

“WE NEED TO LIVE IN PEACE”

Rohingya Civilians’ Priorities for Mass Atrocity Prevention and Response in the Aftermath of Genocide

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UNITED STATES
HOLOCAUST
MEMORIAL
MUSEUM

SIMON-SKJODT CENTER
FOR THE PREVENTION OF GENOCIDE

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum teaches that the Holocaust was preventable and that by heeding warning signs and taking early action, individuals and governments can save lives. The Founding Chairman of the Museum, Holocaust survivor and Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, directed us to do for victims of genocide today what was not done for the Jews of Europe during the Holocaust. With this knowledge the **Simon-Skjoldt Center for the Prevention of Genocide** is dedicated to advancing research and education to prevent genocide. We undertake rigorous research focused on understanding warning signs, analyzing lessons learned from past cases, and providing in-depth reports on countries where crimes are ongoing or at serious risk, and that are receiving insufficient governmental or public attention. Learn more at ushmm.org/genocide-prevention.

The perspectives and recommendations summarized below do not necessarily represent those of the three leaders who conducted the research or those of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

COVER: Members of the Rohingya community. October 1, 2017. *Shoeb Faruquee / Alamy Stock Photo*

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PREFACE

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum teaches that the Holocaust was preventable and that by heeding warning signs and taking early action, individuals and governments can save lives. The Founding Chairman of the Museum, Holocaust survivor and Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, directed us to do for victims of genocide today what was not done for the Jews of Europe during the Holocaust. With this knowledge the Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide is dedicated to advancing research and education to prevent genocide. We undertake rigorous research focused on understanding warning signs, analyzing lessons learned from past cases, and providing in-depth reports on countries where crimes are ongoing or at serious risk, and that are receiving insufficient governmental or public attention.

The Rohingya are victims of a genocide that could have been prevented. For more than a decade, the Center has worked closely with civil society partners to analyze genocide and related crimes against humanity committed against the Rohingya and to support survivors' calls for justice and accountability. In 2015, the Museum sounded the alarm on the risk of genocide against the Rohingya.¹ In 2018, the Museum found compelling evidence that the Burmese military committed ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, and genocide against the Rohingya population.² The Museum worked with Rohingya partners and others to create an exhibition, *Burma's Path to Genocide*, that tells the story of the persecution of the Rohingya and how they became targets of a sustained campaign of genocide.³

For this report the Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide worked with three Rohingya leaders – Tun Khin, president of the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK; Wai Wai Nu, founder and executive director of Women's Peace Network; and Yasmin Ullah, executive director of the Rohingya Maiyafuñor Collaborative Network – to understand the varied perspectives and priorities of the Rohingya community who are facing an ongoing risk of mass atrocities and the ramifications of the impact of genocide. The leaders consulted with a diverse group of Rohingya civilians in Burma, Bangladesh, the broader Southeast Asian region, and the global diaspora to understand their needs and to share their recommendations for policymakers.

To inform this work, these Rohingya leaders conducted interviews with 86 Rohingya civilians living in Burma, Bangladesh, India, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. The researchers made deliberate efforts to gather insights from marginalized groups, such as women and young leaders. The diversity of respondents was reflected in their roles and backgrounds, which included Rohingya activists, refugees, artists, photographers, and representatives from both regional and Rohingya-led civil society organizations. This report is a summary of the concerns raised by members of the Rohingya community and the recommendations they shared for global action to confront genocide.

INTRODUCTION

The Rohingya are an ethnic and religious minority that have lived primarily in Rakhine (or Arakan) State in Burma.⁴ They have survived genocide, which forced over 700,000 people to flee the country, leaving approximately 600,000 Rohingya remaining in Burma.⁵

The Rohingya experienced decades of systemic persecution, violence, anti-Muslim hate speech, and exclusion from Burma's political and cultural life. In 1982, Burma instituted a Citizenship Law which effectively stripped the Rohingya of citizenship.⁶ Local authorities have restricted Rohingya civilians' freedom of movement, marriage and childbirth, and access to healthcare and higher education.⁷ In 2017, the Burmese military escalated its violent campaign, committing mass killings, rape, arbitrary detention, and arson, leading

to the forced displacement of more than 700,000 Rohingya to neighboring Bangladesh.⁸ On March 21, 2022, in remarks at the Museum, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken determined that these acts constituted genocide and crimes against humanity.⁹ The genocide against the Rohingya occurred against the backdrop of sustained armed conflict between the military and other religious and ethnic minority groups throughout Burma.

On February 1, 2021, Burma's military seized power from the civilian government and installed the State Administrative Council (SAC) in a military coup.¹⁰ Since then, the military - perpetrators of the Rohingya genocide - has been attempting to exercise control over the country.

