Ethnic cleansing in Myanmar (Burma): 9 Weeks, 800,000 refugees, Zero UN Security Council Resolutions

Since the start of so-called “clearance operations” in Rakhine State on 25 August, Myanmar’s military has burned down at least 288 villages and forcibly displaced approximately 60 percent of the ethnic Rohingya population. Over the past nine weeks at least 607,000 Rohingya have fled Myanmar, bringing the total number of refugees now living in southern Bangladesh to more than 800,000 people. While Rohingya were prohibited from self-identifying on Myanmar’s last official census in 2014, the total Rohingya population in Myanmar had previously been estimated to be 1 million people.

In response to the largest, quickest and most brutal episode of ethnic cleansing of our times, the UN Security Council has still not passed a single resolution. While a draft resolution is currently being negotiated, some Council members reportedly remain opposed to sanctioning, or even publicly rebuking, the Myanmar authorities for atrocities committed in northern Rakhine.

Meanwhile, evidence regarding mass atrocity crimes continues to mount. Members of the Human Rights Council’s fact-finding mission on Myanmar concluded a visit to southern Bangladesh on 27 October, where they interviewed Rohingya refugees and noted a “consistent, methodical pattern of actions resulting in gross human rights violations affecting hundreds of thousands of people.” Satellite imagery and eyewitness testimony also point to a sustained policy of ethnic cleansing on behalf of the
Myanmar military, constituting crimes against humanity under international law.

In response to UN Security Council inaction, the international community needs to increase the diplomatic pressure to end the atrocities. A number of UN member states have already suspended bilateral programs with Myanmar’s military. All senior officers with command responsibility for ethnic cleansing should also face targeted sanctions. In addition, all international trade, aid and investment programs in Rakhine State should be scrupulously reviewed. Myanmar’s military should not be allowed to prof from ethnic cleansing.

All UN member states should also lobby State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and Myanmar’s government to expeditiously implement the recommendations of the Rakhine Commission report, chaired by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, as a means of ending structural discrimination and recurring conflict in Rakhine State.

During the past 2 months over 600,000 Rohingya have fled a systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing by the Myanmar authorities.

So far, the UN Security Council has failed to pass a single resolution on the crisis.
Remarks Delivered at UN General Assembly Meeting on "Atrocities Against Rohingya: From Condemnation to Action"

Webcast of UN General Assembly Meeting on "Atrocities Against Rohingya: From Condemnation to Action"

Populations at Risk: Myanmar (Burma)
Tensions high following re-run election in Kenya

Last Thursday, 26 October, Kenya held repeat presidential elections following the Supreme Court’s annulment of the results of the previous election held on 8 August. Two weeks prior to Thursday’s vote the main opposition leader, Raila Odinga, withdrew his candidacy and urged his supporters to boycott the re-run election. Despite low turnout and delays in four counties due to insecurity, the head of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) declared that Thursday’s election had been free, fair and credible. On 30 October the IEBC declared incumbent President Uhuru Kenyatta the winner with 98 percent of the vote.

It is estimated that at least 13 people have been killed since last Thursday. During voting, opposition supporters clashed with police outside polling stations, particularly in Odinga strongholds in Kisumu and Nairobi. Since then protestors have reportedly set fire to buildings and established road blocks, while security forces have been accused of using disproportionate and deadly force, including firing live ammunition.

In response to the violence, Kenyan politicians have engaged in dangerous and inflammatory rhetoric. Odinga has rejected the election outcome, calling it a “sham,” while another opposition politician, Musalia Mudavadi, accused the government of deploying security forces to western Kenya to conduct a “genocidal pogrom.” Meanwhile, Deputy President William Ruto has accused Odinga of transforming his party into a “resistance militia,” and compared him to atrocity perpetrator Joseph Kony of the LRA.

Ethnic violence following Kenya’s disputed 2007 presidential election claimed the lives of 1,133 people. The international response and subsequent national reforms were widely acknowledged as a successful example of “R2P in practice.” Following Thursday’s vote, President-elect Kenyatta said that “tribalism is an issue that we must continue to deal with and fight with as we continue to develop our country.”

It is imperative that all Kenyan political leaders refrain from using hate speech or inciting their supporters to violence. All parties in Kenya must work together to deescalate tensions and resolve the current political crisis.
Three schools bombed in Syrian airstrikes ahead of UN Security Council debate on Children and Armed Conflict

On Tuesday, 31 October, airstrikes on two schools in the opposition-held enclave of eastern Ghouta killed at least seven children. Eleven civilians were also killed on 29 October in airstrikes which hit another school in the area. These attacks are part of a wider offensive by the Syrian government which began on 19 September and has resulted in a drastic increase in civilian deaths in opposition-held territory.

The 31 October attack took place on the same day that the UN Security Council held its annual debate on children and armed conflict, during which Council members noted their grave concern regarding the scale and severity of human rights violations and abuses against children in conflict zones.
Eastern Ghouta, where an estimated 350,000 people remain trapped, has been besieged by Syrian government forces since 2013. The UN International Children's Emergency Fund has documented at least 1,200 cases of child malnutrition in Eastern Ghouta. For the first time in over a year, humanitarian aid reached civilians trapped within the Kafr Batna and Saqba districts on 30 October.

The targeting of civilian infrastructure, indiscriminate use of weapons in civilian areas and the deliberate denial of humanitarian aid constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. All UN member states should sign and implement the Safe Schools Declaration. And all those who commit atrocities against children must be held accountable, including via the UN's International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism established to assist in the investigation and prosecution of perpetrators of atrocities in Syria.
UN Secretary-General visits “forgotten crisis” in Central African Republic

Amid increasing violence across the Central African Republic, UN Secretary-General António Guterres visited the country from 24-27 October. The Secretary-General warned that the conflict in CAR is a “forgotten crisis,” even though “communal tensions are growing, violence is spreading, and the humanitarian situation is deteriorating.” Secretary-General Guterres condemned the political manipulation of ethnic and religious identities in CAR and urged community and religious leaders to “call for genuine reconciliation.”

The UN peacekeeping mission in CAR (MINUSCA) currently has 12,870 authorized personnel and its mandate is scheduled for renewal in early November. Shortly before his arrival in Bangui, the Secretary-General urged the UN Security Council to prevent any further escalation of violence by strengthening MINUSCA’s protection of civilians mandate and increasing the number of troops.
Joint NGO Press Release: UN Secretary-General urged to Protect Civilians in CAR

Populations at Risk: Central African Republic

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