



October 23, 2017

**Amnesty International USA calls on Congress to press the U.S. and international community to take immediate action to protect the Rohingya, including imposing targeted financial sanctions against senior military officials responsible for crimes against humanity.**

Senator Bob Corker

*Chairman*

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

423 Dirksen Senate Office Building

Washington, DC 20510-6225

Senator Ben Cardin

*Ranking Member*

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

423 Dirksen Senate Office Building

Washington, DC 20510-6225

Re: Hearing on Assessing U.S. Policy Toward Burma: Geopolitical, Economic, and Humanitarian Considerations

Dear Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Amnesty International (“AI”)<sup>1</sup> and our more than seven million members and supporters worldwide, we hereby submit this statement for the record.

This statement summarizes the findings of an AI briefing paper launched on October 18, 2017, [\*‘My World Is Finished’: Rohingya Targeted in Crimes against Humanity in Myanmar\*](#) (attached as Appendix A<sup>2</sup>) which represents our most detailed analysis of the crisis to date, and describes how Myanmar’s security forces are carrying out a systematic, organized and ruthless campaign of violence against the entire Rohingya population in northern Rakhine State, in an apparent attempt to permanently drive them out of Myanmar for good. In just two months, nearly 600,000 Rohingya have poured into neighboring Bangladesh, one of the world’s poorest and most densely populated countries. For a sense of scale, that is comparable to the entire population of Washington, D.C. running for their lives.

Since early September 2017, AI’s crisis response team has been on the ground in the Bangladesh-Myanmar border region. Our team has interviewed over 120 Rohingya refugees including women who were raped by Myanmar soldiers, children who were shot by soldiers, and people whose limbs were blown off by landmines. Virtually every Rohingya refugee

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<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1977.

<sup>2</sup> Appendix A contains the full version of AI’s October 18, 2017 report *My World Is Finished: Rohingya Targeted in Crimes Against Humanity in Myanmar*.

interviewed by AI has lost family members – some massacred, others burned alive in their homes. AI has also interviewed over 30 medical staff, aid workers, and Bangladeshi officials working directly with the Rohingya refugees who have corroborated these accounts.

In addition, AI experts have used high-resolution satellite technology, aerial photographs, and video footage to confirm the mass burnings of Rohingya villages throughout northern Rakhine State. Finally, AI experts have verified that Myanmar soldiers have recently planted anti-personnel landmines along paths being used by fleeing Rohingya.<sup>3</sup>

AI's rigorous human rights documentation, coupled with modern technology all point to the same conclusion: *nearly 600,000 Rohingya have been the victims of widespread and systematic attacks, amounting to crimes against humanity.*<sup>4</sup>

Because our briefing paper ['My World Is Finished': Rohingya Targeted in Crimes against Humanity in Myanmar](#) discusses the Myanmar military's atrocities in detail, the congressional statement will focus on:

- (1) Identifying the specific Myanmar military units implicated in the most heinous human rights abuses in northern Rakhine State; and
- (2) Recommended actions that the U.S. government and international community should immediately undertake to halt the Myanmar military's ethnic cleansing campaign.

**I. Amnesty International has identified specific Myanmar military units and individuals in crimes committed in northern Rakhine State.**

While AI's investigations remain ongoing into the responsibility of specific units and individuals involved in crimes committed in northern Rakhine State, there is strong evidence from consistent, corroborating witness accounts that certain units have been disproportionately involved in some of the worst violations including the Myanmar Army's Western Command, the 33<sup>rd</sup> Light Infantry Division, and the Border Guard Police.

The Commander in Chief of the Myanmar military, Senior-General Min Aung Hlaing bears the principal command responsibility for the brutal military campaign. Apart from two days, he has been in Myanmar since August 25, 2017. People with intimate knowledge of the military's ongoing campaign in northern Rakhine State have told AI that the Commander-in-Chief has close oversight of the military's operations.

- *September 1*: he announced on his Facebook page, "in the ongoing incidents," the Myanmar military "had to get involved as the strength of police forces alone could

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<sup>3</sup> Appendix B contains an AI press release documenting the use of anti-personnel landmines along the Myanmar-Bangladeshi border.

<sup>4</sup> AI has documented that Rohingya have been victims of the following crimes against humanity: (1) murder including through the use of landmines; (2) deportation and forcible displacement through armed attacks, killings, rape, the burning of buildings, looting; (3) torture including rape, beating, killing in front of family members; (4) rape and other forms of sexual violence of comparable gravity; (5) persecution based on ethnic and religious grounds through burning of whole villages, looting, and severe restrictions on humanitarian aid; and (6) other inhumane acts including denial of access to life-sustaining provisions.

not defend.” His Facebook page includes a September 1 [post](#), “We openly declare that ‘absolutely, our country has no Rohingya race.’”