The military has violently attacked protestors opposing their rule and members of minority groups.¹¹ The military's pattern of attacking civilians predates the coup, though after 2021, reported civilian fatalities and the number of incidents targeting civilians increased sharply and continued to grow steadily each year.¹²

On October 27, 2023, a coalition of armed opposition groups carried out coordinated attacks on Burmese military positions.¹³ Since October 2023, armed opposition groups have gained control of considerable swaths of territory throughout the country.¹⁴ The Arakan Army (AA), an ethnic armed group that participated in the October 27 attack, operates in Rakhine State with the expressed goal of creating an Arakan nation.¹⁵ As of this writing, the AA controls almost all of Rakhine State.¹⁶ Ongoing conflict between the AA and the Burmese military in Rakhine State has significantly heightened the risk of the Rohingya being deliberately targeted for further mass atrocities.

Today, Rohingya in Burma face a risk of future mass atrocities, and those who have fled to Bangladesh and the broader South and Southeast Asian region face a precarious future as they seek to find security and rebuild their community in the aftermath of genocide. This paper summarizes respondents' views on the risks facing the Rohingya and priorities of diverse Rohingya communities, their views on what kinds of support have been helpful so far, and their recommendations for future action.

MASS ATROCITY RISKS FACING ROHINGYA IN BURMA

Recent fighting between the Burmese military and the AA in Rakhine State has targeted Rohingya communities and exacerbated interethnic tension. Civil society groups report systematic crimes targeting Rohingya civilians committed by both the military and the AA, including killings, torture, abduction, and sexual violence.¹⁷ The military has imposed severe restrictions on movement, blocked access to humanitarian aid and essential services, and forcibly conscripted Rohingya civilians.¹⁸ The AA has continued Burmese military policies that restrict the freedom of movement of the Rohingya in areas under its territorial control, preventing travel and livelihood activities, including fishing and farming.¹⁹

The AA has used Rohingya villages as battlegrounds, increasing risk to civilians.²⁰ Witnesses report that the AA used drones and shelling in attacks on Rohingya villages.²¹ In May 2024, the AA launched an offensive on Buthidaung, where Rohingya constitute close to 70% of the population.²² Reports allege that before entering, the AA ordered Rohingya civilians to leave.²³ In Buthidaung, witnesses state AA forces plundered homes and committed widespread arson, causing mass displacement.²⁴ On August 5, 2024, witnesses report that the AA conducted drone strikes and shelled people fleeing violence in Maungdaw town via the Naf River, killing approximately 200 Rohingya civilians.²⁵ In October 2024, AA forces conducted multiple raids of Rohingya villages, imposed strict curfews, assaulted civilians, and abducted young men.²⁶ Recent reports and witness

statements allege that the AA has begun systematically resettling ethnic Rakhine in Buthidaung and Maungdaw after pushing out Rohingya families.²⁷

Both the AA and the military have imposed prolonged telecommunications blackouts in their respective areas of territorial control throughout Rakhine State, leaving civilians isolated without a key way to document or warn of attacks.²⁸ Telecommunication blackouts, escalating conflict, and military administrative barriers have restricted humanitarian access to Rakhine State, critically interrupting organizations' ability to continue operating in the region and impeding civilians' access to food, healthcare, and other essential services.²⁹ In November 2024, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) estimated that a confluence of factors would leave over two million people in Rakhine State at risk of starvation.³⁰ Rakhine State could soon face an acute famine, which has been exacerbated by AA and military conduct.³¹

“The AA and the junta control the region, but neither provides for our survival.” Rohingya respondent

In February 2024, the military instituted a conscription policy that applies to citizens of Burma.³² Yet despite their exclusion from citizenship, Rohingya have been abducted and forcibly conscripted, compelling many Rohingya to either flee or endure significant harm while forced to fight alongside their perpetrators.³³

According to the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK, approximately 200,000 Rohingya were internally displaced in northern Rakhine State in May 2024, including approximately 110,000 who remain in IDP camps around the state capital of Sittwe.³⁴ For over a decade, tens of thousands of Rohingya in Sittwe have lived in conditions that have been described as an “open prison”; their freedom of movement is severely restricted by checkpoints, and there is limited access to food and water, sanitation services, and healthcare.³⁵ In November 2023, the military widened restrictions on the transport of food and medication into northern Rakhine State.³⁶ Rohingya IDPs face severe movement restrictions, which render them particularly vulnerable as they are unable to travel to pursue livelihoods and are forced to depend on humanitarian assistance for survival.³⁷ In 2024, the military occupied a Rohingya IDP camp in Sittwe and placed landmines outside the camp in anticipation of an AA attack, preventing civilians from escaping.³⁸

The increased violence in Rakhine State has forced a mass exodus of Rohingya civilians from Burma. Many undertake dangerous sea journeys in inadequate vessels with scarce supplies.³⁹ An estimated 33,000 Rohingya refugees fled from the beginning of 2022 to the end of 2024, more than 17,000 of whom did so via sea routes.⁴⁰ These sea crossings often end in tragedy. On November 10, 2024, a boat carrying Rohingya refugees capsized near Hai Gyi Island, killing 174 people.⁴¹ Refugees rely on smugglers to facilitate safe passage, leaving them vulnerable to severe human rights abuses, including beatings, torture, and being held for ransom by human traffickers.⁴² Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and rape by smugglers.⁴³ Those who survive the journey and reach neighboring countries face further risks of danger, exploitation, or detention.

