



## **BHRN Concerned Over Arakan State Troop Buildup and Border Wall Rhetoric**

23 September 2020 – London, UK – Burma Human Rights Network is alarmed by the recent deployment of an estimated 2,500 troops in Northern Arakan State along with NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi's recent reference in a campaign speech to the allocation of Kyat 20 Billion (\$15,178,990) for the country's border wall with Bangladesh. This all comes as BHRN has received a number of reports of civilian deaths and injuries, including among women and children, in recent weeks from stray bullets and artillery amid fighting between the Burmese Army and Arakan Army in Arakan State.

"Burma appears to be taking steps to escalate the conflict in Arakan State at exactly the time they need to be de-escalating it. Between the rise in civilian casualties and the spread of Covid-19, Burma needs to do everything it can to reduce hostilities in the region and tend to its citizens' needs. By building up troops in the area they are putting more civilians in danger, heightening tensions with Bangladesh, and pushing the civil war into a new and deadlier phase. A ceasefire in Arakan State is long overdue, and it is vital that all parties come to the table to negotiate," said BHRN Executive Director, Kyaw Win.

Burma claimed that the mass movement of troops to the border area was in response to threats from the Arakan Army and the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army. While both groups have reportedly used the porous border, Burma historically exaggerates threats to justify the expansion of military power and abuse. The areas where the Burmese Army is already active have been plagued with village occupations, arbitrary arrests and torture of civilians, civilian casualties, the widespread use of landmines, and widespread rape of civilians. By increasing troops in the region, these problems will all dramatically escalate. Similarly, by focusing on the border wall as a campaign issue, Aung San Suu Kyi has worked to provoke distrust and bigotry among civilians at a time where reconciliation and calm are desperately needed. The border fence itself is less of an issue than the timing of her emphasis on it.

BHRN calls on Burma to withdraw additional troops sent to the region and for all parties in Arakan State to immediately initiate a ceasefire and begin talks towards a lasting peace. Any talks must include all ethnic groups of Arakan State, including the Rohingya, and should emphasize the rights and autonomy they all seek. Aspirations of federalism have long been rebuffed by the Burmese authorities, but the issue is vital to negotiating peace. This ceasefire needs to be supported by the international community. Bangladesh's role in peace is vital, as a neighboring country, and ASEAN nations have a responsibility to progress any peace plans in the region. Similarly, the UN and UN Security Council should address these issues with urgency, particularly as they are attempting to resolve conflict amid the Covid-19 Pandemic.

### **Organisation's Background**

BHRN is based in London, operates across Burma and 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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