

Joint Statement: Myanmar Must Prioritize Protection of Civilians in Rakhine State, Address the Roots of the Conflict

Thursday 14 December 2017, by [Collective / Multiple signers](#), [Mouvements](#) (Date first published: 14 December 2017).

We, the undersigned civil society organisations, people's organisations and individuals, affirm our belief in peoples' right to self-identification, and the primacy of dialogue and a politically-negotiated settlement in transforming conflicts.

We express our deep anguish and concern with the latest escalation of violence in Rakhine State, Burma/Myanmar, and the attacks against unarmed civilians. We condemn the targeting of civilians of any ethnicity and religion, by any armed group, for any reason. This latest wave of conflict, which has festered for decades and been perpetrated by the Burma/Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) on the Rohingya population, was lately spawned by the Tatmadaw's heavy-handed response to a recent attack by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) on border guard and police outposts. The aftermath of the ferocious Myanmar/Burma military action has led to hundreds of innocent civilian people being killed and hundreds of thousands displaced. Over 600,000 civilians from northern Rakhine State, mostly members of the Rohingya community, have been forced to flee their homes. We are particularly concerned about the "clearance operations" conducted by the Burma/Myanmar military, during which various independent reports have documented systematic burning of Rohingya villages, sexual violence against Rohingya women, and opening fire on unarmed civilians.

The conflict's impact on the civilian population has been multiplied by restrictions on humanitarian access to vulnerable communities. In 25 August 2017, humanitarian agencies were forced to suspend all operations in northern Rakhine State, including provision of aid to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other vulnerable populations due to several factors including the security situation on the ground, government field-visit restrictions and protests by ethnic Rakhine against international aid. While some aid workers have reportedly been allowed access to Rakhine, the overall approval process remains cumbersome. Myanmar media and government-linked social media accounts have contributed to a strong anti-international sentiment in the country fanned by circulation of falsified information including information linking humanitarian agencies and the ARSA. Myanmar nationalists, including those within the government and military as well as those in the host countries in Southeast and South Asia, have also contributed to an atmosphere of fear and hatred through hate speech, propaganda and inflammatory remarks that dehumanize the Rohingya and increase support for the military's response.

We believe that aside from the immediate end in hostilities and emergency humanitarian response, we must address the root causes of the issue and bring into focus the structural-legal discrimination against the Rohingya people. We must also situate the recent violence and abuses within the overall and long-standing patterns of human rights violations against ethnic civilians by the Burma/Myanmar military in other conflict areas in Myanmar that includes - but not limited to - northern Shan and Kachin States. Impunity for abuses against civilians during decades of conflict with ethnic armed organizations has encouraged the Burma/Myanmar military to apply the same tactics in Rakhine State.

There will be no end to the cycles of conflict and displacement in Rakhine State without addressing the main drivers and the roots of this conflict.

Thus, the below signatories call on the:

Burma/Myanmar Military to:

- Cease violence against and abuses of unarmed civilians in Rakhine State and the other conflict areas such as northern Shan and Kachin States.
- Comply with relevant international human rights and humanitarian law standards and norms, particularly with regards to the protection of civilians in conflict, and protection of children, women and minorities.
- Hold accountable those who have committed crimes against civilians.
- Cooperate with the civilian government to allow access for humanitarian groups to assist the entire displaced population, without discrimination based on religion, ethnicity, or citizenship status.

Burma/Myanmar Civilian Government to:

- Publicly call on the Burma/Myanmar military to protect civilians and abide by international law in its military engagements.
- Hold accountable any soldiers and civilians who have committed crimes in the conduct of military operations.
- Cease circulation of unverified, inflammatory material on social media and condemn hate speech against Rohingya and other ethnic minorities.
- Allow independent monitors including the UN-mandated Fact Finding Mission and independent media into northern Rakhine State and other areas of Myanmar.
- Allow unconditional access for humanitarian aid/response in Rakhine State and other parts of Myanmar. Seek assistance from the international community particularly among co-members of ASEAN to provide humanitarian relief and protection to displaced people.
- Review and amend the 1982 Citizenship Law to be in line with international norms; end restrictions to citizenship and freedom of movement of the Rohingya people.
- Comply with relevant international human rights and humanitarian law standards and norms, particularly in regards to the protection of civilians in conflict, and protection of children, women and minorities.
- Undertake a process of review and amendment of the 2008 Constitution in order to bring the military under civilian control and ensure accountability for serious crimes.

Civil Society in Burma/Myanmar to:

- Cease circulation of unverified, inflammatory material on social media and condemn hate speech towards the Rohingya and other minorities.
- Promote understanding of human rights and humanitarian law, particularly in regards to protection of civilians and non-discrimination.

- Call on the government to allow access to independent media and unhindered humanitarian aid.
- Engage the Burma/Myanmar military and government on cessation of hostilities, review of discriminatory legal frameworks, and compliance with international human rights conventions.
- Link efforts with other ethnic and relevant regional and international civil society platforms.