RISKS FACING ROHINGYA IN BANGLADESH

Burma's genocide and repeated mass atrocity crimes against the Rohingya have far-reaching implications for survivors in neighboring Bangladesh. More than one million Rohingya refugees live in 33 overcrowded and under-resourced camps in Cox Bazar, Bangladesh.⁴⁴ Most fled Burma in 2017, but hundreds of thousands fled earlier attacks. With ongoing mass atrocities and continued persecution in Burma, the Rohingya cannot safely return home. The escalating violence in Burma has exacerbated the refugee crisis in Bangladesh. An estimated 150,000 Rohingya refugees entered Bangladesh from January 2024 through June 2025.⁴⁵

Humanitarian conditions in the camps are dire; Rohingya refugees face violence and sexual abuse, malnutrition, disease outbreaks, and inadequate housing and healthcare facilities.⁴⁶ These conditions are part of the long shadow of genocide, harming survivors long after the military's initial attacks.

Rohingya face security threats in the camp. In 2022, the security situation deteriorated significantly due to armed groups and criminal organizations that operate within the camps and clash with one another.⁴⁷ These groups engage in kidnappings, extortion, forced recruitment, and human trafficking.⁴⁸ Rohingya have reported not feeling safe to leave their homes after dark due to the criminal activity in the camps.⁴⁹ The Bangladeshi security forces responsible for camp security have been unable to effectively protect refugees over the years.⁵⁰ Rohingya refugees have reported instances in which Bangladeshi security forces arbitrarily arrested refugees demanding money for their release, as well as regular beatings, including of Rohingya children in the camps, assaults at checkpoints, and indiscriminate raids.⁵¹ In 2025, while truces between armed groups led to decreased violent incidents in camps, armed groups initiated recruitment campaigns amongst residents.⁵² This trend may stoke future ethnically-motivated violence against Rohingya in the future.

Since 2021, Bangladesh has relocated almost 30,000 refugees from Cox's Bazar to housing constructed by the government of Bangladesh on the island of Bhasan Char.⁵³ The island is isolated from Cox's Bazar, and is often in the path of cyclones.⁵⁴ Relocation to the island is voluntary, though non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have raised concerns about respect for human rights and questioned if the process is truly voluntary, as by late 2021, hundreds of people relocated to the island had attempted to flee.⁵⁵

The international community struggles to provide adequate humanitarian assistance to the hundreds of thousands of Rohingya now living in Bangladesh. Most Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh are not classified as refugees but as Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals, which means they are unable to seek formal employment, forcing them to rely on dwindling humanitarian aid.⁵⁶ In 2024, only 64% of the funding required for the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis Joint Response Plan was reached.⁵⁷ As humanitarian funding decreases, Rohingya refugees' access to vital services is severely restricted. The World Food Programme reports that without additional funding through 2025, rations will need to be decreased from \$12.50 USD to \$6 USD per month.⁵⁸ Food and water shortages, lack of hygiene and sanitation services, and high levels of disease exacerbate the health crisis in camps.⁵⁹ Additionally, Rohingya refugees fleeing violence in Burma require immediate medical attention for injuries and long-term psychosocial support to address trauma.⁶⁰

“Education is a distant dream for us.” Rohingya respondent

Long-standing Bangladeshi policy prevents refugee children from enrolling in public and private schools.⁶¹ As the community of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh grew, authorities imposed restrictions on the educational

programming of humanitarian organizations and prohibited “refugee-led” schools organized in camps to offset the absence of formal education services.⁶² As a result, hundreds of thousands of Rohingya children received limited formal education. In 2021, to improve refugee access to education, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) launched the Myanmar Curriculum Pilot, a program based on Burma’s national curriculum.⁶³ As of the 2023-2024 school year, the program includes children from kindergarten through grade ten.⁶⁴

Declining funding has impacted all services in refugee camps, interrupting immunizations and medical care and forcing agencies to scale back health, protection, and sanitation services, and close more than 6,400 education centers.⁶⁵ The decrease in funding for refugee camps around Cox’s Bazar has exacerbated already dire protection and livelihood conditions and forced many refugees to make desperate decisions, including child marriage, child labor, and undertaking dangerous journeys elsewhere in search of better conditions.⁶⁶

RISKS FACING ROHINGYA ACROSS SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

The impacts of the legacy of the genocide against the Rohingya extend to the South and Southeast Asia region, where Rohingya survivors continue to face threats. Large communities of Rohingya have fled to Malaysia, India, Indonesia, and Thailand, risking dangerous journeys, often with traffickers who frequently commit human rights abuses.⁶⁷ Rohingya asylum seekers suffer beatings, extortion, and are sometimes killed on their journeys.⁶⁸ As refugees attempt to reach safety, they encounter pushback policies of neighboring countries, in which boats approaching land are pushed back out to sea.⁶⁹

