Date : 07 March 2018

ISLAM DESCRIBED AS 'CANCER' IN MYANMAR PARLIAMENT

During a discussion in Myanmar's Lower House of Parliament on 5 March, a lawmaker representing Sagaing Region's Min Kin Township referred to Islam as "a cancer" afflicting the country.

Elected Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) MP U Maung Myint's remarks came while discussing a motion he introduced which opposes the relocation of internally displaced ethnic Kaman Muslims to the commercial capital Yangon. He instead called for them to be returned to their "places of origin.

" The motion was intended to "urge the Union government to reconsider its decision regarding the relocation of 55 Kaman IDP families from Kyaukphyu, Pauktaw and Ramree [in Rakhine State] to Yangon."

"I think it will be more appropriate if we treat the cancer that is occurring in Rakhine State in the Rakhine State itself. Otherwise, if we send the cancer to the country's commercial hub Yangon, it is like allowing the cancer to spread to across the country," U Maung Myint said in the legislative discussion.

While speaking to reporters after the meeting, U Maung Myint said he feared that Muslim populations from Rakhine State would spread to other parts of Myanmar. Lower House Speaker Win Myint of the National League for Democracy (NLD) has not opposed U Maung Myint's motion, which was backed by MP Dr. Maung Thin of Meiktila, who argued that the relocation of Muslims to the other parts of Myanmar could spark religious riots. The Speaker did not condemn the MP for describing Islam as cancer.

While acknowledging to the Parliament on Monday that the Kaman are recognised citizens of Myanmar, Dr. Maung Thin of the military-backed USDP said that they could still potentially contribute to the so-called "Islamisation" of Myanmar. MPs have unanimously agreed to continue their discussion on the motion.

Burma Human Rights Network's (BHRN) executive director, Kyaw Win, links the deeply rooted anti-Muslim sentiment among Burmese political leadership to the ongoing genocide of the Muslim Rohingya minority in Rakhine State. "The international community has long been isolated from this reality, and it has now reached very dangerous levels. Muslims in Burma are being treated as unwanted human beings, as third class citizens, " he said, adding that the rising levels of discrimination appear to face no opposition as they spread from the Parliament to the public.

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Dr. Maung Thin, the Meiktila MP, said on Monday that Muslims from Mandalay Region's Kyaukpadaung Township were once relocated to his constituency following riots, and blamed them for unrest in Meiktila in 2013 that killed at least 40 people and injured more than 60, and led to the closure of seven of the city's 12 mosques.

Meiktila is experiencing increased nationalist activity as the five-year anniversary of the anti Muslim pogrom approaches on 20 March, including threats of renewed violence if authorities do not ban annual summer training courses on Islamic religious practices.

In late February, Meiktila Township administration officials visited Islamic religious schools and ordered the closure of these courses in Yadanar Man Aung, Thiri Mingalar, and Chan Aye Thar Yar quarters, citing a failure by the host institutions to obtain "official permission" to run the classes.

Permission requests were sent by 28 February by the heads of 18 Islamic schools where trainings are conducted. BHRN has been informed that they have yet to receive a government response. There are several mosques and Islamic religious schools have been locked since many years across Burma and authorities do not permit to reopen them.

Background on the Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN)
Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN) works for human rights, minority rights and religious freedom in Burma. BHRN has played a crucial role advocating for human rights and religious freedom with politicians and world leaders.

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