



Burma Human Rights Network publishes research revealing state-led persecution of Burma's Muslim minority

5th September 2017, London, United Kingdom: A human rights report released today reveals ongoing and systematic persecution of Burma's Muslim minority by the country's government.

The Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN) conducted eight months of field work and more than 350 interviews. Testimony was collected from individuals in more than 46 towns and villages across the country, from Karen State in the east to Rakhine State in the west, and throughout central Burma.

Human rights violations, detailed in the report, include:

1. Problems for Muslims obtaining ID cards

Research by the BHRN reveals systematic refusal to allow Muslims to receive a government ID cards (known as 'NRCs'). The way in which this manifests varies, but commonly reported problems include the flat-out denial of an NRC card to Muslims; the requirement that Muslims provide extensive, and often difficult to obtain, documentation that proves a family lineage dating back to before 1824; and the refusal by immigration authorities to register a Muslim person as solely Bama, the majority ethnicity in Burma. The denial of an NRC in Burma carries both material and ideological implications. Someone who fails to show an NRC when requested by police or another authority is likely to face harassment, and a penalty of a fine, or imprisonment, or both.

2. Authorities blocking the rebuilding of damaged mosques

A large number of mosques across Burma have either been damaged or destroyed entirely in the last few years. Numerous reports have surfaced of authorities refusing to allow Muslims to repair their mosques. Denying a religious group access to a place of worship contravenes a fundamental right to freedom of expression and religion. In Burma, the refusal by authorities to allow the rebuilding of destroyed mosques and the bar on Muslims returning to their places of worship appears to be part of a calculated strategy to deny religious expression for Muslims.

3. Examples of religious intolerance

In the lead up to an event to mark Prophet Day in Yangon, January 2017, for which permission was granted by the authorities, a crowd of about 300 people gathered outside the venue, including monk U Thusita, and were told that Muslims intentionally committed rapes and killings of members of other religions: “If Muslims wanted to practice interfaith harmony then they should join with other religions to eat pork curry”. The event venue cancelled it at the last minute. A similar event in Pyay Township in Bago Division was also cancelled following pressure from local nationalist groups.

4. Conditions for Muslims displaced or confined by the violence

The violence of June and October 2012 in Rakhine State in Western Burma forced about 150,000 civilians, the vast majority Rohingya Muslims, into IDP camps. IDPs suffer acute restrictions on access to education and healthcare, enforced by the government. Muslims outside of camps in Rakhine state endure severe travel restrictions. The confinement of Muslims to camps, ghettos and villages reinforces the sense that Muslims are a security threat that needs controlling. This provides a foundation for possible future violence. There is also a blockade on Muslims accessing some hospitals, a form of racialised healthcare that denies emergency treatment to individuals solely on the grounds of their ethnicity and/or religion, in clear contravention of international human rights law.

5. Spread of ‘Muslim-free’ villages

There has been a sharp rise in the number of villages across Burma that have declared themselves ‘no-go zones’ for Muslims. BHRN has documented the existence of at least 21 villages spread across the country where locals, with permission from the relevant authorities, have erected signboards warning Muslims not to enter.

6. Launch of military operations against Rohingya in Rakhine State

On 9th October 2016, three police outposts were allegedly attacked in the Northern Rakhine State. In response, the military deployed troops to the region and began a sweep of Rohingya villages in which helicopter gunships were used and, according to some witnesses interviewed by BHRN, either rocket-propelled grenades or mortars.

Since 2012 Burma has experienced multiple waves of violence between Buddhist extremists and Muslim communities. Accompanying the violence was the rise of several ultra-nationalist Buddhist movements, some led by monks that launched boycott campaigns against Muslims and were successful in lobbying parliament to pass a series of laws that rights group believe heavily discriminate against religious minorities in Burma.

While the outright violence has decreased in frequency, persecution has continued in an institutionalised manner. Across the country, “Muslim-free zones” have been formed, while Muslim places of worship have been shuttered or rendered unusable. Muslims in general continue to be denied ID cards, and the Rohingya in particular have been subjected to campaigns of violence carried out by the military.

Notes for editors:

The Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN) was founded in 2012 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. BHRN is funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC), and private individuals. We have members across Burma including in Rakhine State and the Bangladesh border. We also have journalists and activists working in the field. Any information we receive is checked for credibility by experienced journalists in the organisation. We publish press releases and reports after our own investigations.

The report was written by journalist, Francis Wade and Executive Director of BHRN, Kyaw Win, with Dr Thomas MacManus of the International State Crime initiative (ISCI, www.statecrime.org) at Queen Mary University of London's School of Law.

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