Throughout South and Southeast Asia, Rohingya refugees face hate speech and violence from host communities.⁷⁰ Without states in the region committing to legal frameworks to protect the rights of refugees, Rohingya throughout the region are vulnerable to human rights abuses.⁷¹

As violence against Rohingya in Burma has continued, Indonesia has experienced a sharp increase in arriving Rohingya refugees, many of whom are housed in inadequate shelters.⁷² Indonesian laws prevent foreign citizens from legal employment, significantly limiting work opportunities for Rohingya refugees and forcing dependence on humanitarian assistance.⁷³ Despite policies in Indonesia permitting Rohingya students’ enrollment in formal schools, fees often delay or prevent access.⁷⁴ Tensions in host communities have risen, with residents growing increasingly hostile and aggressive towards the Rohingya.⁷⁵ Online hate campaigns have incited mob attacks on Rohingya refugees.⁷⁶

In India, arriving Rohingya are considered illegal immigrants and are often detained with little legal recourse.⁷⁷ Detention centers lack sanitation and proper health services.⁷⁸ In the centers, families are separated and refugees remain in detention indefinitely, despite having served their sentence.⁷⁹ Reports indicate several Rohingya women have been lured by traffickers, taken to India, and sold for labor or into forced marriages.⁸⁰ Rohingya refugees who are not detained are at constant risk of detention and forced deportation, including those who are registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).⁸¹ In May 2025, reports indicated that India was detaining and forcibly deporting Rohingya refugees.⁸²

In Thailand, arriving Rohingya are treated as illegal migrants and many are detained in overcrowded centers.⁸³ Rohingya, including unaccompanied children, are smuggled into Thailand by traffickers and are often arrested and detained.⁸⁴ Detained Rohingya refugee children are transferred to government-run care facilities.⁸⁵ At government-run facilities, refugees are unable to move freely or seek employment, forcing reliance on

humanitarian aid.⁸⁶ In March 2025, six Rohingya children disappeared from a government-run shelter, emphasizing the need for better protections for refugees, especially for children.⁸⁷

Many Rohingya living in Malaysia lack access to health care, education, and are barred from formal work.⁸⁸ As a result, Rohingya are vulnerable to exploitation, extortion, and abuse.⁸⁹ Rings of human traffickers operate in Malaysia, exposing Rohingya to torture, sexual violence, and killings.⁹⁰ Mass graves of Rohingya refugees have been located in Malaysia, believed to have been created by human traffickers.⁹¹ Malaysia is detaining thousands of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants, including over 1,400 children.⁹² Detained Rohingya have shared information about ill-treatment.⁹³ Some are held indefinitely and without charges for years.⁹⁴ Hateful and violent speech directed toward the Rohingya has proliferated on online platforms.⁹⁵ Rohingya face discrimination in Malaysia, due, in part, to misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech campaigns directed against the community.⁹⁶

The harms facing Rohingya as they flee their homes and try to find a way forward elsewhere are compounding the trauma they experienced during the genocide. The international community should redouble its efforts to mitigate the myriad risks facing the population so that genocide survivors can safely rebuild their lives.

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

The United States, European Union, and United Kingdom have imposed sanctions on Burma and Burmese security forces, and targeted sanctions on military leaders, including those responsible for the genocide against the Rohingya.⁹⁷ In 2021, additional sanctions were added, blocking the provision of funds, goods, or services to people or entities connected to the military.⁹⁸ The international community has also supported documentation of crimes against the Rohingya and accountability for perpetrators. The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), for example, established the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar (IIFMM) in 2017 to establish the facts and circumstances of alleged abuses and human rights violations by Burma's military and security forces.⁹⁹ As its mandate ended, the IIFMM turned the evidence over to the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM), established by the UNHRC in 2019 to preserve, collect, and analyze evidence to support criminal prosecutions of perpetrators of international crimes in Burma.¹⁰⁰

Efforts to promote accountability for genocide and other mass atrocities against the Rohingya have received global support. The Gambia initiated proceedings against Burma in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for perceived violations of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.¹⁰¹ In January 2020, the ICJ indicated provisional measures pending the resolution of the case, including that Burma take all measures to prevent genocide, ensure neither its military nor armed groups operating in the country commit genocide, preserve evidence related to all allegations, and submit a report to the court detailing measures taken to comply with the order.¹⁰²

In Argentina, a universal jurisdiction case was brought by Rohingya survivors, and in February 2025, an Argentine court issued arrest warrants for Burmese officials accused of committing genocide and crimes against humanity against the Rohingya.¹⁰³

As fighting in Rakhine State increased, international NGOs have significantly reduced their presence or entirely withdrawn due to volatile conditions and military obstruction.¹⁰⁴ International humanitarian organizations, such as the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and Médecins Sans Frontières, have worked to provide humanitarian services and medical care to Rohingya

communities in Burma, despite severely limited access.¹⁰⁵ The UNHCR and International Organization for Migration (IOM) have worked to improve services and protections for Rohingya refugees.¹⁰⁶

