

## Press Release | Myanmar : Arakan Army Forcing Rohingya to Build Settlements for Rakhine on Their Own Confiscated Land

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### Myanmar: Arakan Army Forcing Rohingya to Build Settlements for Rakhine on Their Own Confiscated Land

Some 300 Rohingya conscripted for forced labor since late May to construct resettlement sites for incoming ethnic Rakhine families on seized Rohingya land in northern Maungdaw



(LONDON, June 15, 2026) The United League of Arakan (ULA) and its armed

wing, the Arakan Army (AA), should immediately end the forced labor of Rohingya civilians in northern Maungdaw Township and halt the confiscation and redistribution of Rohingya-owned land to ethnic Rakhine settlers, the Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN) said today. Information gathered by BHRN's human rights researchers reveals that since the last week of May 2026, the ULA/AA has imposed forced labor demands on at least six Rohingya villages in northern Maungdaw, more than 300 people in total, to build infrastructure for new settlements it intends to establish for Rakhine communities at Sapay Kone and Maung Hna Ma, both former Rohingya villages.

"The Arakan Army is seizing Rohingya land, handing it to Rakhine settlers, and forcing the dispossessed Rohingya to build the new settlements with their own hands," said Kyaw Win, Executive Director of the Burma Human Rights Network. "This is forced labour in the service of permanently erasing the Rohingya from northern Maungdaw."

According to information documented by BHRN, the labor demanded since late May was drawn from six villages: U Shey Kya (75 people), Kyet Yoe Pyin (50), Ngan Chaung (75), Ngar Sar Kyu (25), Nga Khu Ra (50), and Pwint Phyu Chaung (30), and the laborers were collectively mobilized for construction at the two planned Rakhine settlement sites. In households unable or unwilling to provide a laborer, families are compelled to hire substitute workers at their own expense, reportedly around 25,000 Myanmar kyat per day. Female-headed households are not exempt and are required to comply on the same terms, deepening their economic and social hardship. The imposition of forced labor compounds an already desperate humanitarian situation, as the Rohingya community in Rakhine State endures severe food insecurity and extreme livelihood hardship. BHRN's findings track a pattern of abuses against the Rohingya in AA-controlled territory reported over the past year by the United Nations and human rights organizations.

### **Land Confiscation and Forced Resettlement**

The construction at Sapay Kone and Maung Hna Ma is part of a broader campaign to allocate Rohingya land to incoming Rakhine families. A Rohingya resident of Maungdaw told BHRN:

The ULA is offering each incoming Rakhine family a housing plot and two acres of farmland that were unlawfully seized from the local Rohingya population. Allocating our land without taking the consent of the owners is totally unacceptable. This proves that the ULA is always searching for

the possibility to oppress the Rohingya and to grab their properties.

The laborers are reportedly being used to construct and establish new settlements intended for Rakhine communities on land understood to belong to displaced Rohingya. A second Rohingya resident of Maungdaw told BHRN:

These resettlement sites are built on the Rohingya-owned land and built by the Rohingya forced labourers for the incoming Rakhine families. This is a strategy to permanently transfer Rohingya land to Rakhine settlers.

BHRN's findings mirror reporting from across Maungdaw over the past five months. In February 2026, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights reported that Rohingya land and property were being confiscated by the Arakan Army and that [non-Rohingya villages were being rebuilt on Rohingya land](#). The construction of Rakhine settlements at Maung Hna Ma was documented in February 2026 by [Burma News International](#) and [Arakan Now](#), and the seizure of Rohingya farmland and prawn ponds for redistribution to Rakhine settlers supplied with tractors, tools, and seeds was reported by independent Rohingya [media](#) in 2025.

A third resident expressed concern over the nature of the new arrivals. According to BHRN's documentation, the resident stated:

I think they are military personnel or political hardliners rather than ordinary civilians. Allocating the hardliners on our land without our consent would create conflict between the Rohingya and these settlers in the future, which may keep the Rakhine State unstable.

