



Urgent call for action for Rohingya in Rakhine State, Myanmar

Statement

May 19, 2024

Women's Peace Network calls for immediate action to protect the Rohingya ethnic and religious minority in Rakhine State, or Arakan, and prevent the commission of further atrocity crimes in Myanmar.

On May 17, 2024, starting at approximately 10 PM Myanmar time, the Arakan Army set on fire downtown Buthidaung and its surrounding villages, including Tat Min Chaung and Kyauk Phyu Taung, according to local [reports](#). Witnesses have detailed members of the AA burning the vast majority of the city's wards, including its homes, schools and other civilian objects. Hundreds of Rohingya have been reportedly killed and maimed, with nearly 150,000 Rohingya forcibly displaced. Buthidaung township has the highest concentration of the Rohingya – over 200,000 civilians – in the state.

The reports indicate that the AA's attack on downtown Buthidaung, which is composed of seven wards, has not occurred in the crossfires of its ongoing, intensifying armed conflict with the Burmese military in Rakhine State. Three days prior to the AA's attack, the Burmese military reportedly retreated from downtown Buthidaung. The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, which has reportedly been cooperating with the military, retreated from downtown Buthidaung days before the attack. Rohingya forcibly recruited by the military, who had burned several houses from which ethnic Rakhine residents had fled a few weeks ago, were also not present in the affected area.

Alarmingly, the AA's attack on Buthidaung is taking place against the backdrop of a pattern of escalating atrocities against Rohingya civilians. Over the past two weeks, WPN has been informed of cases including the AA's torching of dozens of Rohingya villages; as well as its shelling of the No. (1) Basic Education High School and the township's only hospital, where internally displaced Rohingya were seeking refuge. Cases of mass killings of Rohingya families in multiple villages of the township have also been reported; they include a group of Rohingya elders who attempted to verbally discuss with the AA members present in the area, in order to mitigate the AA's attacks against them and their communities. These attacks have left hundreds of civilians killed and injured, and nearly 100,000 Rohingya forcibly displaced in Rakhine State. WPN is continuing to actively document and verify such cases amid the continued imposition of phone line and internet cuts on Rakhine State, the online and offline spread of misinformation and disinformation, the promotion of hate speech and genocidal rhetoric from actors including the Burmese military and the AA leadership, as well as acts to further exacerbate ethnic tensions and weaponize Rohingya against the aims and efforts of the Burmese pro-democracy movement.

It needs no reminder that the hundreds of thousands of displaced Rohingya facing a growing risk of further atrocities are victims and survivors of the 2017 genocidal attacks. The Rohingya are also among the 600,000 Rohingya remaining in Myanmar, including approximately 130,000 IDPs, under circumstances that render them disproportionately vulnerable in every human capacity. Systematically deprived of citizenship, movement, and other basic rights, Rohingya have no means of escape or protection from an apartheid regime, forced conscription, widespread acts of abduction, torture, killing, as well as other targeted attacks by the Burmese military and other actors. At the same time, the recent evacuation of United Nations staff and other international non-governmental organizations from Rakhine

State effectively abandoned Rohingya civilians without any access to humanitarian assistance including food and essential commodities. Widespread cuts in communication and transportation also remain in effect. Famine, especially among women and children, is now imminent in the region.

International law must be upheld to comprehensively address the situation in Rakhine State. It is vital that all necessary measures are taken to protect the Rohingya ethnic and religious minority, who have been deemed a “protected group” under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide [according](#) to the International Court of Justice.

Immediate action is necessary to stop the ongoing atrocities in Rakhine State, and to prevent the commission of further atrocity crimes against Rohingya. The international community must not fail the Rohingya again as it did in the days, months, years, and decades leading up to the 2017 genocidal attacks.

Therefore, WPN calls for the following actions without further delay:

- **the international community** to deploy independent observers to Rakhine State to expertly verify and investigate the ongoing crisis;
- **the U.N. Member States and donor governments** to provide humanitarian assistance to Rohingya forcibly displaced by the ongoing crisis in Rakhine State;
- **the U.N. Secretary-General** to invoke Article 99 of the U.N. Charter on the situation in Rakhine State, and call for the enabling of cross-border aid to its affected communities;
- **the U.N. Security Council** to hold an open meeting on the situation in Rakhine State, with a focus on the non-compliance of the ICJ provisional measures;
- **the leadership of the Burmese pro-democracy movement**, including the National Unity Government, the National Unity Consultative Council, and ethnic revolutionary organizations, to pursue all measures to prevent the escalation of atrocities against the Rohingya ethnic and religious minority in Rakhine State, and to actively combat the Burmese military’s manipulation of ethnic divisions against the pro-democracy movement and its pursuit for a truly inclusive federal democracy; and
- **the AA and its leadership** to immediately and meaningfully engage with the Rohingya community with the specific aim to prevent the further commission of atrocities against them, to ensure their protection, justice and accountability, and to build a robust foundation for the peaceful coexistence of all communities in Arakan.



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