



Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya who fled Myanmar in 2017 are still living in the Kutupalong refugee camp in Bangladesh. Photo: © Yvonne Koch

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New attacks against Rohingya a disturbing echo of 2017 mass violence

Myanmar

Increasing deadly attacks against Rohingya people in Myanmar's Rakhine State bear a terrifying resemblance to the atrocities of August 2017, Amnesty International said ahead of the seventh anniversary of the crisis. "As the seven-year anniversary of the Rohingya crisis nears, the horrific situation in Rakhine State looks disturbingly familiar. Rohingya men, women and children are being

killed, towns are emptying out, and vestiges of Rohingya history and identity are being eroded. Many are once again seeking shelter in refugee camps across the border in Bangladesh, where economic, security and livelihood conditions have deteriorated,” Amnesty International’s Myanmar Researcher Joe Freeman said.

“After being subjected to a brutal and systematic campaign of violence in August 2017 following decades of state-backed persecution, Rohingya civilians are now caught in the middle of intensifying conflict in Rakhine State between the Arakan Army (AA) and the Myanmar military, which has forcefully conscripted Rohingya to fight on its side.”

The military has responded to battlefield losses with devastating aerial attacks that have killed Rohingya as well as ethnic Rakhine civilians. They have targeted civilian areas, destroying homes, marketplaces and other civilian infrastructure.

“The Myanmar military must immediately end their renewed campaign of violence and refrain from unlawful attacks on civilians, who are bearing the brunt of the conflict not only in Rakhine State but across the country, with millions displaced,” Freeman said.

As they advance through Rakhine State and capture more territory, the Arakan Army has also faced mounting allegations of atrocities.

“In addition, the international community must apply more pressure on the Arakan Army to abide by international humanitarian law. All allegations of war crimes perpetrated by the Myanmar military or by any armed groups in the country should be effectively investigated,” Freeman said.

Arakan Army advances on the northern Rakhine town of Buthidaung reportedly resulted in large-scale arson on 17 May of this year, displacing thousands of Rohingya residents. And on 5 August, an attack that survivors blamed on the Arakan Army killed an unknown number of Rohingya civilians fleeing the town of Maungdaw near the border with Bangladesh. The Arakan Army has denied attacking Rohingya. “The rapidly escalating conflict in Myanmar is all the more reason for the United Nations Security Council to finally refer the situation in the country to the International Criminal Court. There can be no progress without accountability. The future of Myanmar hinges on protecting, promoting and upholding the human rights of all people in the country,” Freeman said.

“This includes scrapping discriminatory laws or policies that are used to cement the apartheid system against hundreds of thousands of Rohingya men, women and children in Rakhine and restoring their rights to health, education and freedom of movement.”

Meanwhile, Bangladesh continues to host nearly one million Rohingya refugees in camps in poor conditions for the seventh consecutive year. Last year, at least 12,000 refugees in the camps were rendered homeless due to devastating fires and the impact of cyclone Mocha. Acute funding shortfalls led to food insecurity in the camps, as well as shortcomings in healthcare and education.

“Bangladesh’s new interim government should prioritize the protection of Rohingya refugees’ human rights and their safety in camps, uphold the principle of non-refoulement, and adopt a rights-respecting policy towards the Rohingya,” Freeman said.

Background

On 25 August 2017 Myanmar security forces launched a widespread and systematic assault on Rohingya villages after an armed group calling itself the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army carried out deadly attacks on police posts. Arakan is another name used for Rakhine State.

The military response included extrajudicial killings, destruction of properties and sexual assault. As a result of the military's so-called "clearance operations", more than 740,000 Rohingya women, men and children fled northern Rakhine State to neighbouring Bangladesh. Taking into account previous waves of violence against them, an estimated one million Rohingya refugees now live in Bangladesh.

Amnesty International has said the 2017 attacks against the Rohingya amounted to crimes against humanity, recommending that at least a dozen senior officials be investigated for their roles in the violence, including Senior General Min Aung Hlaing.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) is investigating alleged crimes committed in 2016 and 2017 against the Rohingya population, but only those committed partly in the territory of Bangladesh or other states, because Myanmar has not ratified the ICC's Statute. Amnesty International has called for the United Nations Security Council to refer the full situation in Myanmar to the ICC, so that an investigation of all crimes committed in Myanmar can be conducted. Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya who fled Myanmar in 2017 are still living in the Kutupalong refugee camp in Bangladesh. Min Aung Hlaing has never been held accountable and on 1 February 2021, the military seized power in a coup, with Min Aung Hlaing chairing the newly created State Administration Council (SAC). SAC-backed soldiers, police and militias have killed more than 5,000 civilians in Myanmar since the 2021 coup.

Amnesty International has documented torture, arbitrary detention and unlawful air strikes by the Myanmar military following the coup. In November 2022, the organization called for the suspension of aviation fuel imports, which the Myanmar military uses to bomb civilians. While many companies have withdrawn from the supply chain after being made aware of the risks, shipments have continued.

Internetlinks

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/08/myanmar-new-attacks-against-rohingya-a-disturbing-echo-of-2017-mass-violence/>

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa16/8630/2018/en/>

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2022/11/myanmar-the-supply-chain-fueling-war-crimes/>

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/07/myanmar-reckless-shipments-of-jet-fuel-continue-as-air-strikes-multiply/>

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