



ARAKAN ROHINGYA UNION

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

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The situation in Arakan remains volatile and there is no sign of peace and stability. As armed conflict rages, the remaining Rohingya population in Arakan have increasingly become a target of the Burmese military and the Government Election Commission. Almost all evidence from the ground indicate that there is a major turning point in how the Burmese military is fighting the war with the Arakan Army. Death toll is on the rise in Rohingya and Buddhist Rakhine communities as the Burmese Government armed forces are reportedly shelling indiscriminately with air, sea, and ground assaults. Burma has also doubled down on the disenfranchisement of Rohingya from participating in the upcoming National Election.

Burmese military using Rohingya civilians as porters and human shields

Myanmar military has reportedly gone one step further in committing war crime in Arakan. It has sent shockwaves through the international community with reports of using Rohingya civilians as human shields in its war with Arakan Army. On October 5, 2020, in Kamichaung village of Buthidaung Township, the Burmese military has conscripted 15 Rohingya farm workers and cattle herders, including 2 minors, for its fight with Arakan Army. According to an account provided by a 12-year-old boy who later escaped from the operation area, the military column has used the group of Rohingya as human shields.

“When we were herding the cows, a group of Myanmar soldiers suddenly appeared and took us with them; we were directed towards the forest terrain where they were holding a group of Rohingya; then the soldiers moved us towards the foothill, putting us all in the frontline and they were behind us; they made us remove landmines hidden under branches and plant debris. Then all of a sudden a gunfight broke out, and five of the Rohingya, including two children, were killed on the spot as the soldiers have forced us to stay in the front (as human shields), according to the conscript who has managed to flee to safety during gunfight.

The Arakan Army has released an **official statement** in Burmese language. The followings are some excerpts from the press statement (translated):

“On October 5, 2020, the Burmese military intruded the territory of Arakan Army at approximately 700 meter southwest of Kamichaung of Buthidaung, and a firefight with our army ensued for 15 min. Two Rohingya children, 10 and 11, were killed and another injured. The 15 innocent Rohingya from Pyin Shay village, Buthidaung, were used as landmine removers and human shields by the Myanmar military...we are deeply saddened by the loss of the innocent lives”

“The nationalist, extremist, imperialist, and Fascist Myanmar military has not stopped its targeting (of civilians) and crimes of senseless killing of innocent civilians and children and continues to commit these war crimes...and they are committing such crimes against several ethnic minority groups”

“Further, while the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army has been making tremendous efforts for peace, stability and communal harmony amongst the ethnic groups of Arakan, the perpetrators (Myanmar military) have been creating rift, problems, and violence among our ethnic groups of Arakan...We declare that the Imperialist Fascist Myanmar military is the perpetrator of the crime and they are fully responsible for the tragic death of the Muslim (Rohingya) men and children”.

Myanmar military spokesman Major General Zaw Min Tun immediately denied the killing of the two Rohingya men and children by Government soldiers, and turned the table blaming the Arakan Army for the death of the Rohingya men and children.

Burma's Election Commission blocks one last remaining Rohingya candidate, sealing the final cap on the disenfranchisement scam

Following the Burma's National Election in 2010, when Rohingya ethnic minority last voted and contested, the disenfranchisement of Rohingya from the electoral process has been further consolidated by the Government. The Government Election Commission has effectively prevented Rohingya population from voting in the upcoming election in November by excluding them from the voters list. Recently, the Election Commission has rejected the application of five Rohingya candidates who submitted the application for contesting in the upcoming National Election. They are the candidates from political parties which have already registered with the Election Commission. The Commission reportedly described them as "*the candidates of Islamic faith from Buthidaung Township*", obviously rejecting the term Rohingya.

