



A YEAR AFTER CYCLONE MOCHA

**TESTIMONIES OF FIVE ROHINGYA
VILLAGES IN MYANMAR**

Research report | January 2024



Rohingya Human Rights Initiative

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INTRODUCTION

Cyclone Mocha made landfall in the Rakhine State of Myanmar with winds as strong as 230-250 km/h that decimated the area between 9th to 15th May 2023. The May storm was the strongest the region had seen in a decade. The State Administration Council [declared](#) all 17 townships of Rakhine state as disaster-affected areas.

It is estimated that 1.6 to [3 million](#) people across five states and regions of Myanmar bore the brunt of the severe cyclone. The destruction of homes, farms, food stock, livestock, telecommunications, and even documents in some cases severely affected the lives of residents. The ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management [records](#) damage to over 2,500 religious buildings, 2,000 schools, 300 hospitals/clinics, and 800 ships/boats. The wreckage has complicated the lives of Rakhine residents including their economic security, and political rights.

RECOVERY OF ROHINGYAS

Rakhine (Arakan) is the most severely affected state by the cyclone. It is also one of the poorest states in Myanmar. According to UNDP, [145,000 people](#) live as internally displaced people in camps. Furthermore, 90% of [houses in Rakhine](#) are semi-permanent or temporary bamboo and hut-like shelters and thereby face difficulty in withstanding Cyclone Mocha.

Movement and telecommunication restrictions have made recovering from the cyclone difficult, especially for the ethnic Rohingya. Rohingyas in the state have been deliberately targeted for state-sponsored ethnic violence, and face socio-economical and movement restrictions. After the [genocidal violence](#) against the Rohingya in Myanmar, the government has seldom allowed humanitarian assistance to reach the community. After the military coup in 2021, the humanitarian aid for Rohingyas inside Myanmar was further neglected. Reportedly, the military administration has discriminated against the Rohingya



victims of Cyclone Mocha while distributing humanitarian assistance. As a result, Rohingyas were left to fend for themselves to rebuild their lives from the wreckage of the storm.

As of today, the most challenging issue in the state is the ongoing armed conflict between the Rakhine Militants or Arakan Army (AA) and the Myanmar Military Regime. The intense fighting between two armed groups in Rakhine State has severely affected people in the state and their access to different socio-economic facilities. According to the International Federation of Red Cross, there was a marked hike in prices of staples such as eggs and rice, disruptions to water systems, risks of waterborne diseases, and an increase in the number of unaccompanied minors due to the cyclone. The flow of goods and basic commodities from Upper Myanmar to Arakan has been halted due to a communication shutdown. International humanitarian organisations have no access to reach out to the people who are in need of emergency aid.

Among all the people affected in the state, Rohingya people have less access to basic social services in comparison with other communities in the State. Therefore, it is paramount to prioritise them in the provision of assistance and emergency aid.

OUR FINDINGS FROM THE FIVE INTERVIEWED ROHINGYA VILLAGES IN BUTHIDAUNG TOWNSHIP, MYANMAR

1. VILLAGE ONE¹

Impact

A resident of this village informed that they have lost an estimated 3,150,000 kyats (USD 1502) in food and other essential items such as bags of rice, crockery, and clothes. Seventy shelters were destroyed, of which 42 were entirely blown away by the cyclone and 18 were severely damaged. The storm also killed 120 cows, worth an estimate of approximately 18 million kyats (USD 8584).

Humanitarian Aid

“Somehow we are managing our survival from hand to mouth by reducing our daily necessities.” - A resident of the village

Aid for the victims of Cyclone Mocha comprised 2 kilograms of rice per family for a month provided by district administration known as Mayaka, a local governmental administrative body. However, the villagers have told the Rohingya Human Rights Initiative that the distributed food was only worth a day of ration.

While most people did not receive assistance from any international aid originations, some widows reported receiving rations from the World Food Programme (WFP) for a month.

Obstacles in Rebuilding

The Rakhine Militants AA is a massive threat to the residents of the village, especially the Rohingya residents. Very often livestock owned by the residents are robbed by both AA or the Military at random raids.

Residents do not step outside of their, now-destroyed, shelters except for necessity or daily requirements. Both AA and the Military force the residents to cooperate with them, instead of the other group. AA specially coerced the Rohingya residents to approach them for judicial matters instead of the military or local administration. As a result, the residents are terrorised between the two armed groups.

