



ON-THE-GROUND IN BURMA

A DIGITAL BRIEFER

Issue 15 | April 30, 2022

MONTHLY HIGHLIGHTS

- In an [interview](#), NUG Foreign Minister Daw Zin Mar Aung stated “the world is responsible for Myanmar becoming a failed state.”
- [China](#) continued to legitimize the junta regime by hosting SAC "foreign minister" Wunna Maung Lwin.
- On April 6, the U.S. House of Representatives [passed](#) the BURMA Act.
- The Karenni Human Rights Group [published](#) their first quarterly briefier.
- A recent report revealed that [India](#) is Burma’s 3rd largest arms supplier after Russia and China.
- On April 24, APHR released an [open letter](#) to ASEAN urging stronger action against the Burmese junta regime.
- Malaysian Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah revealed he [contacted](#) NUG after ASEAN failed to implement and enforce the 5-point consensus.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Impose immediate targeted sanctions on the Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise and the Myanmar Foreign Trade Bank;
2. Provide immediate cross-border assistance directly to local civil society organizations, particularly those working in ethnic areas and conflict zones;
3. Recognize and engage with the National Unity Government (NUG) as the legitimate government of Burma instead of the illegal military junta;
4. Exert all possible pressure through every available means, including multilateral, regional and bilateral engagement, to ensure that the military allows humanitarian assistance in the impacted areas, immediately stops offensives throughout the country, and unconditionally releases all arbitrarily detained protesters and political prisoners.

ANALYSIS

U.S. Genocide Determination: Where do we go from here?

The U.S. genocide determination was warmly welcomed on March 21st, 2022. As echoed by many others, it is a decision that was long overdue; however, it is better late, than never. While the U.S. government moves to recognize the violence committed against the Rohingya as genocide, what does that mean Burma moving forward? Where do we go from here? It is important to note that genocide determination is an important step towards ensuring justice and accountability; however, it is not the only step. Until the U.S. government turns the recognition into tangible action and steps up as a leader for the international community to follow, our work is far from over.

Latest Update



**1.4 million
Rohingya refugees
in Bangladesh**



**34 camps in Cox's
Bazaar and Bhasan
Char**



**24,000 Rohingya
forced to Bhasan
Char**



**150,000 Rohingya
recognized by UNHCR
as refugees in Malaysia**



**56.4% of Malaysians
opposed Rohingya
resettlement**

“

The BURMA Act can be an important implementation mechanism for bringing justice in light of the genocide determination.

*Former Ambassador-at-Large Stephen Rapp during the April 14th event -
"Turning Recognition into Action: What does the Rohingya genocide mean for
Burma?"*

”

While a welcome sign, the [U.S. genocide determination](#) will remain but words until implementation brings tangible justice for the Rohingya and what occurred at the hands of the Burmese military. The [deaths of six Rohingya](#) while fleeing detention in Malaysia shows the urgent need for action in addressing the far-reaching ripples of genocide. To implement the determination, the US must support the [International Court of Justice](#) (ICJ) and [International Criminal Court](#) (ICC) proceedings against the junta and help host countries provide humane living conditions for Rohingya refugees.

In a [recent event](#), “Turning Recognition Into Action: What Does the Rohingya Genocide Determination Mean for Burma?” the U.S. Campaign for Burma, alongside the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, Never Again Coalition, Karenni National Womens’ Organization, and the Rohingya Women Development Network, highlighted Ambassador Stephen Rapp and the toolkit the U.S. must use to act on the genocide determination. To this end, the Ambassador recommends that the U.S. pursue legal routes through the ICJ, ICC, and the United States District Court for the Northern District of California along with replicating the sanctions regime currently imposed on Russia. For the ICJ, Ambassador Rapp suggests that the U.S. should [join Canada and the Netherlands](#) in providing support to Gambia and sharing the evidence of genocidal intent with Gambia.

