

HALT ETHNIC CLEANSING OF THE ROHINGYAS IN MYANMAR

ODHIKAR - Coalition for Human Rights brings the situation of the Rohingya Muslim community of Myanmar's Rakhine state to the notice of the United Nations Human Rights Council to seek immediate effective intervention from the international human rights community to protect the victims from ethnic cleansing.

The Rohingya is a Muslim minority community in Myanmar living mostly in the country's western Rakhine state. The community has long been victims of persecution and discrimination in Myanmar. In recent months, in Rakhine, they have been targeted in brutal violent attacks. Although they have lived in the region for several centuries, the community was stripped of their citizenship rights in 1982 and they became stateless.

In Rohingya-majority villages government-run primary schools follow very strict admission rules for the Rohingya children. Number of secondary level schools is very few in the Rohingya areas. Rohingya students cannot pursue advanced studies in Myanmar since the authorities banned them from the universities in 2012. A Rohingya student can study only up to the 10th grade in Myanmar.

Rohingya Muslims also face hurdles on way to follow their faith. Mass prayers are not being allowed by the Burmese authorities in hundreds of mosques in Rakhine since 2012. Several hundreds madrassas and other Islamic study centres have also been closed down in the Rohingya villages.

A Rohingya cannot buy or sell properties, and even cattle, without the permission from the authorities. Despite being the owner of a farmland, a Rohingya has to share its produce with the government. Rohingya community members are denied government jobs.

On different pretexts the Myanmar government launched several security operations in the past decades in the Rohingya-majority areas of Rakhine state. During the operations the security forces routinely committed gross human rights violations, including, killings, rapes and arson, targeting the Rohingya that fall under the category of '**crimes against humanity**'.

On October 9, 2016, militants attacked a border check-post in Rakhine and killed nine policemen. Soon after that incident the government launched a "clearance operation" in the Rohingya villages of Rakhine in search of the militants, who, according to the security agencies, were Rohingya Muslim. In the name of searching for the militants the security forces killed and raped the Rohingya. As the local Rakhine Buddhists joined the Burmese soldiers and police during the raids, the men also looted the Rohingya households and set fire to houses and shops. At least two thousand Rohingya men were forcibly taken away from the villages by the security forces. The government announced arrest of few hundreds of them and bodies of some others were recovered later. Several hundred Rohingya men remain untraced as victims of **enforced disappearances**.

Fearing for their lives, tens of thousands of Rohingya- including women and children- have fled to Bangladesh, crossing the Naf River.

Activists of Odhikar met some of the Rohingya victims in Bangladesh in January 2017 and documented their recent experiences in Myanmar. The victims narrated before the Odhikar documentation team how they had been raped, their near and dear ones been tortured, burnt alive, hacked to death and shot dead. Several girl children were gang-raped and killed, it has been reported. Rohingya women were raped before their children and husbands, girls were raped before their parents and several girl children and women were held as **sex slaves** in the military camps for days, Odhikar documented. Those who resisted rape were even killed brutally.

Here are some cases of recent human rights violations in Rakhine state. In Bangladesh, in January 2017, Odhikar interviewed close to 100 Rohingya survivors, who had fled Myanmar. Here the excerpts from the statements of few of the survivors:

Case Study 1:

Name: Muslima (F/Unmarried/11)

“When some soldiers were dragging me away from a relative’s house, my father urged them to spare me. But the soldiers did not care for our appeals. They shot him dead before taking me towards the hills. I fell unconscious. I cannot remember how many soldiers raped me. Villagers brought me back to our village after they found me lying near a paddy field.”

Case Study 2:

Name: Mubina (F/Unmarried/12)

“During the raid in our village the soldiers abducted me. In a military camp, they held me and 11 other Rohingya girls, who had been abducted from different villages, and tortured us sexually. After 8 days, when the soldiers left the area and we were released, I saw bodies of four girls lying just outside the camp.”

Case Study 3:

Name: Meherjan (F/Married/23)

“Our family was quite rich. When the soldiers, along with some local tribal Buddhist villagers, raided our village in the last week of December, they looted almost 1 million kyats of cash and a good amount of gold jewellery. When my husband (AbdurRahaman/25) tried to resist, he was beaten up and dragged away. The soldiers took me away to their camp where I found 12 to 15 other Rohingya women who had been forcibly brought in like me. As the soldiers ordered, all women had to remain nude and we all were sexually tortured. For four consecutive days I was forcibly taken to the camp and they tortured me in the same style. On the fifth day I left my village and finally reached Bangladesh. My husband is untraced since the soldiers took him away.”

