

Rohingyas Most Persecuted People in the World

The Muslim ethnic minority, generally known as the Rohingyas, who live in northern Rakhine State, western Myanmar, continue to suffer from several forms of restrictions and human rights violations. The Rohingyas' freedom of movement is severely restricted and the vast majority of them have effectively been denied Myanmar citizenship.

They are also subjected to various forms of extortion and arbitrary taxation; land confiscation; forced eviction and house destruction; and financial restrictions on marriage. Rohingyas continue to be used as forced labourers on roads and at military camps, although the amount of forced labour in northern Rakhine State has decreased over the last decade. These practices, in addition to violating other basic human rights of the Rohingyas, are discriminatory towards the Rohingya population as they do not appear to be imposed in the same manner and at the same level on other ethnic nationalities in Rakhine State, or in the country as a whole. These restrictions and abuses, and the general discrimination against them, also amount to violations of the right to an adequate standard of living for many Rohingyas. As a consequence tens of thousands have fled to neighbouring Bangladesh and other countries. This report is based on almost 50 testimonies taken from Rohingyas which were made available to Amnesty International during the last year. These interviews were conducted in private and in confidence in accordance with the organization's general terms of reference for primary research. Information from other reliable and credible sources is also used to corroborate these testimonies. In order to protect the safety of those interviewed, all details which could identify individuals have been deleted, but information obtained from public sources is cited where appropriate.

Hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh in 1978 and 1992, due to persecution by the government. Those campaigns were aimed at "scrutinising each individual living in the state, designating citizens and foreigners in accordance with the law and taking actions against foreigners who have filtered into the country illegally". This military campaign directly targeted civilians, and resulted in widespread killings, rape and destruction of mosques and further religious persecution. After international pressure the Myanmar government allowed most of the Rohingyas who had fled to Bangladesh to return. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had a presence in the refugee camps in Bangladesh but not in the Rakhine State, nor was it involved in the repatriation process.

Amnesty International and other human Rights organisation have reported on the widespread practice of forced labour in Myanmar since 1988. The organization remains concerned that the practice continues in parts of the country, particularly in northern Rakhine State, where Rohingyas appear to be targeted for such abuse. In spite of the fact that forced labour has decreased in the area, and that some people are paid, forced labour as practiced in Myanmar is in contravention of international human rights law in general, and in particular of ILO Convention 29, which the Myanmar Government has ratified. Amnesty International renews its calls on the SPDC to ensure that no local security forces take civilians for forced labour duties. Those found responsible for the practice should be brought to justice, in compliance with the SPDC's own decrees.

The expulsions of Rohingya Muslims and Kaman Muslims from their neighbourhoods and villages in Arakan State in June and October 2012, and their subsequent treatment, amount to a Burmese government policy of deportations and forced transfer of populations that appear aimed at permanently removing Rohingya and other Muslims from their current residences to other parts of Arakan State or outside of Burma altogether, thus changing the state's demographic nature. Widespread and systematic attacks by Arakanese, with the participation of state security forces in many instances, forcibly displaced over 125,000 Muslims from their homes. At least another 20,000 others are known to have fled the country during that time. Underlying these crimes was an evident goal of the majority Buddhist population to drive out Muslim populations. Deportation and forcible transfer of population are crimes against humanity under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

After June 2012, the RNDP and the Buddhist sangha in Arakan State both issued public statements and at times spoke to the media, explicitly calling for the isolation, departure and removal of Rohingya from Buddhist areas in the state.³⁶³ Members of these organizations committed apparent incitement to violence and participated in attacks that were at least consistent with the expressed positions of their organizations. State security forces also participated directly in the forced transfer of populations by committing violent acts such as killings – in some cases, killings of children – and beatings.³⁶⁴ In June, attacks against the Rohingya Muslim population by state security forces occurred primarily in the state capital, Sittwe, and northern Arakan State. An immediate result was the clearing out of the Muslim population in all areas of Sittwe with the exception of one neighborhood, Aung Mingalar. In October, groups of Arakanese acted alongside local state security forces such as the Nasaka, army, and police. In other cases the security forces simply failed to intervene. In at least Kyauk Pyu and Pauktaw, local government officials and members of RNDP were directly involved in meetings prior to the commission of violent acts during which decisions are known to have been made to coerce Muslims to flee.