call on Myanmar to end all abuses against civilians immediately, and on the Myanmar government to lift all restrictions on internet access and humanitarian aid in the affected regions. Government must impose and strengthen sanctions against senior Myanmar officials responsible for atrocity crimes. Regional Asian governments in particular, including the ASEAN states, must condemn the violence in Rakhine State and push Myanmar to end abuses immediately.

We also urge international community to do everything it can to support justice efforts. Only accountability can break the cycle of violence. More states should follow the lead of Canada and the Netherlands and offer support to The Gambia's case at the ICJ. Other countries should explore opening universal jurisdiction cases. Members of the UN Security Council should also support a full referral of

the situation in Myanmar to the ICC, which will guarantee a comprehensive investigation of the full range of the Tatmadaw's crimes.

Signatories -

1. Arakan Rohingya Development Association - Australia
2. Australian Burmese Rohingya Organisation
3. British Rohingya Community in UK
4. Burmese Rohingya Association in Queensland
5. Burmese Rohingya Association Japan (BRAJ)
6. Burmese Rohingya Community Australia (BRCA)
7. Burmese Rohingya Community in Denmark
8. Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK (BROUK)
9. Canadian Burmese Rohingya Organisation
10. Canadian Rohingya Development Initiative
11. European Rohingya Council (ERC)
12. Free Rohingya Coalition (FRC)
13. Los Angeles Rohingya Association
14. Myanmar Ethnic Rohingya Human Rights Organisation in Malaysia
15. Rohingya Action Ireland
16. Rohingya American Society
17. Rohingya Arakanese Refugee Committee
18. Rohingya Association of Canada
19. Rohingya Community in Norway
20. Rohingya Community in Netherlands
21. Rohingya Culture Centre Chicago
22. Rohingya Human rights initiative
23. Rohingya Human Rights Network (Canada)
24. Rohingya Refugee Network
25. Rohingya Society Malaysia
26. Rohingya Organisation Norway
27. Rohingya Women Development Network (RDWN)
28. Rohingya Women Welfare Association (RWWS)
29. Swedish Rohingya Association

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