There are still severe movement restrictions implemented by the military as well as the AA. Rohingyas need a prior travel permit named ‘Tokenza’, to commute between villages or even access emergency medical treatment. While this village

¹ Names of villages and the people interviewed are omitted for their safety

has no access to electricity, they are also not allowed to use torchlights during the night ordered by the military.

Rebuilding

To cope with the effect of the cyclone with little to no government or humanitarian aid and piling restrictions which include both building restrictions and limitations on gathering building materials, residents have barely managed to erect temporary shelters. Rebuilding houses, including labour, costs 900,000 kyats (USD 429). Even those who may have the funds to rebuild are not allowed to without a permit from the local administration. The residents are also not allowed to enter the forest for their daily earnings or foraging.

"We want to appeal to the world to look at our situation. To restore our right to nationality, to our motherland, and a life with dignity, we require the world to raise their voice for us." The resident interviewed expressed. "I warn the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh against coming back, the situation remains dangerous", he added.

2. VILLAGE TWO

Impact



The village houses nearly 200 families. The resident interviewed had lost their home and additional belongings worth 2 lakh kyats (USD 95). Fortunately, no human lives were lost in the village, but 40 cows worth 40 million kyats (USD 19076) were killed in Cyclone Mocha.

Humanitarian Aid

The village received 2 kilograms of rice per head from Mayaka for a few months. However, the residents have reported that the administration clicked photos and videos of the destroyed shelters, promising assistance in rebuilding the house; however, no help has arrived till the date of writing this report.

After the cyclone, there was no aid from any international agency including the United Nations or World Food Programme unlike the village one. It is worth noting that before the cyclone, the World Food Programme provided Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) or other residents in the village with 13 kilograms of rice.

Obstacles in Rebuilding

Though the villagers are building their shelters themselves, they live under the fear of harassment and torture at the hands of the Rakhine Militants (AA). Women and girls cannot leave their homes fearing abduction by armed groups. The Neighbour's son of the interviewee was reportedly beaten to death by AA.

Residents of the village also cannot move freely from one place to another without fearing the Arakan Army and Myanmar Military operations against Rohingya. Both armed groups arbitrarily arrest people, accuse them of being linked to the other armed group, and treat Rohingyas as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

Daily wage work has also been restricted due to the limited movement. A resident disclosed that he could only earn 15,000 kyats (USD 7) from daily labour, an irregular and insufficient income to meet the daily needs of his family. Incomes of many people have taken a further hit due to the ongoing 4:00 pm to 6:00 am curfew.

Any form of movement requires travel documentation pre-approved by the local administration, where corruption and bribery are rampant. Those seeking to travel are only able to use a porter service without any fixed rate, therefore the price can fluctuate highly. Combined with the people currently undergoing a strict curfew, it is a near impossible task to access emergency medical attention.

The resident says, “We cannot go even for emergency treatment at night using a torch. Free movement is strongly restricted. Many people have been arrested and killed. I fear that may happen to me as well,” said the interviewee.

Rebuilding

The residents cannot build proper weather-proof homes for themselves even though they had ones before the cyclone. Building a permanent house cannot be done without governmental permission. As in the case of the previous village, residents in this village would also need a million kyats (USD 476) to rebuild a temporary home.

The interviewee expressed, “I would like to send a message to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. Do not come back to Myanmar. The situation in Myanmar is still uncertain. Both AA and the military are killing Rohingyas. If you come here, you will face many problems without having a secure life.”



3. VILLAGE THREE

Impact

This village housed over 350 families alongside their livestock. The resident interviewed had lost their home, food, cattle, important documents, and all other

belongings to the cyclone. During the storm, their 8-year-old son suffered injuries along with many other villagers.

Humanitarian Aid

The residents received 1.5 kilograms of rice per head for a few months from the administration. However, there was no provision or discussion of support for the re-establishment of lost homes. The residents also did not receive any support from any United Nations agency. “Somehow we are still surviving in the self-made temporary tent,” commented the interviewee.

Obstacles in Rebuilding

People are forced to live in self-made temporary shelters that have been constructed from some materials foraging from the mountains nearby. This is partly due to villagers not having funds to rebuild and losing their savings, personal belongings, and places of work to the cyclone. They are finding it difficult to rebuild as there is no stable income due to the restriction of free movement or no support has been provided by the administration.

Working has become increasingly dangerous. In the last week of November 2023, 4 people were killed and several injured by the military bombardment, in this village, while they were working at the paddy field. Furthermore, people live in constant fear of arbitrary arrest. Only a day after the paddy field bombing, 10 Rohingyas were taken by the Military while the Rakhine Militants abducted 5 Rohingyas from a village close by.

