

UN Secretary-General: intervene in Rohingya repatriation ‘pilot project’ and investigate UNHCR and WFP’s involvement

The undersigned 201 civil society organizations strongly condemn UN’s participation in the so-called ‘pilot project’ to repatriate Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar. The undersigned organizations are appalled by the UN’s clandestine participation and involvement in facilitating a visit of Myanmar military junta to Cox’s Bazar in Bangladesh. The UN agencies that were [involved](#) in the visit [reportedly](#) removed UN markings from the boats which were used to transport members of the junta to Cox’s Bazar. This is yet another extension of the long-standing pattern of the UN’s deliberately opaque involvement in the attempts to forcibly repatriate Rohingya refugees in absence of conditions in Myanmar for their safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return. This exposes the UN’s lack of so-called “neutrality” in Myanmar, and its ongoing failure to uphold basic humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality and “do no harm”, further eroding Myanmar people’s trust in the work of the UN.

The most recent visit of the junta to Cox’s Bazar on 15 March 2023 as part of this ‘pilot project’ for repatriation which took place reportedly with participation of UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Food Programme (WFP) is a result of a bilateral agreement between the illegal Myanmar military junta and Bangladesh, mediated by the Chinese Government. As the Special Rapporteur has described in his most recent [conference paper](#), the Myanmar military junta’s attempt to seize power from legitimately elected representatives of the people of Myanmar elected in the 2020 General Election “was illegal, and its claim as Myanmar’s government is illegitimate.”

The UN Secretary-General must immediately intervene to prevent Rohingya survivors of genocide from being sent back to the killing fields. Rohingya in Rakhine State continue to be persecuted, denied their right to citizenship under a system of apartheid. They are confined to camps without freedom of movement and cut off from access to food and essential services including health, education and livelihood. The same perpetrators of genocide and crimes against humanity continue to commit atrocity crimes with total impunity throughout the country since the attempted coup of 1 February 2021. Prior to the attempted coup, they have committed genocide against Rohingya and crimes against humanity and war crimes against other ethnic minorities for decades, as [documented](#) by the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission.

The Secretary-General must also urgently investigate the involvement of UNHCR and WFP in the pilot repatriation project. Importantly, the Secretary-General must develop an action plan that meaningfully and urgently implements the recommendations of the “[Rosenthal Report](#)” which found systemic and institutional failures on the part of the UN in Myanmar leading up to and during the genocide in 2017. The 2022 [update](#) by the Secretary-General on the “Progress made in the implementation of follow-up action to the recommendations” of the Rosenthal Report failed to address the grave issues specific to Myanmar that were identified in the Rosenthal Report. The report did not satisfy the UN Human Rights Council’s call for a “comprehensive” investigation and did not reflect the extraordinary gravity of UN’s systemic failure in Myanmar.

The internal communication from the UN’s top official, as [outlined](#) by the Myanmar Accountability Project, exposes the UNHCR’s willingness to capitulate to the genocidal military junta despite “UNHCR’s

assessment that conditions in Rakhine State (to which they will be returned) are currently not conducive to the safe and sustainable return of Rohingya refugees.” The UNHCR’s decision to prioritize its relationship with the military junta and the Bangladeshi Government above safety, security and revictimization of Rohingya refugees points to the broader UN approach which is completely out of touch with the reality on the ground. Rather than protecting refugees, the agency is therefore repeating its past mistakes by putting the lives of refugees at risk.

The Rosenthal Report also speaks to the failure of the UN’s collective membership, represented by the UN Security Council, that did not act to provide support to the Secretariat and more importantly, the victims of genocide, when such backing was essential. Yet, over the five years since the genocide, we have yet to see a UN Security Council resolution that imposes a global arms embargo and targeted sanctions against the military and refers the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court.

The current situation of the Rohingya cannot be divorced from the wider political, humanitarian and human rights crises in Myanmar, which are caused by the very perpetrators of genocide. The Rohingya’s long and immensely difficult plight cannot be resolved by yielding to the demands of the junta and returning them into the hands of perpetrators of their genocide. It must be addressed with meaningful participation of Rohingya themselves in any decision making that involves their lives and future and by robust and strong actions to end the military’s impunity by pursuing justice and accountability for the victims and survivors.