In regards to the ICC, Ambassador Rapp suggests that the U.S. support Bangladesh in its efforts to hold the junta accountable. The U.S. could replicate its approach with the Gambia and the ICJ to support Bangladesh. Based on the suggestions of an anonymous Department of Justice official, Ambassador Rapp recommends that the U.S. Attorney in San Francisco open a preliminary investigation against the Burmese military generals for the crime or genocide. Such a

crime could be prosecutable in the Northern District of California because Facebook is considered an “instrumentality” as the generals [used the platform](#) to commit genocide. Finally, the Ambassador stated that the U.S. should sever Burma’s connection to the global SWIFT banking program just as it did with Russia in regards to the war in Ukraine. He described the BURMA Act as an important mechanism for tightening sanctions. The Act would help upgrade the sanctions regime against Burma to be equivalent to sanctions imposed on Russia.



The Minister of Justice of The Gambia, Abubakr Tambadou, speaks at the ICJ during the Rohingya Genocide case.

Photo Cred: Middle East Institute

While improving the situation of Rohingya in Burma is perhaps a long-term prospect, the tragedy in Malaysia is a sobering reminder that, in the short term, there is much that can be accomplished to help the Rohingya outside of Burma. While the UNHCR recognizes the 150,000 Rohingya in Malaysia as refugees, Malaysian law [classifies](#) them as “illegal migrants.” The Institute of Southeast Asian Studies’ “[State of Southeast Asia survey](#),” conducted in 2019, revealed that 56.4% of Malaysians opposed the “resettlement of displaced Rohingya people” in Malaysia.

The pandemic has only fueled xenophobia with the Deputy President of United Malays National Organisation, Mohamad Hasan, [stating](#) that, “receiving the Rohingya at times like this could open the floodgates for more foreign nationals and vessels to approach the Malaysian border and therefore hinder the government’s effort to fight Covid-19.” The founding of the [National Task Force](#) (NTF) in April 2020 embodied these sentiments as this combined group of the Malaysian army, navy, and police [turned away](#) 22 boats of refugees by July 2020. Along with pressuring Malaysia to sign and respect the 1951 UNHCR Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, the U.S. must demand that they uphold the norm of non-refoulement. Similarly, the U.S. must work with Bangladesh to reverse its current treatment of Rohingya refugees.



*More than 500 Rohingya that escaped an immigration detention center in Malaysia are recaptured hours later .
Photo Cred: Channel News Asia*

The U.S. must work with Bangladesh to reverse its policy of resettling refugees on the island of Bhasan Char and help improve conditions in the refugee camps. Overall, the government moved [24,000 refugees](#) to the island that only [emerged from the sea](#) 20 years ago. Despite the denials of the Bangladeshi officials, many Rohingya refugees [reported](#) to Reuters that the government forced them to relocate. Doctors

Without Borders condemns these relocations because the island lacks any [significant medical infrastructure](#), with NGOs providing limited primary care. The island’s susceptibility to flooding and storms [poses](#) a grave danger to refugees resettled there.



*Rohingya forced to live in makeshift camps in Cox's Bazaar after a fire that destroyed hundreds of homes in January.
Photo Cred: [MD.Jamal Photography](#)*

The conditions in the other camps on mainland Bangladesh are similarly dire. Bangladeshi authorities have [prohibited refugees](#) from attending refugee-led schools that operate on Burmese or Islamic curriculum. Authorities have threatened to forcibly relocate violators to Bhasan Char, implying that they also consider the island a condemnation. The operation of criminal elements and the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) compound these deplorable conditions. ARSA’s assassination of prominent activist [Mohib Ullah](#) illustrates that Bangladesh has given criminal groups free reign over the refugee camps.

Overall, the U.S. must redouble its efforts to stem the effects of genocide that extend far past Burma’s borders. It is crucial that the Rohingya not be victims of new dangers and human rights abuses in other lands.