“We do not feel safe because our state has become a battlefield of AA and Military.” On the day of the interview, the military had bombed ward No. 5 in Buthidaung township while Rohingya Muslims were offering Friday prayers. “Now it seems no place has been left for us to take shelter in. Now we have no way to survive except staying in our destroyed shelters.”

Rebuilding

The residents are not allowed to rebuild their houses without permission for the construction from both the Rakhine Militants and the administration. Even if the permission is acquired, the cost of rebuilding would be nearly 3 million Kyats (USD 1430), a sum of money that residents cannot afford.

“We would like to request the International Community to save us from the Military and AA's harassment and taking the lives of innocent people.” The interviewee implored.

4. VILLAGE FOUR

Impact

This was the largest of all the villages in this study, housing over 1000 families. The person interviewed was severely impacted by the storm. Their 4-year-old child had suffered an injury due to the cyclone after falling from a wooden beam from the roof. The interviewee had injured their shoulder. Their entire house had been destroyed. Furthermore, they lost animals worth 2 million Kyat(USD 953) and rice worth 2.4 million Kyat(USD 1173).

Humanitarian Aid

The village received no assistance from the government. This was despite the authorities accessing a list of the villagers' aid requirements.

No support was received from any UN agency, and although the World Food Programme had also reportedly taken photos and noted the assessed needs in lists, the villagers have not received any aid as of the writing of this report.

Obstacles in Rebuilding

The safety of the villagers is in danger every day due to the Military operation against the Rakhine Militants. Civilians are caught in the crossfire. In a nearby village, 4 Rohingyas were killed and 6 severely injured.

The village is currently surrounded by a Myanmar Military battalion and the AA and is surviving between their fighting. "We do not know if we will be under the target of the next bombardment." Commented the interviewee. To avoid arbitrary arrest and sudden bombardment, the villagers do not move from one place to another.

The villagers reported they often had to undergo forced labour as a porter or night guard.

Being a porter is a service almost exclusively forced on the Rohingya without any payment. The admiration forces the men to serve in army cantonments, police camps, security booths, and other places belonging to the government authorities. There are no fixed working hours, the porters must work for as long as the authorities demand without any payment.

Parallely, being a nightguard requires Rohingyas to serve as night guards from their own houses. The people in the village are forced to keep a watch from their houses, especially taking note of the turning points, entry, and exit points of the

village. “If you do not keep it [the nightguard], the government will kill you. Only Rohingyas are kept for this role.”

In case a house with no men is chosen to serve, the women are forced to pay money to the authorities to compensate for a man to do this forced labour. Alternatively, they have to rely on their male relatives or friends to serve on the house’s behalf. Those who do not or cannot serve are often tortured.

The interviewee informs, “We have no place to take shelter except staying in our own tents that we called home.”



Rebuilding

Most residents have been unable to rebuild proper structures after Cyclone Mocha. They are living in temporary shelters made from low-quality materials since most people cannot afford the endeavour of building new houses. It requires around 20 million Kyats (USD 9538) to get permission from all Rakhine Militants administrative departments.

The interviewee said, "I request the international community to ensure safety and security including our Citizenship rights. The Myanmar government does not secure our lives, religion, property, education, and freedom of movement. I also request refugees to not come back. The government did not even provide any amenities to the people in IDP camps in Sittwe." The comment is regarding those

in Internally Displaced Persons camps in Myanmar, who are still struggling to get back to their own village and have no access to basic amenities.

5. VILLAGE FIVE

Impact

The village consists of over 400 families. Both the interviewees lost their homes and cattle worth 2.4 million Kyat (USD 1144.58). One of their children also got injured in the cyclone.

Humanitarian Aid

The village has not received any support from any administrative agency or UN. Prior to the cyclone, the residents used to receive 10-13 kilograms of rice from the World Food Programme and UNHCR, but all such aid has now been completely halted.

Obstacles in Rebuilding

The residents, as in all other parts of the district, are unsafe due to the fighting between the Rakhine Militants and the Military, which is getting more intense by the day. Amidst the fighting, arbitrary abduction of civilians is reportedly very common by both the Rakhine Militants and the Military Junta.

“After the Military coup in 2021, restrictions doubled. People in the villages are sometimes killed on the spot for being Rohingya. No children can go to school or Madrasa,” confided one of the interviewees. A week before the interview, 4 villagers were killed and 9 injured in a village nearby. The entire region has been shut with no one being able to move freely.