The UN must also ensure accountability for the repeated cycles of individual and institutional failures within its system at the highest levels.

It is time that the UN acts to end its shameful systemic and structural failures and support the victims and survivors of genocide and the people of Myanmar instead of the war criminals and the genocidal junta. In this respect, we call on the UN Secretary-General to investigate the operations of UN agencies in Myanmar and ensure that their involvement and contribution do not lead to further human rights violations of the people of Myanmar.

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Signed by 201 civil society organizations including 30 civil society organizations who have chosen to not disclose their names:

1. 8888 Generation (New Zealand)
2. Action Against Myanmar Military Coup (Sydney)
3. Action Committee for Democracy Development (Coalition of 14 grassroots networks)
4. Active Youths (Kalay)
5. Ah Nah Podcast - Conversations with Myanmar
6. Ah. La. Ka (12) Hta Khwe. Primary Education Student Union
7. All Burma Democratic Front in New Zealand
8. All Burma Indigenous People Alliance
9. All Religions Strike Column

10. ALTSEAN-Burma
11. Arakan CSO Network
12. Arakan Time Rohingya Daily News
13. Asian Dignity Initiative
14. Rohingya Human Rights Center
15. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
16. Association of Human Rights Defenders and Promoters
17. Association Suisse Birmanie (ASB)
18. Athan - Freedom of Expression Activist Organization
19. Auckland Kachin Community NZ
20. Auckland Zomi Community
21. Aung Myay Thar Zan Education Schools Strike Column
22. Aung Pin Lae Main Strike Column
23. Ayeyarwaddy west Development Organization (AWDO, Magway Region)
24. AYN Ayeyarwady Youth Network
25. Blooming Padauk
26. Burma Action Ireland
27. Burma Affairs and Conflict Study - BACS
28. Burma Campaign UK
29. Burma Civil War Museum (BCM)
30. Burma Human Rights Network
31. Burma Support
32. Burmese Community Group (Manawatu, NZ)
33. Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK
34. Burmese Rohingya Welfare Organisation New Zealand
35. Burmese Women's Union
36. Cambodian Americans and Friends for Democracy and Human Right Advocate, CA
37. Campaign for Popular Democracy (CPD), Thailand
38. CDM Support Team Mandalay (CSTM)
39. Chan Mya Thar Si Township People Strike Column
40. Chin Community of Auckland
41. Civil Information Network - CIN
42. Cooperative University Student Strike Column
43. Courage Fund, Cambodia
44. CRPH & NUG Supporters Ireland
45. CRPH Funding Ireland
46. CRPH, NUG Support Team Germany-Deutschland
47. Daung Sit Thi
48. Dawei Development Association DDA
49. Doh Atu - Ensemble pour le Myanmar
50. Education Family (Anti - Fascists Education Strike Columns Coordination Committee)
51. Educational Initiatives Prague
52. Equality Myanmar
53. Ethnic Youth General Strike Committee
54. Federal FM (Mandalay)
55. Federal Myanmar Benevolence Group (NZ)
56. Finland-Myanmar Association
57. Free Rohingya Coalition

