



The Rohingya Crisis

A Blog published on diverse internet sites in 2019

By Hans Noot

Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) has been officially legally guaranteed by most nations. Unfortunately, these legal protections are rarely fully implemented or complied with. For example, it is in vain to assume that in many countries, one is actually free to join his or her preferred religion, change religions, share his or her religious or non-religious beliefs, or for those who are not a member of the nation's sponsored religion, to find equal work opportunity.

Moreover, the arm of the law is often nowhere to be found when either local magistrates or citizens harass people on the basis of ethnicity, tradition, or religious affiliation.

It gets worse when a campaign of discrimination, or worse yet, genocide, a crime of crimes, against certain religious or ethnic groups is actually state-sponsored. One such case is that of the Rohingya in

Myanmar (Burma). Since the 1960s, more than a million Muslims living in the country have fled their homes into neighboring countries. In recent years, the crisis has worsened, resulting in what was described as the world's fastest growing refugee crisis. An estimated 1.2 million people are still in dire straits. Half a million of them are living in makeshift camps with inadequate facilities, with meager food, and a bare minimum of medical assistance.

The latest outflow of Rohingya's dates back to September 2017, when local Buddhist extremists in Rakhine province, supported by the military, started to execute a "[textbook example of ethnic cleansing](#)", as described by the United Nations Special Rapporteur to Myanmar, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein. Looting, burning down villages and shops, mass

killings, torture, arbitrary detentions, forced labor, forcible recruitment, extortion, gang rapes against Muslim women and girls, trafficking, beatings, and an estimated [36 thousand people literally thrown into fire](#). More than [43 thousand Rohingya parents](#) have been reported lost, presumed dead during the 2017 crackdown.

The troubles already started with the so called Burma Citizenship Law of 1982, when people of Rohingya ethnicity, as well as the majority of Indian and Chinese and other so called “[Bengali](#)”, lost all human dignity when they were denied legal status, a fundamental human right. For the Rohingya, especially, this is odd as they, as a people, had lived in Burma for centuries. Ever since the Citizen Law the Rohingya are in effect stateless, making them refugees within their own country of birth. They are severely restricted in their rights, if not making it impossible, to study, work, travel, marry, practice their religion, access health services, vote, practice medicine or law, run for office and even making it difficult to buy and sell without their [National Registration Cards and their ID number](#). Freedom of movement, too, is a fundamental human right, but these people, under this regime, were not allowed to leave their village to find work, trade, fish, attend the

funeral of a relative, or visit a doctor without permission or steep bribes to military officials. They are proportionally high taxed over practically everything they own, catch, produce, buy or sell, including taxes for the birth of a child or the death of a family member. Discrimination and restrictions makes them vulnerable, and open targets to confiscation of land, extortion, theft, rape, torture, arson, displacement, and even murder. Forced labor to build on the infrastructure in North Arkan, especially amongst the Rohingya’s is rampant. Many thousands have died of malnutrition. According to [Amnesty International](#) an estimated 650 thousand have had to flee their homes in Rakhine State during the height of the troubles. Sixty percent of them are children, [many of them without parents](#). Over the past few years 200 thousand Rohingya’s fled from Myanmar into Saudi Arabia, 10 thousand into the United Arab Emirates, 350 thousand into Pakistan, 40 thousand into India; 5 thousand into Thailand, a 150 thousand into Malaysia, 100 into Indonesia and a whopping 890 thousand into Bangladesh, greatly overstretching the country’s already insufficient resources.

The Myanmar government has refused to acknowledge both the severity of the situation as well as their participation in it. Myanmar's army chief told Pope Francis in November 2017 that there was "[no discrimination in this country](#)", and he praised the military for maintaining peace and stability. The country's de facto civilian leader and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi refuses to discuss the plight of the Rohingya, and blames the whole matter to a "[huge iceberg of misinformation](#)". At the same time in January 2018 it was proposed that tens of thousands of undocumented Rohingya would be "[forcefully relocated](#)" to the uninhabitable island of Thengar Char in the Bay of Bengal. The proposal has been roundly criticized due its vulnerability to flooding during the monsoon season.

