



ARAKAN ROHINGYA UNION

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ARAKAN ROHINGYA UNION NARRATIVE REPORT TO OIC Development on the Ground in Arakan State, Burma/Myanmar

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The Rohingya genocide and issues of violence against Rohingya in Arakan/Rakhine State, Burma/Myanmar brings new developments. The Republic of The Gambia has effectively added a new dimension to its pursuit of justice in Washington, D.C, while the case in the International Court of Justice in The Hague is in progress. On the contrary, there is no sign of improvement on stability on the ground in Arakan State. The emerging COVID-19 situation in Arakan has been overshadowed by the increase in volatility with numerous spikes of violent clashes between the Arakan Army and the Burmese military. A possible transformation of armed conflict, from the traditional jungle fights in rural areas to a new type of urban warfare in Arakan State, is imminent.

Armed clashes in Arakan State gradually transform to urban guerrilla warfare

On June 11, 2020, at 8 am, two military personnel from Regional Garrison No. 550, in a civilian attire, were reportedly attacked by a group of eight assailants when the military personnel went for shopping at a market in Punnagyun city.

A Burmese military spokesman said to the Washington-based VOA Burmese program “This morning at around 8 am, a military officer accompanied by a soldier from Punnagyun area Garrison were first arrested and then attacked by Arakan Army insurgents and their accomplices; the military officer who was stabbed has survived and receiving medical treatment; he’s just a regular officer; the other soldier is still missing”.

A resident of Punnagyun also stated “This morning at 8 o’clock the military officer, who came on a motorcycle to do shopping, was knifed by a group of assailants - all in civilian clothing”.

The accounts given by the Burmese military spokesman was reportedly disputed by local residents who claimed that the military officer who was stabbed has succumbed to the injury. Residents have further indicated that the Burmese military is conducting operation in search of the soldier who was taken away by the Arakan Army.

The stepping up of the offensive by the military has reportedly caused some civilian casualties. “we heard that there was a body at a location near the Garrison, but we cannot go out and check, no one can go, there will be shooting; because of this all the shops in Punnagyun are closed, and nobody on the street” a local residence said, according the source on the ground.

On June 10, 2020, armed clashes have also erupted near Myebon and Ann Township where the Western Command of the Burmese military is stationed. On the same day, armed clashes were reported, following an explosion at a location between Kyauk Goke and Thitpoke Taung villages where the village residents have fled to nearby villages.

The Burmese military warns possible military rule in Northern Arakan State

The Arakan Army could take control of Arakan State if the current system of government fails to implement effective governance in Northern Rakhine State, the spokesperson of the military information, Brigadier General Zaw Min Tun, told the Myanmar Times, according to report published by the newspaper on June 14, 2020. "I would like to say that the rule of law is in the spotlight, and we need to implement an effective system of governance, and if they do not, then rule of law will be replaced.," the senior military officer reported to Myanmar Times.

The comment on possible military rule in Northern Arakan was made following the recent spikes of armed conflicts with the Arakan Army. "I mean, what is more effective in conflict than in the current system of governance? I am not going to elaborate much about that;" Myanmar Times has quoted Major General Zaw Min Tun as saying.

The military officer has reportedly claimed that some political parties asked for military rule in Northern Rakhine state, but did not specify which political party. "Northern Rakhine is too late for military rule," Myanmar Times has quoted U Aung Myo, a political analyst as saying.

However, the warning by the military was reportedly rebutted by the Government. At a press conference held in Nay Pyi Taw on June 15, 2020, addressing to a question from RFA regarding the possible military rule in Northern Arakan State, Director of the Office of General Administration of the Ministry of Government Office, U Myint Thein, has said disruption of governance by the Arakan Army in Northern Arakan has not reached a level of concern to require replacement of the current system of government by a military rule.

Meeting between Burmese Government official and Rohingya community leaders in Sittwe focuses on the community relations in Arakan and the ICJ court case

On June 13, 2020, an official from the Government of Burma in Nay Pyi Taw arrived in Sittwe and met with 11 members of Rohingya community in Aung Mingala Quarter in Sittwe, according to sources on the ground. He reportedly identified himself as an advisor of the State Counsellor, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, but his name identity was not available, according to the Rohingya community leader who participated in the meeting.

The first question the official asked was whether there are any current problems between Rohingya community and the Rakhine community. The Rohingya participants reportedly responded "there were problems but now they have somewhat subsided in certain neighborhoods; now we can go to some places in Sittwe where we couldn't before; it was not safe then; we hope that the safety and security situation for us does not go back to how it was before". The Rohingya participants further told the official "There are serious issues in Arakan that we are facing; Education is very important for our children, and they are still not able to go schools and colleges/universities, and we also cannot open our shops and businesses".

Secondly, the official asked the Rohingya community leaders about the court case at the International Court of Justice. The community leaders reportedly responded "We, the Rohingya people in Rakhine State, did not file the case against the Government of Myanmar nor participated in the judicial process; we have no authority to speak on the case; however, we do think that this happened because there is no system of justice for Rohingya in Myanmar; If the Government of Myanmar adopts and comply with a fair system of justice and restore the rights and citizenship of Rohingya, why should there be a case at the ICJ?; Because there is no justice here, the Government of The Gambia, back by OIC and our global Rohingya community leadership, has no choice but seek justice at the ICJ; they want a peaceful solution and they went to court".

