



HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH

“All of My Body Was Pain”

Sexual Violence against Rohingya Women and Girls in Burma

HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH

“All of My Body Was Pain”

Sexual Violence against Rohingya Women and Girls in Burma

Copyright © 2017 Human Rights Watch

All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 978-1-6231-35485

Cover design by Rafael Jimenez

Human Rights Watch defends the rights of people worldwide. We scrupulously investigate abuses, expose the facts widely, and pressure those with power to respect rights and secure justice. Human Rights Watch is an independent, international organization that works as part of a vibrant movement to uphold human dignity and advance the cause of human rights for all.

Human Rights Watch is an international organization with staff in more than 40 countries, and offices in Amsterdam, Beirut, Berlin, Brussels, Chicago, Geneva, Goma, Johannesburg, London, Los Angeles, Moscow, Nairobi, New York, Paris, San Francisco, Sydney, Tokyo, Toronto, Tunis, Washington DC, and Zurich.

For more information, please visit our website: <http://www.hrw.org>

“All of My Body Was Pain”

Sexual Violence against Rohingya Women and Girls in Burma

Map	1
Summary	12
Recommendations.....	56
To the Government of Burma.....	56
To the Government of Bangladesh	56
To the Government of Bangladesh with the support of international partners responding to the humanitarian crisis.....	56
To the UN Security Council.....	67
To UN Member Countries	67
To the UN Secretary-General	78
To the UN General Assembly	78
To the UN Human Rights Council.....	78
Methodology.....	89
Crimes Against Humanity by Burmese Security Forces Against Rohingya	112
Sexual Violence in the August and September 2017 Attacks.....	1516
Gang Rape.....	1516
Mass Rapes.....	1920
Rape, Sexual Harassment, and Looting Leading Up to the Attacks	2024
Numbers of Reported Cases.....	2122
Killing of Women and Family Members	2324
Killing of Women	2324
Killing of Children and Other Family Members	2324
Hardships Faced by Pregnant Women and Rape Survivors While Fleeing.....	2930
Access to Services and Documentation of Sexual Violence.....	3233
Physical and Emotional Trauma	3233
Barriers to Post-Rape Care	3334
Response by the Burmese Authorities.....	3536

Documentation of Rape	3637
Acknowledgments.....	3739

Map



Summary

I was held down by six men and raped by five of them. First, they [shot and] killed my brother ... then they threw me to the side and one man tore my *lungi* [sarong], grabbed me by the mouth and held me still. He stuck a knife into my side and kept it there while the men were raping me. That was how they kept me in place. ... I was trying to move and [the wound] was bleeding more. They were threatening to shoot me.

—Fatama Begum, Balukali refugee camp, Bangladesh, October 2017

Since August 25, 2017, Burmese security forces have committed widespread rape against women and girls as part of a campaign of ethnic cleansing against Rohingya Muslims in Burma's Rakhine State.

Killings, rapes, arbitrary arrests, and mass arson of homes by Burmese security forces in hundreds of predominantly Rohingya villages have forced more than 600,000 Rohingya to flee to neighboring Bangladesh. Rohingya women, men, and children have arrived in Bangladesh in desperate condition—hungry, exhausted, and sometimes with rape, bullet, or burn injuries. The humanitarian crisis caused by Burma's atrocities against the Rohingya has been staggering in both scale and speed.

The Burmese military's brutal campaign follows attacks on 30 police posts and an army base by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) on the morning of August 25, 2017 in northern Rakhine State. The government reported that 11 security force personnel were killed. While the government had a duty to respond to the attacks, the Burmese military, supported by Border Police and armed ethnic Rakhine villagers, not only pursued those responsible, but immediately launched large-scale attacks against scores of Rohingya villages under the guise of counter-insurgency operations. Human Rights Watch has found that the violations committed by members of Burma's security forces against the Rohingya population in northern Rakhine State since August 25 amount to crimes against humanity under international law.

This report is based on 52 interviews with Rohingya women and girls, including 29 survivors of rape, who fled to Bangladesh since these operations began. Rape survivors were from 19

different villages in Burma's Rakhine State, mostly in northern Buthiduang and Maungdaw Townships. They described similarly brutal circumstances of the rapes. Human Rights Watch also spoke to 17 representatives of humanitarian organizations providing health services to women and girls in the refugee camps, including representatives of United Nations agencies and international and national nongovernmental organizations. We also interviewed two Bangladeshi government health officials.

Human Rights Watch found that Burmese security forces raped and sexually assaulted women and girls both during major attacks on villages but also in the weeks prior to these major attacks sometimes after repeated harassment. In every case described to us, the perpetrators were uniformed members of security forces, almost all military personnel. While it is difficult to estimate the numbers of rapes that occurred, humanitarian organizations working with refugees in the camps in Bangladesh have reported receiving dozens or sometimes hundreds of cases.

These likely only represent a proportion of the actual number of women and girls who were raped. Some witnesses reported seeing women raped and then killed. Others do not report rape because of the deep stigma that makes survivors reluctant to seek assistance. Fear of having to pay medical fees that they cannot afford, or the lack of confidence in ever obtaining redress, also are factors. Of the survivors that Human Rights interviewed, almost two-thirds had not reported their rape to authorities or humanitarian organizations.

