

MYANMAR

HUMANITARIAN BRIEF

September 2018



- **More than 725,000 Rohingya refugees have fled to Bangladesh** since the armed attacks and subsequent security operations in August 2017 which prompted the world's fastest growing refugee crisis.
- **Up to 600,000 Rohingya remaining in Rakhine State continue to face serious hardships** and are in need of humanitarian assistance due to displacement, restrictions on their freedom of movement, limited access to essential services, and other deprivations (this includes all those still in Rakhine, including displaced people in camps).
- **More than 128,000 Muslims (98 per cent of whom are stateless Rohingya) remain confined in camps and camp-like settings** more than six years after the outbreak of violence in central Rakhine in 2012. They are living in deplorable conditions as a result of movement restrictions, lack of adequate access to healthcare, education and livelihoods, over-crowded-shelters, and other challenges.
- **In Kachin and Shan states, 107,000 people remain displaced** as a result of the conflict that re-started in 2011. The conflict has escalated since the beginning of the 2018 and about 28,000 civilians have fled conflict and been temporarily displaced since January 2018.
- **Humanitarian access in Myanmar has deteriorated significantly in recent years.** In northern Rakhine, some UN staff now have access, but most international NGO staff who were present before August 2017 are still barred from resuming humanitarian activities. In Kachin State, for more than two years the UN has not been permitted by the Government and Military to deliver assistance to about 40,000 displaced people in areas controlled by armed groups.
- **Myanmar is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world** and is regularly hit by floods, cyclones, and earthquakes. Over 268,000 people have so far been temporarily displaced by monsoon seasonal floods in 2018.

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RAKHINE STATE

Rakhine is one of the least developed areas of Myanmar and has a diverse ethnic and religious population. Rakhine Buddhists make up the largest group. Muslims constitute the second largest group, the majority being stateless Rohingya, while a smaller number are Kaman. Other ethnic minorities include Chin, Daingnet, Khami, Maramagyi, Mro, Thet and Hindus. As reflected in the 2017 Final Report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, “while all communities have suffered from violence and abuse, protracted statelessness and profound discrimination have made the Muslim community particularly vulnerable to human rights violations... The community

faces a number of restrictions which affect basic rights and many aspects of their daily lives.” Detailed information about the humanitarian consequences of the crisis in Rakhine is also provided in the September 2018 report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, established by the UN Human Rights Council.

According to UNHCR, up to 600,000 stateless Rohingya (about 60 per cent of whom are children) are estimated to remain in Rakhine State following the armed attacks and subsequent security operations that led to the exodus of over 725,000 refugees to Bangladesh since

August 2017. UNHCR's estimate that some 600,000 stateless Rohingya remain in Rakhine State is based on the best information currently available, noting limitations including lack of authorization to conduct assessments, inability to verify information independently, and other restrictions.

Approximately 128,000 people (the majority of whom are stateless Rohingya and 53 per cent of whom are children) remain in camps or camp-like settings in central Rakhine. They have been in these camps since the violence in 2012 when many houses were burned. The remaining estimated 470,000 non-displaced stateless Rohingya are spread across ten townships in northern and central Rakhine.

The humanitarian situation in the three northern townships of Rakhine State (Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Rathedaung) remains of great concern. While the pace of departures has significantly slowed in 2018, there have been continued departures from the northern townships into Bangladesh with over 13,000 people crossing the border between January and August 2018. Restrictions linked to citizenship status and documentation continue to severely affect freedom of movement and impact access to basic services and livelihoods for people, along with challenging local dynamics including inter-communal tensions and profound mistrust. Severe access restrictions in the northern part of Rakhine since 25 August 2017 have made it difficult for humanitarian agencies to provide critical life-saving assistance and protection services to affected communities.

In central Rakhine, Rohingya and Kaman Muslims are increasingly isolated. They have been segregated since

2012 and continue to face severe restrictions on their freedom of movement, limiting their access to livelihoods and essential services, including formal education and healthcare. This has exposed them to a wide range of protection risks and it has left them heavily dependent on humanitarian assistance.

The living conditions for displaced people confined to camps in central Rakhine are deplorable. Overcrowding and poor environmental health conditions in the camps have a disproportionate impact on women and children. Despite the wishes of displaced people to return to their places of origin, this is not being permitted and there remains a risk of permanent segregation of the stateless Rohingya community in Rakhine State.

The United Nations and its partners continue to advocate for all people in Rakhine State to have unimpeded, sustained and timely access to healthcare, education, water and sanitation services, and livelihoods, irrespective of ethnicity, religion, citizenship status as well as gender, age, and disability. Restrictions on freedom of movement and other restrictive policies and practices affecting the Rohingya community in central Rakhine mean that they are usually not able to travel freely to the nearest township hospital, even during medical emergencies, a situation which has led to increased risk of preventable deaths. This has a particularly severe impact on women seeking obstetric care. The limited access to education also remains a great concern, with a combination of movement restrictions, lack of schools, and the protracted displacement crisis preventing many Rohingya children from participating in the formal education system.

