

# THE SIEGE OF ARAKAN

*LOOKING INSIDE ARAKAN ARMY'S GENOCIDE  
TACTICS AGAINST ROHINGYAS*



**FINDINGS REPORT**  
May 2024 - January 2025



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*May, 2024 - January, 2025*



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## ► Executive Summary

The report's core analytical framework comprises seven principal chapters. The chapters are systematically structured to provide a comprehensive examination of diverse thematic elements central to the study's or report's inquiry. In addition to principal chapters, the report is prefaced by sections outlining its introduction and methodological framework. These preliminary components establish the research context, objectives, methodological and analytical approach pertinent for the report.

The report begins by exploring how the AA has used [spatial or geographical control as a tool of oppression](#) against the Rohingya community. It documents movement restrictions implemented through village cordons and search operations, forced blockades, checkpoints and other means. These measures have effectively turned Rohingya settlements into open-air prisons. It then examines how forced relocations and geographic segregation are deployed to fracture social cohesion and deny claims to ancestral land. Together, these controlling mechanisms form a calculated strategy of domination and displacement that supports the broader agenda of ethnic cleansing.

The AA is also known for its brutalities and atrocities that they have inflicted upon the Rohingya community. The chapter that deals with the atrocities of the Arakan army mainly analyses the brutalities and agendas of the AA. It provides a critical analysis and systematically examines various forms of violence, including the siege of villages and targeted aerial attacks, by using victim testimonies.

One of the most severe consequences for the Rohingya community is the breakdown of their families, as they are forced to live away from their homeland. Therefore, a significant chapter in the report focuses specifically on this issue. This chapter examines the shattered lives of Rohingya people who were forced to flee their homes. Based on interviews with displaced individuals in Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Thailand, it details the severe impacts of violence and being uprooted. The accounts consistently show that increasing oppression and brutality from the AA left the community with no other option but to escape. The chapter that deals with the

‘fragmented lives and forced displacement’ documents or analyses how this crisis has led to profound family breakdown and displacement.

Sexual violence has emerged as a pervasive and deliberate tool of terror used by the [AA against Rohingya women and girls](#). Survivors of sexual harassment or raped victims recount traumatising experiences of mass rape and other forms of sexual abuse. Testimonies reveal that the horrendous acts were usually committed in front of family members to maximize psychological trauma and humiliation. These accounts highlight the gendered dimension of the atrocities, revealing how sexual violence has been weaponized to inflict lasting harm on individuals and the community, that eventually destroy the social fabric of Rohingya communities.

The AA has continuously carried out multiple operations and atrocities that have resulted in the widespread destruction of Rohingya villages through [arson, looting, and targeted violence](#). These attacks force thousands of people to flee, leaving them without shelter, food, or access to basic necessities. The systematic nature of these assaults reveals that the militant ethnic group is entirely interested in total annihilation of the community. Such an ideology along with brutal attacks takes the humanitarian crisis into a different level in the state of Rakhine.

The AA has also engaged in the [abduction and forced conscription](#) of Rohingya men and boys, often under the guise of investigation or interrogation. Most of the testimonies reveal that the victims are generally taken from their homes and are either forced into military labor or deployed as human shields. These practices have torn families apart, leaving loved ones without information on the fate of those taken, and contributing to a climate of fear, grief, and uncertainty that continues to destabilize Rohingya society.

The last chapter examines how the AA employs sophisticated propaganda to whitewash its systematic violence against Rohingya communities. Through an analysis of tweets by the AA’s Twan Mrat Naing (commander in chief of the AA), the report reveals the deliberate strategy of the group to deny abuses or atrocities that they have been accused of.

This report draws on survivor testimonies, eyewitness accounts, and ground investigations to present a detailed account of the AA’s crimes. It underscores the urgent need for accountability

and international intervention to address the gross human rights violations and prevent further atrocities against the Rohingya community.

## ► Introduction

On May 26, 2025, the [Arakan Army \(AA\) fighters reportedly killed](#) Brigadier General Kyaw Myo Aung, a Division 11 strategist, along with an army captain during clashes near Pyaing Si Kay village on the Kyaukphyu-Ramree road, where the AA had seized several junta positions defending a police battalion headquarters. The fighting still continues in Kyaukphyu, with the military using airpower, naval vessels, and ground troops in a race to hold the town. As of early 2025, the AA had gained control over the majority of Rakhine State, excluding only the capital city Sittwe, the port city Kyaukpyu and the island of Manuang. By December 2024, reports indicated the AA controlled [14 of 17](#) townships in Rakhine including all bordering Bangladesh and Paletwa Township in Chin State. Following the takeover of the towns, the AA is accused of committing atrocities on the civilians particularly the Ronhigyas. Md Zubair, chairman of Arakan Rohingya Society for Peace and Human Rights, said, Arakan [Army is carrying out atrocities against the Rohingyas living in Rakhine State](#). Yanghee Lee, former UN special rapporteur on Myanmar, told [Al Jazeera](#) that there are authentic reports that indicate the AA has been targeting Rohingya civilians. While she emphasized that Myanmar's military has been the ‘main perpetrator’ of the violence over the community, from 2024 there has been an apparent shift in which the AA is also responsible for abuses.

On December 20, 2024, the AA claimed to have overrun the Western Military Command in Ann Township, where clashes with junta forces were still ongoing in 2025. In [January this year](#), the AA intensified operations near Sittwe, Kyaukphyu, and Manaung in which they exchanged artillery fire with junta troops. With the AA seizing control of the majority of the Rakhine State, our report highlights the atrocities committed against the Rohingya community. In view of these atrocities, this report documents crimes committed between April 2024 and January 2025. It highlights systematic human rights violations including the destruction of villages, sexual violence, forced conscription, and mass killings.

Myanmar's persecution of the Rohingya is a long-standing issue, not a recent or isolated one, stemming from decades of systematic discrimination, state-sponsored marginalization, and planned violence. For centuries, the Rohingya Muslim minority (also testified by our testimonies of the respondents) has called Rakhine State home, yet the Myanmar state has worked against their existence. Following Myanmar's independence from British colonial rule in 1948, the newly formed civilian government initially recognized the Rohingya as equal citizens through the 1948 Citizenship Act. However, this brief window of legal recognition got immediately closed with the rise of [military rule](#). From 1962 to 2010, the military junta imposed a repressive regime that gradually stripped the Rohingya of their rights and identity. They were denied citizenship, excluded from state institutions, and subjected to arbitrary arrest, and forced labor. The Rohingya were increasingly marginalized due to indifferent laws. The turning point came in 1982, when General Ne Win's military regime passed a new citizenship law that redefined nationality on the basis of race and ethnicity. The law omitted the Rohingya from the list of '[135 recognized national races](#)' effectively rendering them stateless in their own homeland.

This act of legal disenfranchisement laid the foundation for further marginalization. The Rohingya were now officially labeled as "foreigners" or "Bengali immigrants," despite their claims that they have deep historical and cultural ties to Arakan. General Ne Win justified the law by claiming, "[the foreigners who had settled in Burma at the time of independence have become a problem, so we made this law to solve the problem.](#)" The law institutionalized their exclusion and enabled security forces to terrorize the community under the guise of citizenship verification campaigns. Rohingya identity documents were altered or revoked, and the government ceased to recognize the term "Rohingya," replacing it with "Bengali."

In 2015, the Myanmar government took further steps to deny the community's existence by invalidating temporary identity cards (temporary white cards) held by Rohingya and introducing the [National Verification Card \(NVC\) system](#). Under this system, individuals were forced to register as foreigners to receive basic recognition. This policy further reinforced their statelessness and made them prime targets for discrimination and violence. In the same year, the [voting rights](#) of the community were also taken away.

Alongside legal exclusion, state institutions and extremist religious-nationalist forces fueled animosity against the Rohingya. Buddhist [ultra-nationalist](#) organizations like Ma Ba Tha (969), led by hate-mongering monk [Ashin Wirathu](#), propagated the false narrative that the growing Muslim population posed a threat to Myanmar's Buddhist identity. This ideology fed into state policy and social attitudes, consolidating a climate of fear and hate.

A particularly violent wave of persecution began in 2012 following the lynching of twelve Tablighi Jamaat members traveling from Sittwe to Rangoon. Following this riot, more than 120,000 Rohingyas were internally displaced in Sittwe, Rakhine State, and thousands more were forced to flee from the country due to the targeted illegal arrest by the Military. The incident was also manipulated by radical Buddhist groups and the state to justify widespread violence against the Rohingya. Military and police forces, supported by local mobs, unleashed brutal crackdowns that included mass killings, the burning of villages, and the rape of Rohingya women and girls. These events marked the beginning of a decade-long escalation of state-sanctioned atrocities.

The military carried out systematic campaigns of violence in Rakhine State during 2012-2017, resulting in the [2017](#) genocide. That year, hundreds of villages were decimated, thousands killed, and over 700,000 Rohingya escaped to neighboring Bangladesh in a historically large forced displacement. The extent of the damage and violence came to light through survivor reports, satellite photos, and inquiries from international bodies, notably the UN and Human Rights Watch. The UN described the 2017 genocide of the Rohingya community as a [“textbook example of ethnic cleansing.”](#) Even after highlighting the genocide of the helpless community, still the persecution did not end with the forced exodus of 2017. In the subsequent years and particularly in between 2018 and 2023, the Rohingya continued to face movement restrictions, denial of education, confiscation of land, and arbitrary detention in both Rakhine State and refugee camps. The resurgence of the AA and its ongoing conflict with the Myanmar military has introduced a new phase of violence, with the Rohingya once again caught in the crossfire. However, recent evidence suggests that the AA has not only mirrored the military's repressive tactics but has also initiated its own campaigns of targeted violence.

From 2019 onwards, the AA increased its operations against the Myanmar military, adding more violence and contributing to further human rights abuses. This increased the suffering of the

community, as they became fresh victims of escalating conflicts in the region. The AA, as reflected in the views of its leader (who is also commander in chief of the AA), Twan Mrat Naing, promulgates the idea of establishing an autonomous federal Rakhine State governed by the indigenous ethnic Rakhine people. In 2017, he made an emotional appeal for freedom and sovereignty for its own ethnic community. In his appeal to people, he stated that the freedom of the land of the Arakan is deeply enshrined in the hearts of all Arakanese. He proclaimed, "[Every Arakanese carries a dream in their hearts that one day they will become free citizens of our fatherland. The land of Arakan belongs to us.](#)" In theory, this doctrine is also supported by a belief called 'way of Rakhita' that envisages [unity among various ethnic groups](#) to fulfill this dream. However, in reality, this so-called inclusive doctrine that allows people of Rakhine to fight irrespective of one's ethnicity and religious identity completely fails to integrate the Rohingya ethnic minority of the region. It is extremely important to mention that, irrespective of huge claims, the group in its operations against the Myanmar military has also inflicted tremendous atrocities on the ethnic Rohingyas. The [AA](#) have burnt down the entire neighborhood of Rohingya community in Buthidaung and Maungdaw township and have displaced hundred of thousands of Rohingya community from their ancestral lands and have severely restricted the movement of the Rohingya community from one village to another village, started money extortion in the name of taxes and seizing people produce especially from the farmers. The AA have disconnected the Rohingya community from the rest of the world living in Rakhine State, Myanmar by confiscating the Bangladeshi sim used by the Rohingya community to communicate with their relatives abroad. The AA further confiscated the land of the Rohingya community including the cemetery used by Rohingya for generations to bury their dead bodies.

The AA, very similar to the Myanmar military's approach, rejects the Rohingyas as ethnic minorities in Myanmar and treats the community as Bengalis and outsiders. On the one hand, we see that the AA proposes that the oppression of [Arakan's minority groups](#) and discrimination based on religion and race are unacceptable and will not be tolerated, however, the very same group has also perpetrated unimaginable violence on an ethnic minority community. From 2019-2024, the clashes between the AA and Myanmar's military killed countless and displaced thousands of their families. For instance, during intensified fighting in northern Rakhine, the community faced immense threats from the group that forced them to vacate from townships like

Buthidaung and Maungdaw. The community in these two towns, along with their surrounding villages, faced severe atrocities from April 2024 onwards, including killings, the burning of property, and sexual violence, such as gang rape, abduction and forced conscription of Rohingya youths to use them as human shields in the fight with Military Junta and force labor. Rohingya communities are often accused of having association with Military and Rohingya resistant groups and brutally murder them.

In 2024, the Rohingya experienced yet another [wave of brutality](#) at the hands of AA. Systematic attacks on villages in [Buthidaung](#) and [Maungdaw](#) Townships, mass killings, arson, forced displacement, property takeover and the destruction of religious and cultural sites once again devastated the community. Testimonies collected from survivors recount how entire towns were encircled, bombarded, and burned, with mosques, schools, and hospitals set on fire. Families were torn apart, livelihoods destroyed, and survivors rendered homeless and stateless once more.

This report draws upon detailed survivor testimonies from the 2024 atrocities, situating them within the broader historical context of persecution of the Rohingya. It illustrates how decades of legal disenfranchisement, state-led hate propaganda, and military repression have converged into a sustained and evolving genocidal campaign, one aimed at eliminating the Rohingya from their ancestral homeland, erasing their historical presence, and denying them a future. Focusing on the most recent wave of violence, the report chronicles specific experiences of Rohingya survivors from Rakhine State in 2024. These accounts reveal the objectives of the AA and place their actions within a broader agenda of ethno-religious cleansing. The testimonies expose how the AA's brutal campaign is driven by both ideological motives, seeking to eradicate Muslim identity, and material ambitions, including territorial control and the exploitation of strategic and economic resources. Through targeted violence in Maungdaw Buthidaung and many other townships, the AA seeks to displace the Rohingya population and reconfigure the region into a Buddhist-majority stronghold under its own dominance.

## ► Methodology

The evident inability of human rights organizations and the media to access Rakhine State, especially Buthidaung and Maungdaw townships, poses a great challenge in documenting abuses of the AA. It has plunged the towns into complete darkness imposing all the necessary restrictions, and preventing the dissemination of information. Given the situation, it is incredibly difficult to travel to the region and then write a precise account of the AA human rights violations against the Rohingya community. In such a scenario, the sole source of information regarding human rights violations, community crimes, and widespread abuse is the testimony of victims fleeing the violence. Irrespective of all the challenges, we did our best to document the atrocities by primarily relying on the eyewitness accounts, experiences, and testimonies of the victim survivors.

The research for this report was conducted over a period of months between November 2024 and January 2025. All these testimonies, collected for the report, form a core source for documenting the AA's abuses. To collect these testimonies, a remote data collection strategy was employed, including online interviews and phone conversations conducted across countries like Bangladesh, Myanmar, Malaysia, and Thailand. A total of 48 interviews between the age groups 15-58 were carried out, focusing on various human rights violations such as sexual violence, property destruction, physical abuses, tortures, killings, displacement, and disintegration of families, etc, and other forms of abuse. Five Rohingya refugee civilians were interviewed for sexual atrocities from refugee camps in Bangladesh. Interviews in Bangladesh were conducted in person by our Rohingya Human Rights Initiative (ROHRIngya) ground staff. Due to the restrictions in Rakhine State, interviews were conducted over the phone.

The majority of the testimonies used in this report were also collected through a combination of phone interviews and digital data collection using KoboToolbox. A structured set of questions was designed under multiple thematic categories to ensure consistency, depth, and analytical relevance across interviews. These questionnaires were programmed into the Kobo platform,

allowing for systematic data entry and secure storage. The interviews were conducted in Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh by trained field staff operating under the close supervision of a senior researcher and with the support of an experienced team from the organization. This mixed-method approach ensured both methodological rigor and contextual sensitivity in documenting survivors' experiences.

The questions posed to the interviewees were open-ended to avoid leading them to any particular conclusions. Victims interviewed for this report were interviewed in Rohingya language and informed of the purpose of the interview. These interviews were then translated and transcribed into English by the Rohingya Human Rights Initiative (R4R-ROHRIngya) staff familiar with both languages. From there onwards, the authors of the report engaged with the collected testimonies and started doing contextual analysis keeping in view the considerations of theme and outline of the report.

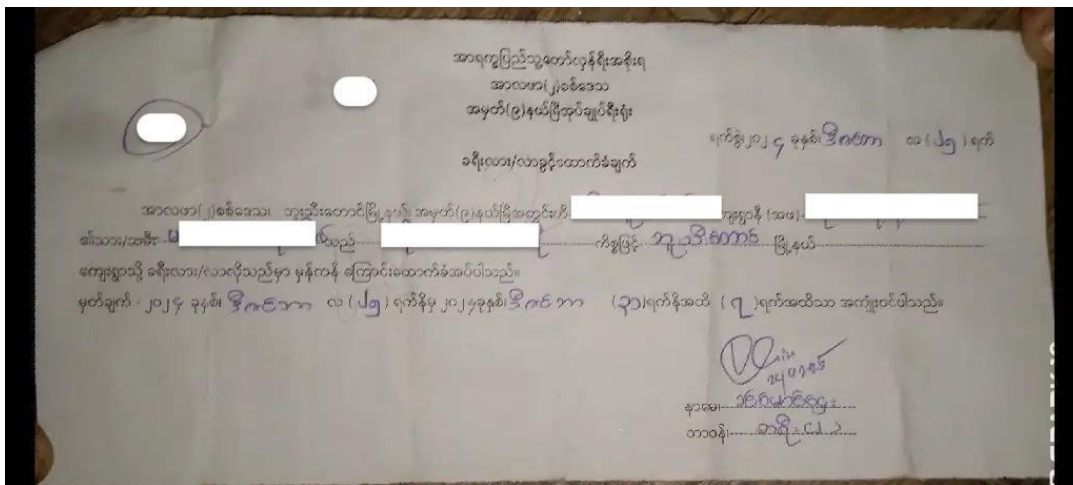
Given the heightened surveillance and precarity surrounding the Rohingya community, the privacy and safety of participants were of paramount concern throughout the data collection process. All interviews were conducted with strict adherence to confidentiality protocols in which no identifying information, including specific residential locations, was recorded. Ethnic, religious, gender identities, and broader geographical references were noted solely for the purpose of thematic and analytical interpretation. The research adhered to the principles of the "Do No Harm" framework, ensuring that participant selection and fieldwork were undertaken with the utmost caution and ethical responsibility. Every aspect of the interview process from the structuring of questions to the use of language, tone, and body language was sensitively calibrated.

In light of widespread fears around illegality, detention, and deportation (particularly from India), written consent was deliberately avoided. Instead, verbal informed consent was sought, with participants being clearly told about the study's purpose and their right to withdraw at any point. A number of participants expressed a willingness to share their stories, often motivated by the trust they placed in our organization's director, a prominent Rohingya activist widely respected within and outside the community whose involvement proved instrumental in building rapport and securing participation. The research team also took care not to interrupt participant's

livelihoods or schedules, fixing interviews flexibly in accordance with their availability. In addition to direct testimonies, the study integrates insights from extended engagement with professionals working on issues of human rights, forced migration, refugee rights, and statelessness, particularly in the Indian context. These conversations provided valuable perspectives on the Rohingya refugee experience across different geographies.

## ► Enforced Prohibitions: Geographical Control, Movement Restrictions & Confinement Of Rohingya

Rohingya testimonies consistently highlight movement restrictions as an important means of control and domination. This methodology of taking up total control originally emanated under the military regime, but was intensified by the [AA after it assumed control](#) of most parts of the Rakhine. The recent frequent clashes (from 2024 onwards) between the AA and the military junta have further worsened the Rohingya community's situation. Psychological warfare and other means of artillery attacks often target or inadvertently affect them, pushing the community into a state of constant fear and vulnerability. Despite being caught in the crossfire, the Rohingya community receives little to [no protection or support, exacerbating their already dire conditions](#). Taking up places in attacks opened up an opportunity for the AA to impose geographical control. The group resorted to old tactics initiated by the military regime, which included isolating the community from reaching out to places of their choice by imposing severe restrictions. Even under the military regime, they were not easily allowed to travel to places without a *Tokenza* (travel authorization letter) and other mandatory documents.



**Image 1.** An image of the Tok ken zar in the Burmese language issued in 2024, used as a motorcycle transportation permit. For privacy and safety reasons, the owner's personal details have been redacted. (Image Credit: R4R)

Interviewees stated that the villagers stuck under the AA are still not allowed to move freely between villages. This is something that has been also suggested by reports [that the Arakan Army is also maintaining strict curfews and movement restrictions on Rohingya villages across northern Rakhine State](#). The villagers often face verbal or physical abuse if they ask or request permission to travel. This practice is similar to that which was imposed by the Tatmadaw to control the movement of Rohingyas. An interviewee described how the AA's travel permission document, locally known as '*Tokenza*', is needed to cross the checkpoints on the way. Along the way, villagers can still face interrogation regarding the location and duration of their travel, despite possession of a *tokenza*. Even villagers who manage to acquire such travel passes remain unsafe. An interviewee who was taking refuge in Sein Nyein Pyar village since May 2024 travelled to a neighbouring ward with a valid *Tokenza* from the AA. However, while returning, he was abducted by the AA.