"Abdur Rashid from Sittwe district and Abu Taher *alias* U Tha Aye, from Buthidaung district were rejected on August 14, 2020, and three other were rejected on August 16, 2020" said U Kyaw Than, the official of the Maungdaw district election office to BBC News. "The letter of rejection by the Election Commission did not clearly specify the ground for the rejection" sources from the ground has quoted the candidate Abu Taher as saying. The other candidates from Buthidaung Township who were rejected were U Aung Hla from Precinct #1 and U Jafar Ullah *alias* U Saw Myint from Precinct #2 for the Arakan State Assembly, and U Kyaw Minn *alias* Mohammed Shamsul Anwarul Huq, the candidate for National Assembly (*Pyithu Hluttaw*).

However, the application of Rohingya candidate from Maungdaw Township, U Aye Win *alias* Dus Mohammed, for the National Assembly, was approved at that time, but that did not last very long. On October 1, 2020, the Office of the Election Commission of Maungdaw Township sent a letter of rejection of candidacy to U Aye Win, reversing the earlier approval of his candidacy by the Central Election Commission in Naypryitaw.

The letter reads that U Aye Win's candidacy was rejected based on the citizenship of his parents. Notably, there was no reference of U Aye Win's citizenship in the letter. The rejection letter specified the serial numbers of the National Registration Certificates (NRCs, as known as Thone Kauk Sho) of U Aye Win's parents, Abul Qaseem (NRC Serial# AK002356) and Ambia Khatoon (NRC Serial# AK002354). The letter states that NRC of U Aye Win's parents are not recognized by the Election Commission, therefore, the candidacy is rejected. The NRCs in Burma were previously issued by the Government to all citizens of Burma.

According to the codes of the Election Commission, candidates contesting in the election must hold the National Scrutiny Card (also known as the Pink Card). The Election Commission has bypassed U Aye Win's National Scrutiny Card and targeted his parents. In fact, as a citizen of Burma, U Aye Win's father has served the Government as the Police Chief of Maungdaw and later the Chief Justice of Maungdaw Township Court.

"There is nothing this office can do on the reversal decision; the decision came from the Central Election Commission" said U Kyaw Than, the Secretary of the Maungdaw Township Election Commission Office.

"The is a complete scam to take away everything what we (Rohingya people) have - piece by piece; they have dishonored my parents; my father has devoted his entire life to Government services; this blunt reversal is not acceptable to me" said U Aye Win to Washington-based RFA in an interview.

Burma cancels election in Arakan and certain ethnic areas

On October 16, 2020, the Office of the Election Commission of Burma posted six statements in Burmese language on its website on cancellation of the general election scheduled for November 8, 2020, primarily in some ethnic area due to the non-prevailing conditions on the ground, as it states. The Statement #4 (196/2020) on Arakan reads "In the national general election scheduled for November 8, 2020, the holding of election in the following townships in Rakhine State (Arakan) has been cancelled due to the non-prevailing

conditions for a free and fair election: Pawktaw, Punnagyin, Rathedaung, Buthidaung, Maungdaw, Kyauktaw, Minbya, Myebon, Maruk-U, and Kyaukphyu (2 precincts), Ann (2 precincts), Sittwe (1 precinct), and Taungup (2 precincts). Similarly, the statements on other areas listed the affected townships and precincts.

“Looking at the demolished townships, all of them were won by the ANP (Arakan Nationalist Party). I would say it is a solution that does not mix military and security and party politics for the sake of political gain.” the Washington-based VOA Burmese program has quoted U Pe Than as saying. U Pe Than is contesting for the People's Assembly from in Myebon Township constituency.

Burmese military's USDP party campaigners attack Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD party supporters

On October 10, 2020, thousands of supporters of the Burmese military and its proxy, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), held a rally in Hinthada township in Ayeyawaddy region, the Burmese language The Irrawaddy reports. When the group returned from the rally and arrived at Tagwa village, some of the USDP campaigners and military supporters used vulgar languages and flashed a group of women at a house where NLD campaign anthems were being played, according to The Irrawaddy. The conducts of hostility by the USDP campaigners and supporters resulted in a clash with the local residents. USDP supporters reportedly attacked the village residents wearing shirts imprinted with NLD logos, and they also threw rocks at peoples' homes flying NLD flags and vehicles with NLD logos, according The Irrawaddy citing the village residents. Fourteen NLD supporters were reportedly injured during the clash and one of them was admitted to hospital for treatment. The NLD has reportedly filed charges against 26 USDP campaigners for causing injury, verbal abuse, threatening, causing material damages, and aiding and abetting.

