

Aid workers involved with Rohingyas in Rakhine resign amid threats
By DhakaTribune
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Rakhine victims have expressed discontent with what they say is a “biased” aid effort

Aid workers in Myanmar who are working with victims of violence in the Rakhine state are being targeted by “anti-Rohingya campaigners,” a report by Myanmar Times revealed.

Activists working with international aid organisations in the conflict-hit state are being threatened on social media once attackers learn their identities.

According to the news website, a source from a big international aid organisation that is currently working in the region said the group had a large number of local members resign after messages were posted on Facebook threatening them and their family members.

“It makes me very sad the way things have developed here. When I first came here I had Rakhine friends who understood what we were doing in the camps, but now I can’t tell them anything because they don’t think we should be helping the Rohingya people,” the aid worker told Myanmar Times.

“It has been very difficult for Rakhine staff, who are picked on by the local community if they are seen to be helping Muslim people, and a lot of them have resigned because of this. It makes things very difficult.”

According to Myanmar Times, Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine, currently hosts about 80 international aid organisations following last year’s violence between Rakhine Buddhists and minority Muslim population, which killed around 200 and left homeless more than 140,000 people, most of whom are Muslims.

Rakhine victims of the conflict have expressed discontent with what they said is a “biased” aid effort, while senior figures of the community complained that international organisations focus on Rohingya issues over the Rakhine population.

Earlier this year, international medical and humanitarian aid organisation Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), also known as Doctors Without Borders, highlighted the problem of staff intimidation saying its medical teams faced “threats and hostility.”

“In pamphlets, letters and Facebook postings, MSF and others have been repeatedly accused of having a pro-Rohingya bias by some members of the Rakhine community. It is this intimidation, and not [lack of] formal permission for access, that is the primary challenge MSF faces,” Myanmar Times quoted MSF as saying.

“Our repeated explanations that MSF only seeks to provide medical aid to those who need it most is not enough to forestall the accusations.”

Though the organisation called on authorities to “do more to make it clear that threatening violence against health workers is unacceptable,” more recent reports of staff resigning from aid organisations suggest the problem had only worsened.

Contacted about the question of staff resignations amid threats and intimidation, a spokeswoman for MSF told Myanmar Times: “I can confirm that this remains an issue today, which obviously impacts our ability

to provide medical, humanitarian assistance to people who need it,” adding that while Rakhine workers were particularly vulnerable, MSF staff originally from other parts of Myanmar and now working in Rakhine have also come under attack on social media.

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