## → Constrained or Controlled Lives

Witnesses from Maugdaw, Buthidaung and Rathedaung townships of the Rakhine State recount a disturbing confined life. This became possible after the areas were taken over by the AA from the military regime. It has been reported that they also enforced curfews, checkpoints, and prohibitive permit systems on the community. In addition to this mandatory pass system, one account from our testimonies revealed that the group imposes strict curfew measures at night, starting from 6 pm to 6 am. Even individuals holding valid passes are required to arrive at and depart from the village within the designated time frame. These restrictions severely limit residents' ability to move freely. As a result, the residents of the villagers are confined into their homes once the curfew is in effect. The testimony also revealed that while staying in a village, the forces of the group carried out raids to investigate villagers' links to the Tatmadaw or the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). False accusations are reportedly made during these raids, resulting in often fabricated claims of the victim's links to the military and ARSA. This often leads to ["arrest" or abduction by the AA](#).

In a [project update](#) made on 27 June 2024, the Médecins Sans Frontières announced that it had been forced to suspend all medical activities in northern Rakhine State due to the “extreme escalation of conflict, indiscriminate violence, and severe restrictions on humanitarian access,” leaving people “with zero access to healthcare in the face of huge needs” and contributing to the “total decimation of the healthcare system.” Both Buthidaung and Maungdaw hospitals were shut down. A report demonstrated that lack of access to medical care has caused [growing malnutrition](#), waterborne diseases, and preventable deaths, including of children due to treatable diarrhea and of pregnant women. MSF reported, “All communities are without proper primary and secondary healthcare, and our teams observed pregnant women and unborn babies losing their lives due to the lack of healthcare.” The evidence, as revealed by the testimonies, showed that taking sick individuals to hospitals was impossible, even in emergencies. They are denied travel passes and humiliated. Movement restrictions also exclude communities from social or economic activities. Because they can’t move freely, the community is vulnerable, and their lives are only about surviving. While the military junta is the primary force behind the long-standing oppression of the Rohingya, the AA has also contributed to their suffering. The respondents testified in their accounts that although the AA does not directly control Sittwe, they have taken strategic positions surrounding the town, effectively trapping civilians inside. Those who are stuck inside the city could hardly travel outside for essential livelihoods such as fishing and forestry. This heavily leads to economic deprivation of the community.

Ekram (Name Changed) explicitly mentions in his testimony that the ‘militant’ group imposes severe movement restrictions on the Rohingya in the areas under its control. It has established numerous checkpoints in its recently conquered areas. They also enforce strict curfews and prohibit travel between villages without special permission. He further asserts that the group claims that such restrictions are necessary for security reasons, however, in reality, they serve to isolate and oppress the Rohingya population. By imposing movement control, the survivor testifies they strengthen its control over Rohingya communities and prevents them from seeking assistance or communicating with the outside world. Additionally, these restrictions provide opportunities for them to engage in systematic extortion, forcing Rohingya to pay bribes at checkpoints or risk arrest and punishment. Ekram asserts that the group did not initiate these movement restrictions. They were originally implemented by the military regime to isolate and

control the Rohingya. Such restrictions deprive them of rights, services, and economic stability. However, after the AA gained control over parts of northern Rakhine in 2024, it continued and even intensified these restrictions. They use these measures to tighten its control over Rohingya communities, block their access to humanitarian aid and external communication, and exploit them through forced payments at checkpoints.

In the last week of December 2024, a coalition of 28 organizations issued a unified statement in which they appealed to the AA and its political wing, United League of Arakan (ULA), for [‘peaceful coexistence, inclusive governance, and equal rights in Rakhine State.’](#) The statement urged them to recognize the Rohingya as [‘equal stakeholders and to end human rights abuses, including forced displacement and extrajudicial killings.’](#) However, statements like this are short lived on seeing and knowing the persecution of the community at the hands of the armed ethnic group. [Reports](#) that surface online and testimonies from survivors reveal an oppressed life of the community under the AA. For instance, Saber Ahmed from Gualla Del Sittwe who is a refugee in Batua, Malaysia states that, “As a Rohingya from Sittwe, I have personally experienced the severe restrictions imposed by both the military junta and the AA, both of whom continue to oppress our daily lives. The Rohingya community is systematically denied the fundamental right to free movement. We are not permitted to travel freely, even between villages, and any attempt to do so results in detention or heavy fines.”

These restrictions extend to essential services such as healthcare and education. Rohingya individuals are often denied medical treatment at major hospitals in the city, where discrimination by Buddhist doctors is a common occurrence. “Similarly, our children are systematically barred from attending schools, preventing access to basic education and perpetuating the cycle of marginalization.” He further asserts that the situation has worsened since the 2012 communal violence. “My family, like many others, was forcibly displaced by the government and relocated to an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp. Life in these camps is marred by extreme hardship, with movement strictly limited. And it makes it impossible to seek employment or basic necessities.” Mohammad Halad also asserts that, “We are not allowed to move freely. Our movement is strictly restricted by both the AA and the Myanmar junta. When we were forcibly displaced by the AA, during their frequent onslaughts, we were not allowed to take the main roads. Instead, we were forced to take dangerous routes, which made our journey extremely

difficult. These paths were filled with landmines set up by the Myanmar junta, putting our lives at constant risk. The group imposes movement restrictions on us. The reason behind this is religious discrimination, as we are Muslims. They treat us differently and unjustly simply because of our faith, making it clear that these restrictions are targeted and deliberate.” The AA is responsible for imposing movement restrictions on Rohingyas in Maungdaw, Buthidaung, and other areas under its control. The restrictions they enforce are intentional and serve as a means to suppress and isolate our community. By imposing all these kinds of restrictions the Arakan Army deliberately creates an environment where the Rohingya community is forced to leave the country on their own often by paying huge amounts of money to the Arakan Army and the agents and often the Rohingya girls and women are often subjected to sexual violence on their journey while fleeing from the persecution.

Shamshudin (name changed) emphasizes on his religious identity when he contends that the group imposes movement restrictions on Rohingyas because of their ethnicity and religion. As Muslims, the community faces systemic discrimination and is treated as outsiders in their own homeland. The Rohingya people’s [Muslim identity](#) is central to their marginalization, as they face widespread denial of basic rights and [severe restrictions](#) on movement. They, as Shamshudin (name changed) interprets it, enforce these restrictions as part of a broader strategy to control and oppress the community. “By limiting our access to food, healthcare, and education, they aim to weaken us and make life unbearable.” He echoes his voice with so many other testimonies by narrating that the AA did not initiate these movement restrictions; instead, the Myanmar military had already imposed strict travel limitations on the Rohingya community long before the former’s involvement. Through policies such as the [1982 Citizenship Law](#), the government systematically denied us basic rights, including citizenship and freedom of movement. However, “the AA has continued and intensified these restrictions, targeting Rohingyas due to our ethnicity and religion. Their actions have only worsened our suffering, making life even more difficult for us.”

### Shamshudin's Testimony

Shamshudin<sup>1</sup> narrates his personal encounter when he was personally denied the right to travel 2024. When I tried to go from my village, Kelaidaung (Khi lai Daung), to Maungdaw city, I was stopped by the military at a checkpoint. They took money from me as a bribe to allow me to continue my journey. However, later on the road, I was stopped again by an AA checkpoint, where I was arrested and severely beaten. They refused to let me continue to Maungdaw and forced me to return to my village. This experience left me terrified and made me realize how deeply restricted our movement is. I have personally witnessed abuse and harassment caused by these restrictions. Rohingyas who attempt to travel between villages without permission are often stopped at checkpoints and subjected to verbal abuse, physical harassment, and extortion. In some cases, individuals are detained or severely beaten for simply trying to reach a hospital or buy food. I remember one particular case where a man from our community was brutally beaten because he tried to go to another village to buy medicine for his sick child. These acts of violence instill fear in our community and further isolate us, making life even more difficult.

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<sup>1</sup> Names of participants here after are all changed for safety purposes.

## → Control Through Intimidation and Surveillance

[Post-attack of May 2024](#), villages in the Maungdaw district fell under AA control, where residents, as reported by our interviewees in their testimonies, were subjected to surveillance, intimidation, and extortion. It is an established fact that the AA's control over the region allowed them to monitor and restrict the movements of the community. Reports indicated that the AA closely monitored the activities in which they suggested security concerns due to the presence of rival groups like the [Rohingya Solidarity Organisation \(RSO\) and the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army \(ARSA\)](#).<sup>7</sup> Eyewitness accounts, as we have heard from the victims interviewed, highlighted the AA's use of drones for surveillance, which preceded several [attacks on civilian populations](#). As described by Noor Mohammad, this pattern of surveillance followed by attacks instilled a climate of fear and uncertainty among the local population. Throughout the conflict, Mohammad Shorif had multiple encounters with both the AA and the Myanmar junta military. These interactions were primarily characterized by fear and intimidation. The Myanmar military frequently interrogated him and other villagers, accusing them of supporting rival rebel groups. They demanded information about their activities, often under threats of violence, torture, or death. Failure to comply meant brutal consequences. Human rights monitors warn that the AA's actions could be part of a broader campaign to establish authority over the Rohingya populations through [intimidation and administrative control](#).

The AA inflicted direct violence and threats on Mohammad Shorif's family. The AA frequently demanded food, supplies, and recruits, threatening violence if their demands were not met. His younger brothers were nearly forced into joining the group and were beaten when they refused. Other villagers who resisted faced physical assault or worse. Mohammad Shorif witnessed people being burned alive in their homes, while others were shot indiscriminately.

The conflict has severely impacted the Rohingya people's ability to access essential resources, including food, shelter, and healthcare. Before the violence intensified, the community had limited access to food and medicine. However, after the conflict escalated, the situation worsened significantly. Authorities (including both, initially the local administration of the Myanmar regime and now the AA) imposed strict curfews, preventing Rohingya shopkeepers from opening their businesses or accessing markets. As Nur Hakim (Name Changed) explained, "After the

violence of 2024, the AA imposed curfews, making it impossible for those who are stuck in the town to open shops or access the market. This left them struggling to manage their daily food and medical needs. On various occasions, they could be seen looting shops of the community and then selling the stolen goods back to them at double prices.” The systematic control over their movement, finances, and daily survival highlights the broader strategy of asserting control and dominance.

## → Impact of Movement Restrictions on Access to Basic Services

The testimonies emphasize that movement restrictions are barriers that dictate every aspect of daily life, making even basic survival a challenge. The inability to move freely isolates the community, depriving them of opportunities to improve their living conditions or escape persecution, particularly those trapped inside. Survivors describe how the inability to move freely has direct and devastating consequences on access to livelihood, education, and healthcare. The respondent recounts being personally prevented from pursuing an education, which has left them with limited opportunities for personal and professional growth. The broader implication of this restriction is the deliberate exclusion of an entire community from economic and social mobility, ensuring their continued marginalization. Access to healthcare is also heavily restricted. Rohingya individuals are often refused treatment at major hospitals in urban areas. Even in medical emergencies, those who do receive care face discrimination from medical staff. This systemic denial of healthcare services increases preventable deaths and suffering within the community. Furthermore, the ongoing conflict between the military junta and the AA has exposed the Rohingya to further violence, displacement, and loss of life. The combination of these restrictions enforces a cycle of oppression, depriving the community of basic freedoms and forcing them into a state of constant insecurity.

For instance, Salamat Ulla provides a firsthand account of being denied the freedom to travel, which directly impacted his ability to seek education and employment. Traditional means of survival, such as fishing, farming, and trade, have been rendered inaccessible, pushing the community into extreme poverty. These restrictions not only prevent individual advancement but

also perpetuate a broader system of socio-economic exclusion that keeps the Rohingya in a state of dependency and vulnerability. In the words of Salamat Ulla, who describes restrictions through his own experience, “Due to these restrictions, Rohingyas, including myself, face numerous challenges in daily life. The inability to travel freely means we are cut off from education, preventing us from building a better future. I was personally denied my right to education, leaving me with limited opportunities for personal and professional growth. Restrictions on movement also make it impossible to seek work in other cities. Such enforced restrictions lead to economic hardship and extreme dependence on aid. Additionally, discrimination at the hands of the military junta and the AA further isolates and oppresses us, making survival a daily struggle. These challenges not only limit our basic rights but also trap us in a cycle of poverty, fear, and uncertainty.”

Ekram (Name Changed) also testifies that restrictions not only limit their freedom but also deny them access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and markets. Any attempt to travel without official permission exposes them to extortion, harassment, and the risk of arbitrary arrests. As a result, many Rohingya are forced to take dangerous and illegal routes, which puts their lives at risk and increases their vulnerability to exploitation. “When I lived in Myanmar, restrictions on my movement severely affected my access to basic services such as healthcare, education, and livelihood opportunities. I was not allowed to travel freely, which meant I could not reach medical facilities when needed. As a result, I often went without proper medical care, and many in my community suffered from preventable illnesses due to a lack of treatment. Education was also largely inaccessible to me. Due to these restrictions, I was unable to attend school regularly, which left me uneducated and with very limited opportunities to improve my future.” This lack of access to education and basic amenities did not just affect only Eman rather it has been a widespread issue for the majority of the community. Even now, as a refugee in Bangladesh, “I continue to face similar challenges. Access to education, healthcare, and stable employment remains uncertain, leaving me and many others struggling daily to survive and support our families.” Mohammad Halad also admits that the movement restrictions violate our basic human rights. “They prevent us from accessing essential services such as healthcare, education, and livelihood opportunities. Because of these limitations, we struggle to meet even our most fundamental needs. Many people are unable to reach hospitals when they are sick,

children are deprived of education, and families cannot seek employment or food, leading to severe hardships and suffering. These restrictions have led to tragic deaths within our community. The AA is fully aware that the roads they force us to take are mined, yet they still insist on making us use them. This has resulted in unnecessary suffering and loss of life. Our ability to seek safety and security is completely undermined by these brutal restrictions.” Shamshudin (name changed) believes that the movement restrictions have had devastating consequences on our daily lives. The Rohingyas, who are trapped inside, are unable to travel freely and are cut off from marketplaces where they could earn a livelihood. This has led to extreme poverty and food shortages in the community. Education is also severely impacted, as children cannot attend schools outside their villages, depriving them of learning opportunities and a better future. Access to healthcare is another major challenge. Many of them can’t reach clinics or hospitals, resulting in untreated illnesses and preventable deaths. These restrictions have isolated them completely, forcing them to live in fear and uncertainty every day. In his testimony, he strongly felt, “one of the biggest difficulties I face was accessing healthcare if I or a family member falls sick, reaching a hospital or clinic was almost impossible.” The constant isolation has caused deep psychological stress, making the community feel helpless and abandoned.

## → Extortion as an Economic Control

The testimonies unanimously describe extortion as a common and systematic form of economic exploitation targeting the Rohingya. Armed groups, such as the AA, demand ransom payments, often in cash, forcing families to sell their valuables and valuable items or seek financial assistance from relatives staying inside or outside Myanmar. The testimonies reveal that extortion is central to the AA's control of the Rohingya community in Rakhine State. Take an incident from Saber whose cousin was abducted and later a ransom call was made. The AA abducted his cousin and later demanded a ransom of 20 lakh Kyats (approximately \$476) over the phone after holding him for a few days. This kind of extortion instills fear in the community, as families are forced to pay large sums of money with no guarantee of their loved one's safety. Threats are often received, where the perpetrators pressure families into paying ransom. In many cases, even after the

ransom is paid, the abducted individuals are tortured or killed, as happened to the Saber's cousin. Such extortion tactics not only cause financial devastation but also create a climate of terror, making it impossible for families to live in safety and dignity. Despite fulfilling extortion demands, there is no security or guarantee of safety. Since many Rohingya families have limited financial resources, they often resort to selling their valuables, borrowing money, or seeking help from relatives to meet such demands. The burden of these payments causes severe financial hardship, pushing families further into poverty. Families sold possessions and went into debt just to protect their kins and loved ones. Extortion is thus not an isolated abuse, but a financial mechanism of domination that reinforces vulnerability and erodes any economic base.

Ekram (name changed) accepts that the AA uses extortion as a method to exploit and control the Rohingya community. He mentions that his family, along with many others in the community, have experienced extortion from both the AA and state forces. The AA demanded money from families under the guise of taxes or donations. Those who could not pay were often threatened with violence. In some cases, they ask a member of the family to join the militancy in case of inability to pay the tax. For instance, young men were forcibly recruited under the threat of retaliation against their families, creating fear and helplessness, particularly for those already struggling to survive. Similarly, the Myanmar military and police also engaged in extortion, frequently demanding bribes from people attempting to move or seek assistance. If someone was caught outside their designated area, they were forced to pay money in exchange for their freedom or faced punishment. In his own words, he admits that the extortion he experienced involved both financial demands and forced recruitment. The AA and state forces demanded money, and those who failed to pay faced severe consequences. The AA, in particular, forced young men to join their militancy groups, threatening violence against their families if they refused. Paying extortion, says Ekram (name changed), was extremely difficult and often meant sacrificing basic necessities. The payments are made in both cash and kind. "Families, including mine, had to sell valuables such as livestock, jewelry, or household items to gather the money required. In situations where we could not afford the full amount in cash, we were forced to give items or other goods instead. The amount demanded varied, but I personally know families who had to pay anywhere between 50,000 to 200,000 Kyat (approximately \$23 to 95)

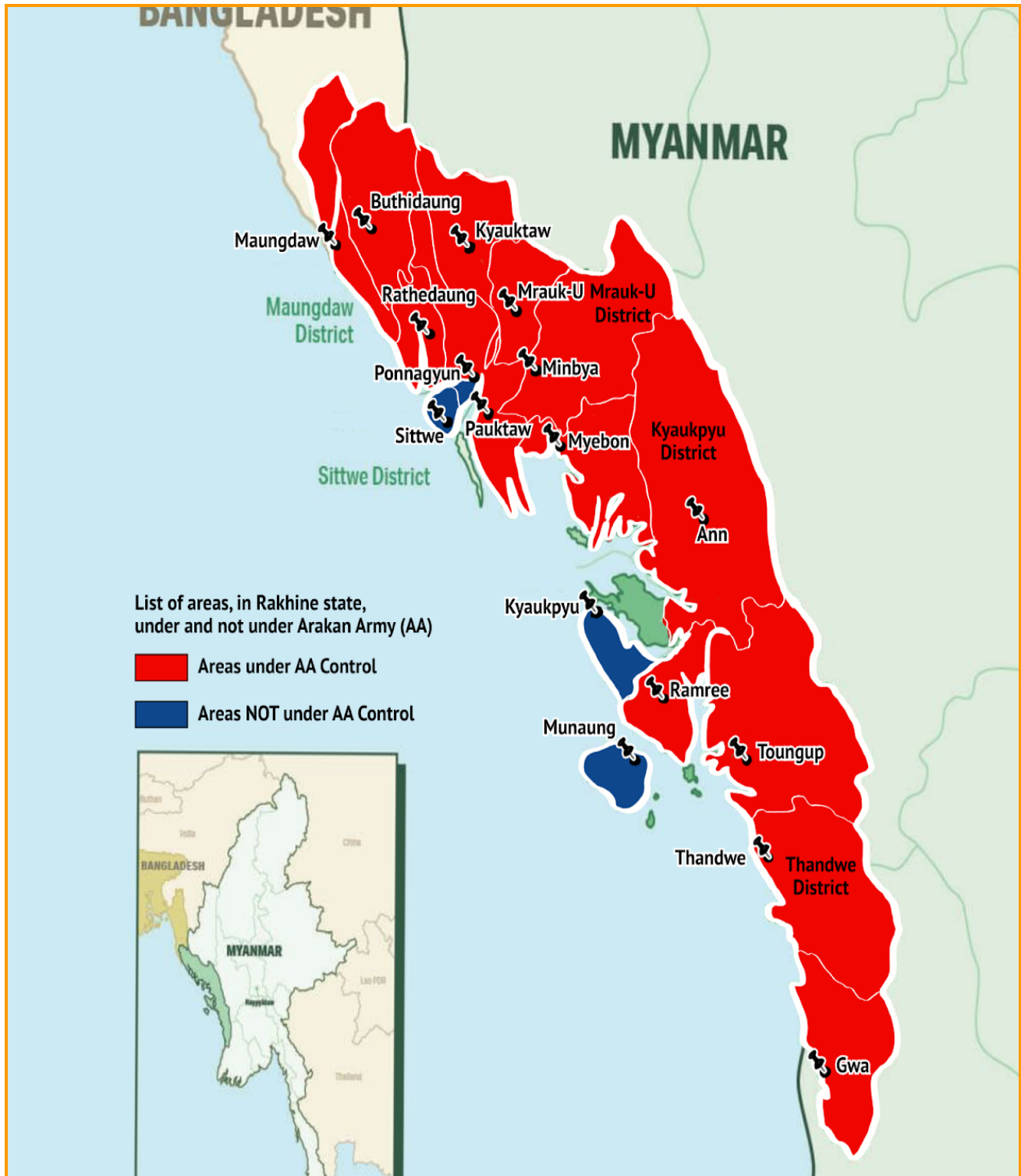
Halamiya (name changed), another survivor, narrates his tragic story that after his family and he were forcibly displaced from his home by the AA, they sought refuge in Sein Hyen Pyar, an area controlled by the ethnic group. However, due to the severe restrictions imposed on their daily lives, survival became increasingly difficult. Eventually, they had no choice but to leave Myanmar and attempt to reach Malaysia for safety. During their journey, they fell into the hands of human traffickers at the Thailand border. They were held captive and tortured for nearly three months. Only after their family paid the ransom demanded by the traffickers, they were finally released. The traffickers contacted one of his family members through a mobile phone and demanded 20 million Myanmar kyats for release. They threatened to kill them if the ransom was not paid and even sent photographs to their families as a form of blackmail. “My family had to arrange and pay the ransom amount of 20 million Myanmar kyats (approximately \$9520) in cash. The human traffickers used threats and psychological torture, making it clear that failure to meet their demands would cost us our lives. The traffickers made it clear that if the ransom was not paid, they would kill us” states Halamiya (name changed). They used intimidation tactics, such as sending photos to families to pressure them into paying. These threats, as he puts it, were terrifying, and many Rohingya families have lost their loved ones because they were unable to pay the demanded ransom.