While supporting accountability and humanitarian efforts, the international community has largely looked to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other regional powers to address the crisis in Burma, though limited steps have been taken. In 2021, ASEAN adopted the five-point consensus towards Burma, which calls for the immediate cessation of hostilities, calls for dialogue among all parties, commits to humanitarian assistance, appoints a special envoy to the ASEAN chair to facilitate dialogue and mediation, and calls for the special envoy to visit Burma and meet with all parties.¹⁰⁷ Despite little progress, ASEAN re-committed to the five-point consensus in 2024.¹⁰⁸

China has characterized the Rohingya crisis as a domestic issue in Burma and has strongly opposed both humanitarian and political intervention.¹⁰⁹ During the conflict, China has called for stability as it considers Burma to be strategically important.¹¹⁰ Despite this position, Beijing has continuously intervened and sought to increase its influence within Burma, pledging \$3 billion USD in support of the military in late 2024.¹¹¹

Experts have warned of a creeping normalization of engagement with the Burmese military in ASEAN.¹¹² The Prime Minister of Malaysia, the current chair of ASEAN, met directly with the military and opposition groups calling for a ceasefire to enable humanitarian aid following the March 2025 earthquake.¹¹³ Rohingya civil society leaders consulted for this report expressed concerns about engagement that could overlook the military's mass atrocities against civilians or suppress goals relating to justice and accountability. The military continued to conduct airstrikes in civilian areas following Malaysia's attempted mediation.¹¹⁴

General Min Aung Hlaing, the Commander in Chief of the military, was allowed to participate in a summit of nations in Thailand.¹¹⁵ Thailand is advocating for more international engagement with the regime to diplomatically end the war.¹¹⁶ Civil society organizations have called on ASEAN to stop all engagement with the military and prevent their representatives from participating in any ASEAN gatherings.¹¹⁷

FEEDBACK FROM ROHINGYA CIVILIANS

In what areas is more progress needed to prevent future mass atrocities against the Rohingya people?

Prevention of Future Mass Atrocities

To reach a long-standing solution to the Rohingya crisis, the root causes of discrimination, persecution, and mass atrocities against the Rohingya within Burma must be addressed. While humanitarian access, coordinated regional response and protection, and improved conditions in refugee camps can alleviate immediate suffering and meet short-term needs, the crisis will continue without meaningful reforms.

Burma's future must be determined through a political transition that includes the Rohingya as equal stakeholders. Rohingya representatives called on the international community to invest in concerted efforts to educate the public on the history of the Rohingya people and the ongoing violence against them, as well as the importance of reconciliation and genocide prevention. Governments and civil society must work to counter harmful narratives, disinformation, and hate speech against the Rohingya. These efforts can be supported by a range of measures, including people-to-people solidarity programs that facilitate dialogue and cultural

exchange. Efforts to counter misinformation and harmful narratives will reduce the risk of future mass atrocities against the Rohingya.

Accountability and justice initiatives can prevent future crimes by deterring potential perpetrators of mass atrocities. It is imperative that the international community challenge impunity and work to hold perpetrators of atrocities against the Rohingya accountable. Rohingya representatives called on the international community to continue to impose targeted sanctions on Burma's military leaders and businesses supporting the military, as well as to impose sanctions on AA leaders if they continue their abuses against the Rohingya. In addition to support for ongoing cases, the international community can promote Article 12(3) declarations that will expand the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to include perpetrators of international crimes against the Rohingya. Support for accountability efforts demonstrates a commitment to the Rohingya community and international law while deterring further acts of violence.

“We need to live in peace, free from discrimination, and with equal rights, just like other ethnic groups in Myanmar.” Rohingya respondent

Protection of Rohingya Rights and Culture

The restoration of citizenship rights to the Rohingya and recognition of them as native (*taing yin thar*) in Burma is essential for their long-term protection and any consideration of future repatriation. Rohingya representatives report that while many refugees want to return to Burma, they are unwilling to do so without assurances that their rights will be reinstated and protected and their property, including land, returned.

The Rohingya are a resilient community with a rich culture and history. The international community should support initiatives that preserve and promote this culture and history. Rohingya activists have consistently called for democracy and supported pro-democracy movements in Burma.¹¹⁸ Rohingya representatives should continue to actively participate in policy discussions or decisions impacting their future.

Protection of Forcibly Displaced Rohingya

Without legal status in Burma and standard refugee policies and protections in the region, Rohingya refugees are particularly vulnerable to abuse. Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and India have not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, which would formalize their responsibilities and institutionalize consistent standards regarding the legal rights, protections, and assistance to which refugees are entitled.¹¹⁹ Without coordinated regional policy on refugees, the Rohingya face inconsistent access to rights and protections throughout the region.

Regional Cooperation

Rohingya representatives identified regional cooperation to develop a more cohesive approach to the protection and rights of Rohingya refugees as an urgent priority. To date, ASEAN has mostly treated the crisis as a bilateral issue between individual states and Burma, resulting in uneven rights and protection for

Rohingya refugees. Instead, ASEAN member states could adopt a unified stance and recognize the protection of Rohingya civilians as a collective responsibility.

