

# BURMA BULLETIN



A month-in-review of events in Burma



ALTERNATIVE ASEAN NETWORK ON BURMA  
campaigns, advocacy & capacity-building for human rights & democracy

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- **Deadly escalation of violence kills hundreds and displaces thousands of people from all communities in Arakan/Rakhine State.**
- **Burma blocks aid agencies from delivering vital supplies of food, water and medicine to civilians in Arakan State.**
- **Tatmadaw burns Rohingya villages and opens fire on their residents without distinguishing between insurgents and civilians. The govt orders media to describe the insurgents as “terrorists” or face action.**
- **UNHCR estimates over 270,000 new Rohingya refugees crossed the Burma-Bangladesh border between 25 August and 8 September.**
- **India plans to deport all Rohingya, including those registered as refugees with UNHCR.**
- **The Annan Commission releases its final report, urging the Burmese govt to implement its recommendations to bring peace to Arakan State.**
- **National investigation commission on the 9 October attacks in Maungdaw denies military abuses against Rohingya.**
- **Arakan State plans to construct Maungdaw economic zone, the third one to use conflict-affected land.**
- **Fighting and human rights abuse is still on the rise in northern Shan State. Humanitarian access continues to be blocked**
- **Refugees and IDPs at the Burma-Thailand border endure further distress: International humanitarian funding no longer available.**
- **Tatmadaw arrests former child soldier for speaking out.**
- **Parliament passes minor amendments on Telecommunications Law, retains the notorious Section 66(d).**
- **Ministry of Defense decides not to relocate a sulfuric factory threatening local communities' health.**
- **Amid the increased violence, peace talks continue.**

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## KEY STORY: DEADLY ESCALATION OF VIOLENCE DEVASTATES ARAKAN STATE

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On 25 August, violence dramatically escalated in Maungdaw and Buthidaung townships, Arakan/Rakhine State, after insurgents staged a major coordinated attack against 30 police outposts and a military base.<sup>1</sup> Tatmadaw and government sources estimated that 1,000 insurgents armed with knives and hand-made bombs were involved in the attacks, and said that at least 59 insurgents and 12 members of the security forces were killed.<sup>2</sup>

The little-known Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) claimed responsibility for the 25 August offensive in a Twitter post, and warned of more attacks.<sup>3</sup> ARSA leader Ataulah Abu Ammar Jununi – also known as Ata Ullah – said that the ARSA did not have any connection with international terrorist groups. He said that their agenda was strictly national and their primary objective was “to liberate our people from dehumanized oppression perpetrated by all successive Burmese regimes”.<sup>4</sup>

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said that “[t]his turn of events is deplorable. It was predicted and could have been prevented”. He noted that “decades of persistent and systematic human rights violations, including the very violent security responses to the attacks since October 2016 [see *October Bulletin*], have almost certainly contributed to the nurturing of violent extremism, with everyone ultimately losing”.<sup>5</sup> He urged all sides to renounce the use of violence and called on the Burmese political leadership to condemn the hate speech and violence that was proliferating, including on social media.<sup>6</sup>

The outbreak of violence took place just hours after the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State – also known as Annan Commission – released its final report, jeopardizing the implementation of its recommendations. The report made broad-ranging recommendations to ensure peace in the state and largely reflected similar ones made by UN bodies and human rights organizations [see *Advisory commission on Rakhine State releases final report*].<sup>7</sup>

### Government response: "Bengali extremist terrorists"

The State Counsellor Information Committee condemned the violence describing the insurgents as “Bengali extremist terrorists”.<sup>8</sup> “Bengali” is a label used by Burmese nationalists to deny Rohingya identity.

On 26 August, the Burmese government called on Rohingya civilians to cooperate with the security forces and said those not related to the insurgents would not be affected. It also said it may take action against media calling the ARSA group “insurgents” and not “terrorists” as per the government's designation.<sup>9</sup>

On 30 August, the Upper House of Parliament approved a proposal to further strengthen security in Arakan State, granting “greater power” to security forces and increased budgets for fencing along the Bangladesh border, and police outposts for border security.<sup>10</sup>

### Military response: More “clearance operations”

In the wake of the 25 August attacks, further fighting broke out in Arakan State, killing civilians, and forcing many thousands of people from all communities to flee their homes.<sup>11</sup> The Tatmadaw started

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<sup>1</sup> Reuters (25 Aug 17) At least 71 killed in Myanmar as Rohingya insurgents stage major attack

<sup>2</sup> Reuters (25 Aug 17) At least 71 killed in Myanmar as Rohingya insurgents stage major attack

<sup>3</sup> Reuters (25 Aug 17) At least 32 dead in Myanmar as Rohingya insurgents stage major attack

<sup>4</sup> RFA (01 Sep 17) Who Are the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army?

<sup>5</sup> UN News (29 Aug 17) Myanmar: UN rights chief says violence in Rakhine state 'predictable and preventable'

<sup>6</sup> UN News (29 Aug 17) Myanmar: UN rights chief says violence in Rakhine state 'predictable and preventable'

<sup>7</sup> DVB (24 Aug 17) Annan-led panel urges 'ambitious steps' in Arakan report

<sup>8</sup> State Counsellor Information Committee (25 Aug 17) Many police outposts and police stations in Maungdaw attacked by Bengali extremist terrorists

<sup>9</sup> Reuters (27 Aug 17) Gunfire heard near Bangladesh border as thousands flee Myanmar violence

<sup>10</sup> The Irrawaddy (30 Aug 17) Upper House Approves Rakhine State Proposal

conducting “clearance operations” against so-called “extremist terrorists”, and gave accounts of several clashes involving hundreds of Rohingya insurgents in the following days.<sup>12</sup>

On 31 August, the Tatmadaw said that the attacks and the following military crackdown killed nearly 400 people. Burmese official figures estimated that about 370 Rohingya insurgents, 13 security forces, 2 government officials and 14 civilians died.<sup>13</sup> The Tatmadaw evacuated more than 11,700 non-Muslim “ethnic residents” from the area affected by fighting to safer locations.<sup>14</sup> However, this assistance did not seem to be extended to Muslim residents.<sup>15</sup>

Rights groups warned that the military counter-offensive could severely endanger the lives of innocent people trapped in the area.<sup>16</sup> Independent reports documented that most of the clashes involved the Tatmadaw indiscriminately burning Rohingya villages and opening fire on their residents, with some instances of villagers joining the militants to fight the security forces.<sup>17</sup>

Rohingya eyewitnesses — many of whom were suffering from burns and bullet wounds — said that Burmese security forces targeted the Rohingya community and shot them without distinguishing between insurgents and civilians.<sup>18</sup> Rohingya civilians also accused Burmese security forces and Buddhist mobs of burning their villages.<sup>19</sup> Satellite imagery analyzed by Human Rights Watch (HRW) confirmed the widespread fire destruction of Rohingya Muslim houses and villages in Arakan State. The burnings took place at 17 separate sites between August 25 and 30.<sup>20</sup> The Burmese government alleged that Rohingya insurgents were torching their own homes.<sup>21</sup>

The deadly violence also targeted the Hindu minority living in Arakan State. Families described attacks carried out by unknown masked assailants in the villages of Bowlibazar and Fakirabazar, Maungdaw Township. At least 100 Hindus were reportedly killed and their houses set on fire. Survivors said they did not know who those attackers were.<sup>22</sup>

On 28 August, Burmese Muslim leaders condemned the violent actions and said that the killing of innocent people on either side was unacceptable.<sup>23</sup>

On 29 August, United Kingdom asked for the UN Security Council to meet and discuss the escalating deadly violence in Arakan State.<sup>24</sup> No formal statement followed the closed-door meeting, but media reported that China resisted a stronger involvement of the UN Security Council in addressing the crisis.<sup>25</sup>

On 1 September, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres expressed his deep concern over reported military excesses during the “clearance operations”, and urged calm to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> BBC (31 Aug 17) Myanmar: What sparked latest violence in Rakhine?

