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NEW EVIDENCE OF CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY DOCUMENTED BY THE BURMA HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK

The Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN) has conducted several interviews with Rohingya who fled Maungdaw following the crackdown by Myanmar forces. Those interviewed said they witnessed the Military shooting live ammunition into fleeing crowds – resulting in believed casualties, arson committed by the military against Rohingya properties, arbitrary arrests and looting by security forces of Rohingya possessions, including food and aid.

Human Rights organizations as well as international media have similarly uncovered several accounts of extrajudicial assassinations, gang rape, mass arrests, arbitrary detention and death under suspicious circumstances of Rohingya in custody. The BHRN also condemns recent news of Myanmar police preparing to arm and train local non-Muslims in northern Rakhine state, and remains incredibly concerned by reports of human rights violations by police and military in Maungdaw and Buthidaung townships following an attack by militants on Border Guard Police posts on October 9th.

“Arbitrary killings, the use of rape as a weapon in war and the destroying of homes are regular practices of the Burmese army. It has been well documented and reported by other ethnic minority rights groups in the country, including among the Kachin, Chin, Shan and Karen. The lives and livelihood of the Rohingya population in Burma are increasingly in danger and at this point the international community should consider pragmatic measures to ensure their safety and security in Burma,” said Kyaw Win, Executive Director of BHRN.

The BHRN has interviewed several Rohingya civilians who fled from Kyet Yoe Pyin (Kiyari Parang) and Ngakhuya villages and managed to take shelter in Bangladesh. They described severe abuses by the Myanmar Military and Police in their respective villages.

In Kyet Yoe Pyin witnesses described a time shortly after the October 9th incident where the Military arrived in the village after claiming to have had their way blocked by trees downed across the road, which they blamed the villagers for placing in their way. They said the incident resulted in sweeping arbitrary arrests. Witnesses said in one instance a crowd ran away from the military, and the military opened fire on them. One man said he saw nine people shot at this time. Another man said he was shot in the incident, and showed a wound on his thigh indicating where he had been hit. Witnesses said at another point the military began firing in the air to scare all the villagers away, and afterwards they saw the military looting houses and then many houses on fire. One man claimed to have seen the military burning homes with petrol, while most said they had fled and were too far away to see how the fires had started, but said no one else was left to have set the houses on fire but the military.



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In Ngakhuya village residents described arbitrary arrests of villagers, particularly elders with standing in the community. All witnesses interviewed by BHRN from Ngakhuya said they witnessed looting of houses by Myanmar soldiers and Police. In some cases they said that this was done coordination with Rakhine civilians, which if true indicates an intentional effort to escalate ethnic and religious tensions between Rakhine and Rohingya in Maungdaw. The villagers said once food and aid had been looted they finally felt they had to flee to Bangladesh to survive.

Late in October, a delegation led by Rakhine chief minister U Nyi Pu and the Number 1 Border Guard Police Colonel, Thu Ra San Lwin visited several villages in northern Rakhine and said that the authorities will arm the local youth so they can defend themselves against 'terrorists'. The BHRN believes that the arming of civilian vigilante groups to combat real or imagined threats in northern Rakhine State can only lead to an escalation of violence, and create conditions for sectarian riots similar or worse than those witnessed by the region in 2012.

In the chaos it is understandable that all citizens wish to feel safe and protected, but this is the responsibility of the police and military, who must do so while obeying international law. To arm one group of citizens during a time of tension with another is an unprecedented step that may easily result in mob attacks, mass killings, and widespread anti-Muslim riots. The BHRN has not read any reports of attacks on Rakhine citizens since the crisis began on October 9th, and efforts to draw ethnic Rakhine into the conflict at a time of military occupation are extremely questionable in judgment and intention.

The BHRN calls on the Myanmar Government to ensure human rights for all citizens in Maungdaw and investigate all reported violations. The Myanmar Government must allow full access to NGO's and Media to ensure transparency, that further violations do not occur and that civilians trapped in Maungdaw have complete access to all available aid.

The international community has a responsibility to ensure assistance is given to facilitate all humanitarian needs, and must place appropriate pressure on the Myanmar Government and Military to ensure they follow international law. Those found in violation should be considered candidates for targeted sanctions and any potential or ongoing weapons sales to the country should be reconsidered until they are fully compliant.

Notes for Editors

Background on current situation:

On October 9th three Border Guard Police posts near the Myanmar-Bangladesh border were overrun by a group of militants believed to be ethnic Rohingya, a marginalized Muslim ethnic group in western Myanmar. Nine police officers were killed in the attack. In response the Military moved to Maungdaw, near where the attack happened. The subsequent crackdown on the city has been especially harsh.

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International Law:

Rape, murder, torture, forced expulsion and other violations the Myanmar Army has been accused of are considered Crimes Against Humanity and in clear violation of Rome Statute at Article 7(1).

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.

Media Enquiries

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