Even basic movement for medication or food is not permitted. Most people in the village are starving because almost all daily needs, including food and water, have become unaffordable. A bag of 50 kilograms of rice costs over 250,000 Kyats (USD 119) and one bunch of Chilli costs 60,000 kyats (USD 28). “We cannot say what will happen after we consume the last grain of the rationed rice.”

Rebuilding

Few people could rebuild a tent-like structure temporarily. The cost of rebuilding a house from scratch is 4 million kyats (USD 1907) for only raw materials, excluding permission costs from both the village and District Administrative Departments.

"I request to all Rohingya who took shelter in Bangladesh: please do not believe the Myanmar government about the repatriation process. After the 2021 Military coup, the restrictions have more than doubled," implored a resident.

LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

The Myanmar Military operation against the Rakhine Militants is underway, causing further conflict in the Arakan (Rakhine) state of Myanmar. Tragically, on the night of 15th January 2024, Rohingya civilians became unfortunate targets resulting in both loss of life and injuries. Among those affected were a father, his nine-year-old daughter, and a woman from another family who all lost their lives. Two children aged thirteen and fifteen were seriously injured. Five days before the incident, a Rohingya managed twenty-four were killed by the Rakhine Militants.

Ten days after the incident, more fighting broke out. Between the 25th and 28th of January, indiscriminate bombardment carried out between the Myanmar military and the Rakhine militants, killed at least 20 innocent Rohingya civilians and severely injured 104 others. The onslaught has resulted in the destruction of 50 Rohingya houses in Hpon Nyo Lake village and 4 in Khin Daung, with an additional hundred houses partially damaged.

The attacks continue to persist as of writing this report.

These incidents are exacerbating an already dire humanitarian situation in the region. The shutdown of mobile networks, communication disruptions, and transportation challenges due to the ongoing fighting have led to a surge in the prices of essential goods, including food and medicines. This has further endangered the lives of civilians.

CONCLUSION

Cyclone Mocha has wrecked the homes of people in the Rakhine state of Myanmar. Aside from destroying cattle, food, belongings, and access to clean water, the strong cyclone has destroyed the one place where the Rohingya felt some semblance of safety — their homes. It has exposed the harsh realities of Rohingyas in the region.

The destruction of their homes leaves them more vulnerable to civilian kidnappings and abductions carried out by the Rakhine Militants and Myanmar Military. In addition, the severe army-imposed realities such as travel bans, bureaucratic obstacles, fluctuating prices, inflated food prices, and unstable income have made survival harder.

Most residents across the state have been fending to rebuild their own houses with resources locally available. Proper rebuilding of weather-proof houses requires permission from both the Rakhine Militants and Myanmar Army which costs an ordinary civilian a high sum that they are unable to afford.

The regular raids, abductions, sudden bombings, and killings are culling the Rohingya population left in the country. Rohingya still in Myanmar dissuade the refugees outside against repatriating, mentioning that the lives which refugees had fled have worsened two-fold.

Humanitarian aid has been little to none.

We appeal to the United Nations and International organisations to monitor the situation and provide effective humanitarian aid to the people affected by Cyclone Mocha in Arakan. We also call for a swift investigation of genocide committed by the security forces against the Rohingya population.

ABOUT THIS WORK

The aim of this short survey was to shed light on the lived realities of Rohingya currently residing in Myanmar, especially their life following Cyclone Mocha. As the strongest storm in a decade made landfall in Rakhine, the already difficult lives of residents became harder with the loss of their homes, cattle, belongings, and ability to commute. A record of how the residents coped is necessary to document as Rohingya narratives are grossly neglected due to the ethnopolitical conflict in the region.



For this initial survey, 18 Rohingya villagers, aged between 24 and 59 inclusive of gender balance, were interviewed to gather information concerning the cyclone and its subsequent impact on their lives. The data was collected in the last quarter of 2023. Although nearly 100 participants were contacted, due to the severe curfew, fear of safety, and telecommunications shutdown, only seven participants were able to complete their interviews at the time of writing. External factors greatly impacted the ability to gather information through interviews.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our sincere thanks and respect to all the interviewees who shared with us their experiences despite several obstacles. Our thanks also to the brilliant work of our volunteers who tirelessly documented the Rohingya experience of Cyclone Mocha and how the ongoing genocide deters recovery.

We also thank the reviewers of the document who contributed to the refinement and polishing of this report.

A FINDING REPORT BY

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