WHAT THE U.S. GENOCIDE DETERMINATION MEANS TO THE PEOPLE BURMA

Genocide Awareness and Prevention Month is often utilized to bring awareness to past and current atrocities committed around the world. This year, it was also a time to reflect on a recent genocide determination. On March 21, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced the decision to formally determine that the acts of violence committed against the Rohingya amounts to genocide. While such a determination has obvious meaning for the Rohingya, U.S. Campaign for Burma looks to widen the scope of the impact of such a determination and examine what it means to various ethnic minorities in Burma. Below are the responses of several community based organizations who shared how the Rohingya genocide determination affected them.



Karenni IDPs forced to live in makeshift camps after fleeing the Burmese military.

Photo Cred: Karenni Human Rights Group

Kanyarmaw, a leader of the Karenni National Women's Organization (KNWO), shared her thoughts on the U.S. genocide determination. For decades, much like the Rohingya, the Karenni suffered under the same perpetrator, the Burmese military. From 1990-1996, the Burmese military used its infamous four-cuts strategy. Hundreds of thousands of people were forcibly displaced and relocated to refugee camps along the Thai-Burma

border. The Karenni also witnessed the Burmese military kill, torture, rape, and sexually assault their friends and family members. They watched their homes and entire villages burn to the ground. At that time, the world did not want to hear the atrocities the Karenni were forced to suffer. The international community ignored the junta's acts of genocide and crimes against humanity. Much of what is happening now in Burma since the February 1st coup could have been prevented if there was early intervention from the international community when the ethnic communities were first attacked.

There not only needs to be justice and accountability for the crimes being committed now, but also for the crimes committed in the past. The Karenni welcome and appreciate Secretary Blinken's genocide determination announcement. It is an important step for everyone to access justice and demand accountability for the crimes committed by the Burmese military for decades.

The Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) also welcomes the decision by the U.S. government to formally designate the violence committed against the Rohingya by the Burmese military that started in 2016 as crimes of genocide. This is a landmark decision for the oppressed Rohingya people, as well as for other oppressed groups in Burma.

KHRG has documented crimes perpetrated by the same Burmese military in Southeast Burma since 1992. This region has witnessed one of the longest ongoing ethnic conflicts in history. The Burmese military has engaged in a multitude of gross human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, torture, rape and other sexual violence, forced relocations, forced labor, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and

detention, and forced recruitment of child soldiers. Even when ceasefires have been reached, human rights abuses have continued. Unfortunately, international justice and accountability mechanisms have yet to hold the Burmese military accountable or bring justice to the people who have endured these atrocities.

Since the 2021 coup, ceaseless attacks have been undertaken against Karen peoples, affecting hundreds of thousands of villagers. Around 170,000 people in Southeast Burma are currently displaced. Most have remained within Burma as they have been prevented from crossing the border into Thailand. As such, they continue to face threats to life and the deprivation of essential needs at the hands of the Burmese military.

This examination cannot be complete without a perspective from the Rohingya diaspora. Sharifa Shakirah, founder and executive director of the Rohingya Women's Development Network (RWDN), discusses what this historic decision means for her community. With over 1 million Rohingya living in refugee camps in Bangladesh, Sharifa shares that though the genocide determination is long overdue, it is "better late than never." It is a huge achievement for the oppressed Rohingya, but also very important for other impacted communities in Burma. While Sharifa recognizes the importance of the genocide determination, this does not mean the work of the Rohingya diaspora or the international community is done. She hopes that everyone will be able to continue working together to turn the recognition into action by pushing the U.S. government to implement further tangible action.

Many Rohingya continue to live in limbo. They are unsure of the direction of their lives given the many restrictions they must adhere to within Bangladesh. However, the U.S. genocide determination has given the Rohingya community a lot of hope. Before this monumental decision,

there were times when Sharifa and other Rohingya activists felt hopeless and wanted to give up fighting for justice. It can be very tiring and traumatic for a survivor to relive their trauma as they raise their voices and ask for help all under the name of justice. However, the genocide recognition boosted their morale. It gave them the energy and hope that justice for the Rohingya is not far away. Solidarity from the international community continues to strengthen over time. The Rohingya are grateful for the decision and are hopeful of what this means for the community moving forward. Their ultimate goal is to return home to Burma and be recognized as full citizens and respected as Rohingya.

