



The Benenson Society

## **Campaign for protection of Myanmar's Rohingya minority.**

The Rohingyas are amongst the most powerless and vulnerable ethnic groups in Asia.

For the last three decades, hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas have fled systematic persecution to neighbouring countries in Asia, the vast majority to Bangladesh. There are about one million Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar who are essentially stateless, and many in the Buddhist-majority country consider them illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. More than 120,000 Rohingya remain confined to dirty camps in the area after violent clashes with their Buddhist neighbours in 2012.

The installation of a democratic government in Myanmar in March, effectively under the leadership of Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi had raised hopes of a better deal for this minority Muslim group.

However, there are reports of atrocities committed by the Army in October. Representatives of the United Nations and diplomats visited the area last week, with US Ambassador Scot Marciel calling for a "thorough investigation" into alleged abuse and the restoration of humanitarian access.

The Human Rights Watch has reported that satellite data shows villages that have been burned, and Reuters and the Myanmar Times have chronicled the alleged rape of Muslim women by soldiers.

The crisis marks the first major test of Suu Kyi's new democratically elected administration, which took over March 31 after decades of military rule.

Below is an article from *the Sydney Morning Herald*:

### **Rohingya women raped, homes destroyed as Myanmar cracks down on militants**

Lindsay Murdoch  
Published: October 29, 2016 - 4:27PM

**Bangkok:** Myanmar security forces have shot scores of people, raped women, burnt the Koran and looted and burnt shops and houses in western Rakhine state in the biggest upsurge in violence against Rohingya Muslims in four years, according to multiple reports.

The United States and United Nations have voiced their concern and human rights groups are demanding a prompt impartial investigation into the escalating violence almost one year after the party of Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi won power in the country also known as Burma.

The *Myanmar Times* has cited credible reports that dozens of Muslim women have been raped by security forces, including 30 in a single village. Some were as young as 16.

Reuters quotes eight Rohingya women, all from U Shey Kya village, describing in detail how soldiers raided their homes, looted property and raped them at gun point last week .

Not all the claims could be independently verified as authorities restrict access to journalists, aid workers and independent observers.

Aid workers have reported that an estimated 10,000 Rohingya have been displaced from their homes and food and other supplies are running low for tens of thousands of others.

Amnesty International said it had received numerous reports of extra-judicial executions, arbitrary arrests and detentions, destruction of homes and crimes involving sexual violence and other violations.

Myanmar authorities are facing mounting pressure to lift a military lockdown across the restive state that advocacy groups say has trapped thousands of Muslims and prevented aid workers from helping them.

"The longer this situation continues, the more vulnerable people will get, as food supplies dwindle and life-threatening health problems are left untreated," said Marta Kaszubska, the coordinator of the INGO Forum Myanmar.

Soldiers have pored into Rakhine since October 9 after an insurgent group of Rohingya allegedly launched coordinated attacks on several border guard posts, killing nine police officers, five soldiers and stealing a cache of weapons. Eight attackers were also killed.

The government blamed the attacks on an armed group comprising about 400 fighters calling themselves al-Yakin Mujahidin, a group previously unknown .

In videos posted online by the group, heavily armed men called for jihad.

A spokesman for the Rakhine government has denied security forces have committed any human rights violations.

"We haven't done anything lawless," said a spokesman for Myanmar's president Htin Kyaw, in response to a complaint from the United Nations.

Ms Suu Kyi, Myanmar's de-facto leader, has called for investigations into the violence but cautioned against making accusations without evidence.

In August, she appointed former UN secretary-general Kofi Annan to look into the plight of more than one million Rohingya, who have been denied basic rights and are considered stateless despite living in Myanmar for generations.

Ms Suu Kyi, 71, last week brushed aside criticism she has failed to speak out on behalf of the Rohingya in her Buddhist-majority nation.

"Things take time. The situation in Rakhine is a legacy of many, many decades of problems," she said.

"We're not going to be able to resolve it overnight. It goes back to even the last century."

Analysts say the military's violent reaction to the border post attacks shows that Myanmar's generals retain a firm grip on power despite the NLD's landslide victory at elections in November last year.

The army controls the key ministries of defence, home affairs and border affairs and a quarter of seats in parliament are reserved for military appointees.

After the October 9 attacks, Home Affairs Minister Kyaw Swe, a lieutenant-general, accused Rohingya Muslims of "invading" the country.

Ms Suu Kyi, who holds the title "state counsellor", has not challenged the military on security issues while the generals have shown no signs of actively undermining her position.

But the Rahkine violence is the biggest crisis to face her National League for Democracy government that officially took office in March

## **Please write a letter to Foreign Minister, Ms Ms Suu Kyi, via the local diplomatic mission.**

The Myanmar Ministry of Foreign Affairs website has listing of all Myanmar diplomatic missions overseas. Below is the address for the mission in Australia and a sample letter:

### **Embassy of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar**

<b>Head of Mission</b>	H.E U Tha Aung Nyun (Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary)	<b>Address :</b> 22 ARKANA STREET, YARRALUMLA, ACT 2600, CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA
<b>Deputy Head of Mission</b>	Daw Khin Sandar (Minister- Counsellor)	Tel : (61-2) 6273 3811, 6273 3751, 6273 9883 Fax : (61-2) 6273 3181 Email: <a href="mailto:mecanberra@bigpond.com">mecanberra@bigpond.com</a> Website: <a href="http://mecanberra.com.au/">http://mecanberra.com.au/</a>

*The Honourable Aung San Suu Kyi  
Foreign Minister of Myanmar*

*Dear Ms Sui Kyi,*

*As a member of the Benenson Society, which in the past joined the international community in campaigning for your release and for democracy in Myanmar, may I express my concern for the plight of the Rohingya people.*

*More particularly, I am concerned about reports of recent violence. The Benenson Society supports UN coordinator Renata Lok-Dessallien's call for the*

*government to launch an independent investigation into allegations of human rights abuses, including rape by soldiers.*

*We also urge immediate humanitarian access to the region.*

*May we urge you to use your moral authority to urge the Government to develop resettlement plans for the Rohingya and give them full rights as citizens of Myanmar.*

*Yours sincerely,*