Putting aside accusations of government complicity in ethnic cleansing and killings, one wonders about the government's responsibility to protect and provide for its citizens and those who live within its borders. Why deny millions of citizens their right of citizenship and other human rights? Why is nothing being done to restore the 362 Rohingya villages that were razed to the ground? Where is the arm of international law that dictates that all humans have a right to

statehood? Where are the trials that the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights calls for, that would have the responsible generals answer for alleged acts of genocide? Why are journalists and aid workers not allowed to enter Rakhine state if they do not speak Rungga? Why are even UN investigators denied visas to investigate the violence there? Where is the Myanmar government's cry for international help, if they, themselves, cannot handle an estimated 687 thousand of their citizens, men, women and mostly children, having to run for their lives over roads intentionally made hazardous with landmines laid by Myanmar's military, or across the [treacherous waters of the Bay of Bengal](#) and [the Andaman Sea](#)? Where is the regional crisis team that puts pressure on Myanmar to solve this issue once and for all? And for those of us, in the West, where is the outcry and media campaign that makes the general public aware of these atrocities? Most people I talk to have no clue of what is going on and were deeply shocked to hear these facts from me.

Having said all that, it is important to point out the enormous sums of money donated by various [UN agencies](#), the [EU](#), the [USA](#), and [some](#)

[states](#), and neighboring countries dealing with the influx of so many people, including Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. And truly, despite official denial of the government that there is a crisis, not the Myanmar Military, but the government has triggered wide response across Ministries and agencies, designating land for these people, coordinating relief and opening it up for private individuals to donate. As a result of international cooperation, almost 100 thousand people have been treated for malnutrition. Hundreds of thousands of children have been vaccinated for diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough. Meanwhile, the US House of Representatives has exerted great political pressure on the Myanmar government by voting to declare what is happening in the country as genocide. The E.U. Parliament has raised concerns with its resolution [2576 of 14 June 2018](#), and Fact Finding Missions on high level have been conducted.

More is needed, though: The lifting of monitoring and journalist limitations; media attention to raise awareness; food assistance, clean water, maternity care, shelters that can withstand the cyclones, sanitation facilities, cooking utensils, dignity supplies for women and girls, basic medicine and hospital facilities to treat and avoid measles,

diarrhea, and cholera. Schooling is needed for the estimated 300 thousand kids in school age. And for help to be sustainable, the Rohingyas need legal recognition, which would allow them to settle permanently, and build and integrate within the national economy. The Rohingya people need financial support and help to rebuild their homes. Additionally, neighboring countries need to clamp down on trafficking of Rohingya women. Bangladesh, which takes the brunt of the foreign impact, needs financial assistance from the international community. For their part, Myanmar's top military brass, including General Ming Aung Hliang must be investigated for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. And the government needs an overhaul to reflect climate change on behalf of human dignity. The crisis and suffering in Myanmar highlights the need for even more regional collaboration commission, organized at top level, with a clear and strong mandate to act, facilitate, coordinate, and inform. This commission consisting of government representatives from the neighboring countries needs to be backed by the international agencies within the UN, EU, USA, OSCE, and others who wish to support. This should focus the needed precision pressure on Myanmar, how, as well as when and where it works best. It should

have a mandate, too, to design and implement a long term road map to solve the issue for once and for all.

If the Rohingya situation was described as “the world’s most persecuted minority”, and if international crimes had been committed, as has been alleged, then all alarm bells should go off in every nation, every aid organization, each church, and in the heart of each human being that claims that humans are worth to be human. A sense of human dignity is called for. The Rohingya need to find their way back home, remain safe there, and be given ample opportunity to thrive. While this may not be the first case of structural and severe mass human suffering; let’s dream of a world in which this would be the very last. And that not just for Myanmar, Yemen, and Syria.