<sup>12</sup> Reuters (27 Aug 17) Gunfire heard near Bangladesh border as thousands flee Myanmar violence; RFA (01 Sep 17) Nearly 400 Rohingya Insurgents Killed in Rakhine Violence: Myanmar Military Chief

<sup>13</sup> Reuters (01 Sep 17) Nearly 400 die as army steps up crackdown on Rohingya militants

<sup>14</sup> Reuters (01 Sep 17) Nearly 400 die as army steps up crackdown on Rohingya militants

<sup>15</sup> UN News (31 Aug 17) Myanmar: UN expert urges efforts to break 'worsening cycle of violence' in Rakhine

<sup>16</sup> RFA (25 Aug 17) Attacks in Myanmar's Volatile Northern

<sup>17</sup> BBC (02 Sep 17) Myanmar conflict: Fake photos inflame tension

<sup>18</sup> BBC (28 Aug 17) Myanmar Rakhine: Rohingya women weep on Bangladesh border; Reuters (31 Aug 17) Bodies wash up on Bangladesh shore as Rohingya flee Myanmar; RFA (01 Sep 17) Nearly 400 Rohingya Insurgents Killed in Rakhine Violence: Myanmar Military Chief

<sup>19</sup> BBC (02 Sep 17) Myanmar conflict: Bangladesh police allow Rohingya to flee

<sup>20</sup> Reuters (29 Aug 17) Rohingya fleeing Myanmar violence face expulsion despite U.N. appeal; HRW (02 Sep 17) Burma: Satellite Images Show Massive Fire Destruction

<sup>21</sup> State Counsellor Information Committee (25 Aug 17) Breaking News 3 – Extremist terrorists torch their homes

<sup>22</sup> RFA (01 Sep 17) Nearly 400 Rohingya Insurgents Killed in Rakhine Violence: Myanmar Military Chief

<sup>23</sup> RFA (28 Aug 17) Myanmar Villagers Flee Maungdaw Township Amid Burnings in Northern Rakhine

<sup>24</sup> Reuters (30 Aug 17) Britain asks for U.N. Security Council to discuss Myanmar violence; Al Jazeera (30 Aug 17) UK calls for UN meeting on Myanmar violence

<sup>25</sup> The Irrawaddy (01 Sep 17) Analysis: China Backs Myanmar at UN Security Council

<sup>26</sup> RFA (01 Sep 17) Nearly 400 Rohingya Insurgents Killed in Rakhine Violence: Myanmar Military Chief

## Humanitarian crisis, aid groups accused of supporting terrorists

After 25 August, Burma blocked all aid agencies from delivering vital supplies of food, water, and medicine to thousands of civilians in Arakan State. The UN said that humanitarian organizations suspended all operations in the region, including providing aid to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other vulnerable populations, “because the security situation and government field-visit restrictions rendered [them] unable to distribute assistance”.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, the UN and other international agencies were forced to withdraw some staff from the area after the government alleged that aid workers were helping the militants.<sup>28</sup> The assumption was based on the finding of some World Food Programme (WFP) biscuits in a militants’ camp.<sup>29</sup> The Ministry of Home Affairs further accused local and international aid groups of being a source of material support to the attackers because improvised bombs were allegedly made out of imported steel pipes and ammonia fertilizers.<sup>30</sup>

On 29 August, High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said that the unsupported allegations made by governmental authorities against international aid workers “are irresponsible and only serve to increase fears and the potential for further violence”.<sup>31</sup>

## Refugee crisis

The renewed “clearance operations” prompted a new exodus of Rohingya refugees to flee to Bangladesh. On 31 August, UN sources estimated that more than 27,000 people had crossed the border, while 20,000 more remained stuck in an unoccupied area between the two countries.<sup>32</sup> Most of those were women and children, and some of them were injured.<sup>33</sup> On 3 September, the estimated number of new arrivals was 73,000, and on 8 September, it was over 270,000 with figures expected to further rise.<sup>34</sup>

Bangladesh border guard officials said they were providing food and water to the Rohingya refugees, but that they could not let them in.<sup>35</sup> Bangladesh officials struggled to handle the new mass refugee influx, and tried to convince them to go back to Burma, but people, fearing for their lives, were desperate to enter Bangladesh.<sup>36</sup> At least 40 Rohingya, including women and children, drowned while attempting to cross the Naf River into Bangladesh, which is currently facing one of the most devastating monsoon floods in recent years.<sup>37</sup> Reporters heard gun shots and saw a huge fire on the Burmese side of the river.<sup>38</sup>

Earlier in August, Bangladesh ramped up border patrols against a fresh inflow of Rohingya that they expected as a consequence of the increased Tatmadaw presence at the Burma border [see *Escalation of violence and instability*].<sup>39</sup> Bangladesh officials declared they would not allow anyone to illegally cross their border.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The Guardian (04 Sep 17) Myanmar blocks all UN aid to civilians at heart of Rohingya crisis

<sup>28</sup> Reuters (28 Aug 17) Bangladesh pushes back thousands of Rohingya fleeing Myanmar violence

<sup>29</sup> The Guardian (28 Aug 17) Aung Sang Suu Kyi's office accuses aid workers of helping 'terrorists' in Myanmar

<sup>30</sup> DVB (30 Aug 17) NGOs a source for explosive materials used by militants in Arakan: minister

<sup>31</sup> UN News (29 Aug 17) Myanmar: UN rights chief says violence in Rakhine state 'predictable and preventable'

<sup>32</sup> BBC (31 Aug 17) Myanmar: What sparked latest violence in Rakhine?; UN News (31 Aug 17) Myanmar: UN expert urges efforts to break 'worsening cycle of violence' in Rakhine

<sup>33</sup> BBC (31 Aug 17) Myanmar: What sparked latest violence in Rakhine?; UN News (31 Aug 17) Myanmar: UN expert urges efforts to break 'worsening cycle of violence' in Rakhine

<sup>34</sup> Reuters (08 Sept 17) Exodus of Rohingya to Bangladesh reaches 270,000- UNHCR; Reuters (07 Sept 17) Exclusive: U.N. expects up to 300,000 Rohingya could flee Myanmar violence to Bangladesh

<sup>35</sup> Reuters (27 Aug 17) Gunfire heard near Bangladesh border as thousands flee Myanmar violence

<sup>36</sup> RFA (03 Aug 17) Southeastern Bangladesh Struggles with Rapid Rohingya Refugee Influx

<sup>37</sup> Reuters (01 Sep 17) Nearly 400 die as Myanmar army steps up crackdown on Rohingya militants; Reuters (25 Aug 17) Worst monsoon floods in years kill more than 1,200 across South Asia

<sup>38</sup> Reuters (28 Aug 17) Myanmar army battles Rohingya insurgents; thousands flee; Reuters (31 Aug 17) Bodies wash up on Bangladesh shore as Rohingya flee Myanmar

<sup>39</sup> Dhaka Tribune (15 Aug 17) Border patrol beefed up following increased Myanmar military presence in frontier; Reuters (17 Aug 17) Bangladesh ramps up border patrols to deter fresh Rohingya inflow

<sup>40</sup> Reuters (17 Aug 17) Bangladesh ramps up border patrols to deter fresh Rohingya inflow

## Escalation of violence and instability

The deadly escalation of violence did not happen overnight. After an apparent break between February and May, the Tatmadaw began to resume clearance operations in June [see *June Bulletin*] and went to full strength on 10 August, after several cases of murder and disappearance inflamed tensions.<sup>41</sup> The Burmese government accused the insurgents of instigating a campaign of terror.<sup>42</sup> The Tatmadaw deployed more troops. Inter-communal violence and riots escalated.

