

## **The International Community Must Address the Situation of Muslims in Burma**

London, UK - BHRN has been monitoring conflict, hate speech trends on social media, printed materials, and propaganda disseminated by the military for several years, and recent events have been deeply troubling. During the early quarter of 2024, we observed a high risk of escalating religious violence targeting Muslim minorities (Rohingya, Kaman, Pathi, Pashu, Panthay and Myaydu) in Burma. At the same time, conscription laws further put Muslim lives at risk.

On 30 March, the military junta brutally bombarded Hsi-Hseng City in Southern Shan State with airstrikes. Much of the attack targeted civilian areas, and a major mosque and other religious buildings were destroyed. Article 8 2 b (i and ii) of the Rome Statute prohibits the targeting of civilians and civilian areas, yet the junta continuously targets civilian areas. Places of worship should be given particular protection, but the Tatmadaw has made a point of targeting Muslim religious sites.

The Burmese military has a history of fueling anti-Muslim sentiments and perpetuating violence against Muslim communities. The military's illegitimate hold on power continues amidst the Spring Revolution and territorial conflicts, prompting the military junta to implement conscription laws due to manpower shortages. However, this move has cornered the Muslim population, which was already under persecution.

BHRN has noted with alarm the concerted efforts of extremist nationalist groups and influential monks, frequently aligned with the military, in orchestrating a deliberate campaign to stoke public resentment against minority Muslim communities. This insidious manipulation not only serves the military's agenda but also deepens societal divisions, resulting in heightened violence against vulnerable groups.

In early March, the killing of a Buddhist woman, Ma Chue Khet Nwe, sparked outrage among extremist nationalist activists and monks. About 200 monks convened in Phyu Township, Bago Township, to incite anti-Muslim violence, which is similar to the start of the anti-Muslim violence in 2012.

In the third week of March, tensions escalated when young Buddhists attacked the Nwe Aye Mosque in Yangon, encouraged by radical ultra-nationalist monks. Additionally, individuals linked to the coup army disguised themselves as Muslim activists on social media, inciting further conflict.

Furthermore, the implementation of conscription laws has disproportionately impacted the Muslim community, rendering them particularly vulnerable. While other segments of the youth populace are fleeing the country for their safety, Muslims find themselves trapped due to the systemic discrimination they face, including the lack of identity documents and substantial delays in passport applications. The fundamental rights of freedom of movement and the right to life of Muslims are under dire threat, as they are unable to seek refuge elsewhere for their safety.

The conscription law also includes a double standard against Muslims. In 2020, parliament exempted Muslims in Burma from rules that prevented religious officials from voting because Muslim religious figures aren't part of an institutional hierarchy like most Christian and Buddhist leaders in Burma, who are overseen by larger bodies such as Sanghas or the Papacy. However, the coup regime reversed this policy in 2023, barred Muslim religious figures from voting rights. Similarly, religious figures are exempt from military conscription, except for Muslim religious figures, who can still be forced into service. The double standard underlies a policy that uses Muslims as cannon fodder in the regime's futile war effort. The policy also enables the junta to draft religious figures who also serve as influential community leaders, removing essential pillars in the Muslim community.

***Kyaw Win, the Executive Director of BHRN, emphatically states, "The long history of anti-Muslim violence and unjust treatment of Muslims must not be allowed to repeat itself. We must take proactive measures before the situation escalates further. The international community must unequivocally stand in solidarity with the Muslim community in Burma, safeguarding their rights to freedom of movement, right to life, and overall safety."***

BHRN urgently calls upon the leaders of the world, including the United Nations, OIC, European Union, United States, United Kingdom, and ASEAN, to champion the cause of the Muslim community in Burma. The junta must immediately cease its incitement of anti-Muslim sentiments and put an end to the perpetuation of violence against Muslim communities. It is incumbent upon the international community to intervene decisively and uphold the fundamental rights of the Muslim population in Burma, ensuring their safety and well-being.

## **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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