The failure to recognize the Rohingya identity throughout the region enables their exclusion and violence against the community. To ensure the rights of the Rohingya are protected and respected, governments in the broader South and Southeast Asia region can fully recognize the Rohingya people and acknowledge their unique identity. This recognition will improve protection in the short term and pressure Burma to implement policy reforms and reconciliation efforts in the long term.

States in the region can collaborate to develop a system for registering refugees, including the Rohingya. A clear and effective registration system will protect the rights of refugees, ensure access to health care, education, and employment services, and support long-term protection and integration in host countries.

To further protect Rohingya refugees within South and Southeast Asia, governments can collaborate to establish a humanitarian visa within ASEAN that recognizes the Rohingya as a vulnerable group. This would provide a legal framework for the protection of Rohingya within ASEAN countries, enable access to services and opportunities for resettlement or asylum, and reduce the exploitation and trafficking of Rohingya refugees.

Governments can do more to prioritize the safety and security of Rohingya refugees in camps, especially as populations increase. This includes ensuring newly arriving refugees reach camps safely, protection against criminal activities and violence in camps, and providing adequate resources and safe shelter to meet their basic needs. In overcrowded camps with inadequate shelter and a lack of privacy, women and girls are at increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence. Rohingya representatives called on governments to create safe spaces for women to improve their safety and dignity in camps.

As Rohingya continue to flee Burma, respondents urged South and Southeast Asian states to coordinate to protect Rohingya refugees, prevent human trafficking, and create a safe, dignified, and voluntary repatriation process that respects the rights and security of the Rohingya people.

What are governments (the US, other donor countries, states in the region) doing now that is helpful?

Humanitarian Support

Many states and international organizations are providing essential humanitarian assistance and services to Rohingya refugees throughout the region. Indonesia has taken steps to provide shelter and protection to refugees through Presidential Regulation 125/2016, which outlines the nation's response to arriving refugees.¹²⁰ Under this regulation, local authorities must work to designate adequate housing for refugees currently living in temporary shelters and for future arrivals.¹²¹ Community hostility and resentment toward the Rohingya continues; in 2023, hundreds of protestors in Aceh stormed temporary housing for 137 Rohingya refugees, forcibly removing and relocating them.¹²²

While humanitarian conditions in refugee camps in Bangladesh remain dire, UN agencies and INGOs are making efforts to improve health and living conditions for refugees. These agencies run programming to improve accommodations, sanitation, nutrition, and health services, and education for Rohingya refugees.¹²³ Rohingya respondents interviewed for this report noted the importance of humanitarian assistance delivered so

far. They noted that as people continue to flee Burma, it is crucial that humanitarian assistance to refugees be fully funded, consistent, and sustainable in order to meet the urgent needs of Rohingya refugees.

Rohingya respondents noted the important humanitarian work being done, but raised concerns about diminished support and the impact on vulnerable groups. They stressed that Rohingya refugees require immediate medical support upon their arrival in camps and long-term care to prevent the spread of disease. In recent years, decreasing humanitarian funding has limited available resources, and Rohingya respondents reported this decrease as threatening their right to dignity¹²⁴. Education is often inaccessible to Rohingya students in Burma, Bangladesh, and throughout Southeast Asia.¹²⁵ Rohingya respondents noted that without formal education, Rohingya children are at risk of becoming a “lost generation” without the skills to advocate for themselves, succeed, and thrive. They also called attention to dwellings for Rohingya refugees, particularly in Indonesia and Bangladesh, that may be prone to natural disasters such as landslides and flooding.

Systems to Support and Protect Rohingya Refugees

Established in 2002, the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crimes is an attempt at regional coordination. It is a nonbinding international, multilateral forum that includes forty-five member states across the Asia-Pacific, Europe, and North America.¹²⁶ Co-chaired by the Foreign Affairs Ministers of Australia and Indonesia, the Bali process creates a space for cooperation, information-sharing, and policy development related to irregular migration patterns.¹²⁷ The Bali Process is a promising mechanism that is well-placed to develop a coherent regional response to the Rohingya crisis. However, member engagement has been uneven, rendering the mechanism ineffective.¹²⁸ Renewed commitment to the Bali Process will revive the vision of coordinated crisis response and benefit refugees.