Shamshudin (Name Changed) and his family and many others, as he narrates in his testimony, in the community have experienced extortion by both the AA and Myanmar state forces. The AA frequently demands money from Rohingya families in exchange for allowing them to stay in their villages or to travel within restricted areas. Similarly, state forces also demand bribes for basic services, such as granting travel permission or access to healthcare. “My family has personally been threatened with violence for not complying with these demands. Many people in my community have had to pay large sums of money just to survive”, he narrates in his testimony. The extortion is both financial and physical. He goes on to record that, “the AA and state forces regularly demand money from us for various reasons whether to allow us to stay in our villages, travel to another area, or even for protection. If we fail to pay, we are often threatened with violence or forced to leave our homes. These threats come in different forms- sometimes they are made directly in person at checkpoints or during raids, while other times, we receive threats through local informants or over the phone.” The extortion payments are demanded both in cash

and in kind. Sometimes, they require direct payments, while other times, they demand goods such as food or forced labor. Additionally, those who resist extortion may be labeled as enemies or traitors, which exposes them to further retaliation, such as exclusion from essential services, targeted raids, or being falsely accused of collaborating with opposition groups. The constant fear of punishment forces many families to comply, even when they have no means to pay. From the beginning of this year, the AA has reportedly imposed new monthly taxes on Rohingya families residing in the AA-controlled territories. The AA visited the Rohingya villages in Maungdaw and Buthidaung and informed the Rohingya residents that homeowners would have to pay monthly taxes starting from this month. The estimated taxes imposed are between [5,000 and 10,000 kyats for homes, and between 20,000 and 50,000](#) kyats (approximately \$10-23) for concrete buildings. It has been also found that the AA officials have threatened to act against those who refuse to pay the taxes.

## ► Endless Brutalities: The Arakan Army and its Atrocities

Maung Maung Tin (Name Changed) remembers that since November 2023, the security situation in Arakan has worsened significantly. This is because both the AA and the Myanmar military junta are involved in committing violence against the Rohingya community. Testimonies like his and from many other survivors of the violence suggest that the armed ethnic group is continuing its efforts to establish full control over the remaining parts of the two districts of the Rakhine State that is Sittwe and the Kyaukpaw. As we know, the AA completely seized the Ann-based Western Command around the last half of December 2024, gaining control over Ann Town, which is a district-level town. With Ann's capture, the AA has gained control of six districts and 14 townships. The districts under occupation consist of Paletwa in Chin State, as well as Maungdaw, Mrauk-U, Ann, Taungup, and Thandwe in Arakan State. Included in the 14 townships under the AA's administration are [Paletwa](#), [Kyauktaw](#), [Buthidaung](#), [Maungdaw](#), [Rathedaung](#), [Ponnagyun](#), [Pauktaw](#), [Mrauk-U](#), [Minbya](#), [Myebon](#), [Ann](#), [Ramree](#), [Taungup](#), and [Thandwe](#). In Arakan State, the towns of Sittwe, Kyaukphyu, and Manaung remain among the last major areas not yet under AA control. While most rural regions including [Ramree town](#) in Kyaukphyu District, are already under AA dominance, the ethnic armed group launched renewed attacks on [junta outposts in the surrounding areas of Kyaukphyu in June 2025](#)



*Map 1: The Map in the red indicates the townships under the control of the Arakan Army. (Credits: Rohingya Human Rights Initiative, 5th September 2025)*

In [May 2024](#), the AA intensified its attacks. It eventually killed hundreds of Rohingyas and injured several others in the Buthidaung town situated in the coastal Rakhine State. One of the most inhumane massacres, in which brutal killings were carried out, occurred in the village of [Hoyaseri \(Htan Shauk Kan\)](#), approximately three km away from the town, on May 2, 2024. Taking advantage of the current instability of the region, the armed ethnic group freely attacked Rohingya Muslims. In response to the violence in Buthidaung and the mass displacement of tens of thousands of civilian Rohingyas, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk expressed grave concern on 19 May. In his statement, he appealed directly to both the groups to halt the fighting, [protect civilians, allow immediate and unhindered humanitarian access, and fully comply with international laws, including the provisional measures already ordered by the International Court of Justice for the protection of the Rohingya](#). The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, through spokesperson Liz Throssell, further raised alarm over ‘frightening and disturbing reports’ of escalating violence. He recognised that [civilians face deadly attacks and the destruction of their homes](#). Among the allegations, Volker Turk noted that they received reports of the [killings of Rohingya civilians and the deliberate burning of their property](#). As a result, they urgently call for an immediate cessation of violence, the protection of all civilians, and requested that all parties adhere to [international law, including the International Court of Justice’s binding orders to safeguard the Rohingya from further atrocities](#).

During this [wave of violence](#), the community faced a new persecution and mass displacement. Such acts of violence are perceived as an existential threat for the community. Most of the witnesses and reports suggest that both the Myanmar Junta and the AA share a common goal, which is the complete eradication of the Rohingya presence in Rakhine State. Their actions align with broader efforts to depopulate Rakhine State of Rohingya Muslims by forcing them to flee into neighboring countries, mostly into Bangladesh.



*Image 2: The image shows Rohingya people fleeing violence perpetrated by the AA. (Image credit: Rohingya Human Rights Initiative, 2024)*

## → Motivations Behind Brutalities

Firsthand testimonies, collected from survivors now displaced in Bangladesh and elsewhere, point towards a systematic campaign to expel the Rohingya from their ancestral lands. This is furnished through endless violence, forced conscription, economic deprivation, and cultural elimination. The testimonies of Rohingya survivors from Buthidaung, Maungdaw, and other regions testify to deeply disturbing methods of targeted violence, displacement, and systemic persecution. Such narrative accounts, drawn from interviews conducted in early 2025, present chilling evidence of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnically motivated violence. This chapter examines these atrocities through survivor narratives, organized into thematic categories that highlight the multifaceted nature of the violence and its consequences.



*Image 3: The Image depicts a wounded Rohingya boy in the aftermath of the AA attack on his village in 2024. (Image Credits: Rohingya Human Rights Initiative).*

For instance, Nur Hakim (Name Changed) testifies that the persecution of the Rohingya is driven by religious and ethnic discrimination. As a Buddhist nationalist movement, the AA seeks to remove all Rohingya Muslims from Rakhine State and seize their land. The ultimate objective of the group appears to be the establishment of an autonomous Rakhine State exclusively for the Rakhine ethnic Buddhist group. Maung Maung Tin also echoes these claims, stating that their actions are premeditated and part of a larger strategy to eliminate the Rohingya and consolidate power over Rakhine State. His account suggests that ethnic cleansing is not merely an incidental outcome of the conflict but an intentional goal of the AA's campaign.

While the Myanmar military junta's genocidal campaign against the Rohingya is well documented, this testimony sheds light on the AA's equally severe role in targeting Rohingya civilians. Yahaya, another survivor, explicitly testifies that the violence against the Rohingya

stems from their ethnic and religious identity. The AA and Myanmar junta military view them as non-citizens and outsiders, using this justification to engage in systematic displacement and violence. Both groups have utilized derogatory language to dehumanize Rohingya individuals.

## → AA's Objectives in the Rakhine

The AA articulates a clear objective of securing [self-determination and autonomy for the Rakhine people](#), aiming to establish control over Rakhine State. While the group publicly portrays itself as an inclusive force that embraces all ethnic and religious minorities, its actions tell a different story. Testimonies from Rohingya survivors present a brutal picture, particularly highlighting the group's discriminatory and violent treatment of the community. The AA's [actions](#) also reveal a sharp contradiction between its stated ideals and its practices on the ground. For instance, the violence experienced by Mohammad Shorif, a Rohingya survivor who has witnessed militant groups' atrocities, states that his community faces deep-seated ethnic and religious hatred. The forces of the group, as it appears from their actions, are determined to eliminate the Rohingya identity. Their brutal tactics aimed to drive the community from their homeland. The militant ethnic group views them as sympathetic to the military and uses violence to force them into submission or allegiance. However, in reality both groups exploited fear and suffering to assert control. In such a difficult situation, innocent civilians become primary victims. The objectives of the AA in the region appeared to be centered on asserting control over the area and gaining political power and autonomy in the region. They claimed to be fighting for the rights and autonomy of the Rakhine people, but in doing so, they often subjected the Rohingyas to violence, fear, and intimidation. "From what I observed, asserts Mohammad Shorif, the AA's goals are to push the Myanmar government out of the region and establish their own authority. However, their actions also seemed to be driven by a belief that the Rohingya were aligned with the Myanmar military, which led to our persecution. The AA used violence against us to intimidate and force us into submission, believing that if they controlled the region and its people, they would have a stronger position in the ongoing conflict." Haroon (Name Changed) describes the AA as a brutal force with a clear objective that is to erase the Rohingya presence from Rakhine State. "Their actions are not just acts of war but a systematic campaign to eliminate and displace our

community. Their ultimate goal appears to be the complete removal of the Rohingya people from Rakhine State to establish an independent nation exclusively for the Rakhine ethnic group,” narrates Amin. For Mg Mg, the AA’s ultimate goal in the region appears to be the creation of a Rakhine-dominated state, often referred to as the Rakhine Empire. This vision includes the systematic exclusion and persecution of the Rohingya population, whom the AA perceives as outsiders. The use of derogatory terms such as Kalar and Bengali further highlights the deeply ingrained ethnic prejudices that exclude them from being part of Rakhine. The AA’s actions suggest an organized attempt to alter the demographic composition of Arakan through forced displacement, mass killings, and village destruction. This aligns with historical patterns of Rohingya persecution in Myanmar, where state and non-state actors have repeatedly sought to marginalize or eliminate the community.

## → Systematic Persecution, Dehumanization, and Ethnic Cleansing

At the core of the violence is a campaign of [ethnic cleansing](#). The AA, echoing the policies of the Myanmar junta, as [reported by the Fortify Rights](#), has committed serious and grave violations including mass atrocities and denial of rights or identity. This is something which survivors continue to reveal in their testimonies. They recount being forcibly evicted from their homes under threat of violence. The AA's strategy includes pushing Rohingya civilians into [more dire situations](#), with allegations that they offer support for food and shelter selectively, while discriminating against Rohingya community members. These patterns, as survivor testimonies reveal, echo traditional ethnic cleansing tactics. While the Myanmar military has historically persecuted the Rohingya, the AA has also engaged in ethnic cleansing. For instance, Ridwan testifies that the AA actively targeted Rohingya villages, forcibly evicting residents and confiscating farmland. Ridwan takes our attention towards a life of institutionalized discrimination in Myanmar, where Rohingya were systematically denied basic human rights. Restrictions on movement, employment, access to healthcare, and education reveal a pattern of state-sponsored persecution. The refusal to recognize the Rohingya as citizens further marginalized them, rendering them stateless and vulnerable to exploitation and violence. Survivor

Nur Hakim (Name Changed) describes life under both military and AA control as characterized by deep-rooted, institutionalized discrimination. A 40-year-old Rohingya from Maungdaw township describes the relentless discrimination and persecution as, “Whenever we went outside our homes or to the market, the AA would snatch our money and take goods from our shops. If we asked them to pay, they would beat us and threaten us with kidnapping. The AA and local Mogs constantly mistreated us, using harsh words and treating us as enemies. We were also prohibited from traveling between villages and towns, making it impossible to run businesses or access medical treatment. If travel was absolutely necessary, such as for medical emergencies, we were required to obtain a *Tokenza* permit, which cost between 20,000 to 30,000 Myanmar kyats. Additionally, Rohingya Muslims were forbidden from attending mosques and schools, especially after the AA took control of the town.” Maung Maung Tin also recounts a longstanding pattern of ethnic and religious discrimination against the Rohingya, driven by both the Rakhine community and state policies. He states that the government of Myanmar actively provoked the Rakhine Buddhist population against the Rohingya, leading to widespread societal discrimination. This testimony aligns with historical reports of the Myanmar state using divisive ethnic policies to marginalize the Rohingya, often branding them as outsiders despite their deep-rooted presence in Rakhine State.

Yahaya describes a lifelong experience of discrimination in Myanmar, where he was systematically denied fundamental human rights, including the right to education, employment, and freedom of movement. Most notably, he and his community were denied citizenship, rendering them stateless and vulnerable to persecution. Even before the conflict escalated, the Rohingya population faced institutionalized discrimination. However, with the intensification of hostilities between the Myanmar military and the AA, these restrictions evolved into active violence and targeted attacks aimed at forcibly removing the Rohingya from Rakhine State.

## → Situation and the Siege of Villages

Between [March](#) and [December](#) 2024, the AA made significant territorial gains across Rakhine State, capturing key towns like Ponnagyun, Ramree, Rathedaung, Buthidaung, Maungdaw and eventually Gwa. These victories allowed the AA to encircle Sittwe and consolidate control over much of the Rakhine. Following the fall of Buthidaung, large-scale arson attacks were [reported by Kalardan Press Network](#) (First Rohingya News Agency since 2001), with witnesses accusing the AA of targeting Rohingya Villages, their homes, and properties. Witnesses from multiple villages Kuandaung (Kwan Dine) , Paundo Prang (Hpaung Daw Pyin), Ward No. 5 Maungdaw report coordinated attacks involving raids, looting, and arson.

In late April, as is well known, the Arakan Army forces began attacking Rohingya villages in Buthidaung, culminating in their [May 17 2024 capture of the town](#), during which it has been reported that they ‘burned, shelled, looted and contained Rohingya neighborhoods’. The containment and violence in villages could be better understood through Mohammad Shorif Amin’s testimony. In his testimony, he asserts that the AA currently controls his village, having taken over in mid-year 2024 after a series of violent raids. He states that the AA maintains control through fear and intimidation, forcing villagers to follow their demands. Those who don't accept are forced to comply under the threat of violence. They have been using the village as a base of operations, restricting movement, and demanding resources from those who remain. Nur Hakim also testifies that the village of Ward No. 5, Maungdaw Township, Rakhine State, was besieged and attacked by both the AA and the Myanmar military. The AA entered from the north, while the military junta advanced from the east and south. Both groups warned the villagers to evacuate, stating that a battle would soon begin. However, with no safe place to flee, the Rohingya residents locked themselves inside their homes. Soon after, heavy clashes erupted between the two-armed factions. In their operations, both groups use modern, sophisticated weapons against each other. However, all Rohingya residents have been forcibly evicted, leaving the village completely abandoned. The AA’s treatment of the Rohingya has been far more brutal than that of the military junta, as they directly caused the mass displacement and forced exile of the community.

On June 23, 2024, when the AA entered Mg Mg Tin's village, the Rohingya residents were forced to flee. The testimony provides insight into how this process unfolded. First, the Myanmar military junta establishes a presence, often under the guise of defense or self-guarding, and later the AA moves in, intensifying the persecution and forcing evacuations. Mg Mg Tin asserts that both the Myanmar junta and the AA are perpetrators of crimes against the Rohingya. While international attention has largely focused on the Myanmar military's genocide, the testimony highlights that the AA has also played a direct role in violent campaigns against the Rohingya.

Since July 2024, the AA has maintained control over Yahaya's village also. According to his testimony, the AA has imposed severe restrictions on movement, requiring villagers to pay large sums for permission to travel between settlements. Additionally, villagers are often forced to serve as porters for the AA, carrying supplies under duress. Yahaya describes the AA's governance as worse than that of the Myanmar military, with looting, enforced labor, and arbitrary punishments being common. This suggests that the AA's occupation is not merely a military takeover but a deliberate campaign of control and oppression targeting the Rohingya population.

## → Targeted Killings and Massacres

In July 2024, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution in which they addressed the plight of the Rohingya and other persecuted minorities in Myanmar. The resolution strongly condemned the '[systematic targeting of Rohingya Muslims and called on all conflict parties in Rakhine State to comply fully with the International Court of Justice's provisional measures.](#)' This was brought into attention in response to the reported AA targeted killings and widespread violence. Several survivors, including Ekram and Mohammad Shorif Alom, recall scenes of extrajudicial executions, bodies strewn in streets, and victims burned alive. Ridwan describes witnessing the indiscriminate killing of Rohingya civilians by the AA, particularly during their forced displacement. His own experience of being attacked with a sharp weapon underscores the brutal and personal nature of these assaults. He estimates that over 100 people he personally knew were killed, reinforcing the scale of violence. Mohammad Shorif's village was besieged

and attacked by both the AA and the Myanmar military. These attacks were part of a larger campaign of violence and intimidation aimed at the Rohingya people. The AA sought to establish control over the region, while the Myanmar military carried out targeted attacks against the Rohingya, whom they considered outsiders and a threat to their authority. The brutality inflicted upon the Rohingya community has also invited international condemnation, but it hardly impacts the AA and its crimes. On seeing the homes burned, civilians killed, and women subjected to sexual violence, the [Arakan Rohingya National Organization](#) (ARNO), in August 2024, stated that despite numerous warnings from rights organizations and the international community, it had hardly made any impact on the issue.

Haroon's (Name changed) Testimony

Haroon (Name changed) unfolds that the AA infiltrated my village without warning, storming into homes and forcefully dragging people out. They beat villagers indiscriminately and harassed women and girls, creating an atmosphere of terror. We were threatened and ordered to evacuate immediately, with no regard for where we would go or how we would survive. They did not engage in any prior communication or negotiation with us before their sudden invasion. Once they entered, they declared that they would be using our village as a strategic position to fight against the Myanmar military. As a result, we, the Rohingya villagers, were given no choice but to leave homes behind. On the morning of the attack, the AA arrived in Kuandaung (Kwan Dine) heavily armed, carrying guns, ammunition, and various other weapons. They spread fear among the villagers, forcing people out of their homes and subjecting women and girls to harassment. Their only command to us was to leave as soon as possible, leaving us displaced, vulnerable, and with nowhere to go. We identified the perpetrators based on their uniforms, language, and behavior. The AA wears distinct uniforms different from those of the Myanmar

military. They primarily speak the Rakhine language and are known for their extreme cruelty. Unlike the military, the AA does not attempt to communicate in a civil manner; instead, they resort to verbal abuse and physical violence. During the attack on our village, the AA carried out numerous atrocities. They executed at least five people by gunfire and subjected many women and girls to sexual violence said Haroon (Name changed). Additionally, they abducted several villagers, whose fate remains unknown to this day. Their families have received no information about their whereabouts or condition, leaving them in a state of endless fear and despair. The AA's activities in my area were devastating. They destroyed and burned down numerous houses, forcefully displaced villagers, and dug defensive positions in preparation for combat against the military. Their actions left our community in ruins. Beyond direct violence against individuals, the AA committed large-scale destruction in our region. I personally witnessed them set fire to three villages in our union, reducing approximately 800 houses to ashes. They also targeted places of worship and education, burning down eight mosques and four madrasas. The village market, a crucial source of livelihood for many, was completely destroyed, leaving the community without access to food and basic necessities.

The escalation of conflict between the Myanmar military and the AA led to direct attacks on civilian settlements. Yahaya recounts an incident in August 2024, when the AA positioned itself in his village, prompting the military to launch missile attacks. As a result, his father and two other villagers were killed, while his brother sustained gunshot wounds. Approximately 10 to 12 Rohingya homes were completely destroyed. Such incidents demonstrate how the Rohingya community is caught in the crossfire of the conflict, with both the AA and the military showing

little regard for civilian lives. Beyond direct combat, the AA engaged in looting and other forms of violence against Rohingya villagers, further contributing to their suffering.