**1 Aug:** Three villagers were found decapitated in Chutpyin village, Rathedaung Township. Authorities were investigating the deaths.<sup>43</sup>

**3 Aug:** Six persons of Mro ethnicity from Kai Gyee village near Mayu mountain range, Maungdaw Township, were found dead, and 4 women were reported missing. This incident led to increased tensions after village administrator Sein Hla Maung reported that the perpetrators were Muslim militants.<sup>44</sup>

**4 Aug:** Security forces fired warning shots after what some people described as a mob attack and others said was a scuffle between villagers.<sup>45</sup> The State Counsellor Information Committee said that a mob of villagers attacked the Border Guard Police (BGP) after they arrested 6 people suspected of supporting the militants.<sup>46</sup>

**8 Aug:** The Arakan State government condemned the murders in Maungdaw Township as acts of terrorism, adding that it would increase security and oversee the work of international aid organizations in the region.<sup>47</sup>

**9 Aug:** The UN distributed a precautionary security notification to its staff, warning them that rumors and misinformation in regard to UN support to Muslim militants – and even their legitimate support to the broader Muslim community – was fuelling “renewed social media rhetoric and incidents of expressed hostility”.<sup>48</sup>

**9 Aug:** The Arakan National Party (ANP) urged Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief Sr Gen Min Aung Hlaing to segregate Buddhist and Muslim communities and send more troops to Maungdaw Township.<sup>49</sup>

**10 Aug:** The Tatmadaw and police boosted security in Maungdaw Township.<sup>50</sup> Labor, Immigration and Population Minister Thein Swe confirmed that “an increased number of security forces will be deployed in [Arakan] State and clearance operations will be carried out”.<sup>51</sup>

**11 Aug:** UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar Yanghee Lee expressed concerns over the increased military deployment, and urged the government to “ensure that security forces exercise restraint in all circumstances and respect human rights in addressing the security situation” in northern Arakan State.<sup>52</sup>

**13 Aug:** Hundreds of Buddhist monks and ethnic Arakan residents protested against aid agencies, which they accused of giving support to Rohingya militants.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Reuters (25 Aug 17) At least 12 dead in Muslim insurgent attacks in northwest Myanmar

<sup>42</sup> Reuters (25 Aug 17) At least 32 dead in Myanmar as Rohingya insurgents stage major attack

<sup>43</sup> RFA (01 Aug 17) Three Villagers Found Mutilated in Myanmar's Rathedaung Township

<sup>44</sup> The Irrawaddy (03 Aug 17) Six Bodies With Gunshot, Machete Wounds Found in Maungdaw

<sup>45</sup> Narinjara News (04 Aug 17) Security forces open fire in northern Rakhine incident

<sup>46</sup> Coconuts Yangon (05 Aug 17) Shots fired as Myanmar forces raid Rohingya village

<sup>47</sup> DVB (09 Aug 17) Arakan govt says recent Maungdaw murders are acts of terrorism

<sup>48</sup> Reuters (10 Aug 17) UN warns aid workers of rising Buddhist hostility in Arakan

<sup>49</sup> The Irrawaddy (10 Aug 17) ANP Asks Army Chief to Segregate Ethnic Communities in Maungdaw

<sup>50</sup> RFA (10 Aug 17) Rakhine Lawmakers Meet With Myanmar's Military Chief to Discuss Security Crisis; The Irrawaddy (10 Aug 17) Tatmadaw Troops Arrive in Sittwe, Bound for Maungdaw: Source

<sup>51</sup> DVB (11 Aug 17) More 'clearance operations,' troops for Arakan after latest violence: minister

<sup>52</sup> OHCHR (11 Aug 17) Myanmar: UN rights expert urges restraint in security operation in Rakhine State

<sup>53</sup> Reuters (13 Aug 17) Hundreds of Buddhists protest against aid agencies in Myanmar's Rakhine

**14 Aug:** Border Affairs Minister Lt Gen Ye Aung said that the Tatmadaw would use armored cars and helicopters in its operation against militants.<sup>54</sup>

**14 Aug:** Twenty Burmese political parties issued a joint statement demanding the government to take effective counter-terrorism measures to address the situation in Arakan State,<sup>55</sup> and declare to the international community that there is “no Rohingya ethnicity” in Burma.<sup>56</sup>

**15 Aug:** San Shwe Kyaw, National League for Democracy (NLD) chairperson for Sittwe Township, reportedly said that people’s militias would be formed to fight against ethnic Rohingya Muslim insurgents. The claim was later denied by President’s Office spokesperson Zaw Htay.<sup>57</sup>

**17 Aug:** State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi met with Tatmadaw leaders to discuss the labeling of insurgents in Arakan State as terrorists.<sup>58</sup>

**22 Aug:** Media reported that Buddhist residents blocked hundreds of Rohingya Muslim neighbors inside their area of Zay Di Pyin village for 3 weeks, preventing them from going to work or getting food and water. Police denied the restriction of movement saying the Rohingya were too afraid to go out.<sup>59</sup>

### **Backdrop of anti-Muslim discrimination and hate speech**

In related developments, anti-Muslim discrimination and propaganda are still on the rise throughout the country.

**2 Aug:** Burmese authorities chained shut 3 more Muslim buildings in Kywe Pone Lay village, Okkan Township, after authorities found that they were used for religious purposes without official permission.<sup>60</sup>

**2 Aug:** Extremist monks and other nationalists started protesting in Mandalay and Rangoon against the Burmese government for failing to protect the Burman ethnicity and Buddhist religion.<sup>61</sup> The protest camp in Rangoon was set up at the Shwedagon Pagoda, while the one in Mandalay was located in front of the Mahamyatmuni Pagoda, Chanmyathazi Township. Authorities requested them to remove the camps, but the monks refused to comply.<sup>62</sup> As a consequence, the Home Affairs Ministry said it would take action against the protesters.<sup>63</sup>

**2-3 Aug:** Over 30 people armed with sticks and swords entered the Muslim-majority Sakya Nwe Sin neighborhood in Mandalay. Two young Muslim men were injured, but authorities said that the incident was just a fight between “youngsters” and not sectarian. Mandalay residents said that they feared the break out of deadly communal violence.<sup>64</sup>

**5 Aug:** Police raided the Mandalay camp and arrested 6 leading monks for offending the state. An arrest warrant was pending on 2 other monks and 5 laypersons.<sup>65</sup> State Counsellor’s Office thanked the citizens who did not participate in the protests against the government.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> RFA (14 Aug 17) Myanmar Government Ministers Meet With Monks to Discuss Security in Northern Rakhine

<sup>55</sup> Myanmar Times (15 Aug 17) 20 political parties urge govt to act on Rakhine issue; DVB (15 Aug 17) Burmese parties demand tougher action against ‘terrorists’

<sup>56</sup> The Irrawaddy (15 Aug 17) USDP-Led Coalition Calls on Govt to Reject Rohingya Ethnicity

<sup>57</sup> The Irrawaddy (16 Aug 17) Govt Spokesperson Denies Establishment of People’s Militias in Rakhine

<sup>58</sup> The Irrawaddy (17 Aug 17) Govt, Military Discuss ‘Terrorist’ Label for Rakhine State Militants

<sup>59</sup> Reuters (22 Aug 17) Exclusive - Rohingya villagers blockaded amid fresh tensions in Myanmar’s Rakhine - residents

<sup>60</sup> ABNA (03 Aug 17) Myanmar closes mosque in further crackdown on Muslims

<sup>61</sup> RFA (03 Aug 17) Nationalist Monks Refuse to Dismantle Protest Camp in Myanmar’s Mandalay

<sup>62</sup> RFA (03 Aug 17) Nationalist Monks Refuse to Dismantle Protest Camp in Myanmar’s Mandalay

<sup>63</sup> RFA (04 Aug 17) Myanmar’s Home Affairs Ministry Ready to Take on Protesting Nationalist Monks

<sup>64</sup> Reuters (04 Aug 17) Buddhist nationalists raise new fears among Myanmar’s Muslims

<sup>65</sup> The Irrawaddy (06 Aug 17) Protesting Nationalist Monks Arrested in Mandalay

<sup>66</sup> DVB (07 Aug 17) Suu Kyi’s office thanks citizens for not joining monks’ protests

**9 Aug:** The Arakan National Party requested the Tatmadaw to segregate the Muslim communities in Arakan State. Its member Khin Maung Latt declared that they called for “designating No-Bengali zones” because “ethnic [Rakhine] villages are surrounded by Bengali villages”.<sup>67</sup>

**14 Aug:** Twenty Burmese political parties — including the Union Solidarity and Development Party, the National Unity Party, the National Development Party and the Democratic Party – repeated that there was no such ethnicity as “Rohingya” in Burma [see *Escalation of violence and instability*].<sup>68</sup>

**29 Aug:** Home Affairs Minister Lt Gen Kyaw Swe declared “We have already said that the Rohingya do not exist in Myanmar. There is no Rohingya among our ethnic groups. [What] we have seen are the Bengalis in this region who have tried to destroy Myanmar’s rule of law”.<sup>69</sup>