“The Military is addicted to power and the dictatorship mentality, and it has been clear all along that it will resort to all means, including violence, terror, and hostile acts, just to cling on to power; they are not happy with their 25% control of the parliament and the several ministries; they want more and more” a resident of Hinthada complains, according to sources on the ground.

Armed clashes intensify in Arakan, displacement of civilians on the rise

Fresh armed clashes in Rathedaung and Buthidaung Townships have been reported from the ground during this week where the Burmese military has been making assaults using heavy artillery, naval ships, helicopters gunships, and fixed-wing aircrafts.

On October 17, 2020, electricity blackout in Maungdaw and Buthidaung Townships has caused problems for the residence as the area is almost paralyzed due to the escalation of fights between the Burmese military and Arakan Army in Rathedaung north. Indiscriminate shelling of villages by Burmese Navy in Mayu River has reportedly destroyed one of the power line towers. “These kinds of blackouts have happened before due to shelling by the military and the power was restored within a day or two, but now there are a lot of uncertainties for restoration because the fighting in Rathedaung area is quite intense this time where the power crew may not have safe access to the towers now for the repair” said a local resident.

On October 3, 2020, a heavy firefight between Burmese military and Arakan Army reportedly broke out at Zauk Chanung tower point near May Lwen village in Minbya Township following several clashes at the vicinity earlier in the week. Later in the day at 5 pm Burmese military has brought in two attack helicopters and bombarded the area for nearly half an hour, according to sources on the ground. “There is no village resident left in May Lwen; all have fled to nearby villages because heavy artillery shells have landed at the village; no civilian casualty has been known at this point” said a village resident who fled to a nearby village. “Yesterday evening we saw the helicopters flying over Minbya; these are different types of helicopters, not like those before; the fighting was very heavy” said Hla Thein Aung, a State Assembly Representative.

On October 14, 2020, armed clashes between the Burmese military and Arakan Army broke out near Aung Thazi village in Rathedaung Township where the military launched attacks from ground, air, and naval

assaults, according to reports from the ground. On the same day in the afternoon, a heavy artillery shell landed at nearby Pyapinyin village where four village residents named U Ba Shwe, U Than Sein Maung, U Maung Mra Khin, and U Maung Mra Twen were reportedly injured. The victims were transported to Rathedaung hospital for treatment; however, one of the victims, U Ba Shwe, was later transferred to Sittwe Hospital due to severity of the injury.

“There has been a dramatic increase of displacement of civilians from Auk Chaung Taung, Sabo Chuen, Aungzay Gon, Pron Wen, and Kanbran villages in Ratheduang areas due to the armed clashes, and the victims taking shelter in temples, school buildings, and homes of local residents in Zaydibran village are facing serious shortage of food” said the community social worker, Maung Saw Win, according to sources from the ground. “There are currently over 10,000 displaced persons in Zaydibran village track alone, and there are more in other villages” Maung Saw Win added.

On October 5, 2020, the Burmese military reportedly fired upon two passenger boats sailing near U Soe Tint bridge in Minbya Township, and killed three Rohingya in the first boat and detained three Buddhist Rakhine residents from the second, according to sources on the ground. All the victims were reportedly from Mrauk-U Township returning home from Minbya.

Arakan Army enforces its authority on the ground in Arakan

On October 14, 2020, at 10 am, Arakan Army reportedly arrested four candidates from ruling NLD party as they arrived at Paungkha village in Taungup Township, in southern Arakan for campaigning. Later in the afternoon, one of the detainees, Than Sein Pyone, was released and the remaining three were taken to an undisclosed destination, according to sources on the ground. The three detainees were candidates, U Min Aung, a former State Minister and current State Assembly Representative seeking reelection, Daw Ni Ni May Myint, seeking reelection to the Lower House of Parliament; Daw Chit Chit Chaw running for a seat in the Upper House.

