
Rohingya in Rakhine State Desperately Need Aid and Protection

London, UK - The Rohingya living in Rakhine State are in dire need of protection and aid as they are thrown in the middle of fighting between the Arakan Army and the Burmese junta. Northern Rakhine, where much of the fighting has occurred, is especially dangerous. The Rohingya have had their villages bombed with artillery, had their villages used as human shields, have faced abuse by both AA and the Burmese Army, and are being recruited by force to fight for both sides of the conflict. At the same time, shortages of medicine and aid are having deadly consequences. Since April, 80 Rohingya in Sittwe have died due to dysentery and lack of medical care. The international community cannot ignore the threats facing the community once again.

Rohingya living in Buthidaung have told BHRN that the Arakan Army is demolishing rural villages during the fighting and that the Arakan Army is using Rohingya villages as shields. The war has caused countless Rohingya to flee their homes. At the same time, Arakan Army leaders have deployed hate speech or insinuations that deny the Rohingya's ethnic identity, which has exasperated tensions and raised many questions about how the Rohingya would be treated if the Arakan Army and its political wing governed the state.

The war in Rakhine State has had a devastating impact on all civilians, including both Rohingya and Rakhine, as well as other ethnicities. The Burmese military has shown utter disregard for civilians and used artillery and air power to bomb civilian villages. On 19 March, an unprovoked bombardment in Minbya Township killed 23 Rohingya civilians and injured dozens more. Throughout the conflict, the military has been accused of arbitrarily detaining and torturing civilians, including Rohingya. These crimes breach international law and are also in direct violation of provisional measures against the Burmese military set by the International Court of Justice.

At the same time, villagers are reporting that both the Burmese Military and the Arakan Army are recruiting Rohingya into the fighting. The recruitment of Rohingya to both sides has fueled the abuse against them, as both the Arakan Army and the Burmese military are suspicious of who they may be allied with.

Similarly, in Maungdaw Township, the military is actively recruiting Rohingya villagers. In recent months, the Burmese army has conscripted as many as 600 Rohingya, according to locals.

The recent social media posts posted by Arakan Army leadership, particularly those by Commander in Chief Twan Mrat Naing, have shocked many observers who consider posts denying Rohingya ethnic identity as hate speech against the Rohingya community living under an ongoing genocide. Describing the Rohingya as Bengali, extremist Muslims, or Islamic extremist groups is blatant hate speech against the Rohingya community. On top of this, AA has never recognised the Rohingya by their proper ethnic name. This raises the question of how the Rohingya community could trust AA or join them, as AA's position is similar to the military junta.

The pressure to involve the Rohingya in the conflict comes as they are deprived of desperately needed aid. Food and medicine are difficult to come by, and the military has severely limited access to NGOs. IDP camp authorities have told BHRN that more than 80 Rohingya, including children, have died in Sittwe Township from dysentery and lack of medical care.

Camp authorities told BHRN that the military has blocked aid coming into the Sittwe IDP camps and that people are dying from lack of medication. The camp authority from Ohn Taw Gyi IDP camp told BHRN that people were dying because of diarrhea, lack of medicine, and lack of clean drinking water. The villages of Say Thamar Gyi, Ohn Taw Gyi, Dar Pine, and Barsayar are among the areas of the IDP camps suffering from dysentery.

A Rohingya youth from the Sittwe IDP camps told BHRN that the conflict is exacerbating the situation because of the widespread need for medicine throughout the state. He said that illness with diarrhea has spread quickly through the camp and has been fatal without medications. To make matters worse, he said, the military is prohibiting Rohingya from leaving the camp to get medicines in Sittwe.

A hospital was built in The Kae Pyin village in 2012 when the military first forced the Rohingya into the IDP camps and restricted their movement. However, the youth said the hospital is unable to adequately provide medication for the population, mainly due to the conflict and the military's restrictions preventing many INGOs from working in Rakhine State.

BHRN's Executive Director, **Kyaw Win**, said,

“The Rohingya continue to suffer while the world fails to take any meaningful action to protect them. The warning signs were ignored before 2017, which resulted in genocide against them. The international community once again has the chance to intercede and must immediately take decisive action to prevent further harm to the Rohingya community. There is no excuse to risk the atrocities of 2017 occurring again.”

Burma Human Rights Network calls on the international community to take every measure possible to intervene on the Rohingya's behalf. INGOs must be given full access to all of Rakhine State, and adequate medical care must be available. All movement restrictions on the Rohingya must be lifted immediately, particularly to ensure they can seek medical care or flee conflict. Belligerents in the conflict must be informed that they will be held accountable for any crimes they commit under international law. The United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and other powerful nations should inform the Arakan Army that they could face sanctions similar to the junta if they do not change their tactics concerning the Rohingya. The UN and its most powerful member states must also enforce the International Criminal Court's existing provisional measures against the Burmese military, requiring them to end violence against the Rohingya.

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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