### Arakan State plans to construct Maungdaw economic zone

On 1 September, Arakan State Minister for Planning and Finance Kyaw Aye Thein announced that construction of Maungdaw economic zone would start when the current situation in the area has calmed down.<sup>70</sup> Kyaw Aye Thein said that the government has selected a parcel of land in Maungdaw Township, northern Arakan State as the proposed location for a border economic zone.<sup>71</sup> The Maungdaw economic zone is expected to host garment factories, refrigeration units for fish and produce, a fuel station, and commodity and industrial showrooms.<sup>72</sup> The Arakan regional minister clarified that the economic zone would not be designated a special economic zone (SEZ) and thus, would not be governed by the SEZ law.<sup>73</sup>

Critics remained skeptical of the proposed economic zone because of the ongoing conflict, overall insecurity and worsening human rights situation in the area.<sup>74</sup> This is the third economic zone to be publicized in the state

**THREE ECONOMIC ZONES ON CONFLICT-AFFECTED LAND**

**Maungdaw Economic Zone (announced on 1 Sep 2017):** Maungdaw Township became the launching point of government forces’ “clearance operations” on 9 October 2016. Civilians were killed, Muslim houses and mosques were burnt down, children were thrown into the burning homes, and women were raped or sexually assaulted by security forces. In June 2017, violence reignited in Maungdaw Township, killing hundreds and displacing thousands of people.

**Sittwe SEZ (to be built by India), announced in August 2016):** Designed to complement a US\$120 million deep sea port built by India, and to compete with Kyaukphyu SEZ. Sittwe has been the scene of ongoing violence since 2012: In June 2012, nearly 1,000 Rohingya homes were burned, over 100 were killed and more than 300 were wounded. In March 2014, anti-Muslim mobs violently attacked international aid agencies’ offices, destroying numerous buildings. This led police to fire over 120 warning shots, resulting in the death of an 11-year old girl, and the evacuation of over 70 aid workers.

**Kyaukphyu SEZ (announced in September 2013):** Expected to cost nearly US\$ 10 billion, the Chinese-led project is being promoted as a “mini-Singapore” in terms of facilities. Kyaukphyu was worst hit on 23-24 October 2012 when Buddhist Arakanese razed the entire Muslim quarter, destroying over 800 houses mostly belonging to Rohingya. Officials said that 64 people died as a result of the unrest, but rights groups feared the actual number of people killed could be much higher.

<sup>67</sup> The Irrawaddy (10 Aug 17) ANP Asks Army Chief to Segregate Ethnic Communities in Maungdaw

<sup>68</sup> DVB (15 Aug 17) Burmese parties demand tougher action against ‘terrorists’

<sup>69</sup> RFA (29 Aug 17) Myanmar Boosts Measures to Take on Rohingya Militants in Rakhine

<sup>70</sup> Myanmar Times (01 Sept 17) Rakhine to construct Maungdaw economic zone

<sup>71</sup> Myanmar Business Today (30 Aug 17) Maungdaw, Rakhine Slated for Special Economic Zone

<sup>72</sup> Myanmar Business Today (30 Aug 17) Maungdaw, Rakhine Slated for Special Economic Zone

<sup>73</sup> Myanmar Times (01 Sept 17) Rakhine to construct Maungdaw economic zone

<sup>74</sup> Myanmar Times (01 Sept 17) Rakhine to construct Maungdaw economic zone; Myanmar Business Today (30 Aug 17) Maungdaw, Rakhine Slated for Special Economic Zone

since anti-Rohingya violence broke out in 2012. The others are the nearly US\$ 10 billion Kyaukphyu SEZ and the SEZ India is planning to develop in Sittwe.

### **Advisory commission on Rakhine State releases final report**

The dramatic escalation of violence coincided with the delivery on 24 August of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State's final report. The report addressed some of the most urgent challenges and urged the Burmese government to consider its 88 recommendations in order to bring peace, stability and development in Arakan State.<sup>75</sup> With the presentation of its final report, the Commission fulfilled its mandate.<sup>76</sup>

The final report, which does not use the term Rohingya upon request of State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, described the inter-communal violence between Muslims and Buddhists in Arakan State as a clash of irreconcilable narratives, both communities ignoring the grievances of the other one.<sup>77</sup> The Advisory Commission's recommendations – summarized below – were substantially consistent with the measures proposed by most rights groups and activists in the past few years [see *Reports*].

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ADVISORY COMMISSION**

**Economic and social development:** Ensure resource revenue sharing, assess the impact of the SEZ on local communities and on the labor market, provide adequate compensation for land confiscation, improve women's economic and social opportunities, invest in infrastructures and services

**Citizenship:** Ensure fairness, transparency and voluntariness of citizenship verification process, implement an independent complaint mechanism, and regulate rights of non-citizens living and working in the country – review of the 1982 Citizenship Law to bring it in line with international standards and treaties.

**Freedom of movement:** Guarantee non-discrimination, equality and freedom of movement for all people in Arakan, mapping and eliminating existing barriers, as well as prohibiting such restrictions in future.

**Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs):** Guarantee decent living conditions in the camps and develop a strategy towards closing them (in line with international standards, including voluntary, safe and dignified returns or relocations, as well as prioritization of returns to places of origin).

**Humanitarian and media access:** Ensure full, fair, and equal humanitarian and media access.

**Education, health and drug issues:** Ensure equal access to education and health treatment for all communities without any discrimination, and expand the related services.

**Communal participation, representation and cohesion:** Promote the representation and participation of minorities, implement actions to support dialogue and combat hate speech, and establish an Ethnic Affairs Minister and a Women's Affairs Department at State level.

**Security sector:** Monitor and inspect the security forces' performance, develop independent and impartial accountability mechanisms for perpetrators of serious human rights violations.

**Access to justice:** Implement measures to make the judicial system respect the principles of the rule of law, including transparency, affordability, certainty of law, and accountability of judges.

**Cultural development:** Protect historical, religious and cultural sites of all communities.

**Border and regional issues:** Discuss and increase cooperation with Bangladesh, facilitate the return of refugees, brief ASEAN members and recognize their interest in the situation in Arakan.

**Implementation:** Appoint a Minister, adequately supported by a secretariat, to implement the Commission's recommendations, in consistent consultation with both key communities in the State, and in cooperation with national and international NGOs.

### **National investigation commission on violence in Maungdaw denies abuses**

The Advisory Commission's report was, however, presented in the background of another national denial of the increased human rights violations committed by the Tatmadaw against the Rohingya minority during the October 2016 clearance operations [see *October Bulletin*]. On 3 August, the 13-member national investigation commission on violence in Maungdaw held a press conference in

<sup>75</sup> DVB (24 Aug 17) Annan-led panel urges 'ambitious steps' in Arakan report

<sup>76</sup> Advisory Commission on Rakhine State (24 Aug 17) Towards a Peaceful, Fair and Prosperous Future for the People of Rakhine- Final Report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State

<sup>77</sup> Advisory Commission on Rakhine State (24 Aug 17) Towards a Peaceful, Fair and Prosperous Future for the People of Rakhine- Final Report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State

Rangoon to present the findings of its final report.<sup>78</sup> The panel said that the allegations of abuses committed by Burmese security forces had no basis, and criticized the report released by the OHCHR in February [see *February Bulletin*] for exaggerating the claims and not taking into account the violence committed by insurgents.<sup>79</sup>

Vice President and national commission chairperson Myint Swe reportedly said "[t]here is no possibility of crimes against humanity, no evidence of ethnic cleansing", and that "some people from abroad have fabricated news claiming genocide had occurred, but we haven't found any evidence".<sup>80</sup> National commission secretary Zaw Myint Pe said "[t]here has been no appearance of confirmed documents and evidence for allegations of rape. It's just accusations",<sup>81</sup> and "[w]e opened doors for them [villagers] to complain to the courts if they have evidence that they suffered human rights abuses, but no one came to open a lawsuit until now".<sup>82</sup>