### **A System of Forced Labor**

The forced labor extends beyond settlement construction. Since February 9, 2026, the ULA/AA administration has systematically subjected Rohingya youths from the villages of Ngan Chaung, Kyet Yoe Pyin, and Ngar Sar Kyu to forced labor. According to BHRN's documentation, approximately 50 Rohingya youths from each village have been compelled to repair the road connecting Phar Wut Chaung in northern Maungdaw to Aung Mingalar village, with each village assigned for a day on a rotational basis. Several of these same villages have since been called on again for the late May construction labor, indicating a sustained and recurring demand on the same communities.

Rohingya who resist are reportedly threatened with expulsion. One Rohingya resident told BHRN:

The ULA/AA frequently threatened us, saying that "if you want to live in Arakan, you have to follow the order of the ULA and the rule of law of the ULA. Otherwise, you are free to leave our state".

Those unable or unwilling to provide labor are reportedly subject to penalties, including monetary fines and threats of punishment. The forced labor system documented by BHRN closely tracks the findings of Fortify Rights, which interviewed 21 survivors and witnesses between November 2024 and October 2025 and found that the AA requisitioned at least one member from each household and [fined absent families 50,000 kyat per day](#) in Maungdaw Township. The lower substitute fee documented by BHRN suggests a quota system administered village by village. Human Rights Watch reached a similar conclusion in July 2025, finding that life under the Arakan Army and the ULA was [harsh and restrictive, with discriminatory regulations and practices](#), despite the group's pledges of inclusive governance.

The burden falls on a population already struggling to survive. A Rohingya daily worker told BHRN:

The cost of living here is very high. We are struggling to meet our basic needs hardly. Now the AA is forcing us to give our working time in their unpaid works. That is a major concern for the Rohingya daily workers like us.

### **The Arakan Army's Response**

In response to previous accusations that it exploits Rohingya for forced labor, the AA has [publicly denied](#) the allegations, stating that it has no record of engaging in such practices. AA representatives have [told](#) Amnesty International that movement and livelihood restrictions are not discriminatory and apply to Rakhine communities as well, citing security needs arising from the armed conflict. The Arakan Army and the ULA have repeatedly committed to respecting the rights of ethnic minorities in areas under their control. BHRN's findings, alongside the body of reporting produced over the past year, indicate a continuing gap between those commitments and conditions on the ground in northern Maungdaw.

### **International Legal Framework**

International humanitarian law applies to the non-international armed conflict in Rakhine State and binds all parties to it, including non-state armed groups such

as the Arakan Army. Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions prohibits outrages upon personal dignity and humiliating or degrading treatment of civilians. Additional Protocol II requires that persons compelled to work receive fair payment and conditions comparable to those of the local civilian population. The Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), which Myanmar ratified in 1955, defines forced labor as all work or service exacted from any person under the menace of a penalty and for which that person has not offered themselves voluntarily. The coercion, threats of expulsion, monetary fines, and punitive measures documented by BHRN bear the hallmarks of forced labor prohibited under international law.

The seizure of Rohingya homes and farmland and its transfer to other communities, when carried out as part of a widespread or systematic attack against a civilian population, may amount to the crimes against humanity of forcible transfer, persecution, and other inhumane acts under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. These abuses follow more than a decade of atrocities against the Rohingya in Rakhine State, including the killings, sexual violence, and mass displacement that are the subject of ongoing proceedings before the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court. Commanders and individuals responsible for serious violations of international humanitarian law can be held individually criminally liable, and the ICC's ongoing investigation into the situation in Rakhine State extends to crimes committed by all parties, including the Arakan Army.

BHRN calls on the ULA/AA to immediately cease all forced labor, halt the confiscation and redistribution of Rohingya-owned land, return seized property to its rightful owners, and end all discriminatory treatment of the Rohingya. BHRN further calls on the United Nations, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and concerned governments to press for accountability for these abuses, including through targeted sanctions against those responsible, and to ensure that any international engagement concerning Rakhine State is conditioned on concrete protections for the Rohingya, including their meaningful participation in decisions affecting them, and does not legitimize or reward the perpetrators of these crimes.

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### **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 in advocating for human rights and religious freedom with politicians and world leaders.

**Media Enquiries**

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