Through policy reforms, individual host nations can positively impact Rohingya refugees' safety and living conditions. Nearly 600,000 stateless individuals live in Thailand, including Rohingya refugees.¹²⁹ In 2024, the Thai Cabinet approved a proposal to accelerate the pathway to permanent residency for stateless individuals.¹³⁰ The policy will primarily target those who resided in Thailand between 1984 and 2011 and their children who were born in the country.¹³¹ With permanent residency, individuals can access education and economic opportunities and move freely throughout the country. Though not yet implemented, this reform is a positive development and could be expanded to reach all stateless persons residing within Thailand. In 2019, Thailand implemented the Memorandum of Understanding on the Determination of Measures and Approaches on Alternatives to Detention of Children in Immigrant Detention Centers.¹³² This policy seeks to stop the detention of refugee children and provide them with shelter.¹³³

Rohingya respondents described opportunities for refugee resettlement in third countries as a lifeline for those facing continued abuse and insecurity. Governments such as the US, Canada, and Australia have been supportive of third-country resettlement for Rohingya refugees.¹³⁴ Resettlement initiatives are a source of hope for many, representing a pathway to safety and stability and an opportunity for Rohingya refugees to rebuild their lives. Moving forward, commitment to the continuation and expansion of such efforts, as well as a streamlined and transparent process, will be essential as the number of Rohingya refugees and the need for resettlement opportunities rise.

Rohingya representatives encouraged the international community to continue raising awareness in global forums, advocating for coordinated support efforts, and rallying resources to meet the needs of Rohingya communities.

Support for Accountability Efforts

The international community has applied pressure on Burma's military and other perpetrators of violence against the Rohingya by imposing sanctions, condemning atrocities, and calling for an end to the violence. The US Congress, for example, has appropriated funds for the investigation and documentation of human rights abuses against the Rohingya, and the US has financially supported the IIMM in gathering evidence of crimes against the Rohingya.¹³⁵ The US State Department also conducted its own investigation into crimes against the Rohingya, and released its report in August 2018.¹³⁶ In March 2022, the US Department of State determined that the Burmese military committed genocide and crimes against humanity against the Rohingya.¹³⁷ Rohingya representatives viewed this determination as critical to accountability efforts and a signal of a strong US commitment to justice for Rohingya survivors.

Ongoing legal action, such as universal jurisdiction cases and the case before the ICJ, are crucial efforts to seek justice for Rohingya victims of genocide and other mass atrocities. Rohingya representatives called for continued support for accountability efforts from the international community.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM ROHINGYA CIVILIANS

Conversations with Rohingya civilians in Burma, Bangladesh, and South and Southeast Asia identified several recommendations for the international community, governments of neighboring states, and Burma's leaders. Among the respondents, there were multiple views and priorities, and respondents did not necessarily agree on all recommendations. The following is a summary of the general priorities expressed. Underpinning all recommendations is the urgent need to protect Rohingya civilians—both within Burma and throughout the region.

Protection of Rohingya Civilians

Several actions can improve the physical protection of Rohingya civilians. One much-discussed option is the establishment of a UN-supervised safe zone within Burma that can be monitored and protected from attack.¹³⁸ A safe zone would ideally protect Rohingya civilians who have been targeted by both the military and AA, and have endured generations of discrimination and violence. The proposed safe zone would be internationally supervised, which could deter violence against civilians and create conditions under which Rohingya could safely return to Rakhine State. Representatives of Bangladesh's transitional government have shown support for this idea.¹³⁹ Any safe zone would require the cooperation of both Burma's military and the AA. The military is unlikely to accept the proposal, and the AA has suggested that this is part of a hidden agenda.¹⁴⁰ Civil society groups have raised concerns that a safe zone may become contested and ultimately increase risks for civilians.¹⁴¹ The details of a safe zone continue to be debated, and it is unclear if the international community is willing to commit to such an operation.

Regardless of how the international community chooses to proceed, Rohingya civilians interviewed for this project stressed their core demands of physical protection, international monitoring, reduction in vulnerability, and assurance that Rohingya communities will be treated with dignity and respect.

Recommendations for Burma's Leaders

- Implement reforms to restore the equal rights, legal status, and citizenship rights of the Rohingya and dismantle discriminatory policies that target Rohingya;

- Direct all military forces and political structures to end human rights violations against the Rohingya and enforce a code of conduct that protects civilians from abuses;
- Allow UN officials and agencies and independent human rights organizations to access Rakhine State to investigate all alleged violations and support the investigations of organizations;
- End all arbitrary restrictions on freedom of movement, access to healthcare and resources, and humanitarian aid delivery to the Rohingya and restore electricity and telecommunications to Rakhine State;
- Promote accountability through a community centered, holistic transitional justice process for perpetrators of violence against civilians, including Rohingya;
- Provide assurances to Rohingya refugees that upon their return to Burma, their rights will be protected, their citizenship will be secure, they will not face continued violence and discrimination, they will be able to reclaim their property, and they will be able to access essential services, including healthcare, education, and employment;
- Coordinate with international donors and Rohingya community leaders to begin rebuilding destroyed Rohingya homes, farms, or villages;
- Collaborate with states in the broader South and Southeast region to implement a repatriation process that provides for the safe, voluntary, dignified return of Rohingya refugees and aligns with international human rights standards;
- Initiate a process of reconciliation and understanding between ethnic groups in Burma that includes the Rohingya as key stakeholders and decision makers in developing political, legal, and social reforms to build a more inclusive and democratic society.