The leadership of RWDN, KNWO, and KHRG all agree- the U.S. government's recognition of the criminal actions of the Burmese military is indeed a positive step toward bringing the junta to justice; however, it is only one step out of many. There needs to be immediate provision and access to humanitarian aid for the IDPs. Such humanitarian assistance must be coordinated in partnership with local ethnic service providers working with cross border assistance through flexible funds and grants. Further action must be taken to put an end to the ongoing crimes and the military's impunity. The U.S. government should push for formal investigations into the crimes against humanity and war crimes committed by the Burmese military against other ethnic minority groups, both since and prior to the 2021 coup. All supplies of money, arms and aviation fuel to the military junta must be cut immediately. As long as the military has the resources, it will continue to wage war against civilians in ethnic areas. Likewise, the U.S. government must use its position of influence to put greater pressure on the UN Security Council to establish military no-fly zones over Burma and ensure the prosecution of military leaders at the International Criminal Court.

AN OVERVIEW OF BURMA

CHIN

After being ambushed by the Chinland Defense Force on the Matupi-Paletwa Road, junta forces [attacked](#) nearby villages from April 6-10. Burmese soldiers [burned](#) down Ram Tein, a village of 300 near the Mindat-Matupi Road, on April 6. Elsewhere, they [burned](#) down silos and looted rice and animals, destroying the villagers' food. This displaced around 2,000 villagers. Aid groups have been unable to help the displaced villagers because soldiers are [blocking](#) them from coming into the hills. From April 11-13, soldiers [stole](#) chickens and pigs from the villages of Tuisip, Valangpi, and Kalar. They burned down all of Valangpi Village's barns. On April 22, Min Aung Hlaing [invited](#) the Chin National Front (CNF) to attend peace talks. The CNF rejected the offer and condemned the junta.

KACHIN

In the first week of April, Sumprabum, Momauk, Hpakant, and Mogoung townships in Kachin state saw increased fighting. On April 1 in Sumprabum, [projectiles and rounds](#) were exchanged between the Kachin Independence Army and Burma Army, and a civilian was struck. A few days later, in Mohnyin Township, the Burma Army [opened fire](#) on a crowd of protestors in Mohnyin Township who were protesting the death of five teachers who had joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). Fragments from shells of the Burma Army also [injured a woman](#) in Daru Hka Tillage of Sumprabum township. There is a marked decrease in freshwater access in the state due to leaching from [military-operated](#) goldmining activities. Despite global sanctions, investors are allegedly purchasing gold mining blocks adjacent to villages.

KARENNI

Women's rights activists in Karenni State recorded an [increase](#) in domestic violence, rape, and child abuse in IDP camps following the military coup. IDPs no longer have regular income and face extreme, harsh situations while also dealing with psychological trauma. The Burmese military continued to shell civilians including in [Loikaw](#), the capital of Karenni, on April 13, injuring several residents. Along the Yangon-Loikaw Road, military forces continue to beat and [arrest](#) travelers after checking their mobile phones, dragging them to interrogation centers. As a result of the military [burning farms](#) and shelling villages, the livelihoods of IDPs have been severely affected. When villagers try to retrieve items or come back to their villages, they are murdered by the Burmese military or killed by hidden [landmines](#) planted around their homes. On April 4, a landmine [injured](#) two children while they were playing in front of their home in Loikaw.

MON

The junta recently [ordered](#) the installation of CCTV cameras in the Mon State towns of Kyaikto, Belin, Thaton, Ye, and Mawlamyine. These areas are conflict-prone places where the PDF is active. During the second week of April, soldiers firing indiscriminately in Ye Township's Mawkanin village [severely injured](#) two women in the head and chest for no reason. During the third week of April, the military [extorted](#) civilians 50 times at security toll gates, stealing at least 60 million Kyat (\$32,400) and confiscating 23 motorcycles. The new rule forcing all foreign currency to be converted to Kyat [causes problems](#), including stopping the importation of gasoline. Gas stations now have high prices and massive lines. Many people in the transportation industry, such as taxi drivers, lost their jobs. The constant power outages which started earlier this year are [disrupting](#) students' ability to study for their matriculation exams. Due to high gas prices, they must rely on candles instead of generators.