“Four armed men in soccer uniform came and arrested us; they slapped our face and also beat some of us while escorting us away” said the released Than Sein Pyone during an interview with RFA in Burmese language. “Aren’t you all of our Rakhine community (the community of Arakan Army), you wicked traitors? – they were scolding at us like that”, said Than Sein Pyone. The United League of Arakan/Arakan Army released a press statement in Burmese language on October 14, 2020, stating that the individuals were detained for interrogation. “Despite our (the Arakan Army’s) repeated warnings not to engage in mass public gathering in Arakan during this COVID-19 pandemic in Arakan and not to use abusive languages against other parties (referring to ethnic Rakhine political parties), the candidates of the NLD party have ignored the warning; therefore, our organization has brought them in to question and warn; the detainees were released after the interrogation” the press statement said.

US Deputy Secretary of State visit to Bangladesh: PM puts strong emphasis on immediate repatriation of Rohingya

On October 15, 2020, during the state visit of the US Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun to Bangladesh, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina renewed her call to the international community, including the US, to assist Bangladesh in repatriation of Rohingya to their homeland of Arakan, Burma, Dhaka Tribune reports. The Prime Minister put emphasis on immediate repatriation and said Myanmar should take their citizens back.

During a press briefing, the Prime Minister's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim said that Secretary Beigun stated the US also wants a permanent solution to the protracted Rohingya crisis. "We'll continue to extend our support to Bangladesh on this issue," Karim has quoted Beigun as saying, according to Dhaka Tribune.

The prime minister reportedly said that the country has been overburdened by over 1.1 million forcibly displaced Rohingya Burmese nationals. "The problem has been created by Myanmar and we're holding dialogue with them ... they should take their citizens back," Prime Minister has reportedly said.

Massive protests on Burmese military's violence and atrocities in Arakan surface in the region

On October 12, 2020, hundreds of ethnic Buddhist Rakhine minority group in Bangladesh staged protests in several locations against Burma's military aggression in Arakan/Rakhine State in support of their sister Rakhine community in Burma who are facing violence and atrocities like the ethnic Rohingya minority has been facing, according to our correspondence on the ground in Bangladesh.

"The Myanmar military, in a premeditated fashion, has been conducting serious military operation targeting the civilian population in Rakhine State with a view to obliterate the whole Rakhine nation; Arakan Army is an organization of common people in Rakhine; the people living there support it; they consider the Arakan Army as the protector of their lives and property" Kyaw Nyin Rakhine, the organizer of the protest, reportedly told BenarNews.

"The Rakhine people have been fighting for independence since 1784. Arakan Army is the outcome of the fight. They have been fighting to regain the lost independence and sovereignty of Arakan." said Kyaw Nyin Rakhine, referring to the loss of the independence and sovereignty of Arakan Kingdom that was invaded and annexed by the Burmese King, Alaungpaya (Konbaung Dynasty) prior to the British colonial rule.

Recommendations:

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

- Immediately stop the Burmese military from using Rohingya men and children as human shields and land mine removers during the armed conflict in Arakan.
- Immediately start repatriation of forcefully displaced Rohingya to their original homes in Arakan.
- Reinstate the voting rights of Rohingya and the candidacy of the Rohingya contestants in the election that was rejected by the Government of Burma.
- Stop the Burmese military from indiscriminately shelling the villages in Buddhist Rakhine and Rohingya areas in Arakan that is causing death, destruction, and displacement of the civilian population.
- Allow peace to prevail in Arakan and resettle the displaced civilian population of all ethnic and religious groups in their original places in respective townships.
- Facilitate community dialogue between Rohingya and fellow ethnic Buddhist Rakhine in Arakan and allow communal harmony to prevail.

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.