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BHRN · Burma Human Rights Network · 22 May 2024

London, UK - BHRN is extremely alarmed by recent attacks on the Rohingya in Buthidaung Township by the Arakan Army and the Burmese junta. These attacks have included airstrikes, artillery shelling, and widespread arson. The attacks on the Rohingya occurred as AA made a significant push to take complete control of Buthidaung Township away from the Burmese military. Rohingya civilians have been increasingly conscripted into the conflict, particularly by the Burmese army, who use them as little more than cannon fodder in the field.

BHRN contacted two Rohingya residents from Ward 2 of downtown Buthidaung. Both residents said that they witnessed widespread arson by the Arakan Army against Rohingya properties.

The locals told BHRN that before the fighting, AA ordered Rohingya from Ward 1 through Ward 7 to leave the area by May 16th. By May 17th at 11 pm, AA began setting fires in Ward 5. A 34-year-old Rohingya man from Ward 2 told BHRN, "All the residents came out of their houses and moved wherever they could. Some people went to the school, and others to the hospital to take temporary shelter. There was heavy gunfire throughout the night by AA towards Rohingya residents in town. The following morning, some people returned to their houses, but on the

morning of the 18th, the AA came to Ward 2 and ordered everyone to leave the town. The residents of the main town areas then started to leave, moving to villages such as Sein Nyin Pyar (Saindi Parang), Harang Khali, and a few other nearby villages to save their lives. Some people stayed at the high school that night, but the AA knew this and fired mortar shells and gunshots at the school.” The resident told BHRN that the shelling and gunfire killed eight people. A 25-year-old Rohingya woman from Ward 2 said that artillery shelling killed eight people in the school and another four outside of it. During the fighting, military warplanes reportedly killed another 12 Rohingya while bombing the area.

The 34-year-old man told BHRN that while he fled, AA confiscated their phones or anything that might contain evidence of what transpired. He said they also took cash and valuables from the Rohingya who were fleeing. While fleeing, he said he saw dead bodies scattered across the road and a large fire in Buthidaung downtown that he believed was coming from a Rohingya area. He also said he saw a Rohingya administrator shot and killed in front of him for ignoring questions by AA soldiers.

Buthidaung is now under AA control, and, according to the man BHRN spoke with, the Rohingya who’ve fled were told by AA to flee to Maungdaw Township or Bangladesh. The humanitarian needs of the Rohingya are great as they fled without being able to take supplies, and the conflict prevents aid from entering the area. There is reasonable fear among the Rohingya that more will die as they are unable to access food, clean water, and medicine. There are estimates of hundreds of Rohingya dead or injured in the attacks, but BHRN cannot independently confirm any total number of deaths or injuries at this time. The Arakan Army has denied committing arson attacks against the Rohingya, but witness accounts increasingly describe AA as the perpetrator.

*BHRN’s Executive Director, Kyaw Win, said,
We condemn these attacks on the Rohingya in the strongest terms. The Arakan Army is treating the Rohingya the same as the Burmese military. What is the point of a revolutionary group that utilizes the same barbaric tactics on minorities as the junta? The uprising in Burma cannot be used as a vehicle for new leaders to unleash the same old oppression.*

BHRN calls on the Arakan Army to immediately stop any attacks on Rohingya or their property. The leadership of the Arakan Army must ensure that it is understood through the entire chain of command that all civilians are to be protected. Those involved in the attacks against the Rohingya should be held accountable by international legal bodies, and consideration should be given to how these attacks may fit into the ongoing cases of genocide against the Rohingya. The current attacks against the Rohingya by AA and the junta should be considered violations of the provisional measures by the International Court of Justice meant to protect the Rohingya from further harm. If the junta falls, the Arakan Army should consider its future standing in the international community and what sanctions or charges they may face. The future of Burma cannot be led by a new set of military strongmen who disregard the lives of civilians and violate international law.

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About BHRN

Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN) is based in London and operates across Burma/Myanmar, working for human rights, minority rights and religious freedom in the country. BHRN has played a crucial role in advocating for human rights and religious freedom with politicians and world leaders.