58. Future Thanlwin
59. Generation Wave
60. German Solidarity with Myanmar Democracy eV
61. Global Myanmar Spring Revolution (GMSR)
62. Grass-root People
63. Human Rights Educators Network
64. Human Rights Foundation of Monland
65. International Association, Myanmar-Switzerland (IAMS)
66. India For Myanmar
67. Info Birmanie
68. Japan Myanmar Help Network (comprising of over 40 youth groups in Japan)
69. Justice 4 Rohingya UK
70. Justice for Myanmar
71. Kachin Women's Association Thailand
72. Karen Environmental and Social Action Network
73. Karen Human Rights Group
74. Karen Peace Support Network
75. Karen Swedish Community
76. Karen Women's Organization
77. Karenni Civil Society Network
78. Karenni Human Rights Group (KnHRG)
79. Karenni National Women Organization
80. Karenni Society New Zealand
81. Kyae Lak Myay
82. Kyaukse University Students' Union
83. Land In Our Hands
84. LGBTIQ Strike of Mandalay
85. Maha Aung Myay Township People Collective Strike Column
86. Mandalay University Student Strike Column
87. Mandalay Alliance Strike Collective Column
88. Mandalay Based People Strike Column
89. Mandalay Civil Society Organizations
90. Mandalay Engineer Group
91. Mandalay Engineer United Force
92. Mandalay Regional Youth Association (MRYA)
93. Mandalay University Student Alumni Union
94. Mandalay Wholesale Strike Column
95. Mandalay Youth Strike Column
96. Me Boun Foundation
97. Medical Family – Mandalay
98. Metta Campaign Mandalay
99. MIIT Student Strike Column
100. Minbu Farmer Group
101. Minhla Development Organization
102. Muslim Youth Union
103. Mya Taung Strike Column
104. Myanmar Accountability Project
105. Myanmar Action Group Denmark

106. Myanmar anti-military coup movement in New Zealand
107. Myanmar Campaign Network
108. Myanmar Community Group Christchurch New Zealand
109. Myanmar Community Group Dunedin New Zealand
110. Myanmar Cultural Research Society (MCRS)
111. Myanmar Diaspora Group Finland
112. Myanmar Engineers - New Zealand
113. Myanmar Gonye (New Zealand)
114. Myanmar People Alliance (Shan State)
115. Myanmar Railway, Region (3) CDM Strike Column
116. Myanmar Students' Union in New Zealand
117. Myaung Education Network
118. Myaung Medical Team မွန်ဦးရောင်နီဆေးအဖွဲ့
119. Naphe Development Organization
120. Nelson Myanmar Community Group New Zealand
121. Network for Human Rights Documentation Network Burma (ND-Burma)
122. New Zealand Doctors for NUG
123. New Zealand Karen Association
124. New Zealand Zo Community Inc.
125. New Rehmonnya Federated Force (NRFF)
126. No 7 State High School Alumni Strike Column
127. Nway Oo Guru Lay Myar
128. Overseas Mon Association. New Zealand
129. Padauk
130. Pakokku Youth Development Council
131. Pan Pa Wash People Strike Column
132. Phayagye Peace Strike Column
133. Private Pre-school Teachers Association
134. Progressive Voice
135. Pwintphyu Development Organization (Magway Region)
136. Pyi Gyi Ta Gon Strike
137. Pyithu Gonye (New Zealand)
138. Rohingya Action Ireland (RAI)
139. Rvwang Community Association New Zealand
140. RW Welfare Society
141. Sangha Samaga Strike Column
142. Save and Care Organization for Ethnic Women at Border Areas
143. Save Myanmar Fundraising Group (New Zealand)
144. SEA Junction
145. Sein Pan Strike Column
146. Shan Community (New Zealand)
147. Sisters 2 Sisters
148. Southern Youth Development Organization
149. Strike Column of Representatives of Arbitrarily Arrested People
150. Strike Column of Teachers from Universities and Degree Colleges of Mandalay
151. Support Group for Democracy in Myanmar (The Netherlands)
152. Ta'ang Women's Organization

153. Taekwondo Sport Association
154. Tanintharyi Nationalities Congress TNC
155. Tenasserim Student Unions' Network - TSUN
156. Thai Action Committee for Democracy in Burma (TACDB)
157. Thapaynyo News Letter
158. The European Rohingya Council (ERC)
159. The Ladies
160. The Netherlands Myanmar Solidarity Platform
161. Think Centre (Singapore)
162. Trip Net
163. U.S. Campaign for Burma
164. White Coat Society Yangon
165. With Myanmar UK
166. Women Activists Myanmar (WAM)
167. Women's League of Burma
168. Yangon Medical Network
169. Youths for Community-Myaung
170. ပွင့်ဖြူလယ်ယာမြေကွန်ရက်
171. မျိုးဆက်-Generations