Human Rights Watch (HRW) responded that "the commission's wholesale rejection of grave abuses despite considerable evidence from independent sources, coupled with the Burmese army's earlier inadequate investigation, demonstrates the urgent need for the government to allow full access to the United Nations-mandated, international fact-finding mission".<sup>83</sup> Right groups have consistently criticized the investigative method used by the national investigation commission and accused its members and/or translators of intimidating witnesses and victims, altering their accounts, and not providing them with any protection [see *March Bulletin*].<sup>84</sup>

## HUMAN RIGHTS

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### Tatmadaw arrests former child soldier for speaking out

On 18 August, the Tatmadaw arrested former child soldier Aung Ko Htway under defamation charges for telling RFA Myanmar Service about his story of abduction and forced conscription.<sup>85</sup>

During the interview, Aung Ko Htway said that in October 2005, a Tatmadaw official abducted him in Rangoon/Yangon, took him to a military market in Mingaladon, and sold him for K100,000 (US \$72) to another soldier. Aung Ko Htway and 2 other child soldiers then tried to escape but were jailed for robbing and murdering the owner of a motorcycle. Aung Ko Htway, despite claiming his innocence, was kept in a cell for 7 months with shackles on his hands and feet and was fed rice mixed with sand. Unable to withstand these conditions, he ultimately signed a document admitting his involvement in the killing. At the age of 16, Aung Ko Htway was sentenced to death.<sup>86</sup>

Aung Ko Htway was released on 15 July this year under a presidential amnesty, and immediately went back home to help his sister Nayzar Htun start a business in Kalaware village, Thanlyin Township. Despite the challenges faced by former child soldiers to get their lives back, Aung Ko Htway seemed to finally be on the right track.<sup>87</sup> Then the Tatmadaw arrested him for speaking out.<sup>88</sup>

### Parliament passes minor amendments on Telecommunications Law, retains Section 66(d)

On 29 August, President Htin Kyaw approved minor amendments to the controversial Telecommunications Law.<sup>89</sup> The amendments, passed in the Lower House of Parliament on 18 August:

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<sup>78</sup> Reuters (06 Aug 17) Myanmar rejects allegations of human rights abuses against Rohingya

<sup>79</sup> Reuters (06 Aug 17) Myanmar rejects allegations of human rights abuses against Rohingya; Nikkei Asian Review (07 Aug 17) Myanmar committee denies Rohingya atrocities

<sup>80</sup> Reuters (06 Aug 17) Myanmar rejects allegations of human rights abuses against Rohingya

<sup>81</sup> Myanmar Times (07 Aug 17) Maungdaw Commission urges government to act fast on Rakhine issue

<sup>82</sup> Reuters (06 Aug 17) Myanmar rejects allegations of human rights abuses against Rohingya

<sup>83</sup> HRW (07 Aug 17) Burma: National Commission Denies Atrocities

<sup>84</sup> HRW (07 Aug 17) Burma: National Commission Denies Atrocities

<sup>85</sup> RFA (21 Aug 17) Former Myanmar Child Soldier Arrested After Interview With RFA

<sup>86</sup> RFA (18 Aug 17) Former Myanmar Child Soldier Describes Long Struggle to Turn Life Around

<sup>87</sup> RFA (18 Aug 17) Former Myanmar Child Soldier Describes Long Struggle to Turn Life Around

<sup>88</sup> RFA (21 Aug 17) Former Myanmar Child Soldier Arrested After Interview With RFA

<sup>89</sup> DVB (31 Aug 17) Burmese president approves changes to Telecommunications Act

- reduce the maximum prison sentence from 3 to 2 years.
- allow defendants to apply for bail.
- prohibit third parties from filing charges. Only those directly affected by the action or those acting on such an affected individual's behalf can press charges under the law.

However, Section 66(d), the most contentious clause prohibiting the use of the telecommunications network to “extort, defame, disturb or intimidate”, remains in place despite calls from free speech advocates to repeal the law.<sup>90</sup> Activist Maung Saung Kha, who was jailed for 6 months for charges under the law, said that “[f]reedom of expression is still being threatened as long as clause 66(d) exists”. Rangoon/Yangon-based Telecommunications Law Research Group said that no less than 96 lawsuits had been filed under Section 66(d) by 20 August, and at least 20 journalists had been sued.<sup>91</sup>

### **Related developments:**

**4 Aug:** The Hsipaw Township Court denied bail to the 3 journalists arrested in June for covering a drug-burning event organized by the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) in Shan State [see *June Bulletin*].<sup>92</sup> A second bail request was submitted on August 11,<sup>93</sup> and denied on August 18.<sup>94</sup>

**4 Aug:** The Bahan Township Court finally released on bail of The Voice Daily editor-in-chief Kyaw Min Swe after rejected his 9 prior bail requests. He was charged under Section 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law for publishing a satirical article about the military [see *June Bulletin*].<sup>95</sup>

**10 Aug:** The Pyin Oo Lwin Township Court revoked the previously granted bail for Ko Toe Gyi and 8 other farmers and activists from Pyinsar village who were charged in August 2016 for farming their own land. Their land was confiscated in 1988 for a coffee plantation project which later failed, and was sold to private companies instead of returning it to the legitimate owners.<sup>96</sup>

**15 Aug:** The Taungoo Township Court released former student activist Aung Htet on bail due to injuries he sustained in prison. He was arrested under defamation charges for composing and singing a song critical of the military-drafted Burmese Constitution.<sup>97</sup>

**28 Aug:** Mandalay police arrested journalist Zaw Moe Htet after Aung Mai, son of Kachin State Chief Minister Khet Aung, filed a lawsuit under Section 66(d) of the Telecommunications Act. Zaw Moe Htet reportedly said in a Facebook post that Khet Aung was “the worst of all the chief ministers in Myanmar” and that his son Aung Mai was involved in the issuance of permits and land grants in Kachin State. Zaw Moe Htet later deleted the post and apologized.<sup>98</sup>

### **Ministry of Defense refuses to relocate dangerous sulfuric acid factory**

On 16 August, the Ministry of Defense rejected MP Win Thein Zaw's proposal to relocate a sulfuric acid factory in Salingyi Township, Sagaing region during a session of the Lower House of Parliament.<sup>99</sup> The factory produces sulfuric acid to supply Letpadaung and Sabetaung and Kyisintaung (S&K) copper mines. It is operated by the Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (UMEHL), which itself is owned by the Tatmadaw.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>90</sup> The Irrawaddy (24 Aug 17) Amendments to Telecoms Law Passed; Reuters (18 Aug 17) Myanmar retains tough clause in communications law despite calls for repeal

<sup>91</sup> DVB (31 Aug 17) Burmese president approves changes to Telecommunications Act

<sup>92</sup> DVB (04 Aug 17) Defendants denied bail in high-profile 'unlawful association' trial

<sup>93</sup> The Irrawaddy (11 Aug 17) Detained Journalists Reapply for Bail in Unlawful Association Trial

<sup>94</sup> The Irrawaddy (18 Aug 17) Detained Journalists Denied Second Bail Appeal in Unlawful Association Case

<sup>95</sup> RFA (04 Aug 17) Yangon Court Releases Detained Editor on Bail

<sup>96</sup> The Irrawaddy (10 Aug 17) Pyin Oo Lwin Farmers Returned to Jail

<sup>97</sup> RFA (15 Aug 17) Myanmar Court Grants Bail to Former Student Activist Charged With Defamation

<sup>98</sup> DVB (29 Aug 17) Mandalay journalist arrested under Article 66(d)

<sup>99</sup> The Irrawaddy (17 Aug 17) Defense Ministry Rejects Relocation of Sulfuric Acid Factory; Mizzima (17 Aug 17) No plan to relocate Moegyo sulfuric acid factory in Sagaing

<sup>100</sup> Amnesty International (24 Aug 17) Myanmar: Ministry of Defence's refusal to relocate military-owned acid factory threatens health of local community

MP Win Thein Zaw of Salingyi Township raised the locals' concerns over the health and environmental impact of the factory. However, Deputy Defense Minister Maj Gen Myint Nwe denied these allegations and even said that the factory contributed to national development.<sup>101</sup>

On 24 August, Amnesty International called for the relocation of the factory for causing respiratory, skin, and eye problems to residents of nearby Kankone village. The factory also damaged the crops in fields adjacent to it. Amnesty International added that the decision of the Ministry of Defense to decide on the relocation of the factory exposed a clear conflict of interest as it was not appropriate for the Defense Minister to decide the regulation of the operations of a Tatmadaw-owned company.<sup>102</sup>

