

# Burmese government rejects international inquiry into anti-Rohingya pogrom

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A European tour by the Burmese (Myanmar) head of government Aung San Suu Kyi this month has been marked by shameless hypocrisy, outright lies and cover-up of the campaign by the military and nationalist thugs to terrorise the country's Rohingya Muslim minority.

On May 2 in Brussels, the European Union headquarters, Suu Kyi, flatly rejected a fact-finding investigation mission proposed on March 24 at the annual meeting of the 47-member UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva.

The military's campaign in Rakhine state, bordering Bangladesh, seeks to drive Rohingyas from the country. The offensive began last October after attacks, allegedly by Rohingya militants, on border posts that killed nine members of the security forces.

The "clearance operation" has the full backing and complicity of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) government.

UN reports from February, based on hundreds of interviews with refugees in Bangladesh and satellite imagery, provided evidence of murders, rape, pillaging, kidnappings and the burning of whole villages. Over 70,000 Rohingya had fled the country, joining over 300,000 living in squalid camps in Bangladesh, with many more dispersed throughout South and South East Asia.

At a joint press conference with Suu Kyi, EU foreign affairs commissioner Federica Mogherini said the EU supported the UNHRC mission, saying it would reveal the truth "about the past" by "establishing the facts."

Standing beside Mogherini, Suu Kyi declared: "We do not agree with it. We have dissociated ourselves from the resolution because we do not think it is in keeping with what is happening on the ground."

As state counsellor and foreign minister, Suu Kyi

heads a hybrid government in which the NLD shares power as a junior partner with the country's military. Both groups are mired in anti-Rohingya chauvinism that dominates the Burmese political establishment.

This coalition was established under a 2008 constitution imposed by the military junta that exercised a brutal dictatorship for over half a century. The generals continue to retain veto power over constitutional changes and exercise direct control over key state bodies, including the defence, home affairs and border security ministries.

The Brussels statement is not Suu Kyi's first attempt to cover up the military's crimes against the Rohingya. Last November, her office issued a statement that no crimes were being committed because the armed forces command said so.

On April 6, as UN reports made clear the extent of the pogrom, and international concerns increased, Suu Kyi made a rare personal statement. She told the BBC no "cleansing operation" was underway in the closed-off province and expressed her support for the army. "They are free to go in and fight," she said, "military matters are to be left to the army."

Military commander Min Aung Hlaing, who played a major role in installing Suu Kyi, made the military's position clear in March. He said Rohingya were illegal "Bengali" immigrants who had no right to live in Burma.

In reality, many Rohingya families have lived in the region for generations, but have been largely denied citizenship.

Suu Kyi's Brussels statement was her most explicit on an international stage. Long promoted by the Western powers as a "democrat," she publicly supported the pogrom in Rakhine and rejected any international scrutiny.

Nevertheless, the European political establishment continued to fete her. Mogherini said there was one point of difference but many other issues of agreement, and other progress during the NLD's 12 months in office.

Suu Kyi's trip included meetings with the Pope and Belgium's King Philippe and Prime Minister Charles Michel. She also met Britain's Queen Elizabeth and Prince Charles and was granted the Freedom of the City of London, the financial capital. That award cited her "non-violent struggle over many years for democracy and her steadfast dedication to create a society where people can live in peace, security and freedom."

The UNHRC resolution itself proposed a watered-down investigation based on the assumption of cooperation from Burmese authorities. It was drafted as a result of direct intervention by EU diplomats at the Geneva meeting.

The UN has been complicit in covering up developments in the Rakhine region. Since 2012 the campaign against the Rohingya has continued with various levels of violence without any major UN response. The intensity of the current offensive has created a large refugee outflow, creating a regional crisis that forced the UN to act.

Yanghee Lee, the UN special rapporteur on human rights in Burma, and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'as al-Hussein urged the Geneva meeting to "at a minimum" establish a Commission of Inquiry (COI), the UN's highest form of investigation, and al-Hussein spoke of a review by the International Criminal Court.

EU diplomats blocked the COI proposal, eventually settling on a more limited fact-finding mission, with the clear intention of protecting Suu Kyi. The Burmese UN ambassador rejected the plan, however.

Significant geopolitical and economic interests are involved. The Obama administration worked to bring the NLD into office to wedge Burma away from China as part of Washington's strategy of undercutting Beijing's influence in Asia. Washington took advantage of the junta's need to end Western sanctions and lessen its economic and political dependence on China.

With an eye to its own global interests, the EU jumped in to begin the lifting of sanctions. EU corporations covet Burma's largely untapped natural

resources and potential as a cheap labour platform.

As part of its own machinations, Suu Kyi's government has maintained a relationship with Beijing. In April, she sent Burmese President Htin Kyaw and a delegation to China to sign economic agreements and reaffirm Burma's support for the One China policy.

Beijing, in turn, promised to help the regime in its efforts to end conflicts with ethnic groups along China's borders and gave Burma a non-interference assurance in the Rakhine. Suu Kyi spent five days in China last August and is due to arrive again on May 14 to discuss further participation in China's One Belt infrastructure initiative across Eurasia.



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