KACHIN STATE

In Kachin State, as a result of the intensification of armed conflict in 2011 and ongoing hostilities since then, about 98,000 people (of whom 46 per cent are children and 75 per cent are women and children) remain displaced across 139 camps or camp-like settings. About 40 per cent of the displaced people are located in areas outside of the effective control of Government.

In the first half of 2018, the conflict escalated across Kachin State both in terms of intensity and frequency with the use of heavy weapons, aerial bombardment and artillery in several areas. These clashes resulted in an additional displacement of more than 14,000 people. In some areas, fighting broke out in or in close proximity to civilian areas, including villages and displacement camps. Lack of respect for the provisions of International Humanitarian Law around the protection of civilians remains a grave concern, and among those most vulnerable to violations are women, elderly people, children, and people with disabilities. Civilians have been killed or injured in the fighting and shelling of villages. In addition, there are frequent reports of human

rights violations and abuses, including arbitrary arrest and intimidation of those fleeing violence, forced recruitment (including of children), gender-based violence, and restrictions on freedom of movement, including denial of safe passage to civilians fleeing violence.

Among the risks to physical safety, landmines are a critical concern. Humanitarian organizations have documented 185 mine-related casualties in the period from January to July 2018. Landmine incidents increased by 40 per cent and landmine casualties by 17 per cent over the same period in 2017.

Against the backdrop of worsening security, national and international humanitarian organizations have been facing increasing challenges in accessing affected people in Kachin State. The United Nations has not been permitted by the Government and military to travel to areas beyond Government control since June 2016, inhibiting the delivery of assistance, needs assessments, and support of local partners. While some international actors and local humanitarian

organizations continue to operate, their activities are increasingly constrained. Access to areas within Government control has also dramatically declined with most permissions for international staff only granted to the main towns. While local partners remain at the centre of the humanitarian response in Kachin and have

been able to deliver assistance to some remote areas inaccessible to international staff, sustained support is still needed to complement and enhance local efforts, given the growing humanitarian needs resulting from protracted displacement and renewed conflict.

SHAN STATE

In northern Shan State, over 8,500 people (of whom 48 per cent are children and 77 per cent are women and children) remain displaced across 31 camps or camp-like settings. Since the beginning of 2018, there has been increased fighting in northern Shan state which resulted in civilian casualties and additional displacement in several conflict-affected townships. Displacement was usually caused either by conflict between ethnic armed groups and the Myanmar Military, or as a result of fighting between different ethnic armed groups, illustrating the complexity of the situation. Temporary displacement followed by return to areas of origin once fighting subsides continues to be a key characteristic of displacement in northern Shan state, which presents challenges in humanitarian planning, response, and monitoring of the protection risks faced by returnees.

There are many protection concerns in northern Shan State related to the protracted nature of the conflict and continued and often multiple displacements. The most commonly reported protection threats and human rights violations include gender-based violence, forced recruitment, recruitment and use of children by armed forces, forced labour and portering, lack of access to humanitarian and other essential services (such as health and education), lack of documentation,

appropriation of land or occupation of places of origin by parties to the conflict, and human trafficking, particularly of women and children.

Landmine and unexploded ordinance contamination also remain of great concern. In 2017, Shan State accounted for 37.8 per cent of total incidents and 43.2 per cent of total casualties reported in Myanmar. Out of 76 casualties in 2018, 23 were children and eight of them died.

As in Kachin, 2018 saw a further deterioration in access for humanitarian organizations in Shan State, leaving some previously accessible locations now off-limits. Access challenges have resulted in a reduction in the quantity and quality of humanitarian support to displaced people and other vulnerable communities. Such difficulties have resulted in the under-reporting of violations of International Humanitarian Law and human rights violations and abuses, hindering a comprehensive analysis of the threats faced by civilians affected by conflict. Displaced people have found it difficult to restore their livelihoods and reduce their dependency on aid in an environment of continued militarization, extensive landmine contamination, and repeated displacements due to conflict.

NATURAL DISASTERS

Myanmar is one of the most disaster-prone countries in Asia. It ranks third out of 187 countries in the Global Climate Risk Index. It also ranks 12th out of 191 countries in the Index of Risk Management (INFORM), and fourth highest in terms of exposure to natural hazards. The country is prone to a range of natural hazards including cyclones, storms, floods, landslides, earthquakes, tsunamis, drought and forest fires.

Historical data shows that medium to large-scale natural disasters occur every few years. In 2008, Cyclone Nargis devastated southern Myanmar, killing 140,000 people. Myanmar was hit by devastating floods and

landslides in 2015 which affected more than nine million people, killed 172 people, and temporarily displaced 1.7million people.

Monsoon seasonal floods triggered by heavy rains in 2018 affected several states and regions in Myanmar. Since 9 July 2018, over 268,000 people have been displaced by flooding and at least 16 people have died. The vast majority of those displaced have been able to return home. The Government continues to lead the response to floods, in cooperation with state/regional authorities and with the support of national and international humanitarian organizations.