



29. September 2025



Rohingya-Flüchtlingslager in Kutupalong (Bangladesch)

Foto: Yvonne Koch

Rohingya repatriation ‘catastrophic’ under existing conditions in northern Rakhine State

Myanmar/Bangladesh

Rohingya communities in Myanmar’s northern Rakhine State are facing forced labour, food and health crises, severe restrictions on movement and escalating armed conflict, Amnesty International said today as it warned against dangerously premature decisions to repatriate refugees from Bangladesh.

Tomorrow the UN General Assembly will convene a High-level Conference¹ on the Situation of Rohingya Muslims and Other Minorities in Myanmar. The conference aims to formulate a plan² under which the more than one million Rohingya refugees living in Bangladesh can

¹ <https://www.un.org/id/civil-society/high-level-conference-situation-rohingya-muslims-and-other-minorities-myanmar>

² <https://asianews.network/bangladesh-to-press-for-permanent-rohingya-solution-at-upcoming-new-york-conference/>

return home to Myanmar after the majority were violently driven from the country by the military in 2016 and 2017.

Amnesty International conducted interviews with 15 Rohingya refugees who arrived in Bangladesh within the past year, as recently as July 2025. The refugees came from both Maungdaw and Buthidaung Townships, which were both captured from the Myanmar military by the Arakan Army in 2024. The organization also spoke with UN agency staff, diplomats, researchers and international humanitarian organizations.

In addition, Amnesty International met with representatives from the political and humanitarian wings of the Arakan Army: the United League of Arakan (ULA) and the Humanitarian and Development Coordination Office (HDCO).

“Existing conditions in Myanmar’s northern Rakhine State are nowhere near ready for Rohingya to return safely,” Amnesty International’s Myanmar Researcher Joe Freeman said. “The Arakan Army has, to many Rohingya, replaced the Myanmar military as their oppressor. The military are using Rohingya civilians as cannon fodder to fight against the Arakan Army, and Rohingya armed groups are launching new attacks into the territory. The dramatic reduction of US aid has further contributed to a humanitarian crisis in which supplies are scarce and prices are skyrocketing.

“While it is vitally important to put an international spotlight on the Rohingya crisis with this conference, any attempt to push ahead with repatriation without addressing the acute dangers facing all communities – Rohingya, Rakhine and other ethnic minorities in Bangladesh and in Myanmar – could be catastrophic.”

‘This is not your country’

The northern part of Myanmar’s Rakhine State, which borders Bangladesh, is now under the control of the Arakan Army, while the Myanmar military still controls the state capital Sittwe, a key entry point for aid and transportation.

In November 2023, the Arakan Army, which is also loosely aligned with myriad opposition armed groups fighting against the Myanmar military since a coup in 2021, began an offensive that drove the military out of much of the northern part of the state. It now has effective control of Myanmar’s entire border with Bangladesh.

Long-standing tensions between the ethnic Rakhine Buddhist population of Rakhine State and the Rohingya Muslim population have been exploited by the Myanmar military, which worked with Rohingya armed groups and forcibly recruited Rohingya civilians to fight against the mostly Buddhist Arakan Army.

Due to the armed conflict, Rohingya and Rakhine civilians have been caught between the Arakan Army and the Myanmar military, which has blocked the delivery of humanitarian aid via the state capital Sittwe, and carried out deadly indiscriminate air strikes. Earlier this month, in one such attack, a military air strike reportedly killed at least 19 Rakhine students while they slept.

Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya are internally displaced, and more than 150,000 Rohingya men, women and children have fled across the border to the Bangladesh camps in the last 20 months, according to the UN refugee agency, bringing the total number of refugees to an estimated 1.2 million.

Amnesty International and other groups have documented violations of international humanitarian law and mounting abuses against civilians by the Arakan Army, including indiscriminate attacks and arbitrary detention.

For Rohingya civilians, life under Arakan Army rule in Rakhine State feels painfully similar to life under the Myanmar military. Many allege it is worse, as they are constantly under suspicion of being tied to Rohingya militant groups. A report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on 2 September said that “restrictions on the rights and freedoms of Rohingya imposed by previous Governments remained in place,” and that similar to the Myanmar military, the Arakan Army denied Rohingya identity by referring to them only as Bengalis or Muslims.

Arakan Army representatives argue the group is the victim of a propaganda campaign fuelled by Rohingya activists and armed groups.

According to testimony gathered by Amnesty International, Rohingya communities in northern Rakhine state face severe restrictions on movement by the Arakan Army, discriminatory bans on fishing or other livelihood options, forced labour and inadequate access to healthcare, education and humanitarian aid. They also continue to die or be seriously injured in the ongoing conflict.

One man in his 20s said that while Arakan Army soldiers were leading him and members of his family to a camp for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), he saw at least four people lose limbs from stepping on landmines.

A 60-year-old man who fled Myanmar with his family in July 2025 described life in an IDP camp in Buthidaung Township, where he was moved after the Arakan Army took Buthidaung from the Myanmar military in May 2024. He said the Arakan Army were searching for members of Rohingya armed groups at the camp and that they “randomly took people from the crowd and disappeared them”.

