

Burmese government continues persecution of Rohingya minority

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Reports over the past week have shed further light on the Burmese regime's brutal campaign against the Rohingya ethnic minority, while highlighting the dire circumstances confronting those who have fled to neighboring Bangladesh.

The Burmese military, with the support of the government headed by Aung San Suu Kyi, has been conducting a vicious assault in Rakhine state since August. Reports have documented the indiscriminate killing of Rohingya, the wholesale destruction of villages and a litany of human rights abuses. Some 600,000 Rohingya have fled abroad since August 25.

Suu Kyi's government has prevented aid deliveries into Rakhine state, on the pretext that humanitarian organisations are assisting "Muslim extremists." The United Nations, which is among the entities being blocked, this week warned that the death toll from the Burmese military's "clearance operation," may be "very high."

UN officials said the actions of the Burmese military indicated a "consistent, methodical pattern of action resulting in gross human rights violations affecting hundreds of thousands of people." They said fleeing refugees had reported troops carrying out "killings, torture, rape and arson," and restated their warning that the actions amount to "ethnic cleansing."

Refugees who have made the dangerous journey to Bangladesh, have faced water and food shortages, poor sanitation, disease outbreaks, and exposure to floods and elephant stampedes.

Doctors Without Borders said the situation in makeshift refugee camps in Bangladesh is "a public-health time-bomb" and warned about the inability of aid groups to meet the dire needs of the growing population.

UN agencies have made similar assessments, based

on interviews with refugees in Cox's Bazaar, the largest of the refugee camps. At a conference last week, the UN raised only \$344 million of the \$430 million needed to expand the reach of food and sanitation supplies, with the US providing a paltry \$32 million.

In an interview with the *Guardian*, Elhadj As Sy, the head of the International Federation of Red Cross Societies, described the refugee conditions as in "a state of deprivation. It's hunger, fear, exhaustion... You see almost the unbearable look of a total destitute person in need."

The contemptuous attitude of Bangladeshi authorities to the asylum seekers was underscored by an article in the *Independent* on Sunday, which reported that the government is preparing to implement a program of "voluntary sterilization" for refugees.

The major imperialist powers, led by the United States, have issued utterly hypocritical statements of concern, while continuing to back the Burmese regime.

The US State Department has suspended aid to military units directly linked to the pogroms, revoked previous invitations to US events, and halted the issuing of travel waivers.

These actions, however, are largely cosmetic, focusing only on military units directly carrying out the cleansing of Rohingya populations. They ignore the role of Suu Kyi, her National League for Democracy (NLD) and other key sections of the military in supporting the campaign.

Last Thursday evening, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson held a phone conversation with the head of the Burmese military Min Aung Hliang. Tillerson reportedly encouraged the army's cooperation with the Burmese government in "ending the violence and allowing the safe return of ethnic Rohingya who have fled the area."

The Trump administration is reportedly considering limited trade sanctions in response to growing public outrage at home and internationally. However, the head of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Senator Bob Corker summed up the policy, stating: “The United States should not abandon Burma. However, it may be time for a policy adjustment.”

These “adjustments” will be handled with utmost caution, in order to prevent the regime turning toward China for economic and political support. The US views Burma as geo-strategically critical to its military encirclement of China, in preparation for war against the Beijing regime.

U Ko Ko Gyi, a former student “democracy” activist and supporter of the Burmese regime, pointedly noted: “We are a small country that lies between India and China, and the DNA of our ancestors is to try to struggle for our survival. If you in the West criticize us too much, then you will push us into the arms of China and Russia.”

Reports of the ongoing persecution of the Rohingya preceded a tour of Asia by US President Donald Trump, starting this week.

Trump will visit Japan, South Korea, China, Vietnam and the Philippines, and attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Vietnam and the Association of South East Asian Nations in the Philippines. The tour will be used to consolidate military ties and alliances forged by the US in its anti-China campaign, and to escalate the threats against Beijing and North Korea.

Sections of the US ruling elite have called on Trump to make a show of opposition to the persecution of the Rohingya during the tour.

The *Washington Post*, which has close ties to the US military and intelligence agencies, published an editorial on Sunday, declaring that Trump has “an opportunity to show he will not ignore crimes against humanity.” It called for the US government to impose sanctions targeting top Burmese military officials.

Such a move, from the commander-in-chief of the blood-soaked American military, would be aimed at covering up the US role in backing the persecution of the Rohingya, and placing pressure on the Burmese regime to align more directly with Washington’s plans for a catastrophic war against China.



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