## → Use of Aerial and Advanced Weaponry in the Attacks

As the Arakan Army took control of Maungdaw, the Rohingyas started escaping the violence for their survival. However, a group from the community, fleeing to Bangladesh, [were fatally struck by aerial attacks near the Naf River](#). On August 5, nearly 200 Rohingya people were reportedly killed following drone strikes and shelling on civilians fleeing fighting in Maungdaw town near the Bangladesh border. The assaults were reportedly carried out using homemade rockets, artillery, and drones targeting a motorboat and crowds gathered at the riverbank, killing many. A [54-second video](#) uploaded by Radio Free Asia (RFA) shows bodies soaked in blood and scattered across the ground. According to RFA, sources confirmed to them that the Rohingyas were killed by a bomb fired by the Arakan Army as they attempted to cross into Bangladesh, fleeing intense clashes between the AA and junta forces in western Myanmar's Rakhine State. This incident brought international condemnation from across human rights networks, activists, and organizations. For instance, in its statement, [the Arakan Rohingya National Organization \(ARNO\) strongly condemned](#) the brutal aerial attack and called upon the international UN security council and the International Criminal Court to take action on the AA. Similarly, the [Rohingya Human Rights Initiative \(ROHRingya\)](#) strongly condemned the brutal aerial attack on Rohingya civilians fleeing violence in Rakhine, which have reportedly killed hundreds and injured many more. These deliberate assaults on vulnerable Rohingyas constitute grave human rights violations and must be met with immediate international action to protect civilians and deliver critical humanitarian aid. In its statement, the organization demanded an end to all targeted violence against the Rohingya and urged the global community to hold the perpetrators accountable for these atrocities.

Our testimonies also reveal that the Arakan Army has, at times, employed similar tactics involving both aerial and ground assaults in their areas. Survivors who also come from the same town describe coordinated attacks that mirror the violence seen near the Naf River. For instance,

Yahaya and Mg Mg Tin linked these attacks to deliberate acts of civilian targeting rather than military necessity. Mohammad Shorif Amin points out that the perpetrators used various forms of attacks, including aerial assaults, drone strikes, and shelling. Such [aerial attacks](#) resulted in the destruction of homes, loss of lives, and mass displacement of people. In some cases, entire villages were wiped out due to aerial bombings. The AA, while primarily engaging in ground combat, also used explosives and shelling in their confrontations with the military, which often put civilian populations in extreme danger. The conflict between these armed groups left innocent people caught in the crossfire, with no safe place to go.



***Image 4:** The image indicates the destruction of a Rohingya house targeted in an airstrike allegedly carried out by the Arakan Army. (Image Credit: Rohingya Human Rights Initiative, 2024).*

Mg Mg concludes that the violence against the Rohingya has been carried out through a combination of direct attacks, aerial bombardments, and systematic destruction of property. Both the AA and the Myanmar junta have been reported to use drones and heavy artillery. While the specific perpetrators remain uncertain, eyewitnesses strongly suspect the AA's involvement. Such tactics indicate a shift towards more technologically advanced methods of warfare, intensifying the scale and effectiveness of violence against civilian populations. Both the Myanmar military

and the AA employed advanced weaponry, including drone strikes and shelling, which disproportionately affected Rohingya civilians. Yahaya recalls that the military justified its airstrikes as operations against the AA; however, such attacks targeted Rohingya villages, leading to mass displacement and destruction of the Rohingya.

## → Denial of Basic Resources and Economic Strangulation

Multiple testimonies reveal that the AA imposed curfews, looted goods, and extorted civilians, denying them access to markets and medical care. Noor Mohammad's and Haroon (Name changed) accounts describe an environment where travel permits were commodified, businesses were plundered, and healthcare access was conditional or outright blocked. These restrictions weaponized poverty and starvation against a defenseless population. During times of conflict, the deprivation of food, healthcare, and security became even more severe. The blockade of Rohingya-owned businesses, including medical shops, exacerbated the humanitarian crisis. Ridwan's personal experience with his grandmother's death due to the denial of medical access illustrates the lethal consequences of such policies.

### Mohammad shorif's (Name Changed) Testimony

Mohammad shorif (Name Changed), a 25-year-old Rohingya man, was born in Shawnagna, a village in Maungdaw Township, Myanmar. He currently resides in Bangladesh's Rohingya refugee camp 1E, where he has sought safety after experiencing the devastating consequences of conflict and displacement. Despite engaging in business as his source of income, his life has been shaped by the turmoil and suffering inflicted upon his community. Before the conflict, Mohammad Shorif and his family had basic access to food, shelter, and healthcare. However, as violence escalated, these necessities became increasingly inaccessible. The destruction of homes, villages, and roads rendered it impossible for

families to find food or shelter, forcing many, including Mohammad shorif's (Name Changed), to flee without provisions. The situation worsened as healthcare facilities were either destroyed or overwhelmed with an influx of survivors. Medical supplies and personnel were scarce, leaving many wounded and sick without treatment. Even after escaping to Bangladesh, life in the refugee camps remained harsh. Limited resources meant that food distribution was inconsistent, and healthcare services were inadequate due to overcrowding. Mohammad shorif (Name Changed) struggled to receive medical care, leading to a deterioration in his health over time. The hardships of displacement only reinforced the deep suffering experienced by him and his community.

Haroon (name changed) mentions that during the conflict, access to essential resources such as food, shelter, and healthcare became nearly impossible. Both the military and the AA imposed severe restrictions, cutting off the Rohingya from vital supplies. Movement was heavily restricted, preventing people from traveling to access food or medical care. Markets and shops were forcibly shut down, leaving families struggling to secure even basic necessities. As a result, the Rohingya community faced extreme hardship, suffering from hunger, lack of medical treatment, and deteriorating living conditions.

Mg Mg testifies before and during the conflict, access to basic necessities such as food, shelter, and healthcare was limited. While Mg Mg Tin states that he was able to receive partial healthcare, his mother was injured during clashes between the AA and the Myanmar military junta. The testimony highlights the precarious position of Rohingya civilians, who often become collateral damage in conflicts between warring factions. Despite the presence of humanitarian needs, both the AA and Myanmar junta restricted movement, making it difficult for Rohingya civilians to seek medical assistance and safety. Yahaya's testimony also reveals that the Rohingya were deprived of essential resources such as food, shelter, and medical care. The AA imposed severe movement restrictions, preventing access to daily necessities. Additionally, NGOs providing

humanitarian aid, including Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), were forced to shut down, cutting off critical healthcare services. This created a dire humanitarian crisis, exacerbating the suffering of an already vulnerable population.



## ► Fragmented Lives, Forced Displacement and Family Disintegration of Rohingyas

Drawing from a series of interviews and narrative testimonies from displaced individuals now living in Malaysia, Thailand, and refugee camps in Bangladesh, this chapter explores the various consequences of violence, forced displacement, and exile. The testimonies collectively narrate that the AA's increasing oppression of their community left them with no choice but to leave. They explicitly reveal that its youth were being forcibly abducted, conscripted into unpaid services, and at times even used as human shields in the ongoing conflict against the junta. Between March and June 2025, 200,000 Rohingya people were internally displaced following an arson attack and house burning by the Arakan Army. Satellite imagery and rights monitor groups described atrocities committed against the Rohingya community on several occasions. It would not be wrong to say that their fleeing of the place is not easy either, the Arakan Army in most of the cases only allows people if they are ready to pay huge amounts of money. While leaving their places, the community people also take up precarious routes that are usually unsafe. However, we must also recognise that this forced mass migration of the persecuted community is not a recent phenomenon; it has already been in practice. The Arakan Army forcibly displaced the Rohingya community from their home and villages in Buthidaung and forced them to live in the rice paddy fields and open areas. Forced displacement has occurred in 35 Rohingya villages in Buthidaung following the Arakan Army's brutal attack, forcing more Rohingya people to flee to neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Thailand, and Malaysia. Following the violent military actions of 2017, over 1 million Rohingya people were forcibly displaced, with over [750,000 initially seeking refuge in Bangladesh](#). As per the latest statement released by UNHCR in March 2025, the total number of refugees in Bangladesh, fleeing violence, has gone up to [1.5 million](#), adding to the hundreds of thousands already there. Due to the escalating violence in Myanmar since the 2021 military takeover [displaced 2.6 million people internally](#). Renewed violence in Buthidaung has displaced 40,000-50,000 more Rohingya in March 2024, from [10 villages of Buthidaung's Ka Kyet Bet, Ah Lel Chaung and Ba Gon Nar villages, and Maungdaw's Paung Zar and Hla Baw Zar](#). Human rights organizations, including Fortify Rights and Amnesty

International, have condemned Myanmar's systematic persecution as "ethnic cleansing," while some activists warn of family disintegration as [children, women, elderly, and disabled continue to displace](#). In the years from 2023 to March 2025, Rohingya sea journeys to Malaysia and Indonesia have increased, with reports of deaths or disappearances of people fleeing through dangerous routes. The disintegration of the Rohingya community led to pervasive uncertainty; many did not know whether their missing family members were whereabouts, dead or alive. It has been also reported in the media that after defeating the military regiment from the areas, the AA forces civilians, usually Rohingyas, to leave Buthidaung and Maungdaw townships. Alongside resource extortion, [the AA is forcibly displacing the remaining Rohingya from their homes](#).

## → Fragmentation of Families and the Disintegration of Kinship

### Networks

In the latest episodes of violence that has been inflicted upon the Rohingya community, the reports claim that the number of displaced people have gone up. As of 4 March 2024, the UNHCR reported that [350,900 individuals had been displaced](#) due to renewed fighting between the AA and the Tatmadaw since November 2023. In May 2024, the news agency Al Jazeera, in its news report, estimated that around [45,000 Rohingyas had fled to Bangladesh](#) following intensified clashes in Buthidaung and Maungdaw townships. Later, during November and December 2024, an additional [60,000 Rohingyas](#) reportedly crossed into Bangladesh amid escalating conflict. Our testimony of Anowar Sadek, aged 25, who hails from Shidda Fara (Ward no-5) of Maungdaw, but now displaced in Bangladesh, recounts the reasons for displacement. For him, it was the daily violence and persecution carried out by both the AA and the Myanmar military. For instance, he says that in 2024, the situation in his village rapidly deteriorated as both groups intensified their attacks. These attacks resulted in widespread destruction: "Our homes were set ablaze, our agricultural fields were destroyed, and innocent civilians, including children and the elderly, were mercilessly killed." Beyond the physical violence, the psychological toll was immense. "We, he narrates in his own words, lived in perpetual fear of being caught in the

crossfire, abducted, or executed. Faced with these dire circumstances, I had no choice but to leave my home and seek refuge in Bangladesh.”

Madulla (Name changed) was forcibly displaced from home in Maung Ni Fara village in Maungdaw Township, when the AA launched a brutal assault on the community. He states that they burned down their homes and executed two men in front of him. Fearing for his life and the safety of his loved ones, he fled with his family. “Our displacement was not only the event, but approximately 4,500 villagers from Maung Ni Fara were also displaced, and at least 1,000 are reported to have disappeared. Within my extended family alone, 50 members have been displaced and two are missing. Although neither I nor my immediate family faced direct violence, the atrocities committed by the AA, including the murder of Rohingya civilians, rape of women, and indiscriminate violence, left us with no choice but to flee.” The Arakan Army deliberately created circumstances for the Rohingya community across Rakhine State to flee voluntarily often by paying and taking precarious journeys from Rakhine State to other states like Yangon and eventually to a third country. He details how he lives in Kutupalong Camp 1E, while his family is in Balukhali camp. “I have not been able to reunite with them due to lack of money and shelter. I think about them every day.” His sense of separation is shared by 16-year-old Amir Faisal, who fled to Thailand with his sister, leaving behind his parents, who could not afford to escape from Rakhine State, Myanmar. These testimonies show that leaving places or their own villages is not an individual choice but a forced decision imposed through a series of violent incidents. For many, this journey of fleeing their places, as reported by testimonies and also various media outlets, takes days and weeks, often without [food, shelter, or protection](#), or to say precisely under life-threatening situations.

Since June 2024, there have been multiple reports of river drownings, deaths, and killings among people fleeing conflict or undertaking dangerous journeys. Many [community people, including children](#), drowned while attempting to cross into Bangladesh by boat to escape violence. In such a situation when people are killed and families or their relatives become unaware about each other, fragmentation becomes more emotional and brings unending anxieties. Imagine a mentally and emotionally displaced person, who for years has not been able to meet his loved ones; his level of pain would be at a different level. Displacement, in these cases, disables relationships, severs ties between families, isolates children from their parents, and consequently breaks kinship lines.

This leaves families at vulnerable risk, with little space to reach out to each other or get in contact. Anowar Sadek perfectly fits in this situation who has been displaced and separated from his family. He recounts that living away from family members feels like living without purpose. It feels exactly like that one of your fundamental parts of existence has been torn away. Breaking away from one's kinship network is filled with an overwhelming sense of incompleteness, and the distance between family members deepens anxiety. He emphasizes that he constantly fears for their safety, wondering if they are dead or alive or facing hardships or any dangers. Feeling a sense of helplessness on being unable to protect or support them. For him, this feeling of powerlessness is agonizing. Managing to get in touch with a few of his family members over the phone, he says that every phone call or message is disturbing. While acknowledging that at times it brings some relief to hear their voices and receive some safe messages, it is equally painful that the family members remain apart.

Mohammad Noor, another victim of the 2024 violence of the AA, along with four members of his immediate family, was impacted due to forcible displacement. In addition to his family, ten relatives from his extended family have also been displaced. His family is lucky as none of his members have disappeared. However, he has reported in his testimony that four individuals from his village have gone missing. The violence and persecution led to the displacement of around 800 villagers from his hometown. He is aware that the displacement of the community began in 2012. He vividly remembers that tensions and violence, in his state back then, made it very difficult for Rohingya families to sustain their lives. Unfortunately, the military imposed severe movement restrictions, and multiple episodes of violence occurred up to the year 2023. However, the situation escalated in 2024 when military forces and the AA groups came face to face in his hometown. He vividly recalls the night of the attack when, at around 9:00 p.m., the armed group that is AA seized his place. They fired at innocent civilians, resulting in the loss of many Rohingya lives. Setting fire to the homes and Rohingya properties, he realised like most of the fleeing people that the AA does not want the community to return back to their villages or places. A similar pattern was found by [Burmese Rohingya Organization United Kingdom](#) (BROUK), in the forced displacement of Rohingya civilians in Buthidaung and Maungdaw townships, in its January 2025 report, as it states,

*“The AA has not yet allowed [Rohingyas living in] IDPs to return to their homes and villages in Buthidaung township and continues to conduct raids, including on villages that are hosting large numbers of IDPs, such as Hpon Nyo Leik. In early October, AA forces conducted an early-morning raid on the Rohingya villages of Ah Twin Nget They and Hpon Nyo Leik. Villagers reported that AA members threatened and assaulted residents. The AA claimed the raids were in response to alleged Rohingya armed groups hiding in these villages, but residents deny this.”*

We must remember from our testimonies who repeatedly denied that there were either members or supporters of the Rohingya armed groups in the attacked villages. In the villages, the respondents testified that there lived only innocent civilian Rohingyas. It was also found that they haven't seen the movements of any armed groups except the movements of the Arakan Army in their areas. Mohammed Alom also echoes a similar tone and says this seems to be part of a plan to continue their brutal actions against Rohingya IDPs, who sought refuge in the camps after fleeing from their own villages, while talking about his own displacement and the fragmentation of his family. Along with five members of his immediate family, he was also made to leave and live a displaced life due to violent attacks by the AA. In his extended family, another two members have also been displaced, while another two have disappeared. He further testifies that his village witnessed the displacement of around 1,000 residents, with several individuals also reported missing. This was because in 2024, the AA launched attacks on their place that created a state of chaos and fear among his community. He reiterates that the AA forcibly entered their locality. He and his family had no choice but to flee for their lives. Alom and all his fellow villagers faced direct threats from the AA. His own relative was shot in the leg and critically injured. The primary reason for their displacement was the repeated use of Rohingya villages as battlegrounds whenever the AA engaged in conflict with the Myanmar military. The destruction of their homes and the constant violence left them with no safe place to stay.

Abdullah, along with nine members of his immediate family, was forcibly displaced from his home due to increasing restrictions and violence imposed by the AA. His extended family also suffered greatly, with 70 relatives displaced. While none of his family members have disappeared, 11 villagers from his community are unaccounted for. The displacement was triggered by the

AA's occupation of an undisclosed village near Htan Shauk Khan village, where they positioned themselves for battle against the Myanmar military junta. As a result, military airstrikes targeted their location, but the attacks primarily affected the Rohingya civilians in the village. In the aftermath, the entire village was forced to flee. When they evacuated, both the AA and the military set fire to approximately 40 houses and 35 shops. Seeking temporary refuge, Abdullah and his family moved to the Seing Hyen Pyar village, where they lived for 10 to 15 days. Once the intensity of the fighting decreased, some villagers returned to an undisclosed village near Htan Shauk Khan village, but they were left with makeshift huts in place of their homes.'

Story of Ibrahim name change from an undisclosed village near Htan Shauk Khan Village

My name is Ibrahim , and I was born and raised in an undisclosed village near Htan Shauk Khan Village ) in Rakhine State, Myanmar. I fled my home country in September, 2024. This was due to an increasing violence, persecution and insecurity that resulted from violent clashes between the Myanmar military and the AA. As a result, the conflict caused severe destruction to my village and forced the residents to flee for their lives. Although I was not directly subjected to threats or violence by either the AA or the military, the general atmosphere of fear and repression intensified after the AA took control of our area. Arbitrary arrests and disappearances of young men became increasingly common. Fearing for my life and safety, I made the painful decision to leave my home and seek refuge abroad. Twelve members of my immediate family, as well as twelve others from my extended family, have been displaced. Thankfully, none of them have disappeared. Although my family is still residing in our village in Rakhine, contacting them remains difficult due to poor internet connectivity. We occasionally manage to communicate over the phone, but the connection is often unreliable. During the height of the fighting, my family and other villagers fled to neighboring areas for safety. Once the AA

withdrew, they cautiously returned to our village. Despite this temporary return, our lives remain fragile and uncertain.

## → Life and Journey in Dangerous Routes

It is an established fact that Rohingyas who flee persecution usually end up in refugee camps in neighboring Bangladesh. However, there are also many of those who either by choice or chance also arrive in [Malaysia, Indonesia, or Thailand](#). Hurling in overcrowded and unsafe boats, the human traffickers and smugglers usually take them through dangerous routes across the Bay of Bengal, the Andaman Sea, and the Strait of Malacca. The physical journeys detailed in the testimonies are long, dangerous, and often deadly. For instance, Mir Jaan's journey involved walking for 14 days and sailing for 7 days without food or water as opined in his own words, "I saw dead bodies in the sea while fleeing violence." There have been several instances when boats ended in tragedy. Between January and March 2015 alone, an estimated [50,000 people risked the voyage, many facilitated by smugglers](#). Hundreds perished along the way, with reports of around [100 deaths in Indonesia](#), [200 in Malaysia](#), and [10 in Thailand](#) after traffickers abandoned them at sea. In November [2023 alone, at least 200 Rohingya drowned in a single boat incident, and it was roughly reported that 569 deaths or disappearances](#) occurred that year as they attempted to flee by sea. Two separate boat disasters took place in May 2025. The incidents reportedly claimed 427 Rohingya lives fleeing. It has been reported and also stated by [UNHCR in its press release that nearly 20%](#) of those attempting to cross sea in the region are 'dead or missing so far in 2025.' As a result of such tragedies, the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal remain among the world's deadliest migration routes. We must also recognise that most of the deaths of the Rohingyas who take up these ways, in these dangerous routes, are either underreported or not reported at all.

Knowing the deadly risks the refugees face on these routes, this section will now take you through the firsthand testimonies of those who have survived. They would reveal bad experiences at every stage. Their accounts expose the brutal realities of smuggling networks, starvation at sea, and the impossible choices forced upon fleeing families. For instance, Mohammad Noor's journey

from Myanmar to Malaysia, in July 2024, was filled with immense difficulties, dangers and challenges. Initially, he left the internally displaced camp and moved to a place in Buthidaung, where agents were luring Rohingya people who were ready to flee the country. From there, he was taken to the seashore, where he boarded a boat. The journey eventually brought him to Malabaing. From there, he and 135 Rohingya men, women, and children were put into a truck and transported to Myawaddy. The journey was extremely dangerous, with limited access to food and water. The conditions were deplorable, and the travelers suffered physical abuse at the hands of Rakhine agents. Noor himself was beaten multiple times without any reason. After a period of 11 days in Thailand, the agents or smugglers finally transported him to Malaysia, where his brother received him. Throughout the journey, Noor says that he has experienced extreme situations for himself as well as people he traveled with in unsafe and overcrowded boats. Many of his fellow travelers were severely beaten up by the smugglers for a variety of reasons. The experience was both physically and emotionally traumatizing for him. Similarly, Amir Faesal fled from Myanmar to Thailand with his sister. Their journey began with a boat ride, arranged by the agents, to Shamila, followed by travel to Puna Jwen, where they stayed for 14 days. From there, they were made to sit into a boat that sailed for seven days without food or water. The conditions on board were inhumane. They were overcrowded, faced heat, unsanitary spaces, and brutality from traffickers. He mentions an incident when he was beaten up with a belt by one of the smugglers for attempting to move to the upper deck in search of air. The boat ferried them through seas and oceans for days and nights. Upon reaching the Thailand border, they walked for another 14 days through dense terrain to enter Thailand. Along the way, he witnessed the consequences of displacement and family disintegration firsthand. On the boat, people chatted among themselves, sharing stories about family members they did not know about their locations. He also says that he still remembers navigating through dangerous routes in the sea, and he saw his fellow people breaking down from fatigue and fear. No humanitarian organizations or any state forces came to their aid during the journey, and they survived through sheer will and looking at each other.