## ETHNIC AFFAIRS AND CONFLICT

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### More clashes and human rights abuse reported

**5 Aug:** Renewed clashes between the Tatmadaw soldiers from 88 IB and Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) broke out in Kuktai Township, Shan State. Artillery shells landed in Maw Saung village, killing a woman. She was survived by her 4 children. Another clash between the Tatmadaw and the TNLA near Man Kyawt village, Mantong Township, broke out on the same day.<sup>103</sup>

**5 Aug:** As a response to a TNLA attack to a military convoy in Mantong Township, the Tatmadaw closed entry and exit points of the town for 5 days. The closure made it really difficult for residents to get their basic supplies, receive medical treatments, and go to work.<sup>104</sup> Civilians said that Tatmadaw soldiers were terrorizing residents through house inspections and arbitrarily arresting residents and visitors. A nurse working in a hospital in Mantong testified that the Tatmadaw arrested her husband without any evidence, beat him while he was tied up, and prohibited family visits to the detained relatives.<sup>105</sup>

**8 Aug:** Further violence between the Tatmadaw and TNLA forced over 100 people to flee Khay Khin and Man Wel villages, Namhsan Township, Shan State, and to seek shelter at the monasteries of neighboring Namtu Township. The TNLA said that 7 different clashes between Tatmadaw soldiers from 77 IB and its troops occurred that same morning.<sup>106</sup>

**13 Aug:** Fighting between the Tatmadaw soldiers from 88 IB and TNLA injured 4 civilians and force hundreds to flee Kaung Wine village, Namkham Township.<sup>107</sup>

**13 Aug:** Tatmadaw soldiers from IB 577 and Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) signatory Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army-South (RCSS/SSA-S) clashed near Wan Mong village, Mong Kung Township. The RCSS/SSA-S captured a Tatmadaw soldier but said it would return him.<sup>108</sup>

**23 Aug:** The Arakan Army (AA) attacked an outpost of the Arakan Liberation Army (ALA)—the armed wing of Arakan Liberation Party (ALP)—in Paletwa Township, Chin State, near the Burma/Myanmar-India border.<sup>109</sup> ALP secretary Saw Mya Yarzar Lin said that the recent hostilities marked an unprecedented escalation of violence between the two factions.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> The Irrawaddy (17 Aug 17) Defense Ministry Rejects Relocation of Sulfuric Acid Factory; Mizzima (17 Aug 17) No plan to relocate Moegyo sulfuric acid factory in Sagaing

<sup>102</sup> Amnesty International (24 Aug 17) Myanmar: Ministry of Defence's refusal to relocate military-owned acid factory threatens health of local community

<sup>103</sup> DVB (08 Aug 17) One civilian reportedly killed in fighting between TNLA, govt troops

<sup>104</sup> RFA (08 Aug 17) Myanmar Military Closes Off Shan State Township After Ambush by Rebel Army; RFA (10 Aug 17) Myanmar Army Reopens Shan State Township, Continues Search For Attackers

<sup>105</sup> N.M.G. (11 Aug 17) Tatmadaw arrests residents in Manton

<sup>106</sup> DVB (09 Aug 17) TNLA, Burma Army clashes in Namhsan displace over 100; RFA (09 Aug 17) Fighting in Myanmar's Shan State Forces Hundreds to Flee to Namtu Township

<sup>107</sup> DVB (14 Aug 17) Four civilians hit by shelling in TNLA-Burma Army clashes; N.M.G. (14 Aug 17) Four civilians injured as Tatmadaw, TNLA trade fire in Namkham township

<sup>108</sup> SHAN (16 Aug 17) RCSS/SSA to return detained soldier to Tatmadaw

<sup>109</sup> The Irrawaddy (23 Aug 17) Arakan Army Seizes Ceasefire Signatory's Outpost

<sup>110</sup> DVB (23 Aug 17) Arakan Liberation Party says its outpost attacked by Arakan Army

**31 Aug:** Fighting broke out between the Tatmadaw and AA in Paletwa Township, Chin State. AA spokesperson Khine Thukha said that the Tatmadaw entered their territory. The Tatmadaw said that the AA attacked a column of soldiers that was conducting “security and stability” operations in the region.<sup>111</sup>

The Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF) reported that the Tatmadaw targeted civilians in Hopong Township, Shan State, after Tatmadaw clashed with the RCSS/SSA-S on 14 July [see *July Bulletin*]. The report contained allegations of human rights abuses, including enforced disappearances, unlawful detentions, and torture [see *Reports*]. The SHRF requested the Tatmadaw to immediately release the 7 detained villagers, particularly a 12-year-old boy, and take responsibility for the actions of its troops. Shan activist Sai Hor Hseng said that “[t]he situation is the same or even worse compared to last year”.<sup>112</sup>

### **Amid the increased violence, peace talks continue**

On 11 August, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi opened the 3-day Forum for Myanmar’s Democratic Transition to discuss the transition from a military to civilian administration, from a centralized to decentralized economy, and from war to peace.<sup>113</sup> During her opening remarks, Aung San Suu Kyi emphasized that the government’s first priority is the peace process, not development, and urged people to forget the past in order to achieve national reconciliation.<sup>114</sup> Aung San Suu Kyi said that “[t]he victims of the past, those who can’t shatter the shackles of the past, have caused a lot of hindrances in the democratic transition”, and “[t]he past is only about learning lessons. The most important thing for us is the present. Think simply: What you are doing for the democratic struggle?”<sup>115</sup>

Central topic of discussion was the civilian-military relationship. Civilian representatives suggested putting the military under civilian control to solve many of the country’s problems. On the contrary, military personnel argued that the Tatmadaw could not be removed from politics because the civilian government could not solve the problems by itself.<sup>116</sup>

### **Related developments:**

**1 Aug:** Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) member Min Kyaw Zayar Oo said that the UPDJC was facing many challenges and that the NCA needed to be amended.<sup>117</sup>

**7 Aug:** Aung San Suu Kyi held a “peace talk” with villagers of Myaetinekan village, Mandalay region, and told them that “the peace process is a matter for everybody... We can maintain development only when we get peace”.<sup>118</sup>

**9-10 Aug:** The Peace Process Steering Team (PPST) – coalition of the 8 ethnic armed groups (EAG) that signed the NCA - held a meeting in Chiang Mai, Thailand, and called for the review of the misunderstandings that emerged after the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong Conference. Main concerns expressed were “lack of common understanding of the NCA provisions, vagueness regarding decision-making power and inadequate time”.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> RFA (01 Sep 17) Nearly 400 Rohingya Insurgents Killed in Rakhine Violence: Myanmar Military Chief

<sup>112</sup> SHAN (04 Aug 17) Burma Army killed, tortured civilians in Ho Pong, says Shan NGO; Karen News (09 Aug 17) Burma Army Ignores UN and NCA Conventions, Targets and Arrests Shan Civilians

<sup>113</sup> The Irrawaddy (11 Aug 17) At Political Forum, State Counselor Urges Break With the Past

<sup>114</sup> DVB (11 Aug 17) Peace process is priority, not development: Suu Kyi

<sup>115</sup> The Irrawaddy (11 Aug 17) At Political Forum, State Counselor Urges Break With the Past

<sup>116</sup> The Irrawaddy (14 Aug 17) Impossible to Remove Tatmadaw from Politics: Army Colonel

<sup>117</sup> Mon News Agency (01 Aug 17) Interview with UPDJC’s secretary group member Min Kyaw Zayar Oo

<sup>118</sup> Reuters (07 Aug 17) Suu Kyi touts peace efforts in visit to Myanmar heartland; RFA (07 Aug 17) Aung San Suu Kyi Stops in Myanmar’s Mandalay Region to Sell Peace Process

<sup>119</sup> The Irrawaddy (11 Aug 17) Peace Process Team Calls to Review NCA Misunderstandings

**10-11 Aug:** The government Peace Commission and United Nationalities Federal Council's Delegation for Political Negotiation (DPN) met in Rangoon/Yangon for its sixth round of formal talks.<sup>120</sup> Despite the high hope of reaching an agreement expressed by government representatives, the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) remained undecided on signing the NCA because only half of the 9-point proposal that must be met for its member to sign the NCA was generally agreed upon.<sup>121</sup>

**12 Aug:** The Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army-North (SSPP/SSA-N) resigned from the UNFC. The UNFC would decide how to proceed with the SSPP/SSA-N resignation during its next meeting.<sup>122</sup>

#### UNFC's 9-point proposal

1. Bilateral ceasefire agreement between the gov-military and UNFC;
2. Federal union;
3. Tripartite dialogue composition;
4. Promulgation of constitutional law based on the outcome of the peace dialogue;
5. Agreement on Military Codes of Conduct and monitoring on Terms of Reference;
6. Formation of military Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) with representatives from gov, EAOs and international figures;
7. Formation of a neutral enforcement tribunal for NCA involving domestic and international law experts;
8. Developmental projects to be tackled according to EITI, in cooperation with the public and the EAOs;
9. As soon as the points above are agreed upon, the NCA would be signed.