KAREN

Fighting between the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and Burma Army led to heavy artillery use. The Burma Army reportedly used [Swedish-made shells](#) to bomb the KNLA. In the beginning of April, fighting between Karen forces and junta soldiers escalated along southeastern roads. The Burma army [launched an airstrike](#) near Kyeik Township, and set a truck and two civilian vehicles alight. Karen forces were forced to use heavy artillery during the military's attempt to [take a "peace town"](#) for territorial control. The displacement of 150,000 displaced in Karen State have caused life-changing impacts on many residents, including [long-term financial difficulties](#). One maize farmer shared, "I suffered financial losses, I borrowed money from others at interest to grow my maize. I had to buy pesticides for my farm. I also had to look after and pay for treatment for my chronically ill father." Following the Burma Army's attempts to militarize the Kyainnseikgyi Township region, villagers resorted to [catching insects](#) to afford living expenses despite dangers from nearby shooting.

SHAN

The beginning of April was marked by fighting in Muse, Kuthkai, Lashio, and Namhkam townships. On April 6, in Muse Township, around 60 junta troops were [ambushed](#) by the KIA. Lives of IDPs in Shan State [remain precarious](#) due to no livelihood and food insecurity. The Burmese military's attacks and indiscriminate shelling prevent IDPs from returning home. During the annual New Year celebration of Thingyan, two youths were [abducted](#) and a house was set alight. The military also [burned](#) villages and arrested several youths, including a 16-year-old and a toddler. On April 17, six villagers from Pae Yin Thaung village, Ywarngan township, were [abducted](#) and murdered on April 19. Military violence in Ywarngan led to around 400 people fleeing attacks. The Burmese military [raided](#) the home of 32-year-old Aung Min Thu, a Taunggyi resident supportive of IDPs, and held his mother hostage. After he turned himself in, he was sentenced to ten years in prison on April 22. Other Taunggyi residents who support IDPs are being tracked through Kpay, a digital wallet application.

RAKHINE

The ongoing [drought](#) led to several sources of drinking water to dry up, causing extreme water shortages for IDPs in Rakhine State who are also facing hardships due to strong [winds damaging](#) hundreds of houses in the camps. Dirty water and lack of access to hygiene and sanitation causes health problems, such as diarrhea and skin diseases. The Burmese military [evicted](#) several residents in Ann Township, claiming ownership of the land and destroying the homes. On the night of April 4, two Muslim village headmen were [arrested](#) by military personnel in Ngapun Chae village on suspicion of ties to the Arakan Army (AA). At least four people from Maungdaw Township were [sentenced](#) for alleged links to the AA. In Tawkan village in Sittwe, security forces [raided](#) several houses, causing some residents to flee. Tension between the AA and the Burmese military remains high. A brief [clash](#) in mid-April led to Wet Khaung village residents fleeing after artillery shells exploded in the village.

CENTRAL BURMA

A [protest](#) broke out at Monywa Prison on April 3 against human rights violations and torture at the facility. Soldiers killed one protester and injured five others. They interrogated and tortured the prisoners the rest of the night. That same day, the military [arrested](#) a monk in Madaya and tortured him to death. On April 4, soldiers [arrested](#) nine anti-coup activists in Mandalay's Amarapura Township. Their families have lost contact with them. During April 3-7, the junta [attacked](#) several villages throughout Magway, Mandalay, and Sagaing. In Magway, they burned or bombed five villages. On April 7, they burned five houses and killed two people after interrogating 20 villagers. After winning a battle near the village of Shauk Khar, Sagaing, junta forces burned down 67 houses. One civilian was killed and another was injured during the battle. Soldiers almost completely burned down the 600-house village of Ngar Tin Gyi and the 1,000-house village of Ywar Nang.