

World Leaders Must Speak Out for Rohingya in Arakan

London, UK/Sittwe, Arakan - Burma Human Rights Network calls on leaders of ASEAN, the United States, United Kingdom, and European Union countries to speak out for the Rohingya as they are being victimized and exploited in the war between the Burmese military and ethnic armed groups. The Rohingya have been forcibly recruited into the conflict, had their villages shelled, had their villages used as staging grounds for military assaults, and had their children murdered, all in recent weeks.

On 18 March, an airstrike on Thar Da Village, Minbya Township, killed at least 25 Rohingya civilians and injured dozens more. Locals reported children among those killed. There is no justifiable reason for the Burmese military to target a Rohingya village with airstrikes, even if militants are stationed nearby. Indiscriminate attacks and direct attacks on civilians violate the Rome Statute Section 2(b). It is a severe war crime, and the international community must prosecute it.

Forcible recruitment of Rohingya continues without pause. On 23 March, junta forces entered the IDP camp in Basara village, Sittwe Township, at around 9 PM, seeking to conscript 50 Rohingya men as soldiers. The IDPs refused and said that the junta had already taken 26 men from the village. Security forces then detained the camp leader, and some other men held them for about an hour. While held, junta forces told the men that they must give recruits or security forces would blockade their village. The Junta gave them until 25 March to turn over 20 men for forced conscription in the military. Upon hearing this, many men fled and hid, not wanting to be used as human shields by the junta. The camp leader was only able to provide six men to the junta. The junta has placed the village under total blockade since 24 March, with no updates of any changes to their situation.

Similarly, the Burmese army abducted 20 Rohingya during evening prayers in Dar Paing Mosque on 14 March. Videos on social media show large numbers of Rohingya in Burmese military gear riding in military transports. The military's only purpose for the Rohingya is to utilize them as cannon fodder and to fill their depleted numbers quickly. The Arakan Army has issued a statement calling on Rohingya who

were conscripted or fear conscription to flee to safe areas. Still, there is no clear way for them to do so in places like Sittwe, where Rohingya are held in fenced IDP camps. The Burmese military, which has no legitimacy as a government, has no right to conscript the Rohingya. The crime is compounded by threats to withhold food and aid to the besieged community if they do not join.

In a tragic event, men believed to be from the Arakan Liberation Party kidnapped a four-year-old Rohingya girl on 12 March in Sittwe Township. The kidnappers demanded 100 Lakh ransom, then demanded another 50 lakhs after the girl's father paid them. The girl was found dead on 14 March, resulting in angry protests by Rohingya at the ALP office. The ALP and its armed wing are allied with the Burmese military, leading some to speculate the incident was intended to raise tensions between Rohingya and Rakhine communities. Whatever the motivation, the incident is one of depraved cruelty and exploits the vulnerability of the Rohingya trapped in an emerging warzone but unable to flee.

BHRN's Executive Director, Kyaw Win, said, "The Rohingya are being killed, abused, and exploited while the world's attention is scattered elsewhere. The international community must act now, enforce the International Court of Justice's provisional measures against the junta, and put every member on alert that they will be prosecuted for any war crimes they've committed."

BHRN calls on the leaders of OIC, ASEAN, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union to speak out for the Rohingya now and to take concrete measures to protect their safety. The Tatmadaw must not be allowed to commit further crimes against the civilian population as they lose power. The junta is weakened, and significant pressure and targeted sanctions at this time are needed to help put an end to the conflict and protect civilians. The Arakan Army must also ensure safe passage for those Rohingya who do manage to flee, and they should establish cooperation with Rohingya community leaders to facilitate movement and create future cooperation and peaceful coexistence.

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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