The dangers faced by those fleeing were not limited to the dangerous sea crossings, the overland journey particularly to Bangladesh was equally filled with hardship. From their villages and towns, people moved under constant fear, anxious about being intercepted by the AA forces or

detained by the Border Guards of Bangladesh (BGB). For instance, reports and our testimonies indicate that those attempting to flee Buthidaung and Maungdaw were often arrested by AA personnel and only permitted to continue after paying exorbitant ransoms. Several people from the community were encouraged and facilitated by the AA to leave their places for Bangladesh. According to reports, [AA members usually demanded payments between 300,000 and 500,000 kyat \(approximately \\$143 & 238\) per person in exchange for safe passage across the border.](#) Similarly, at the Bangladesh border, many faced the looming threat of arrest and deportation as the BGB has repeatedly pushed back such asylum seekers. Fortify Rights also revealed in their news release that the forces pushed back refugees many times at its border. For instance, between February and April 2024, [Fortify Rights](#) conducted interviews with nine Rohingya refugees from Maungdaw Township who had fled the ongoing conflict and genocide in Rakhine State, only to be forcibly returned by the Bangladeshi border force. The organization has also found that more than [300 Rohingya refugees were pushed back into Myanmar](#) between February and April in six separate incidents.

The overland movement of people fleeing violence and persecution is also tough. For instance, Anowar Sadek describes his own exile journey in the following manner. His journey from home was one of immense fear, exhaustion, and suffering. When it became evident that staying meant certain death, he made the difficult decision to flee. With nothing but the clothes on his back, he embarked on a journey filled with uncertainty. Traveling mostly on foot, he walked for miles, often navigating through dense jungles and abandoned villages to avoid detection. The roads were dangerous, as both the AA and the military had set up checkpoints, making direct routes nearly impossible. He relied on hidden jungle paths and less-traveled routes, often moving at night when visibility was low. During the day, he took shelter in abandoned homes, dense forests, or isolated and lonely places, hoping to remain unnoticed. Perhaps the most heartbreaking aspect of the journey was encountering others who were also fleeing; men, women, and children, all burdened by the same fear and despair. Some had been on the road for days or weeks, wandering with no clear destination but knowing that turning back was not an option. They moved together and shared the little information they had about safe routes and avoiding areas that had been recently attacked. Crossing into Bangladesh was another challenge in itself. The border was heavily patrolled, and they had to find a way through without being caught. Eventually, after days

of relentless travel, they reached a refugee camp. Similarly, Alom's journey from his home to Bangladesh was filled with hardship. After being displaced from his village, he and his family initially sought refuge in Pyin Pyu, an area under AA control. However, conditions there remained unsafe, forcing them to seek refuge across the border. The journey was also filled with danger. They spent nights on the road without access to food or water. When they first attempted to cross into Bangladesh, they were pushed back by the border guards of Bangladesh. With no other option, they waited and made another attempt, spending two nights in a valley called Jalaidiv before finally managing to reach the refugee camps. The journey exposed them to immense suffering. Alom witnessed many casualties along the way, including men, women, and children who perished near the riverside. Their only means of transportation was a rowboat, which made the journey even more treacherous.

## → Emotional and Psychological Impact

The number of internally displaced persons in Myanmar in January 2025 has gone up to [3.5 million - a considerable increase of nearly 1.5 million since 2023](#). This is a worry for all of us as it represents one of the world's fastest growing displacement crises. Not to talk of the victims, such a volume of displacement would affect any rational mind. In a range of testimonies for the report, it was apparent that the displacement of the Rohingya community has been quite impactful for all of them. Being separated from his family, for instance, has caused significant emotional disturbance for Abdullah. He describes in his testimony that displacement has stripped him of home, his family and the sense of community. Virtually all contributors to this report shared a common feeling that they face due to displacement and family separation. Their testimonies unanimously revealed how forced migration and fractured kinship networks have left deep emotional scars. This psychological violence in the form of anxiety, depression, and many other psychological disorders has also been [documented and highlighted](#) as a result of their long persecution. We must also understand that all such terms are purely clinical frameworks that reduce experiences to diagnostic categories. However, the psychosocial challenges faced by such vulnerable people demand an analysis of testimonies from a 'social suffering' point of view. It means that the affected individuals and their families collectively share the same amount of loss

as a result of the violence, displacement, and systemic oppression. Stories of collective suffering become more apparent and disturbing in mass displacement. For instance, in recent episodes of conflict in 2024, it has been reported that [100,000 people in Rakhine were displaced by violence](#) that has ultimately led to social suffering at a larger scale. One such person affected by this latest form of violence is Madulla (Name changed) who narrates that losing home, village, and way of life has had a devastating effect on him. He mentions that, “I once had a home, a livelihood as a fisherman, and a sense of security. Now, I live as a refugee in a foreign land displaced far away from my own place, land, neighborhoods and brotherhood. The absence of peace and dignity in my life often leaves me feeling helpless and hopeless.” Similarly, Mohammad Islam also admits that being displaced and separated from his family has been emotionally devastating. He often reflects on the pain of leaving loved ones and the friendships behind. Displacement has not only physically uprooted him but has also emotionally isolated him from those he holds dearest. Had he not been forced to flee, he narrates that he would have continued to live among relatives and friends, pursuing a simple life with dignity.

Almost every testimony contains a moment of grieving for home and their families. For many, their villages and members were not simply places and numbers, but, they were entire worlds for them. The loss of familiar landscapes, languages, and community is disturbing. All the testimonies disclosed that they had their own places of living; now they live without shelter and food. The testimonies also reflect the psychological pain and loss of identity; many have no citizenship, no legal documentation, and no right to return. “We have lost our village, our property, our children's dreams,” says one survivor. The weight of these losses is incalculable and often results in generational despair. The testimonies also reveal that displacement and loss of homeland has resulted into a deep emotional pain. That is why the testimonies collectively testified that the most difficult aspect of displacement is being unable to see their village, town, and neighbourhoods. For example, they deeply miss their social gatherings and events, particularly when fellow villagers celebrate their cultural traditions together, such as celebrating Eid and visiting relatives. Losing his homeland has left Alom feeling as though he has lost everything. He describes it as feeling like death itself, having no home, no property, no known faces, and no means of getting back into shared, celebrated traditions and customs. The hardest part of this loss is the uncertainty about the future and also knowing that there are very few

chances of bringing back what they have lost. He deeply misses his village, his home, and the life he once knew.

The testimonies of the survivors know that it is not possible to bring back the people who died because of the long persecution of the community. However, they believe that ending displacement and getting back to the families and loved ones is only possible when the country returns to normalcy and peace. In the process of testimony analysis, one also comes to an understanding that they did not ignore the decisive role that international organizations and states could play. They are particularly hopeful towards the United Nations and many of its human rights bodies. They also believe that the international powerful states and the neighbouring states must take initiative and intervene. Without global efforts and intentions to restore peace and ensure their safety, returning home will remain an impossibility. Their hope for the future is one of peace. They also emphasised that if peace is restored in Rakhine, they envisage a better life for their people. However, if the persecution continues, they fear their suffering will only grow worse.

## ► Sexual Violence Against Rohingya Women

This chapter is based on testimonies from five Rohingya women and girls who were raped and sexually tortured by the AA in the Rakhine State. Sexual violence victims are from villages in northern Buthidaung Townships and Maungdaw Townships, the same areas where [Burmese military forces committed sexual atrocities in 2017](#) as documented by the Human Rights watch. Our testimonies accounts reveal similarly brutal patterns of rape and assault, now perpetrated by AA forces. In their accounts, the survivors described being attacked during raids on their villages. As you will see in the victims' descriptions throughout this chapter,, the perpetrators were identified as AA fighters in almost every case. While the full scale of sexual violence remains difficult to determine due to fear and stigma, [humanitarian workers in Bangladesh report growing numbers of survivors seeking assistance](#). It is also likely possible that many more cases go unreported due to a variety of issues. In the testimonies, the victims revealed that after the assault, they faced immense social shame, financial barriers to medical care, and little hope of justice.

Shajida, who is 40 and hails from Kupurdaung (Kyauk Phu Daung) village of the Maungdaw, was among those abducted and raped during the AA's violent attacks in 2024. She described in her testimony that perpetrators were the members of the AA as she recognised them by their Rakhine language and green uniform. After she was forcibly taken into custody from her village, she was first physically assaulted, slapped, and tortured. Revealed in her testimony, she narrated that the soldiers warned her to either comply with their sexual demands or face death. Following this threat, she was gang-raped by eight members of the AA. During her resistance to the assault, she fell semi-conscious, and could not fully understand what they were saying. But, even in that semi-conscious state, she says, she could see the hostile and abusive tone of the perpetrators. For her, the violence was driven by 'deep-rooted ethnic hatred and religious discrimination, an attempt to dehumanize Rohingya women.' The Atrocities did not end with the sexual assault, and she was taken to another village in the hills where she was forced to wash the clothes of the rapist soldiers. It was at this place that she was fortunate to flee. Seizing an opportunity when they were not monitoring her closely, she managed to flee back to her village and eventually escaped to Bangladesh. Testimonies like hers and many more narrating similar episodes of sexual violence indicate that the use of violence against Rohingya women is a strategy rather than a mere

coincidence. Defined as stateless, an ethnic outsider, and a Muslim without rights, the Rohingya woman emerges as the most vulnerable target. And we must realize that the women were not merely casualties of crossfire; rather, they have been actively and deliberately targeted.

It is well known that the Arakan Army resumed fighting with the Myanmar military on 13 November 2023. This is the third outbreak of hostilities in Rakhine State since 2018. In this conflict, Rakhine has seen [cycles of violence](#), with the Rohingya community often being targeted on account of their religious and ethnic identity. Other than mass killings, forced displacement, and the destruction of properties, there are reports that indicate the episodes of violence have been also accompanied by sexual atrocities of the Rohingya women. The sexual violence is something that has been previously also committed by the '[Myanmar military, in which innumerable women from the community have been raped](#).' There are credible reports and testimonies that reveal the AA's methods of sexual violence surpassed the cruelty of the military. Human Rights Watch's 2025 report notes that as conflict expanded into late 2024, Rohingya girls and women were increasingly faced with sexual violence by both [Military and non-state actors](#) such as the Arakan Army (AA). United Nations investigator Thomas Andrews in late 2024 also reported explicitly named the [Arakan Army committing rape, torture, killing, abduction, arbitrary arrest, sexual violence against innocent Rohingya](#) civilians in Rakhine State, Myanmar. Therefore, the chapter and the analysis of the testimonies that follow is rooted in the voices of the survivors of the sexual violence. We have seen in our testimonies that rape and sexual harassment survivor recounted that the AA came into their villages in groups. In addition to revenge in which their men did not obey the various demands proposed by the group, they also targeted women based on their appearance. The systematic rape of Rohingya women by the AA in 2024 constitutes a war crime and a gendered dimension of genocide. These women who are traumatized courageously offer crucial evidence to study sexual violence in a society where being raped is seen as a matter of shame.

## → Rape as Weapon, Women as Targets

[‘Several Rohingya women have spoken out about gang-rape at the hands of AA soldiers in Maungdaw township’](#) as also partly reported by the BROUK in its January report. By targeting the helpless women of the community with sexual violence, the ethnic armed group sends a clear message. After reading the testimonies, it becomes pretty clear that such acts communicate domination and fear. The women have been threatened at gunpoint, forced into submission, and then brutally raped. These attacks also reflect another important dimension that the perpetrators are conscious of - the fact that the community lacks rights. As a result of this, the perpetrators know there is no legal accountability for their acts and would easily go away without facing any punishment. The intersection of religious and gender identity with the lack of legal punishment for the perpetrators makes Rohingya women uniquely vulnerable.

Sexual violence also becomes as a means of punishment for the victims for simply being Rohingya women. They are particularly vulnerable to attack because they do not share the same identity as their perpetrators. In such a context, the religious and ethnic identity of the victims comes to play during their sexual assaults. Perpetrators are driven by both prejudices and the amount of hate they carry for the identity of the victims. This becomes very relevant in the context of the report as the testimonies revealed that the perpetrators used derogatory terms such as ‘Kolar’ and ‘Bengali’ for their victims. In the hills of Buthidaung Township, where Rohingya homes stood for generations, 28-year-old Nur Kaida Bibi’s life was violently impacted by the AA. A mother and wife from Min Gyi Si village, she now lives in the Kutupalong Rohingya Refugee Camp Cox’s Bazar in Bangladesh. Nur Kaida is convinced that her identity as a Rohingya Muslim woman made her a target. “They called us ‘Kolar’ and said we didn’t belong in Myanmar,” she said. The AA’s actions were not random, but part of a broader campaign of ethnic and religious hatred. By weaponizing rape, they aimed to punish women of their Rohingya identity. “They didn’t just want to hurt me,” she explained. “They wanted us to know that we had no power, no rights, and no safety not in our homes, not in our villages.” Nur’s testimony echoes the pattern of ethnic hatred that underlies sexual violence against Rohingya women. This hatred, deeply rooted in racial and religious discrimination, fuels a system where violence is not merely collateral, but a tool for ethnic punishment. They didn’t just rape; her rather they destroyed her

for her identity. Like many other survivors, she identifies that the assaults are a result of religio-ethnic hatred. The testimonies explicitly reveal that the AA is targeting them for being a Rohingya Muslim woman in Rakhine State.

Radio Free Asia investigation has documented heartaking accounts of sexual violence against Rohingya women and girls. The victims of the violence have narrated systematic assaults by the AA. For instance, one Rohingya woman and rape victim who asked to remain anonymous over safety concern narrated, [“It was in August 2024, I woke up early in the morning after constant knocking at my door. The moment I opened the door a group of AA entered my home by force and kicked me on the ground, groped and physically assaulted me in front of my family members before slaughtering my father-in-law and two of my brother-in-laws and dragging them out of our home.”](#) Assaults like the one mentioned and many more from our testimonies narrate the coordinated sexual violence committed by the AA against Rohingya women during the 2024 conflict in Rakhine State. For many victims, it is a concerted assault on the very identity and continuity of the Rohingya people; ‘an effort to destroy through gendered humiliation, bodily desecration, and psychological annihilation.’ Survivors were not merely victims of battlefield brutality; they were victims of a doctrine of control that relies on rape as a weapon of ethnic cleansing. The calculated selection of women, the use of sexual violence to extract male compliance, and the recurring nature of these crimes across multiple villages speak to the systemic nature of the campaign. This is not incidental violence but a form of genocidal logic, one that understands the female body as both a symbol of lineage and a site of communal continuity, making it a prime target in the destruction of a people.

## → Punishing Beauty: Sakina Bibi's (Name Changed) Account

Sakina Bi Bi (name changed), a young woman of 18 years old and a resident of Maung Ni Fara, discloses in her testimony that she was assaulted because of her good looks. Abducted from her home in the village in 2024, she was chosen for assault due to what her perpetrators described as her physical beauty. This aspect of rape or sexual violence is something of a common pattern in the conflict-ridden regions. As we all know in conflict areas, it is an inevitable reality that young

women live in constant fear of sexual violence. This is particularly because perpetrators weaponize beauty to exert individual and collective punishment. Testimonies, in the context of the report, also reveal in their experiences that it becomes more dangerous in already vulnerable communities like Rohingyas. In her testimony, Rehena narrated similar motives behind the perpetrators when a group of AA stormed her village and began forcibly identifying Rohingya girls based on appearance. She was among several young women kidnapped that day and taken to a remote unknown location. Rehena's account reveals that after the assault, the perpetrators assumed she had died and discarded her body. Her survival was the result of both chance and extraordinary will. But survival did not bring safety. Upon her return to her community, she experienced overwhelming sickness and severe emotional trauma. "I want to die," she said. "I think dying is better than surviving in this way." Her words capture the unbearable weight of stigma, betrayal, and ongoing psychological suffering that survivors endure, not only from the violence itself but from the silence and rejection that follow. What distinguishes Rehena's testimony is not only its clarity, but the larger context or the contours around rape, especially for Rohingya women. She was violated not simply as an individual but as a symbol of beauty and community. The soldiers' choice of her for rape and their stated goal of raping 'every beautiful Rohingya girl' who refused to leave becomes a moment of fear for all the women around her.

## → **Patterns of Violence: Noor Banu and Other Similar Voices**

In the Maung Ni Fara village, three sexual assault victims describe how an armed group, likely members of the AA, dressed in army clothes, came into the village fully prepared. Arriving with guns and other military attacking equipment, they stormed into homes at night. During the searchout investigation, they asked about the male family members of the families so that they could take them to fight the military. It was obvious that, fearing for their lives, the men would go into hiding or flee the area so that they could not be taken away by the group. This was something unacceptable for the forces, and as a result of this, the women would become easy targets. Noor Banu's experience and her encounter with a similar situation is quite illustrative. She was taken from her home, detained in the hills, and then sexually assaulted. She was told explicitly that her

suffering was punishment for her husband and son as the raided forces were unable to find them during their raid on the house.

Her testimony reveals a chilling pattern of gendered violence perpetrated by the AA. In August 2024, she was abducted during a wave of raids targeting Rohingya villages and was taken into custody, where she endured beatings, humiliation, and rape. Her abductors made it clear that the violence inflicted upon her was directly connected to the refusal of her male relatives to join the AA. The AA did not merely use rape as a weapon of personal abuse; it deployed it as a form of collective punishment and coercion. Noor Banu's experience highlights the role of forced displacement and strategic isolation in this violence. After her abduction, she was taken to the hills and later imprisoned in Buthidaung township. There, she was subjected to sexual violence and was kept under conditions of extreme deprivation, receiving only one packet of food per day. Her perpetrators monitored her movements strictly, and any attempt to leave or communicate was met with threats of death. Eventually, she managed to escape while searching for water, a rare moment of unsupervised activity that she used to flee. Her return to her village did not bring relief. Instead, she encountered rejection and blame from her family and community, compounding her trauma with social ostracization. Her husband threatened separation, and relatives distanced themselves from her, treating her as a bearer of dishonor rather than a survivor of war crimes. Other testimonies also narrate similar patterns. Nojiba Bibi, abducted from the same village and taken to a nearby school, was gang-raped after refusing sexual compliance under threat of death. She escaped only under the cover of darkness, and upon return, her husband accused her of dishonor and abuse.

In another instance, in September 2024, members of the AA forcibly abducted Nojiba from her village and transported her to Gozzin Diya village, where she was imprisoned in a local school building. There, she was subjected to multiple acts of physical and sexual violence. Nojiba clearly identified her perpetrators as members of the AA through their military uniforms, their use of Rakhine language, and their possession of weapons. The abuse she endured was preceded by direct threats: they pointed guns at her, warned that they would abduct or kill her and her family, and demanded that she submit to sexual violence. When she resisted, she was raped.

This violence was not isolated, nor was it random. Nojiba described living in constant fear even before her abduction, as the AA repeatedly threatened Rohingya women in her village. Her testimony is consistent with a broader pattern of targeting Muslim women due to their ethnic and religious identity. She believes that the rape was a deliberate act of hatred and prejudice, designed not just to degrade her personally but to terrorize her entire community.

Following the atrocity, Nojiba managed to escape under the cover of night, fleeing from her captors and returning to her village. But the violence did not end with her physical escape. Upon returning home, she was met not with comfort but with rejection. Her husband, instead of supporting her, accused and beat her, branding her as "AA's sex maker." The betrayal by her spouse compounded her trauma, isolating her within her own household and community. This reflects the layered impact of sexual violence: it not only harms the survivor physically and psychologically but also exposes her to social stigma, victim-blaming, and secondary abuse. Nojiba did not receive any medical attention. She did not report the assault to any authority for fear of reprisal, a fear that is not unfounded in a context where perpetrators enjoy impunity. Despite seeking help, she received no support from local leadership or humanitarian actors, further deepening her sense of abandonment. Today, Nojiba lives in Camp 1E in Bangladesh, emotionally shattered and psychologically fragile. She expresses a profound sense of hopelessness and recurring suicidal ideation, a distressing but common response among survivors of such unpunished brutality. She continues to worry not just for herself, but for other girls, like one unnamed young woman from Hanri Fara (ward no. 5) who was raped alongside her but whose current whereabouts are unknown. Her concerns about the future of this unmarried survivor reflect broader fears about the societal consequences of rape, especially for women in conservative, displaced communities.