International/regional intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to:

- Coordinate to monitor developments in Rakhine State and other conflict-affected areas, as well as monitor governments' action on the refugees, mindful of 'Do No Harm' principles.
- Support/impose a global arms embargo and advocate to relevant governments to cease military-to-military engagement and impose targeted sanctions against the Burma/Myanmar Army, until it ends attacks against civilians.
- Support and cooperate with the UN-mandated Fact Finding Mission on alleged crimes and human rights violations throughout Burma/Myanmar particularly in northern Rakhine, Shan and Kachin States.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN) and its members states to:

- Prioritize immediate dialogue between Burma/Myanmar and other ASEAN members on Rohingya issue with the aim to seek a sustainable solution to the conflict and to address the continuous human rights violations against the Rohingya and other minorities in Burma/Myanmar.
- Open borders and pro-actively accept and provide shelter and assistance to fleeing refugees from Rakhine State. Respect the fundamental principle of non-refoulement, in accordance with international law, which forbids a country from returning asylum seekers to their country of origin when they would be likely to face persecution based on race, religion, nationality, and from membership of a particular social group or political opinion.
- Send an ASEAN peace and humanitarian mission to provide humanitarian relief to displaced persons in Rakhine State and in Bangladesh.
- Urge the Burma/Myanmar government to conduct a comprehensive review of its 1982 Citizenship and other discriminatory laws in order to ensure that all persons should have rights and equal access to citizenship and are not treated unfairly on grounds of ethnicity, political and religious beliefs
- Revisit and review ASEAN Charter principles and current practices and consider embedding prevention norms for internal conflicts.
- Strengthen and mobilize ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (AIPR) and ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) mandate and mechanisms to tackle the crisis, and similar cases.
- Move towards a collective and decisive approach to regional conflict prevention, in line with its priority theme on "peace and stability."

Initial Signatories:

114 organisations

Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC)
Solidarity for ASEAN Peoples' Advocacies (SAPA)
Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID) / GPPAC Southeast Asia, Philippines
Progressive Voice (PV), Myanmar/Burma
SUARAM, Malaysia
Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
Working Group for Peace (WGP), Cambodia
Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT), Cambodia
Cambodia Civil Society Working on Asian (CCWA)
Cambodian Civil Society Partnership (CCSP)
IM Centre for Dialogue and Peace-Indonesia
Institut Titian Perdamaian (Peace Building Institute) (ITP), Indonesia
People's Empowerment Foundation, Thailand
Southeast Asian Conflict Studies Network (SEACSN)
ASEAN SOGIE Caucus
Think Centre, Singapore
SAMIN, Indonesia
Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN)
Center for Peace Education-Miriam College (CPE), Philippines
Acehnese Civil Society Task Force (ACSTF), Indonesia
Asia Democracy Network (ADN)
ALTSEAN-Burma
International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development (INFID), Indonesia
Pusat KOMAS, Malaysia
Islamic Renaissance Front, Malaysia
MARUAH, Singapore
Vietnamese Women for Human Rights (VNWHR)
Arakan Watch
Rohingya Arakanese Refugee Committee (RARC), Malaysia
Rohingya Youth Development Forum (RYFF), Arakan-Burma
Rohingya Academy
Destination Justice, Cambodia
Coalition for Integrity and Social Accountability, Cambodia
Cambodian Youth Network (CYN), Cambodia
Centre for Development Resources
KontraS, Indonesia
Swedish Burma Committee (SBC)
GZO Peace Institute, Philippines
Burmese Relief Center, Japan
Free Burma Campaign, South Africa
Info Birmanie, France
International Campaign for the Rohingya
Karen Community of Canada
Rhiza Collective
The Arakan Project
Coalition of Cambodia Farmer Community
Vietnam Committee on Human Rights
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Empowering Singaporeans, Singapore
ReturnOurCPF, Singapore
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Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP)
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Migrants Rights Council, India
Pambansang Koalisyon ng Kababaihan sa Kanayunan (PKKK/NRWC), Philippines
Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA), Philippines
RIGHTS Network, Philippines
Vietnam Coalition Against Torture
Buhay Na May Dignidad Para Sa Lahat (DIGNIDAD)/Life of Dignity For All, Philippines
Action Aid International
Network for Transformative Social Protection (NTSP)
SYNERGY (Social Harmony Organization), Myanmar/Burma
Khmer Kampuchea Krom for Human Rights and Development Association (KKKHRDA), Cambodia
ASEAN Youth Forum
Boat People SOS
Burma Human Rights Network
Burma-Initiative
Stiftung Asienhaus
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Women Peace Network-Arakan
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Centre for Community Development and Social Work (Codes Vietnam)
Center for Community Development and Education (CCDE)
Europe solidaire sans frontières (ESSF), France
Indian Social Action Forum (INSAF), New Delhi, India
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Migrant CARE, Indonesia
Mindanao Peoples' Peace Movement (MPPM), Philippines
Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee, Pakistan
National Garments Workers Federation, Bangladesh
Focus on the Global South
Stop the War Coalition, Philippines
New Trade Union Initiative, India
Bangladesh Krishok Federation, Bangladesh
Philippinenbüro e.V., Germany
Network of Young Democratic Asians (NOYDA)
People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD), South Korea
PeaceMOMO, South Korea
Green Formosa Front, Taiwan
Genocide Watch, United States
Alliance for Peacebuilding, United States
International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI)
World Federalist Movement-Institute for Global Policy (WFM-IGP)
Permanent Peace Movement (PPM), Lebanon
Middle East and North Africa Partnership for Preventing of Armed Conflict (MENAPPAC)
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International Center on Conflict and Negotiation (ICCN) / GPPAC South Caucasus, Georgia
Foundation for Tolerance International (FTI) / GPPAC Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan
GPPAC Eastern Europe
Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
Igarapé Institute, Brazil
United Nations Association of the United Kingdom (UNA-UK), UK
Nansen Dialogue Centre, Serbia
Center for Media Studies and Peacebuilding (CEMESP), Liberia
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