

# Who are the Rohingya and why are they fleeing Myanmar?

Tuesday 19 September 2017, by [Amnesty International](#) (Date first published: 7 September 2017).

**In recent weeks, more than 370,000\* Rohingya refugees have fled into Bangladesh, as a result of an unlawful and totally disproportionate military response to attacks by a Rohingya armed group.**

Here, Amnesty International explains this people's plight, their state-sponsored persecution, and the crisis' wide-ranging humanitarian effects.

## **A persecuted people**

The Rohingya is a predominantly Muslim ethnic minority of about 1.1 million living mostly in Rakhine state, west Myanmar, on the border with Bangladesh.

Though they have lived in Myanmar for generations, the Myanmar government insists that all Rohingyas are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. It refuses to recognize them as citizens, effectively rendering the majority of them stateless.

As a result of systematic discrimination, they live in deplorable conditions. Essentially segregated from the rest of the population, they cannot freely move, and have limited access to health care, schools or jobs.

In 2012 tensions between the Rohingya and the majority Rakhine population - who are predominantly Buddhist - erupted into rioting, driving tens of thousands of mainly Rohingya from their homes and into squalid displacement camps. Those living in the camps are confined there and segregated from other communities.

In October 2016, following lethal attacks on police outposts by armed Rohingya in northern Rakhine State, the Myanmar army launched a military crackdown targeting the community as a whole. Amnesty International has documented wide-ranging human rights violations against the Rohingya including unlawful killings, arbitrary arrests, the rape and sexual assault of women and girls and the burning of more than 1,200 buildings, including schools and mosques. At the time, Amnesty International concluded that these actions may amount to crimes against humanity.

## **The recent violence**

The latest wave of refugees into Bangladesh follows Myanmar's military response to an attack by a Rohingya armed group on security forces posts on 25 August.

The military's response has been unlawful and completely disproportionate, treating an entire population as an enemy. Reports from the ground have described deaths of civilians, along with entire villages burned to the ground.

Myanmar government has said at least 400 people have been killed so far, describing most of those killed as “terrorists.”

There have also been reports of violence by Rohingya armed groups against civilians including of other ethnic and religious minorities.

### **Who is responsible?**

Myanmar’s military has carried out the bulk of these latest atrocities. It has considerable independence from the civilian government and is not accountable to civilian courts. Commanders of all ranks and soldiers therefore bear responsibility for any crimes they have committed during the current crisis.

The military have a history of human rights violations against the Rohingya and other ethnic and religious minorities in Myanmar.

However, Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar’s state counsellor, the country’s de facto leader, is failing to acknowledge the horrific reports of military abuses and to deescalate tensions.

Earlier this month her office accused aid workers in Myanmar of providing support to the Rohingya armed group prompting fears for their safety.

She has also failed to heed calls from the United Nations (UN) and world leaders to intervene to address the situation in Rakhine State.

### **Humanitarian catastrophe**

According to the UN, around 300,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh in the first two weeks of the crisis alone, and more are coming in.

People arriving are injured, hungry and traumatized and in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, including food, shelter and medical care. The Bangladesh authorities require urgent international assistance to help them support people in need.

Inside Myanmar around 27,000 people from other ethnic minorities have also been displaced in Rakhine State, and are being assisted by the Myanmar authorities.

The authorities have stopped vital supplies from the UN and other aid agencies of food, water and medicine to thousands of people - mostly Rohingya - stranded in the mountains of northern Rakhine State.

A large number of Rohingya relied on aid for their survival even before this latest violence. These restrictions have put tens of thousands of people at further risk and shown a callous disregard for human life.

*\* Statistic updated on 11 September 2017*

### **The crisis in numbers**

Around 370,000 - how many Rohingya fled to Bangladesh in the first two weeks of the crisis

1.1 million - the number of Rohingya living mostly in Rakhine state

27,000 - the number of other ethnic minorities displaced in Rakhine state

400 - the minimum number of people killed so far according to the Myanmar government

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**P.S.**

\* 7 September 2017, 15:18 UTC:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/09/who-are-the-rohingya-and-why-are-they-fleeing-myanmar/>

\* Follow Tirana Hassan, director, research and crisis response unit for live updates from Bangladesh: <https://twitter.com/tiranahassan?lang=en>