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Myanmar / Burma : UN reports details brutal effort to drive out half a million Rohingya - 'Textbook ethnic cleansing'

Thursday 12 October 2017, by [Press Agencies](#), [SAFI Michael](#) (Date first published: 11 October 2017).

Region's head of human rights calls on Aung San Suu Kyi to stop violence as report says 'clearance operations' include killings, torture and rape.

Myanmar security forces have driven out half a million Muslim Rohingya from northern Rakhine state, torching their homes, crops and villages to prevent them from returning, the UN human rights office said on Wednesday.

Jyoti Sanghera, head of the Asia and Pacific region of the UN human rights office, called on Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi to "stop the violence" and voiced fear that if the stateless Rohingya refugees return from Bangladesh they may be interned.

"If villages have been completely destroyed and livelihood possibilities have been destroyed, what we fear is that they may be incarcerated or detained in camps," she told a news briefing.

UN political affairs chief Jeffrey Feltman is due to visit Myanmar on Friday, said UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric.

In a report based on 65 interviews with Rohingya who have arrived in Bangladesh in the past month, the UN human rights office said that "clearance operations" had begun before insurgent attacks on police posts on 25 August and included killings, torture and rape of children.

UN high commissioner for human rights Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein - who has described the government operations as "a textbook example of ethnic cleansing" - said in a statement that the actions appeared to be "a cynical ploy to forcibly transfer large numbers of people without possibility of return".

"Credible information indicates that the Myanmar security forces purposely destroyed the property of the Rohingyas, scorched their dwellings and entire villages in northern Rakhine State, not only to drive the population out in droves but also to prevent the fleeing Rohingya victims from returning to their homes," the report said.

It said the destruction by security forces, often joined by mobs of armed Rakhine Buddhists, of houses, fields, food stocks, crops, and livestock made the possibility of Rohingya returning to normal lives in northern Rakhine "almost impossible".

The campaign was "well-organised, coordinated and systematic" and began with Rohingya men under 40 being arrested a month earlier, creating a "climate of fear and intimidation".

“We are not in a position to make a finding of genocide or not, but this should in no way detract from the seriousness of the situation which the Rohingya population is currently facing,” said Thomas Hunecke, who led the team that went to Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, from 14–24 September.

It was “highly likely” that Myanmar security forces planted landmines along the border in recent weeks to prevent Rohingya from returning, he said, citing doctors treating injuries.

Despite growing international condemnation of the crisis, the military campaign is popular in Buddhist-majority Myanmar, where there is little sympathy for the Rohingya, and for Muslims in general, and where Buddhist nationalism has surged.

Myanmar on Tuesday launched its first bid to improve relations between Buddhists and Muslims since the eruption of deadly violence inflamed the communal tension and triggered an exodus of some 520,000 Muslims to Bangladesh.

But the UN’s Sanghera, noting that 11,000 Rohingya crossed into Bangladesh on Monday alone, said: “Clearly it seems that some level of eviction, displacement, forced movement and violence may be continuing.”

The UN experts documented Myanmar security forces “firing indiscriminately at Rohingya villagers, injuring and killing other innocent victims, setting houses on fire”.

“Almost all testimonies indicated that people were shot at close range and in the back while they tried to flee in panic,” the report said.

The UN report quoted a 12-year-old girl from Rathedaung township as saying the security forces had surrounded her house and started shooting.

“It was a situation of panic – they shot my sister in front of me. She was only seven years old. She cried and told me to run. I tried to protect her and care for her, but we had no medical assistance on the hillside and she was bleeding so much that after one day she died. I buried her myself.”

The girl did not know what happened to her mother and four brothers, nor her father jailed a month earlier.

Reuters at the United Nations

* The Guardian. Wednesday 11 October 2017 23.19 BST:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/11/rohingya-refugees-myanmar-aung-san-su-ki-un-report>

Myanmar treatment of Rohingya looks like ‘textbook ethnic cleansing’, says UN

Top human rights official denounces ‘brutal operation’ against Muslim minority in Rakhine state.

Myanmar’s treatment of its Muslim Rohingya minority appears to be a “textbook example” of ethnic cleansing, the top United Nations human rights official has said.

In an address to the UN human rights council in Geneva, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein denounced the "brutal security operation" against the Rohingya in Rakhine state, which he said was "clearly disproportionate" to insurgent attacks carried out last month.

More than 310,000 people have fled to Bangladesh in recent weeks, with more trapped on the border, amid reports of the burning of villages and extrajudicial killings.

"I call on the government to end its current cruel military operation, with accountability for all violations that have occurred, and to reverse the pattern of severe and widespread discrimination against the Rohingya population," Hussein said. "The situation seems a textbook example of ethnic cleansing."