**14 Aug:** Kyaw Wan Sein – peace negotiator of the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K) – said that they will not sign the NCA without reaching an agreement that covers the ethnic Naga people in both Burma and India.<sup>123</sup>

**16 Aug:** The Peace Commission said it was prepared to meet with representatives of the Northern Alliance – armed coalition composed of the TNLA, KIA, AA, and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) – before the next 21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong Conference.<sup>124</sup>

**23 Aug:** The New Mon State Party (NMSP) said it would consider signing the NCA before the third session of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong Conference.<sup>125</sup>

#### Other developments:

**12 Aug:** The Tatmadaw questioned the NMSP about military parades and a gun salute it held on Mon Revolution Day in breach of a Tatmadaw's ban on holding military parades in uniform at locations other than the party's headquarters.<sup>126</sup>

**14 Aug:** Tatmadaw representatives in Parliament defended the military clearance operations carried out against the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in amber and gold mining areas of Tanai Township, Kachin State since June [see *June Bulletin*]. They argued that the Tatmadaw acted in line with the Burmese Constitution and law, protecting the resources of the country on its own initiative and stopping the "unlawful acts" of the KIA.<sup>127</sup>

## DISPLACEMENT

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### Refugees and IDPs at the Burma-Thailand border endure further distress

On 4 August, The Border Consortium (TBC) executive director Sally Thompson lamented that humanitarian funds were no longer available for Southeast Burma/Myanmar, since international donors

<sup>120</sup> The Irrawaddy (10 Aug 17) Govt, UNFC Still at Odds on Signing NCA

<sup>121</sup> The Irrawaddy (11 Aug 17) Following Talks, NCA Signing Remains on Hold for UNFC; DVB (14 Aug 17) 4 of 8 NCA points agreed at gov, ethnic bloc talks

<sup>122</sup> DVB (21 Aug 17) Shan ethnic armed group bids UNFC farewell

<sup>123</sup> The Irrawaddy (14 Aug 17) Naga Faction Signing NCA Hinges on Cross-border Agreement

<sup>124</sup> DVB (17 Aug 17) Govt eyes meeting with Northern Alliance ahead of next 21CPC

<sup>125</sup> The Irrawaddy (23 Aug 17) NMSP Eyes Signing NCA Before Third Panglong Conference

<sup>126</sup> The Irrawaddy (14 Aug 17) Myanmar Army Questions NMSP After it Defies Military Parade Ban; The Irrawaddy (07 Aug 17) Myanmar Army Bars Military Dress for Mon Revolution Day

<sup>127</sup> The Irrawaddy (15 Aug 17) Army Defends Kachin State Clearance Operations

have priorities elsewhere. However, the situation on the ground is not safe enough for the large-scale return of refugees and IDPs.<sup>128</sup>

Karen National Union (KNU) official Nay Tha Blay said that refugees and IDPs cannot return home because the Tatmadaw has not withdrawn its troops from Karen State, despite the ceasefire signed between the KNU and the government in October 2015.<sup>129</sup> Rights groups confirmed that Tatmadaw troops still remain on the land of Karen refugees and IDPs, and said that the area is also littered with land mines.<sup>130</sup>

Later in August, TBC said that the cut in international funds and aid will also apply to the 6 camps where ethnic Shan refugees and IDPs live: Loi Sam Sip, Loi Lam, Loi Kaw Wan, Loi Tai Leng, Kuang Jor, and Kuang Mone Mai. The Shan State Refugee Committee (Thai Border) said that there have been about 6,200 refugees and IDPs in 6 camps along the border since 1999. Over two-thirds of the camp residents are women and children. It added that their food aid will be totally stopped in October 2017.<sup>131</sup> Shan people requested continued humanitarian support until they can return home “in dignity and safety”. Kuang Jor IDP camp committee chairperson Sai Lin said “we cannot go back to our villages because the military offensives are ongoing. There are more Tatmadaw forces than ever before in the area”.<sup>132</sup>

### **Authorities block local aid groups from assisting IDPs in Kachin State**

On 10-11 August, following clashes between the Tatmadaw and Kachin Independence Army (KIA) [see *Ethnic Affairs and Conflict*], over 1,000 villagers fled their houses in Kasung and Zup Mai Yang villages, Mogaung Township, Kachin State. The IDPs found shelter in churches of Namti, Mogaung Township.<sup>133</sup> On 17 August, local Kamaing authorities blocked local aid groups from Hpakant from travelling to assist the IDPs in Namti. Two drivers were arrested, and a female aid volunteer was beaten by police and was hospitalized.<sup>134</sup> On 20 August, the Tatmadaw stopped the 88 Generation Peace and Open Society Group from delivering bags of rice to IDPs in Sadone, Kachin State.<sup>135</sup>

Meanwhile, IDPs, who make up 9 percent of the population in Kachin State, faced food shortages in Kachin State because of the obstruction of humanitarian aid. There are approximately 100,000 people who have been sheltering in IDP camps for up to 6 years across northern Burma since the collapse of the ceasefire agreement between the KIA and the Tatmadaw. The current aid package provides most IDPs with US\$ 0.22 a day to live on—“barely enough to purchase leaves to fry and boil in soup”.<sup>136</sup>

As of 22 August, most of the displaced villagers had returned home.<sup>137</sup>

### **Meanwhile, India plans to deport Rohingya**

On 11 August, the Indian government said it was discussing plans to deport around 40,000 Rohingya with Bangladesh and Burma.<sup>138</sup> On 12-13 August, government officials told Reuters that even refugees registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) would be deported.<sup>139</sup>

Rohingya refugees responded that they would be killed if forcibly sent back to Burma.<sup>140</sup> Rights groups said that India should abide by its international legal obligations to protect the Rohingya from

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<sup>128</sup> DVB (04 Aug 17) International aid to Karen IDP camp to end in 60 days

<sup>129</sup> DVB (04 Aug 17) International aid to Karen IDP camp to end in 60 days

<sup>130</sup> News Deeply (11 Aug 17) Karen Refugees Wary of Return to Myanmar as Despair Rises in Camps

<sup>131</sup> Karen News (31 Aug 17) Refugees from Burma Desperate as International Donors Cut Food Funding From October 2017

<sup>132</sup> DVB (31 Aug 17) Shan refugees face massive cut in international assistance

<sup>133</sup> The Irrawaddy (14 Aug 17) More Than 1,000 New IDPs Reported in Kachin State

<sup>134</sup> Kachin Women’s Association Thailand (21 Aug 17) Latest Burma Army War Crimes in Kachin State Highlight Urgent Need to End Military-to-Military Ties With Burma

<sup>135</sup> RFA (21 Aug 17) Myanmar Military Stops Aid Group From Delivering Rice to Kachin State Refugees

<sup>136</sup> Progressive Voice (23 Aug 17) Civilians Continue to be Targeted in Decades Long War in Myanmar

<sup>137</sup> The Irrawaddy (22 Aug 17) Displaced Kachin Return Home

<sup>138</sup> Reuters (11 Aug 17) India in talks with Myanmar, Bangladesh to deport 40,000 Rohingya

<sup>139</sup> Reuters (14 Aug 17) India says to deport all Rohingya regardless of U.N. registration

<sup>140</sup> Hindustan Times (15 Aug 17) If sent back forcibly, we’ll be killed: Rohingya Muslims on deportatio

widespread and systematic abuse by Burmese security forces.<sup>141</sup> The clearance operations carried out by Burmese security forces after the 25 August attacks further endangered the lives of thousands of Rohingya living in Arakan/Rakhine State, forcing them to flee to Bangladesh [see *Key Story*].