Women's experiences of sexual violence suggest that militarized gender violence is a strategic pattern, not accidental. They were more than just casualties of war or the ethnic conflict in the region. We also come to know that sexual assault was used by the perpetrators to destroy families, demoralize communities, and cause disobedience to forced conscription. This reflects an inherent system of domination, where Rohingya women are used to inflict control, terror, and punishment. These crimes are made more horrific by the lack of justice, the silence of local authorities, and the normalization of violence in occupied areas.

## → Psychological Violence

In a report published on 18 April by the United Nations Human Rights office, it was roughly estimated that there are over, [“40,000 pregnant women and girls among the Rohingya refugee population \(in Bangladesh\), and a significant number of these pregnancies are the result of rape.”](#)

It was also urged in the report that the Bangladeshi government must support the victims of sexual violence suffering in many ways. One of the important challenges that these victims faced was ‘stigma and unwarranted pregnancies’ as a result of the forced rape. In the process of testimony collection, and then in the analysis part, one comes to know that the Rohingya women are silenced not only by rape, but by the fear of rejection from their families, and the absence of justice. Most of the victims have repeatedly voiced their disappointment over the treatment after their rape incidents. They are seen as invisible, as though they don't exist in the family or the society. For instance, as Noor Banu shares in her testimony, “I was dying every day, but no one cared.” The psychological violence exerted through these acts does not with the acts of rape violence, it stays in the minds, and futures of the survivors. And in most cases, their life is ruined and they are unable to reconstruct it.

All survivors reported that local village leaders or authorities (usually Buddhists) refused to intervene or offer redress. In multiple testimonies, victims described how village bodies or elders either dismissed their experiences or expressed helplessness in the face of AA dominance. One testimony recalled being told, “I don’t have the power to make a judgment against the AA.” This lack of response from local leadership leaves survivors doubly victimized, first by their attackers, and second by the silence and inaction of those meant to protect them. The implications of this are far-reaching. Not only are Rohingya women left without formal justice or protection, but they are also shunned within their own families and communities. Survivors like Noor Banu and Nojiba Bibi reported that their husbands have changed after the incident. They have been abused and blamed for the violence inflicted upon them, with husbands accusing them of dishonor and withdrawing emotional and material support. In many cases, family members refused to offer even basic care, deepening the isolation and trauma experienced by survivors. In Sakina Bi Bi (name changed)’s case, although her family wept for her, they could do little to shield her from the shame that followed. The result is a crushing burden of guilt and loneliness that survivors are

forced to carry, often without any psychological support. These women are not only raped; they are left to live on their own. For instance, following her escape back to the village, Noor received no formal support. When she reported the assault to her local village chairman, she was told, “I don’t have power to judge against the AA,” and was advised to remain silent. Family and community responses added to her suffering. Her husband attempted to separate from her, and her relatives are not equally supportive. This pattern of stigmatization of survivors of sexual violence is mirrored in Nojiba Bibi’s testimony, who described being physically abused and shamed by her husband for being raped by the AA. The trauma left by gender-based violence runs deep.

This chapter, grounded in the testimonies of survivors, has highlighted sexual violence within the broader genocidal strategy employed against the Rohingya. These women are not passive victims; they are witnesses, truth-tellers, and agents of memory. Their narratives provide a lens through which we can understand the full scope of the violence, its layered impact, and the urgent need for justice. Any meaningful response to the crisis in Rakhine State must begin with these stories. It is from their courage that our responsibility is born to bear witness, to document, and above all an indication for human rights champions to act.

## ► Forced Abduction and Conscription of the Community

Forcible abduction of the Rohingyas has been a constant feature of Rohingya persecution in Rakhine. In our report, the chapter documents abduction and conscription crimes of the AA, but we must know that it has been perpetrated previously by the military as well. Specifically, after the communal violence in 2012, the military junta implemented a brutal policy of detaining men without legal process. Thousands of youths were unlawfully taken by the Myanmar military in a wave of arbitrary mass arrests. Brutal persecution, including manhunts and mass detentions, also intensified after a wave of genocide in 2017. The AA, observing this pattern of violence, employed similar tactics, resulting in thousands of deaths, the displacement of thousands, and the forced captivity, particularly in Maungdaw and Buthidaung townships in the 2024 violence. For instance, forcible conscription is an inevitable part of their daily exploitation by Myanmar's military regime. The junta has forced hundreds of the men from the community into military service. Once taken into conscription, the men are subjected to short and basic training before being deployed in conflict. This practice continues today, [as evidenced by recent conscription warnings issued to men in the Dar Paing displacement camp](#) in September 2024. With the military desperate to regain its areas lost to the Arakan Army, the already displaced Rohingya people are being coerced into a war they did not choose or want to be a part of.

### → Forcible Abduction

From all the testimonies collected for this chapter, it becomes explicitly clear that the pattern of forcible conscriptions begins with abductions. It would be done either with individual targets or village raids. However, the AA has increasingly relied on village raids as a preferred method for forced abductions. These raids, as revealed by our testimonies, often involve surrounding the entire village, conducting mass abductions of men and boys. After the village is taken over, they coerce them to be a part of the group under threat of violence. Eyewitness accounts describe

armed AA fighters storming homes, separating men from their families, and taking them away with no warning or justification. Those who resist or attempt to flee face risk and retaliation against their families. As a result, they would leave the entire family or the community in a state of fear and helplessness. Mohammad Imran estimates that 3,000 to 4,000 Rohingya men were abducted from various villages in Buthidaung and Rathidaung townships alone. Saifullah, a 17-year-old man whose testimony is very relevant, narrates his own story in the following manner. In my village, Dabboriyong, the AA abducted at least 15 to 20 individuals, including one of my uncles. These abductions were carried out with extreme brutality. Most of the people taken were either killed or disappeared, with little to no information reaching their families. The AA targets the Rohingya out of deep-seated hatred, falsely accusing us of being outsiders from Bangladesh and treating us as enemies without cause. The objective behind these abductions appears to be part of a broader campaign of ethnic cleansing and terror. The AA often uses the justification that Rohingya are enemies or infiltrators. In reality, the goal seems to be to eliminate the presence of Rohingya from Rakhine by instilling fear, destroying families, and using victims as human shields in their conflict with the Myanmar military.

Facing a similar fate, Saifullah, in his testimony, elaborates that he was also taken away. Describing his captivity life, he states, “I was abducted from my home around midnight, four months ago (September 2024), by the AA. They gave no explanation and we were too terrified to question them asking anything that would only result in brutal beatings. I was taken, along with nine other young men from his village, to a military camp that the AA had captured from the Myanmar army. There, we were interrogated and tortured.” He further asserts that they repeatedly beat him with wires, sticks, punched and kicked him while accusing us of having links with the Myanmar military or ARSA. They wanted to know if ARSA had any presence in our village. “We were given barely any food or water, and sometimes we had to survive on tree leaves. The living conditions were horrific, and he describes his abduction as a deliberate form of psychological and physical punishment for simply being a member of the Rohingya community.

## → Forced Conscription

Across Maungdaw township, more than [2,500 Rohingya](#) men are believed to have been abducted by the AA for the purposes of forced recruitment. ‘They have reportedly been taken to the AA headquarters in Kha Maung Seik in northern Maungdaw. Many are believed to have been taken to the frontlines to fight against the SAC and allied Rohingya armed groups.’ According to local media reports, the AA uses the Rohingya conscripts as forced labour on a daily basis, [described in more detail below by the BROUK in its report](#).

*“Forced recruitment by the AA has also continued in Buthidaung Township. In late October, the AA issued orders to at least five villages in southern Buthidaung Township. A Rohingya resident explained: Smaller villages are required to provide 30 youths, while larger villages must provide 90. These youths will be recruited into the Arakan Army to fight against the Military Council and the Rohingya armed groups...Additionally, any individuals with connections to the Military Council or the Rohingya armed groups must be handed over to the AA. If they fail to comply, the AA will continue conducting operations in the villages.”*

Survivors explain that young men were either pressed into service or taken by force when they refused. The testimonies disclosed that they do not want to be a part or attend any military training. However, at the same time, they do not have any choice but to join and fight alongside the military. For example, one man in his statement testified that "If we refuse conscription, the junta will arrest our families. We have no choice, we can't escape their forced recruitment, and there's nowhere to run. The regime is using us as tools in their war." Another young man from a record of testimonies added, "If a person flees instead of joining the military, the group detains his relatives and forces them to serve. And if a conscript skips training, they arrest and torture his family member, a relative, or his parents instead. While Soyed's immediate family was spared, many others in Kelaidaung (Khi Hlai Daung) were not. He personally knows at least 30 individuals who were forcibly conscripted by the AA or the Myanmar military. These were young men and boys, many of them taken from their homes or ambushed in the fields. Once conscripted, they were thrown into open war, often used as human shields or assigned to frontlines without

proper training or protection. It is almost impossible to resist, and if one does, he has to face fatal consequences. Soyed described one man who was killed for refusing to join, and whose entire family was subsequently targeted and shot as punishment. The process of conscription, according to Soyed, is both harsh and continuous, without any signs of mercy or intention to stop.

Soyed Ahmed, a 32-year-old Rohingya man from Kelaidaung (Khi Hlai Daung) village in Maungdaw Township, recounted his traumatic experience of abduction by the AA. On July 27, 2024 he was taken along with 30 other villagers to a remote location in the Kelaidaung (Khi Hlai Daung) hills, where they were held captive. The AA's primary intent was to forcibly recruit them to fight against the Myanmar Military Junta. They came to his village daily threatening and demanding that young men should join them. Those who refused were either beaten or taken away. The abduction was not random; it was part of a systematic and coercive campaign to force young Rohingya men into war. When he refused to join, Soyed recounted, "they tied him tightly with ropes, beat him severely, and dragged him to their hideout. Their intention was clear; they wouldn't leave him until he obeys their orders.

As already said, conscripts were pushed into active conflict zones without any training or proper equipment. Kamal, a 65-year-old man from Maungdaw, narrated to us that over a hundred individuals from his locality alone were conscripted and then deployed to the frontlines, where most perished. With no concern for their safety or survival, this form of exploitation reflects an utter disregard for Rohingya lives. This also gets reflected in the testimonies when they say that the AA forces, coerces, and uses violence to conscript them. The community has nothing to gain from the war, but still, the armed group seeks to exploit them for its conflict. The disregard for their life can also be judged from the fact that not joining conscription demands often resulted in brutal punishment not only for the individual in question but for their entire family. Kamal recounted that when men rejected recruitment, their families were persecuted, extorted, and threatened. In some cases, as narrated by Soyed Ahmed, families were shot at or subjected to

violent attacks. This form of collective punishment created an environment where refusal became almost impossible, as the safety of one's life or the loved ones around them remains at stake.

Soyed further states that once the person is conscripted “the families left behind are devastated, they live in constant fear, not knowing if their loved ones are alive or dead.” Communication is completely severed, most are taken to remote locations or military frontlines, making contact impossible. This rupture of familial ties leaves Rohingya households emotionally shattered and economically crippled. With breadwinners and sons taken away, many families descend into deeper poverty and psychological despair. The abductions and forced conscriptions act not only as a method of militarization but as a tool of destruction. Mohammad Imran also outcries that the impact of forced conscription on families is devastating. Families are left distressed and helpless, watching their sons and brothers vanish or die. The loss of young men whether to death, disappearance, or displacement cripples the community's structure, both emotionally and economically. This systematic targeting of Rohingya youth through conscription serves not only military interests but also a broader genocidal intent, to fragment and erase the Rohingya identity from Myanmar’s social fabric.

The testimonies presented in this chapter collectively expose a campaign of systematic violence waged against the Rohingya people. The acts of abduction, torture, and conscription are not random episodes but part of a coordinated effort to terrorize, displace, and erase an entire ethnic group. These practices violate every principle of human dignity and international humanitarian law. More than that, they reflect a genocidal intent: a calculated strategy to depopulate Rohingya communities, dismantle their social structures, and render them powerless in their own homeland. This chapter calls for urgent international recognition, accountability, and protection for people who continue to suffer under militarized apartheid.

## ► Stories of Property Destruction and Burning

On November 13, 2023, '[renewed fighting](#) between the Myanmar military and Arakan Army ended a year-long unofficial ceasefire in Rakhine State.' In this renewed fighting, the armed ethnic force has started gaining significant territorial gains. Since January 2024, both forces have attacked each other in Rohingya villages, particularly in South Buthidaung township. According to local residents, Rohingya groups, and the media other than civilian killings, it has also resulted in [destruction of Rohingya properties](#). However, In May 2024, the violence against the Rohingya population in Myanmar's Rakhine State reached its highest levels. Among many [burning incidents reported](#), the most disturbing incident was the assault on the village of Ward No. 2 in Buthidaung township. The testimonies of Rohingya survivors from Buthidaung, Maungdaw, and surrounding villages expose a [systematic destruction perpetrated by the AA](#). However, the [AA has been categorically denying its responsibility](#) for the most widely publicised acts of violence targeting the Rohingya villages, properties and their houses in May during the AA's military campaign to seize Buthidaung township. But we also know that, seeing or hearing about brutal acts of the AA, many groups, international organizations and human rights activists, stated that the fighting forces should prioritize civilian safety and avoid unnecessary destruction. For instance, [Shayna Bauchner](#), Asia researcher at Human Rights Watch also reported that the force must "minimize civilian casualties and destruction of homes and property." For most of the reports, statements, as particularly mentioned by the Human Rights Watch in its [news release, published in early 2024](#), that the conflict has the potential to bring "Rohingyas and their places again at risk that were once devastated by military atrocities in 2017.'

This denial by the group from taking any sort of responsibility was in response to the documented reports, press briefings, newspaper stories, and statements of various human rights organizations who accused them of making numerous attacks. Many Rohingya men in their testimonies revealed to us the armed groups brutality during its attacks on their villages in Buthidaung township in May 2024. However, the signs of the AA brutality were seen in a way before the May atrocities of the Buthidaung. The ethnic armed group actually entered the area in January

2024 in an effort to take control of the military command situated near the town. And it was around the same time that the signs of future brutality were sown. For instance, the Human Rights Watch has reported that some [killings and destruction of homes of the community](#) took place at that time. And we also see that the group accused the community of siding or favoring the military and pro-Rohingya militia groups like ARSA. As a result, they also told the community openly that they do not have any rights and cannot live in the land anymore, and afterward started burning the houses. However, the AA has dismissed allegations of human rights abuses against Rohingya civilians and called them “[one-sided accusations](#)” propagated by Rohingya militants and diaspora groups. The AA argued that civilian casualties were either “collateral damage” or involved Rohingya fighters, while also claiming that fires in Buthidaung were caused by fleeing militants or junta airstrikes. But this narrative is contradicted by investigations, including those by Human Rights Watch. These denials come despite overwhelming evidence documenting the AA's role in targeted violence and arson attacks against Rohingya communities.

This chapter documents the accounts of survivors who were witnesses to the atrocities inflicted. Their testimonies serve as a powerful means through which the patterns of destruction and property burning can be understood. Through thematic analysis of her experience, this chapter lays bare the broader strategy of omitting a community or making them invisible. Through missile strikes, arson, looting, and demolition, the targeted destruction of homes, farms, businesses, mosques, schools, and even hospitals illustrates a calculated policy of erasure, designed to permanently remove the Rohingya from their ancestral land and prevent any return. This chapter offers a thematic synthesis of survivor testimonies that document the breadth and intent of this destruction.

## → **Coordinated Assaults and Widespread Burning**

In April, fighting escalated in the predominantly Rohingya townships of Buthidaung and Maungdaw. As a result, the Arakan Army began attacking Rohingya villages east of Buthidaung. [Satellite data analyzed by Human Rights Watch shows that over 40 villages were partially or fully burned between April 24 and May 21](#), with thousands of structures destroyed. The pattern, as reflected in the imagery, suggests [deliberate](#) arson attacks on the areas inhabited by the

community. In this new phase of attacks that was started in January 2024, these areas faced insurmountable hardships. Enatullah, an 18-year-old from the village of undisclosed village near Htan Shauk Khan village, witnessed the calculated violence unleashed by the AA on the Rohingya population. In early January 2024, the AA targeted an undisclosed village near Htan Shauk Khan village with missile attacks, destroying six houses and ten shops in a single strike. At the time, Enatullah and his family were sheltering 2 to 3 kilometers away from their home, narrowly escaping the blast. “We saw fire and smoke rising from our village. The shops and homes were gone. We were told to leave before the attack. Then they fired the missiles.” This strategic warning and subsequent attack marked the beginning of a forced evacuation under the guise of military conflict. Later that month, the AA entered an undisclosed village near Htan Shauk Khan village and neighboring villages, including Khezinga Fara (Tha Bait Daung), setting fire to roughly 40 houses in an undisclosed village near Htan Shauk Khan village alone. Khezinga Fara was hit even harder; 200 homes were burned, and 20 people were abducted. “They came at 7 PM, right after the military had left. Everyone in our village watched them set fire to Khezinga Fara (Tha Bait Daung). It was five minutes from us.” The targeted destruction was more than just random violence; it was a message of dominance and a campaign to erase community settlements.

After months, on May 16, 2024, the AA again surrounded the Rohingya village of Buthidaung, cutting off every possible escape route. Sabeku Nahar, a 19-year-old female survivor who bore witness to the atrocities, describes the movements of the forces as deliberate and calculated, holding their positions until the evening of May 17. On the same day, she stated that at approximately 8:00 PM in the night, the village was plunged into terror as the AA opened fire indiscriminately. They fired at men, women, children, anyone in sight, Sabeku recalls. “There was nowhere to run. People screamed, fled, and fell.” The AA did not stop at gunfire. Homes were torched, religious institutions destroyed, and marketplaces incinerated. The night sky glowed with flames and was choked by smoke, signaling the obliteration of a community. Her family owned both a house and a grocery shop, valued at approximately 80 million Myanmar Kyat (approximately \$38,117). These were reduced to ashes in the coordinated attack. On May 17, [Reuters also conducted interviews with a dozen of residents from Buthidaung](#), both over the phone and near refugee camps in Bangladesh, and analyzed satellite imagery of the area before

and after the fires to piece together what happened. In their investigation, they found that the party directly responsible for the arson was none other than the AA.



*Image 5: Images capture widespread damage and destruction across Buthidaung town due to fire, reportedly carried out by the AA in its attacks on the town in May 2024. (Image Credits: Rohingya Human Rights Initiative)*

In the process of analysis of the testimonies, almost all the survivors recounted that their attacks were not spontaneous. They were well-planned, coordinated offensives aimed at the complete destruction of the community and its villages. For instance, Zomila Khatun, a 40-year-old Rohingya woman, was among the survivors of this systematic onslaught, describing how

Buthidaung was surrounded and shelled from all directions on May 17, 2024. On the same day, a calculated act of mass violence was also unfolded in Ward No. 2, Buthidaung. Her account provides crucial insight into the nature of the attack and the destruction of the Rohingya community and its belongings. They came from all sides and opened fire on men, women, and children, she recounts. “We were in chaos, and there was nowhere to hide.” Following the gunfire, the attackers turned to firebombing. Homes were set ablaze, one after another, until the entire village was engulfed in flames. The mosque, the madrasa, and the market, critical pillars of community life, were all destroyed. Zomila lost not only her home but her family’s farmland, all inherited from her parents and valued at approximately 80 million Myanmar Kyat. “They burned the mosque where we prayed, the madrasa where our children studied, and the market where we found food and medicine. They didn’t just destroy our homes. They tried to destroy who we are,” she stated in her testimony.

In Maungdaw, Jani Alom witnessed similar tactics. Homes were first looted, then burned, and residents were forced to flee under shelling. Jani Alom, a 30-year-old Rohingya man originally from Maungdaw Township in Rakhine State, now lives as a refugee in Camp 1E in Bangladesh. His testimony reflects the destruction of homes and villages to the forced loss of livelihood and identity. His place, like many in Maungdaw and Buthidaung, was engulfed in chaos as the Myanmar military and AA launched coordinated assaults involving shelling, arson, and looting. ‘They attacked the place with everything like guns, fire, and fear’ Jani recounts. They burned homes, stole belongings, and left nothing but ash. Rohingya families were driven from their homes under direct threat. Military shelling destroyed homes and farms, while arson left villages reduced to rubble overnight. The military and AA looted what they could before forcing families to flee, making it impossible to recover anything. He described watching, from afar, as village after village, including Kuandaung (Kwan Dine) , U Hla Pay , and Fuk Fara (East Village), engulfed in flames.