- *September 19 to 21*: he met with senior military officers on the ground in Rakhine State, including the head of Western Command. While in Rakhine State, his Facebook page included statements indicating that he “gave [those commanders] instructions on getting timely information” and on the “systematic deployment of security forces,” among other things; he also “honoured” the military’s “brilliant efforts to restore regional peace.”
- *October 11*: his Facebook [page](#) posted this statement: “exaggeration to say that the number of [Rohingya] fleeing to Bangladesh is very large” and that the “native place of [the Rohingya] is really Bengal. Therefore, they might have fled to the other country with the same language, race and culture as theirs by assuming that they would be safer there.”

Western Command: In many villages where AI documented mass killings and other serious violations, witnesses consistently described a patch on soldiers’ uniforms that matches the one worn by Western Command. Witnesses who offered this description of a logo that looked like a star and flower, or drew a related picture, were then presented with various options of Myanmar Army patches. They each picked out the Western Command patch. Western Command has long played a leading role in military operations in northern Rakhine State, and is led by Major General Maung Maung Soe.

33rd Light Infantry Division (“LID”): Several witnesses in scorched Rohingya villages described and identified the patch worn by the 33rd LID. Many soldiers from the 33rd and 99th LIDs were moved from northern Myanmar to Rakhine State in mid-August 2017. In June, AI published a [report](#) that documented war crimes committed by soldiers from these two units against civilians from ethnic minorities in northern Shan State, as part of the ongoing internal armed conflicts in northern Myanmar.

Border Guard Police (“BGP”): Rohingya witnesses repeatedly implicated the BGP, a force that has operated in close proximity to many Rohingya villages since it was established in 2014. The BGP are identified by their distinct, camouflage blue uniforms. Witnesses from at least several dozen burned villages described the BGP working with the Army to surround and set ablaze Rohingya houses. The BGP were also identified as among the perpetrators of killings and sexual violence in several villages. Major General Thura San Lwin was the commander in charge of the BGP from October 2016 until early October 2017, a period marked by two rounds of highly abusive “clearance operations” that followed ARSA attacks. He was then replaced by Brigadier-General Myint Toe.

AI is not aware of any disciplinary measures being taken against soldiers or commanders implicated in violations during the campaign, nor of efforts to relocate away from ongoing operations specific units that have been identified as responsible. Indeed, the Myanmar military and government have instead repeatedly denied responsibility for any such violations, and justified their approach by implying, for example, that all Rohingya men are “terrorists.” This fits a longstanding pattern of impunity.

## **II. The U.S. and international community must undertake actions to halt the ethnic cleansing campaign and to hold the Myanmar military accountable for its atrocities**

AI strongly urges the U.S. government and international community to take the following actions without delay:

- A. Cut off military cooperation with the Myanmar military by immediately suspending the transfer of all weapons, munitions, and other security assistance.
- B. Impose a comprehensive arms embargo as well as targeted financial sanctions against senior Myanmar military officials responsible for the most heinous human rights abuses.
- C. Press Myanmar authorities to provide immediate unfettered access to northern Rakhine State for the U.N. Fact-finding Mission. The mission's work is essential to investigate independently the human rights violations and abuses committed by all sides.
- D. Press Myanmar authorities to halt the severe restrictions imposed on international and local aid organizations. These restrictions have deprived the Rohingya of food and other life-sustaining provision, thereby compounding their suffering. There is mounting evidence that the latest wave of Rohingya pouring into Bangladesh is facing starvation.
- E. While AI welcomes the U.S. government's recent contribution of 32 million dollars in humanitarian aid for the Rohingya, given the enormity of the humanitarian crisis, the U.S. should increase aid to provide food, medical care, water, sanitation, and shelter for the nearly 600,000 Rohingya refugees.
- F. Press the Myanmar civilian government to end the longstanding systematic discrimination against the Rohingya who are denied citizenship under Myanmar law despite having resided there for decades. For those Rohingya who wish to return to Myanmar voluntarily, authorities must facilitate such return in safety and with dignity in accordance with international law.

Time is of the essence. The Rohingya can wait no longer while the U.S. and international community stand by as the Myanmar military continues to commit crimes against humanity with impunity. If the international community does not come together now to save lives and protect refugees, when will it?

Sincerely,

Joanne Lin

National Director

Advocacy and Government Affairs