## ECONOMY

### Important developments:

**4 Aug:** Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone (SEZ) Management Committee vice-chair Dr. Oo Maung said that he expected the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between China and Burma/Myanmar relating to a national-level framework for the Kyaukphyu SEZ to take place in August. The previous plan to develop the deep sea port stipulated that China's CITIC consortium would take 85 percent, Myanmar Port Authority 5 percent, and Myanmar Kyaukphyu SEZ Holding Company (MKSHC consortium) would take 10 percent. MKSHC is now negotiating for a higher 25 percent stake so CITIC would only get 70 percent.<sup>142</sup>

**28 Aug:** Deputy Commerce Minister Aung Htoo said that Japan was conducting a master plan survey to revive the Dawei SEZ as the Burmese government encouraged the resumption of the project.<sup>143</sup>

**28 Aug:** Namsan Township MP Aung Tun said during a Shan State parliamentary session that Burmese and Chinese oil and gas firms who operate pipelines through Kyaukme District in northern Shan State must pay about 5 percent profit share to the Shan State regional government. MP Aung Tun argued that if the pipeline project impacts upon the local population, it is the Shan State government that must take care of the people. Shan State Minister for Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation Dr Nyi Nyi Aung suggested that the matter be raised at a national level in Naypyidaw because it is not the regional government's responsibility.<sup>144</sup>

## DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

### Parliamentarians criticize transparency and amount of defense budget

On 9 August, members of the Parliament pointed out that the defense budget spending under the National League for Democracy (NLD)-led government remains high and still lacks transparency.<sup>145</sup>

Lower House lawmaker Phyu Phyu Thin of Mingalar Taungnyunt also questioned the transparency of the defense budget during the discussion of the Union Attorney General Office's (UAGO) analysis report on the 2015-16 year national budget at the National Parliament. Joint Public Accounts Committee secretary Khin Cho said that the UAGO does not have the mandate to audit defense expenditures in detail.<sup>146</sup>

2017-2018 National Budget Highlights		
	Kyat trillion	% budget
Total	K 20.6	
Defense	K2.9	14.08%
Education*	K1.761	8.4%
Health	K1.077	5%
*UNESCO recommends 20% for education		

### Other important developments:

**14 Aug:** Rangoon/Yangon Chief Minister Phyo Min Thein filed a complaint with Myanmar Press Council against Reuters over an article questioning the transparency and accountability behind his regional government's deal to import buses from China. This is the second time for Minister Phyo Min Thein to file a lawsuit against Eleven Media Group's (EMG) CEO Than Htut Aung and chief editor Wai Phyo for allegedly suggesting that Phyo Min Thein was involved in corruption. [see *November 2016 Bulletin*].

<sup>141</sup> HRW (17 Aug 17) India: Don't Forcibly Return Rohingya Refugees

<sup>142</sup> Myanmar Times (07 Aug 17) MoU on Kyaukphyu SEZ likely in August

<sup>143</sup> The Irrawaddy (28 Aug 17) Japan Conducts Survey to Revive Dawei SEZ

<sup>144</sup> SHAN (29 Aug 17) Myanmar-China pipeline firms must share profits, says Shan State MP

<sup>145</sup> The Irrawaddy (09 Aug 17) Lawmakers Denounce Large Defense Budgets

<sup>146</sup> The Irrawaddy (09 Aug 17) Lawmakers Denounce Large Defense Budgets

**18 Aug:** The Anti-Corruption Commission reported that it has not received reports of graft and corruption among the National League for Democracy (NLD) ministers since the NLD took office in 2016.<sup>147</sup>

**21 Aug:** Complainant Tin Naing Win accused NLD regional lawmaker Win Naing of Arakan/Rakhine State's Thandwe Constituency of asking for a K13 million (US\$ 9,600) bribe from 3 locals in exchange for withdrawing his objection to a land deal involving 15 acres near the well-known Ngapali Beach.<sup>148</sup>

**21 Aug:** NLD complaint committee leader Dr. Myo Nyunt said that the NLD has received around 400 complaint letters in total since it assumed office in April 2016, including against 4 regional and state chief ministers. So far, the complaint committee has found 20 individuals guilty of misconduct. The complaints mostly concerned an arrogant or disdainful approach to the public, the undesirable behavior of lawmakers in dealing with their peers and the party central executive committee, and the disregard for party policies and chain of command.<sup>149</sup>

## PARLIAMENT WATCH

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### Important developments:

**24 Aug:** The Upper House of National Parliament passed a bill amending the **Telecommunications Law**. The amendments reduced the penalty for violating the law and banned third parties from filing cases under the law. However, Section 66(d) of the law remains in place despite calls for repeal from free speech advocates [see *Key Story*].

**29 Aug:** The Lower House of Parliament voted down a proposal to **create a national DNA database in an effort to aid in the citizenship verification process**. Military MP Maj Win Mun Tun said that the Tatmadaw is ready to cooperate with civilian technicians to develop genetic profiles of Burma/Myanmar's 8 major ethnic groups—Kachin, Karenni, Karen, Chin, Mon, Arakanese, Shan, and Bamar. Shan State's Pyin Oo Lwin Township MP Dr. Aung Khin said that much needs to be done to develop DNA profiles at a national level such as hiring technicians, building hi-tech labs, and developing a law in case of controversy.<sup>150</sup>

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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### Pope will visit Burma in December

The Vatican confirmed that Pope Francis would visit Burma/Myanmar from 27 November to 30 December and would stop by Rangoon/Yangon and Naypyidaw. The Vatican announced the news after Bangladeshi border guards pushed back Rohingya Muslims fleeing “the worst violence in Burma in five years” [see *Key Story*].<sup>151</sup> The Catholic Bishop's Conference of Myanmar (CBCM) reportedly suggested to Pope Francis not to use the term “Rohingya” during his visit.<sup>152</sup>

This is the first time for any pope to visit Burma.<sup>153</sup> Pope Francis would also visit Dhaka, Bangladesh from 30 November to 2 December.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> The Irrawaddy (18 Aug 17) NLD Ministers Corruption-Free, Says Commission

<sup>148</sup> The Irrawaddy (21 Aug 17) Rakhine NLD MP Accused of Bribery in Land Dispute

<sup>149</sup> The Irrawaddy (21 Aug 17) NLD Receives 400 Complaints Since Assuming Office

<sup>150</sup> The Irrawaddy (30 Aug 17) Parliament Votes Down Ethnic DNA Proposal

<sup>151</sup> Reuters (28 Aug 17) Pope to visit Myanmar, Bangladesh amid Rohingya Crisis

<sup>152</sup> UCA News (29 Aug 17) Myanmar bishops ask pope not to use Rohingya term during visit

<sup>153</sup> The Guardian (28 Aug 17) Pope Francis to visit Bangladesh and Myanmar in November

<sup>154</sup> Reuters (28 Aug 17) Pope to visit Myanmar, Bangladesh amid Rohingya Crisis

## REPORTS

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**“Atrocity Alert No. 69: Rakhine State, Myanmar, 30 August 2017”** Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect <https://goo.gl/i7C8uW>

**“Joint report on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material; and trafficking in persons, especially women and children (A/72/164) [EN/AR]”** UN General Assembly <https://goo.gl/icsjis>

**“Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (A/72/276)”** UN General Assembly <https://goo.gl/FWfCEa>

**“Security integration in Myanmar - Past experiences and future visions [EN/MY]”** Saferworld <https://goo.gl/cWxWWn>

**“Towards a Peaceful, Fair and Prosperous Future for the People of Rakhine”** Advisory Commission on Rakhine State <https://goo.gl/bgJQtC>

**“Widespread arrests, torture, disappearance of civilians under high-level Burma Army operation in Ho Pong after fighting with NCA signatory RCSS/SSA”** Shan Human Rights Foundation <https://goo.gl/BF7MCh>