30 May 2019

RAKHINE AND ROHINGYA CIVILIANS CONTINUE TO SUFFER MOST FROM RAKHINE CONFLICT

May 30th 2019 -- London, UK -- Burma Human Rights Network remains extremely alarmed by the number of civilian casualties and injuries suffered by members of various ethnic groups in the areas of conflict between the Burmese Army and the ethnic armed group, the Arakan Army. Civilians have been killed or maimed by guns, landmines, and artillery shells with near silence from the international community. Among those casualties are Rakhine, Rohingya and Chin civilians. As of now, nearly 40,000 civilians in Rakhine have been displaced due to this conflict.

“The fighting between the Burmese Army and the Arakan Army has significantly harmed the communities of all ethnic groups living in the region. As minorities their lives are too often treated as less valuable to the military. It is imperative that Rohingya and Rakhine can achieve some unity now to amplify their voices to call for peace and that the international community acts to help them do so,” said BHRN Executive Director Kyaw Win.

Between March of 2019 and today, BHRN believes that at least 35 civilians have died in the conflict based on confirmed ground sources and news reporting, though this number is a conservative estimate. Among the dead were five children and at least two elderly individuals. All of these deaths were the result of direct violence such as gunshots, artillery shelling, landmines, or aerial bombardments and do not include deaths which may have occurred due to sickness or starvation resulting from displacement. It is worth noting that the Burmese Military has not utilized the same scorched earth policy against civilians they deployed against the Rohingya in response to Rohingya militant attacks in 2016 and 201 but the disregard for civilian life while using heavy artillery, aerial bombardments, and landmines remains excessive and deadly.

On top of deaths and injuries, Rohingya continue to frequently find themselves unable to seek medical help due to travel restrictions imposed on them by the Government and NGO access during the conflict is extremely limited.

At the same time, reports are now emerging that Chin civilians are being forced to serve as porters in the conflict by the Burmese army, a serious human rights violation.

In this conflict the Burmese Military continues to show disregard for International Law and guiding principles and norms. In particular, the Military has clearly violated the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 3 which guarantees the right of life liberty and security of person, Article 4

which prohibits slavery or servitude, Article 5 which prohibits the use of torture, Article 9 which prohibits arbitrary detention, and Article 13 which assures freedom of movement. The Burmese military have also disregarded the Principle of Proportionality which states, “Before launching an attack there is an obligation to assess whether or not the impact on the civilian population is excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated.” Finally, the Military is operating in defiance of the ASEAN Charter Article 2 2(I) and 2(J) which call for the protection of human rights and upholding of International Humanitarian Law.

The Burmese Government must be reminded that these cases should be referred to the International Criminal Court and that the civilian government also bears responsibility for the military operations taking place in Rakhine State. While the National League for Democracy has often escaped blame for Military operations, their continued enabling, excusing, and minimising of the violence of the military has made them culpable as well. These instances should be pertinent to the UN’s Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar and when conducting further military actions Burma should be aware that any crimes are being monitored and documented.

BHRN calls upon the international community to increase pressure on the Burmese Military to cease the conflict in Rakhine State and immediately end arbitrary attacks on civilians and the use of heavy weapons in civilian areas. The international community must impose targeted sanctions on the Military’s economic interests, including businesses connected to senior military and known cronies. An arms embargo against the Burmese Military is also necessary and requires the participation of all ethical governments. Simultaneously, the Arakan Army must stop the use of landmines and IEDs in or near civilian areas. Unimpeded access for NGOs must be granted and all residents in Rakhine State must be allowed freedom of movement, especially in order to obtain medical treatment.

Below is a table of incidents resulting in the deaths of civilians since March 21st of 2019:

Date	Incident	Number of deaths
March 21st	A group of civilians killed, including one elderly woman, when an artillery shell hit their home in Si Taung Village, Buthidaung	5
March 25th	Boat operator killed by Burmese Military shooting near Ye Soe Chaung, Rathedaung Township	1
March 29	A 70-year-old man and a 30-year-old woman were killed in Auktha Kan, Mrauk U Township by an artillery shell. The woman was pregnant at the time.	2
April 5th	A group of Rohingya men were killed by aerial bombardment by the Burmese Military while collecting wood in Sai Din, Buthidaung Township.	Military claimed 6 dead and 9 injured but locals claim as many as 15 men died in the incident.
April 12th	A 79 year-old chin woman died after an artillery shell hit her home in Kyi Taung Village in Ann Township.	1

April 13th	A 62-year-old man was killed in Baung Du VIllage, Mrauk U Township when he was hit by a stray bullet during fighting between the Burmese army and Arakan Army (AA).	1
April 26th (reported)	Three men died while in detention by the Burmese Army in Lakar Village in Mrauk U Township. The army claimed one of the men had a heart attack, another hanged himself, and one died of 'depression caused by addiction.'	3
April 28th	A child died and two other children received severe injuries caused by an artillery shell in Khayu Chaung village, Rathedaung Township	1
May 2nd	A group of civilians accused of affiliating with A.A. were shot and killed by Burmese soldiers while in detention in Kyauk Tan village, Rathedaung Township.	6
May 10th	A motorcycle taxi driver was shot and killed when caught between A.A. and the Burmese Army during fighting in Phayar Paung village in Kyauktaw Township	1
May 11th	A 12-year-old schoolboy was killed during a shelling on Mee Yat Pyin village in Kyauktaw Township. Possible he may have been killed by an IED on the roadside.	1
May 20th	Civilians, including three children, were killed by gunshots when they were caught in fighting between the Burmese Army and A.A. between Myauk Taung and Malar villages in Kyauktaw Township.	5
May 21st	A man and his 8-year-old son died after stepping on a landmine in Ah Lei village in Kyauktaw Township.	2
	Total deaths: At least	**35**

Background on the Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN)

Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN) is based in London and operates across Burma/Myanmar 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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