At midnight in 2024, the village of Oli Moroung, nestled in Buthidaung Township, Rakhine State, found itself in chaos. The AA launched a sudden and violent attack. It eventually shattered the fragile existence of its Rohingya residents. Among them was Enamul Haq, a 35-year-old rickshaw driver, who now resides in Camp 27 of Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. His harrowing account reveals not just the horror of the night his village burned, but the deeper ethnic cleansing agenda

driving the AA's campaign. At around 12:30 AM, the AA infiltrated Oli Moroung. Enamul recalls the precise moment terror unfolded. "They opened fire everywhere, indiscriminately. Everyone was running, screaming, trying to escape. The whole town turned red with fire." He and others fled to the main road, watching from a distance as their homes were consumed by flames. Enamul's home was destroyed in the attack. Alongside it, he lost twelve heads of cattle, a vital asset representing years of savings and economic stability. The total value of his property, including the cattle and house, was estimated at 1.5 million Myanmar Kyat.

In April 2024, the village of Kwan Dine and surrounding Rohingya communities in Buthidaung Township were engulfed in a wave of systematic violence and destruction. Aman Ullah, a 50-year-old madrasa teacher and landowner, fled his ancestral home alongside hundreds of others when the AA launched a brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing. Now displaced and destitute in Shafiullah Khata, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, Aman bears witness to the annihilation of his village, his livelihood, and his community. The AA entered Kuandaung via the routes of U Hla Pay and Ruainga Daung (Ruwa Nyu Daung), opening fire without warning and slaughtering anyone unable to flee. They came firing. People screamed. We all ran for our lives toward Buthidaung downtown.

Though Aman did not witness the killings firsthand, reports circulated quickly. Those left behind were murdered, and a number of his neighbors never made it out alive. As he fled, he looked back and saw the red glow of flames consuming everything he had known. From a distance, Aman watched helplessly as the AA reduced his village to rubble. They burned Kwan Dine, U Hla Pay, Houyasiri (Htan Shauk Khan Village), Fosin Fara (west village), Fuk Fara (East Village), and Bor Fara. They burned the mosques, the madrasas, the homes, everything. The coordinated destruction wasn't isolated. It was part of a systematic campaign to erase Rohingya villages from the landscape of Rakhine State.

## → Destruction of Livelihoods

Following Buthidaung's capture, approximately [70,000](#) individuals from the community were displaced, and later sought refuge to the west and south because of ongoing attacks. The Arakan Army declared, on May 18, it had captured all Myanmar junta camps in Buthidaung. In the days

after the announcement of complete taking over of the town, the people started escaping. This resulted in heavy loss of livelihood. In the testimonies, we come to know that families lost not only their homes but shops, farmland, and livestock. Such items are very vital for subsistence and dignity of life. Mohammad Faisal, a former merchant, in his testimony revealed that he lost property worth 70 million Myanmar Kyat, including crops, land, motorcycles, and livestock. Sabeku Nahar's family-owned grocery and Zomila Khatun's inherited farmland were both obliterated. Enamul Haq, a rickshaw driver, had his house destroyed and livestock stolen before being beaten by AA members for pleading to recover them.

This targeting of livelihoods left survivors without livelihood and entirely dependent on humanitarian aid. Following the massacre of 2024 Buthidaung, the AA seized Rohingya property in the area. Homes, farms, and communal buildings were looted. They were also systematically razed to the ground. Even properties not immediately destroyed in the initial attack were later bulldozed or burned to prevent any return. They are not just occupying our land, Zomila says, they are erasing us from it. Military bases are now being erected on the occupied land, cementing AA control and preventing any future claims by Rohingya survivors. Zomila emphasizes that this is not accidental; it is a calculated campaign to destroy evidence of Rohingya presence. Before the attacks, Zomila's husband owned a shop that supported their family. However, years of conflict and systemic discrimination denied them the right to work, and his business was eventually shuttered. Now I am without any livelihood, she says, we have nothing left. Not land, not income, not even safety." Living in exile in Hyderabad, India, Zomila now represents the fate of thousands of Rohingya who have been forcibly removed from their homeland, stripped of livelihoods, and made invisible to the very country they once called home.

Jani's account is no different from Zomila's. His family had depended on farming for generations. Their land was fertile, supporting rice, vegetables, and fruit cultivation, as well as livestock. But the ongoing conflict stripped them of everything. We had chickens, cows, and rice fields. All gone. Our farm, our tools, and our food were destroyed or stolen. The destruction was more than economic. Schools, mosques, and community spaces were targeted to sever the community's cultural and spiritual roots. This wasn't just the loss of infrastructure, it was the erasure of identity. Jani inherited his land and home through generational lineage. Yet this ancestral claim was wiped out when the Myanmar junta and now the AA began systematically seizing Rohingya

land. They took our houses, our fields, and now they use them for military camps or give them to Buddhist settlers, Jani says. “They don’t want us to return.” Where homes once stood, military outposts now rise. Looted homes were burned or bulldozed to eliminate all evidence of Rohingya habitation. The land has become a battleground for territorial and ethnic domination.

Aman Ullah was not only a religious educator, running a madrasa in his village, but also the owner of a house and ten acres of fertile farmland. Together, these assets were valued at approximately 150 million Myanmar Kyat. “All of it, my house, my land, my madrasa was wiped out.” His work as a teacher had given him social purpose and community standing. Now, he is without work and shelter in a refugee camp.

## → Agenda Behind Property Destruction

Sabeku Nahar reveals in his testimony that the AA is consciously destroying Rohingya homes and entire villages as part of a systematic effort to erase the Rohingya population from the region. Their actions are driven by hatred and an intention to show that we can no longer live in Rakhine State. By setting fire to houses, demolishing villages, and confiscating land, they are not only displacing but also making it impossible for the community to return. “Their goal is to erase our presence, our history, and our identity from the land where we have lived for generations. This campaign of destruction and forced displacement is a direct attempt to ethnically cleanse the Rohingya people and prevent us from ever reclaiming our rightful place in Rakhine State. The AA is pursuing its goal of establishing an independent state exclusively for the Rakhine ethnic group.” As part of this agenda, they are systematically targeting the Rohingya community, using violence, destruction etc. to drive them out. By attacking villages, burning down homes, and seizing land, they aim to ensure that they have no place to return. Their ultimate objective is to create a Rakhine inhabited by the ethnic Buddhists. The areas where homes and villages once stood are now being cleared and transformed into military bases. These bases serve as strategic centers for the AA, strengthening their military presence and reinforcing their claim over the region. This calculated campaign of ethnic cleansing and militarization highlights their intent to permanently displace the Rohingya community and reshape Rakhine State according to their own ethno-nationalist vision.

Jani Alom, another community man, outlines that the agenda behind the destruction of property by the Myanmar military and AA is primarily to displace and terrorize the Rohingya community. The destruction serves several purposes. The destruction is intended to create fear, forcing people to flee and preventing them from resisting or organizing against the oppression they face. The AA and Myanmar Junta have specific agendas behind the destruction or possession of Rohingya assets and lands, which align with their broader goals of ‘territorial control, ethnic domination, and strategic advantage.’ Both the AA and the Myanmar junta military aim to expand their control over areas with Rohingya populations, particularly in Rakhine State. By seizing Rohingya lands, they can settle ethnic Rakhine people or other supporters in those areas, consolidating their influence and undermining the presence of the Rohingya. Rohingya lands are often fertile and used for farming, providing an economic base. The military and AA exploit these resources for agricultural production, taking over fields, crops, and livestock. This helps them financially sustain their operations and strengthens their economic control in the region. The military may use Rohingya land for establishing military bases, camps, or outposts. These locations are strategically significant for controlling the region and suppressing resistance from other ethnic groups or insurgents. It also provides them with logistical advantages in the conflict. The seizure of Rohingya lands and properties also serves the agenda of erasing the Rohingya’s cultural and social identity.

## → Replacing Rohingyas and their Properties

The AA’s takeover of the township has unleashed brutal attacks on marginalized Rohingya communities that has caused widespread destruction and mass displacement. This Md Zubair, chairman of the Arakan Rohingya Society for Peace and Human Rights stated the community is, [“witnessing systematic atrocities in which the AA is forcibly evicting Rohingya families and replacing them with Rakhine settlers \(Mogh\) brought from neighboring countries.”](#) Survivors in their testimonies revealed that lands once occupied by Rohingya communities were quickly put into military use or resettled with Buddhist Rakhine civilians. For instance, Zomila and Enamul testified that homes were first looted, then razed, and those remained are later occupied or given

to settlers. Amanullah and Enatullah provided testimony on how entire villages were bulldozed to make room or space for AA bases.

Sabeku Nahar testifies that the land that the Rohingya community was forced to abandon is now being systematically cleared and used for military expansion. The AA, along with other authorities, is leveling large areas to build military bases. This further solidified their control over the region. These bases serve as strongholds, effectively ensuring that the Rohingya people can never return to reclaim their rightful homes, lands, or properties. At the same time, the houses left behind by the Rohingya are being looted and deliberately destroyed. Many homes are being set on fire, burning to the ground, while others are torn down using heavy machinery, erasing all traces of the families that once lived there. This destruction is not random; it is a calculated effort to eliminate any evidence of Rohingya presence in the area. By demolishing homes and wiping out entire villages, they are not only preventing the community from returning but also erasing their history and rightful claim to the land. The widespread burning and destruction of Rohingya properties reveal a clear intent to permanently displace the community and the reality of its existence in Rakhine State. The land and the village properties that stay behind are being redistributed to the non-Rohingya community. A similar pattern has been reflected in one newspaper article that explicitly stated that The United League of Arakan (ULA)/AA has been systematically displacing Rohingya communities in Buthidaung Township, forcibly removing them from their homes and subsequently relocating Rakhine families into the emptied villages, as it is stated in their [report](#),

*“Following AA’s military operations in Buthidaung Township that began around March 2024, many Rohingya villages were reportedly burned, and Rohingyas were forcibly expelled by AA troops. After taking full control of Buthidaung Township, AA reportedly forced the evacuation of around 30 Rohingya villages. These now-vacant original Rohingya villages are being repopulated with Rakhine families under AA’s program, and many Rakhine communities have also been expanding their territory into these former Rohingya areas.”*

Zomila Khatun also comes up with a similar story to that of the other survivors. In her narrative, she also says that the AA seizes land that belongs to the displaced Rohingya community. Every piece of property, including homes, farmland, and other owned spaces, has been forcefully taken

over. Now, they are strictly prohibiting the Rohingya people from returning to their villages. By preventing return, the AA is not only displacing but also erasing their presence from the land where their ancestors lived for generations. Meanwhile, the houses left behind by the Rohingya community are not only being looted but also deliberately allotted to non-Rohingyas. Many homes are set on fire, while others are demolished using heavy machinery, erasing any trace of our existence. This systematic destruction is part of a calculated effort to remove all evidence that Rohingya families once lived there.

What emerges from these testimonies is not merely a collection of tragic incidents, but a genocidal blueprint that is to destroy the homes, steal the land, erase the culture, and repopulate with the dominant group. This destruction is systematic and strategic, aimed at ensuring the Rohingya can never return, at least not physically, economically, or spiritually. The use of fire, explosives, and forced displacement is not random. It is a calculated campaign to annihilate a people's presence, rewrite territorial ownership, and entrench monoethnic dominance in Rakhine State. Through the voices of the survivors, this chapter

bears witness to a crime still unfolding and demands global recognition, accountability, and action.

## ► Propaganda and Hate in Offline and Digital Spaces

Disturbing violence against the community at the hands of multiple forces is a recurring feature in Rakhine. Data shows that the violence has been on the rise since the country's independence.<sup>2</sup> Given the nature of the system of persecution, armed and political leadership is a crucial driver, often preceded by religious and political mobilization mainly carried through propaganda and hate. Coinciding with the rise in violence from 2012, the advent of social media has given leaders, armed groups and far-right Buddhist supremacists a powerful space to perpetuate hate through offline mood and digital spaces like Facebook, twitter and ect. As we have seen, the testimonies highlight how both the Myanmar military and the AA systematically create propaganda and spread anti-Rohingya narratives throughout Rakhine State and abroad. The objective of this propaganda is to legitimize Rohingya persecution by denying their indigenous status and framing them as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh or security threat, and the other to incite social division by fostering hostility between Rohingya and other ethnic communities.

For instance, Salamat Ulla (Name Changed) testifies to propaganda in the following way: “Both the AA and the Myanmar military actively spread false propaganda and hatred against the Rohingya community. Their goal is to justify the persecution of Rohingya, remove us from the country, and create social disharmony among different communities. The Myanmar military has long used state-controlled media and official narratives to portray Rohingya as illegal immigrants or terrorists, denying our rightful identity and presence in Rakhine. This propaganda fuels discrimination, making it easier for the government to justify its oppressive policies. Similarly, the AA also promotes anti-Rohingya propaganda, portraying us as outsiders or a threat to their

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<sup>2</sup> For detailed information on the violence and persecution of the community, see links. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/in-depth/myanmar-rohingya-refugee-crisis-humanitarian-aid-bangladesh>, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rohingya\\_conflict](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rohingya_conflict), <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/atrocities-against-burmas-rohingya-population>, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rohingya\\_people](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rohingya_people), <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/political-science/articles/10.3389/fpos.2024.1144493/full>, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/10/myanmar-bangladesh-rohingya-community-facing-grave-st-threats-since-2017/>

nationalist agenda. This serves their political interests and helps them justify violence, extortion, and displacement from our land. These propaganda efforts not only lead to direct violence but also isolate Rohingya from potential allies, leaving us even more vulnerable to oppression, discrimination, and human rights abuses.”

Ekram (Name Changed) states that he has witnessed and heard of anti-Rohingya propaganda from both the AA and the Myanmar military. The AA often spreads messages portraying Rohingyas as enemies of the Rakhine people, accusing them of collaborating with their opponents. This narrative fuels division and incites hostility between ethnic groups, leading to increased violence against the Rohingya. The Myanmar military has long promoted propaganda that labels the Rohingya as ‘illegal immigrants’ from Bangladesh, despite their long history in Myanmar. This false narrative dehumanizes them, justifying the violence, killings, and forced displacement. By spreading these messages, both groups seek to rally support for their actions and prevent international intervention in the crisis. Ekram (Name Changed) recounts that propaganda has a significant impact on the Rohingya community. It dehumanizes us, portraying us as threats, terrorists, or unwanted outsiders. This fuels hatred and discrimination, leading to violence and persecution. Local communities, influenced by these false narratives, may join in attacks, burning homes, and forcing displacement. The propaganda also isolates us, making it harder to gain support or assistance, and justifies the atrocities we face, including killings, forced labor, and arbitrary detention. Ultimately, it perpetuates a cycle of fear, violence, and injustice.

Halamiya (name Changed) mentions that the AA has actively spread misinformation to the world. They have taken staged photographs showing them providing rations and evacuating Rohingya people from violence-affected areas. However, the reality is the exact opposite; they are the ones responsible for persecuting and displacing the Rohingya community. Their propaganda serves to manipulate public perception and conceal their role in the ongoing [atrocities](#). In his testimony, he further adds that the Rakhine Buddhist community has also been involved in the propaganda. Many local Buddhists actively participated in instigating and anti-community propaganda and setting narrative that propelled persecution. Their support for the AA has intensified the violence and suffering. The spread of false propaganda has had devastating effects. Homes have been attacked, and entire communities have been displaced because of these lies. The propaganda fuels violence, making the already dire situation for the Rohingyas even worse.

## → The Framing of Rohingya as ‘Bengali Intruders’ or ‘Illegal Outsiders or Immigrants’

The AA, Myanmar military, and some local Buddhists actively use both misinformation and disinformation as propaganda tools. They spread rumours claiming that Rohingyas are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. Labeling them as ‘illegal immigrants or Bengali outsiders’ has allowed armed actors like the AA to rationalize brutal policies. In addition to their own violence on the community, this propaganda serves a function like inciting local Buddhist populations against the community, fabricating moral justifications for persecution. The purpose of this propaganda is to dehumanize the community, justify violence, and gain support from the local population by portraying them as a threat. This misinformation strategy increases hatred, and worsens the ongoing violence and discrimination. For instance, Shamshudin (Name Changed), in his testimony, has witnessed significant anti-Rohingya propaganda from both the AA and the Myanmar military. He narrates that they “spread false narratives that portray us as terrorists, illegal migrants, or threats to national security. The Myanmar military, in particular, has labeled us as extremist outsiders to justify their persecution, including forced displacement, killings, and destruction of our homes. Similarly, the AA spreads propaganda that accuses us of collaborating with the Myanmar government or opposing their cause. This misinformation fuels discrimination and violence against us, making it increasingly difficult for us to live in peace. The propaganda is part of a larger effort to erase our identity and justify the ongoing atrocities against our people.”

The homogenization of Muslims as uncivil, barbaric and a threat to Buddhist civilization, and of to the Buddhists, or to the AA as a unit – A study of the website content of the AA and General [Twan Mrat Naing’s social media posts](#) found that they portray Rohingya Muslims as threats and describe them as outsiders, extremists, not to be trusted or deceptive. Organizations like the AA claim the large diverse group of Buddhists is united irrespective of ethnic barriers, against a threat posed by this outsider community. The online and offline narratives compound the homogenization polarization rhetoric by adjoining the calls for Buddhist unity with the framing of Rohingya Muslims as threats to Buddhists and the Buddhist Rakhine nation. Rohingyas are considered the most dangerous and are pursuing all kinds of activities against Buddhists. In online spaces, AA proponents continuously refer to the Rohingya as ‘Bengalis’. General Naing,

the commander-in-chief of the AA, aligns himself with the Myanmar state's official position, which denies Rohingya indigeneity. The use of terms like 'irrational individuals' for the Rohingya describes his mindset and attitude towards the community. In the subsequent pages of the chapter, we are going to come up with selected tweets or posts of the General to see his attitude towards the community and also how he uses his social media handle to spread lies, hate, and propaganda.

A recurring theme in General Twan Mrat Naing's posts is the denial of Rohingya identity through the use of the term 'Bengali.' This terminology deliberately frames the Rohingya as foreigners or recent migrants from Bangladesh, thereby stripping them of their historical and indigenous connection to Rakhine State. The insistence reinforces the narrative that they are outsiders, illegitimate claimants to land and rights in Arakan. Such discourse echoes and supports long-standing state policies of disenfranchisement and exclusion. In one such [tweet](#) posted from his own account X, formerly Twitter on 26 March 2024, he writes:



In the post, the problem arises in the selective recognition and labeling of the groups. For instance, the General refers to Rakhine origin individuals in Bangladesh as rightful citizens and their identity. However, the same courtesy is not extended to the Rohingya community in Myanmar. Instead, he dismissively recognizes them as 'Bengalis', implying that they are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and denying their historical roots in Rakhine State. This denial serves a political purpose; it delegitimizes the Rohingya's claim that they belong to Rakhine, undermines their demand for citizenship, and justifies their exclusion and persecution. Figures

like General Naing using terms such as ‘Bengalis’ instead of ‘Rohingyas’ and claiming that they are ‘citizens’ (often without rights or recognition) contributes to the spread of misinformation. This narrative falsely implies that the Rohingya are recent settlers with no claim to indigeneity or rights in Myanmar. Simultaneously, calling Rakhine-origin people in Bangladesh by their ethnic name and acknowledging their citizenship demonstrates a double standard rooted in ethnic hierarchy and political expediency.

In another X post, General Naing shares two screenshots accompanied by a caption that, on the surface, appears innocuous, stating that “there is nothing wrong in calling Bengalis as Bengalis.” While this might seem like a neutral assertion, the subtext and intent reveal a deeper, more troubling narrative. The post implicitly addresses the Rohingya community, suggesting that they should accept the ‘Bengali’ label and relinquish their self-identification as Rohingya.



At first glance, his statement might appear reasonable. After all, calling someone by their ethnic identity isn't inherently problematic. However, in the highly politicized context of Myanmar's ethnic conflicts and citizenship debates, the issue is not about the use of the term 'Bengal' in isolation, but rather its deliberate use as a tool of erasure. By insisting that Rohingyas are 'Bengalis', the General is reinforcing a state narrative that denies the community's historical, cultural, and political roots in Rakhine State.

This form of rhetorical manipulation is central to Myanmar's longstanding project of denying the Rohingyas their identity, rendering them stateless and framing them as outsiders or illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. The General's tweet functions within this ideological framework, it may sound benign, even factual, but it weaponizes terminology to strip the Rohingyas of their collective memory, belonging, and rights. In essence, his message promotes a false choice: accept an imposed identity or face continued denial and exclusion. What appears to be a simple linguistic claim is, in fact, a political strategy of delegitimization, one that seeks to normalize the erasure of the Rohingya identity under the guise of ethnic labeling.