Case Study 4:

Name: Parvin (F/Married/20)

“Around 20 Burmese soldiers, accompanied by 10 to 15 Buddhist men in plain clothes, attacked our village. They beat up my husband (Motaleb/30) and dragged him away. The soldiers returned after 10-12 days. Then they set fire to our house and forcibly took away my sister Manwara (18). My husband and sister are still untraced.”

Case Study 5:

Name: Noorjahan (F/Married/40)

“Around 20 soldiers came to our house and locked up my 5 children in a room before setting it on fire, using a ‘gun-bomb’. All 5 children were burnt alive. Then, at gunpoint they forced me to take off the clothes of my two teenage daughters and raped them before my eyes. They shot dead my husband when he tried to stop the soldiers from torturing our daughters. Later, they killed those two daughters. They also raped me...They finished off 8 people of our 10-member family in just a few hours.”

Case Study 6:

Name: Jamila (F/Married/25)

“Around mid-December the military attacked my family. With my child I hid myself in a bush near our house. They pushed my father- a Maulana- and my mother into a room, I witnessed it. They forced my elder sister, her husband and their 4 children into that room before bolting it from outside. Then they set the house on fire. When the soldiers left and we put out the fire, we

found all 8 of my close relatives had been charred to death. They hate Muslims and Islam. They hate Muslim religious leaders even more. That's why they killed my father and his family in such ruthless way."

Case Study 7:

Name: Rabiya Begum (F/Married/40)

"Around mid-December around 20 to 30 soldiers attacked our house. They beat up my husband and forcibly took away my sister's teenage daughter Sabikunnahar. We knew that they were taking young women to hold them in their camps and gang-rape them there. Later, we went towards the camp in search of my niece. We found her body lying in a bush near the camp there."

Case Study 8:

Gulnaz (F/Unmarried/18)

"On October 24, 2016, many soldiers and Moghs pounced on our village. While most men fled to forests, they forcibly took away other men whom they found in the village. Then they gathered all women at one place and picked up the good-looking and young women for torture. Two soldiers and two Moghs pushed me into a room and began raping me one by one when I became unconscious. Later, when I got back to my sense I found many young women and girls had been raped by them. They also killed a few women who tried to resist them."

Case Study 9:

Ayesha Begum (F/Unmarried/18)

"Through the Moghs who live in nearby village the military sought 40 'young and beautiful' Rohingya women from our village. After no woman willing to give in to that demand, the soldiers attacked our village to punish us. In front of my father they raped my 22-year-old pregnant sister Rajuma. My father (Alimullah) sought to resist the soldiers, but he was shot dead. They beat up my mother badly and she fell unconscious. Two soldiers raped me. Before the next soldier could rape me, I slipped out. After the soldiers left, I returned home and found the body of Rajuma lying there."

Case Study 10:

Zainab (F/Married/31)

“On November 21, during a raid the soldiers shot dead my husband. On December 14, 2016, five soldiers and a few Moghs forced into my house. Two soldiers pinned me down and three soldiers raped me before my daughter. On December 21, when some journalists visited our village, I came forward and told them how the soldiers had murdered my husband and raped me. Later the soldiers launched a hunt for me. I spent a few days hiding at different places before fleeing to Bangladesh.”

Recommendation:

The ongoing ethnic cleansing in the Rakhine state of Myanmar urgently deserves the attention of the UN Human Rights Council. The Council should adopt resolutions that should pave the way for sending the UN Peacekeeping Mission in the Rakhine state of Myanmar for the protection the survivors of genocide and crimes against humanity in that country. The UN should appoint high-profile international probe commissions to investigate the crimes against humanity committed by the security forces and their civilian allies against the Rohingya Muslims. Such probe commissions should be able to work independently by disassociating itself from the governmental entities and their agents, while conducting the probe. Urgent humanitarian aids should be made available directly to the survivors of the ethnic cleansing who are hiding in Bangladesh and elsewhere.