Recommendations for the International Community

- Deploy and increase independent international monitoring and reporting of attacks on Rohingya civilians;
- Impose an embargo on arms, jet fuel, and dual-use equipment on Burma's military;
- Use all available diplomatic channels to halt ongoing violence against the Rohingya in Burma, including by coordinating efforts to limit the capacity of the military and to press the AA to protect the rights of all those under its territorial control;
- Coordinate efforts to press the military and the AA to restore freedom of movement for the Rohingya and halt arbitrary detentions and arrests of Rohingya civilians;
- Enable and increase cross-border aid, considering delivery options including the proposed humanitarian corridor;
- Ensure that humanitarian assistance is focused on the particular needs of displaced women and girls, including ensuring physical protection and psychosocial support;
- Coordinate emergency response and rescue for refugees attempting dangerous sea crossings;
- Coordinate diplomatic pressure on countries that forcibly return Rohingya refugees to Burma or otherwise deny their rights.

Recommendations for States in South and Southeast Asia

- End forcible repatriation of Rohingya refugees to Burma, and grant newly arriving Rohingya legal status as refugees;
- Develop appropriate documentation processes for Rohingya refugees to ensure their legal protection, reduce their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse, and enable them to access essential services;
- Improve security in refugee camps in order to prevent violence against Rohingya refugees, and ensure perpetrators are appropriately held accountable;
- Coordinate emergency responses across South and Southeast Asia, including search and rescue missions when necessary;
- Take measures to dismantle human trafficking networks, including by supporting accountability efforts for human traffickers and others who commit crimes against fleeing Rohingya civilians;
- Coordinate across the region to implement policies that provide for the safe, voluntary, dignified return of Rohingya refugees and that align with international human rights standards;
- Educate the public about the Rohingya and facilitate peacebuilding programs in order to reduce prejudice and hostility towards the community.

Justice and Accountability

Holding perpetrators of crimes against Rohingya civilians accountable can dissuade future violence and support the long-term safety, protection, and inclusion of the Rohingya. Burma has a long history of impunity for crimes against civilians, and today, perpetrators of genocide against the Rohingya enjoy impunity as they assert their control over the country.

Recommendations to the International Community

- Support the ongoing efforts to promote justice for mass atrocity crimes against the Rohingya, including the effort in Argentina to hold perpetrators of genocide against the Rohingya to account;
- Invest in documenting evidence of all perpetrators of attacks against Rohingya communities - including the military and non-state groups such as the AA - and support the pursuit of accountability for these crimes. Due to limited access for international organizations, donors can support community-led investigation efforts;
- Encourage the UN Security Council to refer Burma to the ICC;
- Amend the ICJ's provisional measures to require Burma to immediately allow international, national, and local humanitarian actors unrestricted access to the country, including Rakhine State, and cease conscripting Rohingya into armed forces or allied armed groups. Review Burma's compliance with the ICJ's provisional measures, formally communicate these findings to the UN Security Council and make them available to the public, and direct Burma to make its reporting to the Court public;
- Expand universal jurisdiction laws to enable prosecutions for crimes committed against the Rohingya in more countries;
- Refrain from normalizing diplomatic and economic relations with perpetrators of genocide and crimes against humanity against the Rohingya;

- Support programs that focus on reducing and countering discrimination, xenophobia, and hatred against the Rohingya;
- Secure the historical record of genocide and crimes against humanity against the Rohingya, and pursue memorialization efforts in partnership with Rohingya community members.

Humanitarian Support

Rohingya civilians, both within Burma and throughout Southeast Asia, rely on humanitarian assistance and services to meet their critical needs, such as food, healthcare, shelter, and protection. Respondents reported that humanitarian conditions in Rakhine State are dire due to the military’s deliberate obstruction of aid. They called on the international community to enable life-saving aid to reach Rakhine State.

“Without international support, we have no path forward. We’re stuck between being stateless and being forgotten.” Rohingya respondent

Recommendations to the International Community

- Pressure Burma’s military to allow international, national, and local humanitarian actors immediate, unrestricted, and sustained access to Rakhine State and all of Burma;
- Fully fund humanitarian services in Rohingya communities, including by investing in accessible education, vocational training, employment, and entrepreneurial opportunities;
- Establish a humanitarian visa within ASEAN that recognizes the Rohingya as a vulnerable group;
- Engage host governments, particularly the interim Bangladeshi government, to find long-term solutions to increase access to services and improve the living conditions of Rohingya refugees, including by ensuring full access to education and livelihood programming;
- Support the flow of humanitarian assistance from Bangladesh into Rakhine State, including through a potential aid corridor, to prevent famine and ensure access to medicine and agricultural resources. Work collaboratively with Bangladeshi officials and Rohingya leaders to address the urgent health, security, and shelter needs of Rohingya in refugee camps;
- Establish accessible mental health care and psychosocial support for Rohingya refugees to facilitate their long-term recovery;
- Hold implementing agencies accountable for their management of funds to ensure transparency, efficiency, and effectiveness;
- Urge the UN Security Council to take action on the regime’s obstruction of humanitarian aid, a violation of UN Security Council resolution 2669 and the ICJ’s provisional measures.

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