Emergence of another possible setback for return of Rohingya refugees to their homeland, Arakan State

Since the signing of the agreement between the Governments of Burma and Bangladesh for safe, dignified, and voluntary return of Rohingya refugees to their original homes in Arakan in late 2017, nothing has been implemented due a number of stumbling blocks set up by the Burmese Government officials - that includes not providing conducive conditions on the ground in Arakan, construction of refugee camps on the Burma side for the possible returnees, rejecting family members from the list of returnees that the Bangladesh has reportedly submitted to Burma, the Burmese Government complicating the process with NVC, and several other obstacles that the Government of Burma has reportedly set forth.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 global pandemic, the leadership in Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh have expressed major concerns about possible exploitation of COVID-19 situation by Myanmar authorities against the repatriation of Rohingya refugees. After so much anxiety, the concerns have turned out to be a reality. A Rohingya man who returned voluntarily from camp in Bangladesh to his native Arakan State has reportedly tested positive for the coronavirus, according to a report by Irrawaddy, citing to local authorities in Arakan. He was reportedly part of a five-member family who chose to cross the border and returned to their village in Maungdaw Township on May 30, 2020.

Local authorities in Maungdaw Township reportedly went to the village and took the family to the Hla Poe Khaung camp for quarantine. Only the head of the household tested positive, according Maungdaw district administrator U Soe Aung, Irrawaddy reports. The test result could not be independently verified through any international healthcare group.

In relation to the development, a Buddhist Rakhine extremist group organized a rally in Maungdaw, demanding the Government to block return of refugees from camps in Bangladesh. The group reportedly gathered at the soccer field in Maungdaw and headed to the city center carrying banners, escorted by four police officers on two motorcycles.

Burma's Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development, explains the repatriation status

The Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development (UEHRD), a semi-Governmental body in Burma, has said the process of repatriation of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh will be resumed after the coronavirus pandemic situation is effectively managed, according to Washington-based Radio Free Asia (RFA).

"We have been criticized by the refugees and the human rights activists that despite much talk of repatriation there are no practical efforts by the Government [of Burma]" RFA has quoted the UEHRD spokesperson as saying. "If the coronavirus situation can be controlled through cooperation between the two countries [Burma and Bangladesh], the repatriation of the refugees, humanitarian support for them in Rakhine State, resettlement and development projects will be resumed" said Dr. Win Myat Aye, Deputy Chairman of the UEHRD, according RFA. "We have signed bilateral agreement, we will follow it through, we are preparing for it, and the other country should also cooperate; however, there are a lot challenges and negotiations; we are still trying; although a timeframe cannot be identified, we are preparing and we can only accomplish this when the coronavirus pandemic situation does not hamper the process; earlier in April we had to suspend the repatriation process due to the coronavirus pandemic" Dr. Win Myat Aye added.

Khin Maung, Director of Rohingya Youth Association in the refugee camp in Bangladesh, has reportedly told RFA "not allowing the returnees to their original homes in Arakan and inaction by

the Government to address their demand for reinstating their citizenship rights, has made the return of the refugees to their homeland impossible.”

U.S. court asked to force Facebook to release Burmese officials' data for Rohingya genocide case

The Government of The Gambia which brought the case before the International Court of Justice accusing Burma of committing genocide against its Rohingya ethnic minority have asked a U.S. district court to order Facebook to release posts and communications of the country's military and police.

The court filing by the attorneys in Washington on behalf of the Republic of The Gambia on June 8, 2020, with the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, calling on Facebook to release all false propaganda, misinformation and communications content, drafted, posted or published on Facebook by the Burmese armed forces and extremist organizations, was welcomed by the Arakan Rohingya Union.

On behalf of Rohingya people, Arakan Rohingya Union has called on Facebook officials to exercise greater transparency and demanded to unconditionally release all the postings by current and former Burmese military officials, police forces, and extremist organizations that include various forms of systematic campaigns, propaganda, and hate speech directed towards Rohingya ethnic minority of Burma. Other organizations, including United States Council of Muslim Organizations, The Burmese Rohingya Association of North America, and The European Rohingya Council have also endorsed the court filing by the attorneys in Washington.

Recommendations

The OIC and the international community must demand the Government of Burma:

- To submit the mandatory reports to the ICJ that accurately reflect the real situation on the ground in Arakan State.
- To immediately resume the refugee repatriation process, including restoration of the citizenship, all the basic rights, and security of the Rohingya people.
- Not to exploit the COVID-19 situation to further delay the repatriation process. A mechanism to address the health-related issues during the repatriation should be developed through cooperation with international agencies and healthcare professionals.
- To prevent establishment of any military or undemocratic dictatorial rule in Northern Rakhine State on the pretext of military's armed conflict with any armed group.
- To prosecute any township administration official in Arakan who violates the rights of the internally/locally displaced Rohingya to return to their original homes, harass, extort, and threaten to evict them from their homes with impunity.
- Protect Rohingya and other innocent civilian population in the newly emerging urban violence and armed clashes in Arakan.

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Arakan Rohingya Union, a global Rohingya umbrella organization representing 61 Rohingya organizations worldwide, was formed under the patronage of the OIC Secretary General through the 38th OIC Council of Foreign Ministers Resolution No.4/37-MM as a united Rohingya coordinated council to reclaim the rights of Rohingya people in their homeland. Arakan Rohingya Union is registered in the United States as non-profit (501)(c)(3) organization and recognized by all the 57 member countries of the OIC as the official representative organization of the Rohingya people.