With international pressure mounting on Monday, the country's foreign affairs ministry - which is headed by the country's de facto leader, Aung San Suu Kyi - said it shared global concerns at the displacement and suffering of "all communities" in the latest violence.

The statement failed to mention the Rohingya, who are not a recognised ethnic group in Myanmar, but listed other affected communities in Rakhine state, including other Muslim groups, whose fate it said was "sadly overlooked by the world".

It added that the security forces had been instructed "to exercise all due restraint and to take full measures to avoid collateral damage and the harming of innocent civilians".

Human rights violations and other crimes would be addressed "in accordance with the strict norms of justice", it said.

The latest crackdown against the Muslim minority was triggered on 25 August when a Rohingya insurgent group attacked more than two dozen security sites and killed 12 people.

Militia groups, local security forces and the Burmese army responded with "clearance operations" that have forced refugees into Bangladesh and left tens of thousands more displaced inside the state.

The foreign ministry said the attacks were deliberately timed to sabotage the release of a report by the former UN secretary general Kofi Annan advising on ways to overcome the decades-old tension between the Rohingya and Myanmar's leaders.

Annan's report, which also did not name the Rohingya at Aung San Suu Kyi's request, recommended that the government begin lifting longstanding restrictions on the community's ability to participate in politics, move freely and gain citizenship.

On Sunday, Bangladesh's foreign minister accused the Myanmar government of committing genocide against the Rohingya. Analysts said that AH Mahmood Ali's language was the strongest yet from Myanmar's neighbour, and reflected intense frustration in Dhaka at the continuing influx of Rohingya refugees.

Over the weekend, the Dalai Lama became the latest Nobel peace prize laureate to speak out about the crisis, telling the Burmese forces involved in attacks on the ethnic Muslim minority to "remember Buddha".

Ali told diplomats on Sunday that unofficial sources had put the Rohingya death toll from the latest unrest in Rakhine at about 3,000.

“The international community is saying it is a genocide. We also say it is a genocide,” Ali told reporters in Dhaka. He said the influx of refugees in the past month took the total number of Rohingya in Bangladesh to more than 700,000. “It is now a national problem.”

Ali said about 10,000 homes had been burned in Rakhine state, a figure that cannot be verified as Myanmar has restricted independent access to the state.

In Washington, Donald Trump’s administration broke its silence on the crisis on Monday, but White House spokesperson Sarah Huckabee Sanders did not mention the Rohingya by name and appeared to blame the violence on both sides.

Sanders said: “The United States is deeply troubled by the ongoing crisis in Burma where at least 300,000 people have fled their homes in the wake of attacks on Burmese security posts on 25 August. We reiterate our condemnation of those attacks and the ensuing violence.”

Scores of refugees in Bangladesh have given accounts of arson by Burmese security forces. Human Rights Watch said on Sunday that satellite analysis had shown evidence of fire damage in urban areas populated by Rohingya as well as in isolated villages.

Myanmar says it is targeting armed insurgents, including fighters from the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (Arsa), the group which claimed responsibility for the August attacks and reportedly controls small areas of Rakhine.

Arsa, which has been accused of carrying out attacks against Buddhist and Hindu civilians, called for a month-long “humanitarian pause” on Sunday to deal with the refugee crisis. The truce was dismissed by Myanmar authorities, which said they did not negotiate with “terrorists”.

The International Organisation for Migration estimated about 313,000 Rohingya had crossed into Bangladesh by Monday, noting that the influx appeared to be slowing. Many new arrivals were on the move inside Bangladesh and could not be counted, it said.

Rohingya people have been systematically persecuted for decades by the Burmese government, which, contrary to historical evidence, regards them as illegal migrants from Bangladesh and restricts their citizenship rights and access to government services.

The UN has described earlier security operations as possible “crimes against humanity”, but the scale of the latest violence – and allegations that Burmese forces are mining the border – have led to speculation the military is trying remove the Rohingya from the country for good.

The Dalai Lama spoke about the crisis for the first time on Friday. “Those people who are sort of harassing some Muslims, they should remember Buddha,” he told journalists. “He would definitely give help to those poor Muslims. So still I feel that. So very sad.”

Myanmar’s population is overwhelmingly Buddhist and there is widespread hatred for the Rohingya. Buddhist nationalists, led by firebrand monks, have operated a long Islamophobic campaign calling for them to be pushed out of the country.

Aung San Suu Kyi has been condemned for her refusal to intervene in support of the Rohingya [1].

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Associated Press and Agence France-Presse contributed to this report

* The Guardian. Monday 11 September 2017 23.16 BST First published on Monday 11 September 2017 09.18 BST:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/11/un-myanmars-treatment-of-rohingya-textbook-example-of-ethnic-cleansing>

Footnotes

[1] ESSF (article 42197), [Myanmar / Burma : UN reports details brutal effort to drive out half a million Rohingya - 'Textbook ethnic cleansing'](#).