People living in the camp were also forced to work, including in frontline conflict areas.

“They would make us carry stones and bricks to their checkpoints and stack them there while we were hungry. Since I was old, they did not make me do all of that work, but my children had to do it more than 10 times...if we refused to work, [members of the Arakan Army] would beat us severely, forcing us to lie face down while they beat us.”

People who lived in IDP camps in Myanmar before fleeing to Bangladesh said they ate infrequently, relying on rice and water from a muddy well, and that children died after getting diarrhea.

“They [the Arakan Army] did not provide anything; instead, they seemed happy when anyone died,” the 60-year-old man said. “They would say, ‘This is not your country. This is our country, our land, our water, our air – nothing here belongs to you. Get out of our country.’”

People were told by the Arakan Army that if they did not follow their rules or refused to work, they would be kicked out of Myanmar.

‘No school, no medicine and no aid’

A 25-year-old who spent eight months displaced from his home in Buthidaung Township before arriving in Bangladesh in January of this year said conditions in the IDP camp where he lived were “terrible”.

“We had no school, no medicine, no food and no aid. Occasionally, we secretly brought back some rice from unburnt villages. We used water from a single pond and needed Arakan Army permission to go anywhere.”

He said his brother was shot and injured by the Arakan Army when soldiers were trying to forcibly relocate large groups of people and they were not moving fast enough. On another occasion, the man said the Arakan Army suspected him of being part of a Rohingya armed group and began beating him for information. When the man’s pregnant wife asked them to stop, he said they hit her as well, which the couple believe caused developmental problems with their baby after the birth.

“The Arakan Army treated us worse than the Myanmar military. Whenever fighting occurred between the two forces, they forced us to clean the aftermath, picking up bodies and debris, then dumping them in the river. I was forced to do this over 10 times without pay. Every family was required to send someone aged 15 to 70 for forced labour. If anyone refused, they were beaten,” he said.

A 35-year-old woman, who also arrived in Bangladesh in January 2025 after walking for five days across mountainous terrain with her children, said farmers had to pay tax in rice to the Arakan Army, and Rohingya had to make paid applications to seek permission to travel.

“Under Arakan Army control, every household was forced to provide night guards, boys from as young as 10 years old up to men in their 70s, and to send family members for forced labour at least five times per month,” she said, adding that young men were also forcibly recruited to fight. “If anyone refused, we were told to leave this country or face punishment.”

The descriptions of restrictions on movement imposed by the Arakan Army match details of travel documents obtained by Amnesty International that show the permissions needed to move from place to place. One interviewee said mandatory travel documents had to be paid for, and some were only good for two days. Another said that the Arakan Army would allow only a limited number of people to leave their homes for basic errands and only for one hour.

Under international law, forced labour is defined as any work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty, and for which the person has not offered himself voluntarily.

Responding to these allegations, Arakan Army representatives told Amnesty International that it did not practise forced labour against civilians, but that detainees such as convicted criminals or prisoners of war would sometimes be put to work, or given tasks as “exercise”. They said that any clean-up activities following the conflict were voluntary community work, and that while there were fees for travel authorization documents, they were around 2,000 to 3,000 Myanmar kyats, equivalent to \$1 to \$1.50 USD.

‘We were not allowed to fish’

The World Food Programme said in August that “a deadly combination of conflict, blockades, and funding cuts is driving a dramatic rise in hunger and malnutrition”. It added that in central Rakhine State, the number of families unable to meet basic food needs was up to 57 percent, compared to 33 percent in December 2024. It said the situation in northern Rakhine state, where international organizations are not active, was likely “much worse”.

A 45-year-old man who arrived in Bangladesh in July 2025 said that ethnic Rakhine people in Buthidaung Township were allowed to fish and move around freely, while Rohingya were not.

“We were not allowed to fish or go to the river. We could not work or buy food. The Arakan Army began demanding money from us, used us as forced labour without pay and banned movement between villages. Anyone who refused was punished harshly,” he said, adding that this included being detained and denied food.

“One day, I tried to go fishing for survival. The Arakan Army caught me, beat me with a rifle...and took away the fish I had caught.”

Arakan Army representatives told Amnesty International that movement and livelihood restrictions were not discriminatory and applied to Rakhine communities too. They said due to the armed conflict the restrictions were necessary for the security of the community. They also added that the Rohingya – whom they referred to as Muslims – were given jobs and that their rights and freedoms would be fulfilled and protected, pointing to the recent opening of a long-closed mosque in Maungdaw.

“We welcome any steps by the Arakan Army to provide the Rohingya communities with long-denied rights, and we hope that their public commitments to inclusivity, justice and accountability match the situation on the ground. They must avoid presenting one face to the international community and another to the Rohingya,” Freeman said.

Link zum Originaldokument

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/09/myanmar-rohingya-repatriation-catastrophic-under-existing-conditions-in-northern-rakhine-state/>