On one occasion in his social media discourse, General reluctantly, against his will to write the full spelling of the Rohingya, refers to the community as 'R. Bengalis', a deliberate misnomer designed to deny their Rohingya identity and legitimacy. More troubling, however, is his recurring accusation that the community and its diaspora is engaged in a covert effort to establish a 'separate Islamic zone' in Rakhine State. This narrative is a clear instance of slander and misinformation, strategically crafted to associate the Rohingya with extremist ideologies and militant ambitions.



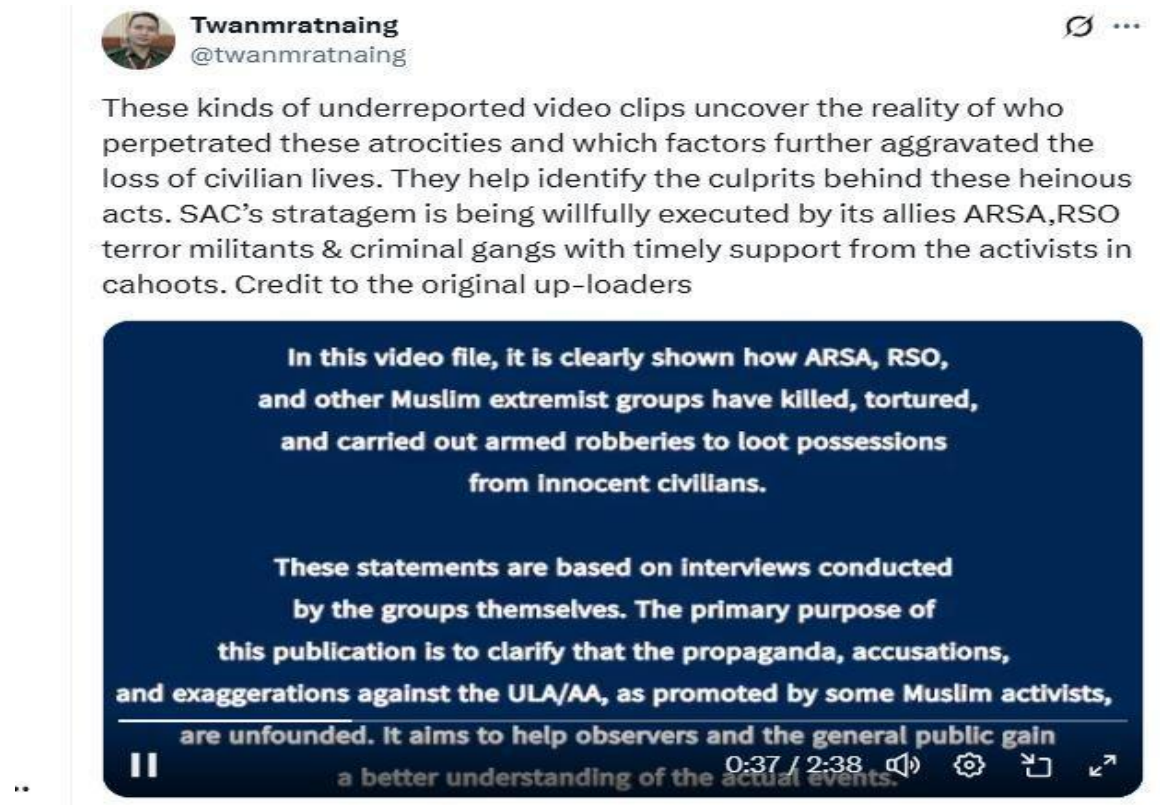
Such framing has serious consequences. By linking the Rohingya to alleged foreign-funded ‘Islamic separatism’, the General not only delegitimizes their struggle for recognition and rights but also sows suspicion and fear among the broader population. This form of disinformation undermines the Rohingya’s efforts to gain international sympathy and legal recognition as an indigenous people of Myanmar. It fuels Islamophobic sentiments and contributes to their continued marginalization, statelessness, and vulnerability to violence. Moreover, this narrative is weaponized to suggest that the presence and activism of the Rohingya community obstruct the political ambitions of the Arakan Army, which seeks a separate Rakhine Buddhist ‘fatherland’. By framing the Rohingya as a threat to the AA’s ethno-nationalist goals, the General’s rhetoric deepens divisions and portrays the Rohingya not only as outsiders but as active saboteurs of the movement.

## → Fake Videos, Bogus Messages to Propagate anti-Muslim (Rohingya) Hate

In online spaces, individuals like the General play a prominent role in propagating anti-Muslim and anti-Rohingya hate by actively sharing, amplifying, and endorsing content that is designed with a specific agenda. One of the most important objectives of this is to defame the Rohingya community and discredit any organization, activist, or voice that expresses solidarity with their struggle. Through posts, retweets, selectively edited images or videos, and inflammatory commentary, such actors contribute to a toxic online environment that normalizes hate speech and shapes public opinion against an already vulnerable community. The following section explores this disturbing aspect of the General’s digital presence, along with that of like-minded individuals, and examines how social media is being used as a tool of disinformation and hatred.

In one of his posts on the X platform, the General shares a video, from his personal account, in which members of the community are allegedly interviewed by an unidentified individual who remains off-camera, revealing only his voice. The setting appears highly controlled, and the individuals being interviewed offer statements blaming Rohingya organizations, such as ARSO and RSO, acts of loot, plunder, and the killing of civilians. Notably, the interviewer provides no

information about his identity, organizational affiliation, or the context of the interviews. The anonymity of the source, the selective nature of the statements, and the lack of transparency raise serious concerns about the credibility and authenticity of the video.



Despite these red flags, General Naing uncritically amplifies the video on his account, using it as evidence to accuse not only specific Rohingya organizations like ARSO and RSO, but also activists and broader solidarity networks. While these organizations do carry the Rohingya identity, the General's framing blurs the line between specific actors and the entire community. In doing so, he indirectly attributes the alleged acts of violence to the wider Rohingya population, reinforcing dangerous stereotypes and justifying further marginalization. However, one user account (Ro Saifullah Patriot) quickly responded to the post, openly condemning the authenticity of the conversation in the video. Rather than accepting it at face value, the user accused the AA of fabricating the video to conceal its own crimes and acts of genocide against the Rohingya community. He alleged that the footage is staged by the AA as a diversionary tactic to shift blame and deflect attention from their ongoing atrocities, and even called it a propaganda orchestrated

by the AA to mask its crimes against the Rohingya community. According to him, the sole purpose of the video was to obscure the reality of the AA's violence and to manipulate public perception against the Rohingya. He identified both the uploader, implied to be the General and the anonymous interviewer as supporters of the AA, accusing them of collaborating in a disinformation campaign aimed at vilifying the Rohingya and its sympathetic organizations or activists, while concealing the AA's own atrocities.



On the other hand, comments to General's post, a flood of replies appeared, many of which expressed explicit praise and support for him and, more notably, for the AA. While such comments may appear as spontaneous expressions of loyalty, they must be critically examined for what they implicitly endorse. Messages such as 'we love the AA', 'we fully support AA', 'we stand with AA', or more explicitly hostile remarks like 'destroy ARSA' reveal a deeper alignment with the AA's agenda. They go beyond mere support and signal a disturbing approval of the group's ongoing violence, particularly its brutal actions against the Rohingya community and any organizations or individuals seen as sympathetic to them.


← **Post** Reply ↻

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 **Soe Than Aung** @aung\_soe35127 · Dec 14, 2024 🗑️ ⋮  
We love AA

💬 ↻ ❤️ 📊 23 📌 ⬆️

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 **Eagle** 🇲🇲 @EaglePromax1 · Dec 15, 2024 🗑️ ⋮  
We love AA


💬 ↻ ❤️ 📊 15 📌 ⬆️

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 **Min Ko Naing** @NaingKo532 · Dec 15, 2024 🗑️ ⋮  
We stand with AA


💬 ↻ ❤️ 📊 21 📌 ⬆️

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 **San Tun Aung** @SanTun44113 · Dec 16, 2024 🗑️ ⋮  
We Love Arakan army

💬 ↻ ❤️ 📊 21 📌 ⬆️

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 **naymin tun** @naymintun596344 · Dec 17, 2024 🗑️ ⋮  
We will always support you. We will always support you. We love you AA

💬 ↻ ❤️ 📊 30 📌 ⬆️

---

 **Htoolin** @Htoolin850009 · Dec 21, 2024 🗑️ ⋮  
Destroy the terrorist group Arsa.

💬 ↻ ❤️ 📊 14 📌 ⬆️

These kinds of public endorsements, while perhaps emotionally charged, function as a form of legitimization for the AA's atrocities. When supporters romanticize or glorify a group actively involved in ethnic persecution, their expressions of solidarity are not neutral, they serve to normalize hate, and appreciate erasing the community. Moreover, they reflect the intensity of animosity harbored by segments of the AA's online base, many of whom direct their hostility toward the Rohingya community under different fervors.

Such comments also help to sustain and amplify the AA's propaganda narrative in digital spaces. Rather than condemning or critically engaging with the group's actions, these supporters use

social media to create a chamber of hate, where calls for violence against the Rohingya, or their affiliated or perceived organizations like ARSA, are not only tolerated but celebrated. This normalization of hate speech and open endorsement of violence in public forums is a grim reminder of how online spaces can be weaponized to reinforce ethno-nationalist ideologies and justify mass atrocities.

## → Warnings, Intimidations, and Staged Agendas

Ekram (Name Changed) narrates that the Anti-Rohingya propaganda follows several key narratives that are used to justify violence and discrimination. One of the most common messages is the warnings and intimidation. Propaganda also accuses the Rohingya of collaborating with enemy forces, portraying them as traitors or terrorists. Unfortunately, this is used to justify military operations and mass violence. Additionally, propaganda paints the Rohingya as a threat to Rakhine culture and Buddhism, creating fear that they will overtake the local population. Propaganda against the Rohingya is spread through state-controlled media, social media, religious leaders, and emotional political speeches. The aim is to justify violence, create fear, and divide communities, making it harder for the Rohingya to seek justice and protection.

In one of his tweets, General Naing issues a stark warning directed at individuals he labels as collaborators or traitors to the Rakhine nation. Without naming anyone explicitly, the tweet delivers a clear message- those who betray the nationalist cause will be punished. He draws a parallel to the aftermath of a Bangladeshi liberation war, referencing how those who were seen as betraying the movement were dealt with harshly.



**Twan Mrat Naing** @TwanMrat · 8 May 2024



"Reflecting on Bangladesh's liberation war, I marvel at the resolve of its courts and security forces in confronting those who betrayed their nation. History teaches us the price of treachery; let it serve as a cautionary tale for those who flirt with betrayal. Justice is relentless, and the echoes of past decisions reverberate through generations. [#LessonsOfLiberation](#) [#BewareOfBetrayal](#)"

139

168

1.2K

71K



Although the General does not specifically identify who these traitors are, the subtext is unmistakable. The warning appears to target communities and ethnic groups, particularly the Rohingya, who are not aligned with or supportive of the AA armed struggle against the Myanmar military. By framing non-support as betrayal, the General effectively dehumanizes those who refuse to align with the AA, equating it with treason. This rhetoric is deeply dangerous. It constructs a binary worldview, either you are with the AA or you are a traitor and leaves no room for the complex realities of identity, survival, and political autonomy in conflict zones like Rakhine State. Such messaging not only justifies punitive action but also incites violence, particularly against the Rohingya, who are already marginalized.

In one of his tweets, the General criticizes what he calls the ‘biases’ of human rights activism, claiming that it is driven by “sensationalism and politics” rather than ‘genuine concern for justice’. While this framing already attempts to undermine the legitimacy of national and international human rights organizations, the tweet takes a more troubling turn by accusing these very groups of “cultivating and nurturing criminal gangs” in Rakhine. Although he avoids naming specific organizations or communities, the underlying message is clear: he is pointing toward the Rohingya community and the rights groups that have documented and exposed their persecution.



**Twan Mrat Naing** @TwanMrat · 3 Aug 2021

Sensationalism and politicization of the bias HR activism . Disingenuously validating the criminal gangs on our soil and sowing the seeds of further division . What an odious craps!

77

272

1.2K



This kind of rhetoric is dangerous. We must be clear in the context of Rakhine, where the Rohingya have faced decades of systemic violence, displacement, and denial of citizenship, the “criminal gangs” being alluded to in such posts are undoubtedly the Rohingya themselves. Human rights organizations, national and international, have repeatedly documented the atrocities committed against this community, often at great personal and political risk. To avoid naming the Rohingya directly is a calculated move, an attempt to distance himself from outright hate speech while still planting the seed of suspicion and resentment in the minds of his followers. This tweet exemplifies how propaganda works to delegitimize both victims and those who advocate on their behalf.

On 18 May 2024, the same day the AA reportedly seized [control of Buthidaung](#) town and the surrounding township, an area heavily populated by Rohingya civilians, General Naing took to his social media account to post the following statement on X,



**Twan Mrat Naing** @TwanMrat · 18 May 2024

Kindly urge to not buy any distorted & misleading craps during this challenging time. Our dedicated Arrakkha soldiers are committed to protecting and serving everyone, regardless of their religious or ethnic background.

291

260

1.3K

80K



At first glance, this message appears to be a call for calm and unity. However, when examined with ground realities, it becomes clear that the tweet is a blatant act of misinformation and damage control. On the very day this message was posted, multiple verified testimonies (collected during our testimony collection process) and online media reports documented the

destruction of dozens of Rohingya villages in Buthidaung. According to eyewitness accounts corroborated by journalistic investigations, Arakan Army forces carried out [widespread arson, looting, shelling of civilian infrastructure including schools, and the torture](#) and killing of Rohingya civilians. One strategic policy institute later reportedly wrote, [“The images show that as Arakan Army forces advanced across rural Buthidaung township in late April and May, they left a trail of rubble and ash as they burnt down Rohingya villages, seemingly indiscriminately.”](#) This stark contrast between the General’s public statement and the documented atrocities points to a well-crafted disinformation strategy. By claiming that the AA, “serves everyone regardless of their religious or ethnic background” the General Naing not only seeks to portray his forces as inclusive, but also attempts to ignore ground violence. His use of inflammatory language, calling testimonies or reports ‘distorted and misleading crap’, further reveals an intention to delegitimize any narrative that holds the Arakan Army accountable. His tweet, therefore, is not merely a denial; it is a calculated propaganda tool. It spreads incendiary falsehoods while real communities, in this case the Rohingya, are being targeted, displaced, and persecuted. His assertion of ‘dedication to all communities’ rings hollow when placed alongside the scorched remains of Rohingya homes and the bloodied testimonies of survivors.

On 10 May 2024, just a week before the Arakan Army launched its attack on the Buthidaung town itself, General Naing posted a series of photographs on his X account. These images show AA personnel assisting visibly Muslim civilians (who appear to be Rohingyas), elderly men in skull caps, children, and a frail elderly woman, carrying their belongings as they moved along a rural road. The imagery was clearly designed to project an image of compassion and protection extended to the Rohingya community, presenting the AA as a benevolent force during a time of crisis. Accompanying these photos, the General wrote,



**Twan Mrat Naing** @TwanMrat · 10 May 2024



Whereas self-righteous and self-opinionated vested interest activists and pontificating stooges are blowing hard , true heros steadfastly remain committed to their course,,,fearless,,compassionate,,,dutiful and victorious . ‘They are the true warriors and defenders of our fatherland.’



486

449

2.3K

169K



At face value, this post positions the AA as the protectors of civilians, particularly vulnerable Muslims, however, when analyzed in the context of simultaneous reports from the ground, it becomes evident that the post is part of a broader propaganda strategy designed to sanitize and obscure the AA’s actual conduct. Independent testimonies and news reports from that same period, corroborated by satellite imagery, survivor accounts, and human rights monitoring groups, clearly indicate that the Arakan Army was actively engaged in destroying Rohingya villages, shelling civilian areas, looting homes, and committing mass atrocities in Buthidaung. In this light, the General’s post appears not as an act of transparency or goodwill, but as an intentional attempt to mislead domestic and international audiences.

The images of AA soldiers helping civilians are staged to build a counter narrative that highlights credible reports of ethnic cleansing. The reference to ‘true warriors’ and ‘defenders of the fatherland’ serves to glorify the perpetrators while activists, and rights groups are termed as

interest groups. By framing the AA as compassionate, the General weaponizes optics to deny the lived experiences of the Rohingya community, distort facts, and shield the atrocities of the perpetrators. In short, the post exemplifies how propaganda operates as a strategic tool to hide realities on the ground.

## → Key Recommendations

### 1. **Recognizing Genocide**

We urge that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) recognize the 2024-2025 Rohingya atrocities at the hands of the Arakan Army (AA) as a genocide. The Rohingya population has suffered systematic killings, sexual violence, mass displacement, the destruction of villages, and other atrocities. The AA's actions clearly demonstrate intent to destroy the community in whole or in part. We urge the ICJ to prioritize investigations into these crimes, hold perpetrators accountable, and ensure justice for the Rohingya people in line with international law.

### 2. **Establishing an International Criminal Tribunal**

To prosecute the AA for committing crimes against humanity, genocide, and war crimes, we urge the establishment of an International Criminal Tribunal. The prosecution should hold those responsible for violence, including the attacks between May 2024 and January 2025.

### 3. **Cutting Diplomatic Ties**

We call upon the government of Bangladesh to refrain from establishing any form of relationship with the AA. Engaging with AA as a group would convey a troubling message about Bangladesh's priorities and commitment to resolving the Rohingya crisis. Thereby, undermining efforts to address the humanitarian and other challenges faced by the Rohingya community.

**4. Collaborating with International Investigative Agencies**

The government of Bangladesh should hold the AA accountable for its crimes against the Rohingya community, including the forced displacement of Rohingyas into Bangladesh. To ensure justice, Bangladesh should collaborate with international investigative agencies to document the testimonies of Rohingya victims who have sought refuge within its borders and facilitate efforts to address the atrocities committed by the AA.

**5. Stopping Smuggling**

Reports indicate the AA smuggles raw materials such as cement, iron, and fuel from Bangladesh for the construction of their bunkers and facilitating transportation for their operations. We strongly urge the government of Bangladesh to take immediate action against this smuggling by strengthening border patrol, customs inspections, and implementing stricter monitoring measures.

**6. Investigating International Military Recruitment**

There are also reports suggesting that some Bangladeshi citizens of Rakhine ethnicity are joining or affiliating with the AA. We urge the government of Bangladesh to conduct a thorough investigation into these claims and take appropriate measures to address and prevent such involvement of its citizens.

**7. Strengthening Repatriation Standards**

Any agreement for the repatriation of Rohingya refugees must guarantee safety, dignity, and adherence to human rights. The international community should play a monitoring role in ensuring that Rohingya returnees are not subjected to further persecution. A comprehensive system should oversee this process, involving organizations like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

#### **8. Compelling ASEAN to Uphold International Law**

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) must be compelled to take a more active stance in addressing the crisis and ensuring that Myanmar upholds its obligations under international law. Neighbouring countries, especially Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia, should be encouraged to join regional initiatives for the protection and relocation of Rohingya refugees.

#### **9. Supporting Independent Reporting**

The international community should provide resources for independent bodies to document crimes and collect evidence. Additionally, efforts must be coordinated with the United Nation's Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) to preserve testimonies and material evidence for future prosecution.

#### **10. Provision of Humanitarian Assistance**

Governments and international NGOs must urgently provide humanitarian assistance to Rohingyas in both Myanmar and neighbouring countries like Bangladesh. Food, medical care, shelter, and trauma support should be delivered to those displaced by violence, ensuring their basic rights under international humanitarian law.

#### **To Human Rights Organizations & NGOs:**

We request:

- Expanding documentation efforts for future legal action
- Increasing pressure on the UN to provide humanitarian aid despite Myanmar's restrictions

#### **To International Legal Bodies (ICC, ICJ, and UNHCR):**

We request:

1. Pursuing universal jurisdiction cases against military and AA leaders

## 2. Recognizing Rohingya persecution as genocide under the 1948 Genocide Convention

### **To Regional Governments & ASEAN:**

- Imposing targeted sanctions on Myanmar military and AA leaders
- Strengthening border security to combat human trafficking
- Providing legal pathways for Rohingya refugees instead of treating them as illegal migrants

Many testimonies provide a comprehensive insight into how propaganda and misinformation sustain the persecution of the Rohingya in Myanmar. The collusion between state and non-state actors, including the Myanmar military, the AA, and local Buddhist nationalists, demonstrates the deeply embedded nature of Rohingya oppression. To challenge propaganda system of persecution, there is an urgent need for:

- International accountability measures against both state and non-state actors involved in using propaganda to strengthen the Rohingya oppression.
- Counter-propaganda efforts to expose false narratives and highlight Rohingya history and rights.
- Protective mechanisms to shield Rohingya from propaganda, extortion, violence, and forced displacement.

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**FINDINGS REPORT**  
May 2024 - January 2025

