



**Genocide Emergency: Violence against the Rohingya and other Muslims in Myanmar  
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By Katelyn Nawowski**

The Rohingya are a Muslim ethnic minority of one million people that has lived in Rakhine state for centuries. But they face systematic religious and ethnic discrimination because under Myanmar's constitution, they are not classified as one of 135 legally recognized ethnic minority groups with Myanmar citizenship. Ethnic Burmese consider the Rohingya as "illegal immigrants" from Bangladesh. But Bangladesh does not recognize the Rohingya as its citizens.

Without citizenship, the Rohingya have no civil rights in Myanmar.

- The regime refuses to issue identification cards to Rohingya, which are necessary to be able to travel, as well as to obtain passports and enroll in higher education.
- They are denied land and property rights and ownership. The land on which they live can be taken away at any time.
- The Rohingya people are barred from government employment.
- Marriage restrictions are imposed on them. They are limited to two children per couple.
- They are subject to forced labor, extortion and other coercive measures.
- Public services such as health and education are neglected. Illiteracy is 80%.
- More than 40,000 Rohingya children in western Myanmar are deprived of rights to travel, to attend school, or to marry in the future, because their parents had an unauthorized marriage or exceeded the two-child limit the Myanmar government has imposed on the Rohingya. These blacklisted children are refused birth registration, and so are not included in family lists and must be hidden during the authorities' population checks.
- The Rohingya are subject to curfews and other restrictions on basic freedoms.

The Rohingya are a dehumanized and persecuted minority in Myanmar. Many attempt to flee to Bangladesh or Malaysia in rickety boats, but are not accorded the rights of refugees in those countries. Some of these boat people drown.

Among the crimes against humanity the Myanmar military regime is committing against the Rohingya are: denial of citizenship, imprisonment in displaced persons camps, murder, denial of the right to travel, denial of education rights for children, and denial of food and medicines.

During 2012, violence increased against Rohingya and other Muslims in the Rakhine State. According to the [Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting](#), the Rohingyas have become one of the most oppressed ethnic groups in the world. The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [issued a report](#) on discrimination against the Rohingya.

Miss Thidar Htwe, a Buddhist woman from Rakhine, was murdered on 28 May 2012. Government officials arrested and charged three Muslim men with the attack. [The Economist reported](#) that six days later a mob of Buddhist vigilantes stopped a bus carrying Muslim pilgrims, killing ten and raping one. Violence by Buddhists against Muslims grew. Scores of Rohingya were slaughtered. Attacks against Muslims have now spread to other areas of Myanmar. [Attacks by government forces](#) followed shortly thereafter. Mass media have incited discrimination against the Rohingya and Muslims, using derogatory terms [and twisted stories](#) when reporting on incidences.

Violence against Muslims is not just targeted against the Rohingya; Muslims living in other states have also been targets of ethnic, racial, and religiously motivated violence. [The Burmese government](#) has committed atrocities against Muslims, including mass killings and rapes, burning of Muslim villages, arrests, forced labor, and torture. Many Muslims attempt to escape to Bangladesh for sanctuary. However, in Bangladesh the Myanmar refugees face discrimination, exploitation, and deportation. In Myanmar, the Rohingya are a stateless people.

On 28 March 2013, [The New York Times reported](#) that President Thein Sein publicly declared that he would begin using force to stop religious conflict and rioting in Myanmar. This was the



president's first public comment on the issue since 40 Muslims were killed during rioting in central Myanmar the week before. About 12,000 were forced out of their homes and into refugee shelters as a direct result of that rioting, [which included burning of Muslim houses and mosques](#). This was the worst instance of violence against Muslims in the past year.

The release from house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi and lifting of restrictions on trade have given much of the world press a false sense that the Myanmar regime is liberalizing. In fact, the model it is following is China's, with firm control by the military unshaken.

On 29 March 2013, the UN's Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Myanmar, Tomás Ojea Quintana, issued a statement from Geneva in which he not only expressed the UN's concerns about the violence between Muslims and Buddhists in Myanmar, but urged the government to take "bold steps" to rectify the ongoing violence. Quintana noted the violence has been occurring since June and the government has not been doing enough to stop it.

State-supported violence against Muslims not only continues a long pattern of discrimination, but is also a warning sign that genocidal violence against Muslims, Shin, Karen, and other minorities remains rampant in Myanmar.

Genocide Watch is issuing an updated Genocide Emergency Alert for the Rakhine State of Myanmar. Genocide Watch recommends that the following actions be taken:

- Myanmar authorities should cease human rights violations against the Rohingya and other Muslims, and against other minority groups;
- The Myanmar Parliament should pass legislation that grants full citizenship to the Rohingya with all rights of citizens of Myanmar, including the right to hold land titles and travel, and other rights guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- Bangladesh should adhere to its obligations under the UN Convention on the Protection of Refugees by accepting Rohingya refugees, permitting them to settle in refugee camps until they can be repatriated with full citizenship rights in Myanmar.