All but one of the rapes reported to Human Rights Watch were gang rapes, involving two or more perpetrators. In eight cases women and girls reported being raped by five or more soldiers. They described being raped in their homes and while fleeing burning villages. Human Rights Watch documented six cases of "mass rape" by the Burmese military. In these instances, survivors said that soldiers gathered them together in groups and then gang raped or raped them. Ethnic Rakhine villagers, acting alongside and in apparent coordination with government security forces, were also responsible for sexual harassment, often connected with looting.

The rapes were accompanied by further acts of violence, humiliation, and cruelty. Security forces beat women and girls with fists or guns, slapped them, or kicked them with boots. In two cases women reported that their attackers laughed at them during gang rapes, and more

frequently attackers threatened their victims either verbally or through actions like putting a gun to their heads. Some attackers also beat women's children during the attacks.

Rape survivors spoke of enduring numerous abuses at once. In addition to being gang raped, three women described with great distress seeing security forces murder their young children. Other women and girls said they witnessed killings of their elderly parents, their husbands and other family members and neighbors. Many reported witnessing cruelty toward those especially vulnerable, such as a soldier killing a 5-year-old girl who could not keep pace with her fleeing family, or security forces pushing older persons who could not flee back into burning houses.

For those able to flee, the journey toward relative safety in Bangladesh was fraught with pain and hardship. Gang-rape survivors reported days of agony walking with swollen and torn genitals through jungle to Bangladesh. Women in late stages of pregnancy described walking up and down steep hills slippery from monsoon rains, through rivers and dense vegetation, often with little to eat and on sore hips and swollen legs. Three women told us about giving birth during their journey without basic medical supplies or skilled health assistance.

None of the rape survivors we interviewed received post rape care in Burma. They missed access to urgent interventions that must take place within days of the rape, like emergency contraception (120 hours) and prophylaxis against HIV infection (72 hours). The Burmese government obstructs humanitarian access to much of Rakhine State.

Women continued to suffer even after reaching Bangladesh. Human Rights Watch spoke to 10 women who continued to experience physical injuries, including vaginal tears, bleeding, or infections as a result of rape, without accessing care. Many of the women we spoke to reported symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or depression.

The Bangladesh government, together with international partners, has provided sanctuary and have allowed Rohingya refugees access to health facilities around the camps as well as specialist care further afield. But a lack of knowledge and chaos in the overcrowded refugee camps together with stigma and shame has prevented many women from obtaining post-rape care.

Burmese authorities have rejected the growing documentation of sexual violence by the military against Rohingya women and girls. With an eye to future accountability and for use in investigations and prosecutions, Bangladesh and all humanitarian medical agencies should ensure women receive medical certificates of rape as part of their care and that copies are kept securely by medical organizations.

After years of persecution and denial of basic services, all Rohingya, including rape survivors, need a basic level of safety and security.

While Bangladesh and international donors have promptly provided desperately needed funds and services to assist the refugees, little has been done to date to reimpose targeted sanctions and other measures against senior military officials responsible for the worst abuses. The UN Security Council should urgently implement a full arms embargo on Burma and individual sanctions against leaders responsible for grave violations of human rights. The UN Security Council should also refer the situation in Rakhine State to the International Criminal Court to investigate and prosecute the most serious crimes.

Attention to the specific abuses suffered by Rohingya women and girls, including sexual violence, should be integrated into every aspect of the international response to this human rights and humanitarian crisis. This includes efforts to fully investigate the scope of sexual violence and other crimes against the Rohingya, putting in place measures to protect displaced Rohingya in Bangladesh from gender-based violence in refugee camps, and promoting their full participation and leadership in consultations with the Rohingya community.

Recommendations

To the Government of Burma

- Cease the campaign of ethnic cleansing against Rohingya in northern Rakhine State, and issue clear orders to security forces to stop all sexual violence.
- Investigate and appropriately punish members of security forces and others responsible for sexual violence, including as a matter of command responsibility.
- Ensure unimpeded access for humanitarian aid organizations in Rakhine State, including organizations assisting sexual violence survivors.
- Cooperate fully with international investigations into alleged crimes in Rakhine State, including the UN Fact-Finding Mission established by the UN Human Rights Council.
- Comply with the UN Security Council November Presidential Statement, which called on the Burmese government to “implement measures in line with UN Security Council resolution 2106 [2013] to prevent and respond to incidents of sexual violence and... work with the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict.”

To the Government of Bangladesh

- Keep open the border for Rohingya asylum seekers from Burma, recognize Rohingya who have fled Burma as refugees, and fully respect the principle of nonrefoulement.
- Continue the accurate biometric individual registration of Rohingya women, men, and children to ensure their full participation and equal access to protection.

To the Government of Bangladesh with the support of international partners responding to the humanitarian crisis

- Provide long-term post-rape care, including health care and psychosocial services, and monitor these services for quality.
- Create outreach programs to the Rohingya refugee community to reduce stigma around sexual violence and to inform individuals about available, free, and confidential medical and mental health services, including for post-rape care. Ensure assistance for associated costs, such as transport for access to services.

- Introduce protocols so that health clinics and other facilities that treat women and girls who report rape provide them with a medical certificate, and that they store a copy of the certificate in a secure physical or digital location.
- Ensure the full participation of Rohingya women in all consultations with the Rohingya community, and ensure such consultations for the design of refugee camps, distribution of aid, and measures to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence.
- Support efforts to document, investigate, and prosecute sexual violence against Rohingya women and girls, including by immediately deploying specialist capacity, and ensuring provision of adequate training and witness protection measures.

To the UN Security Council

- Impose individual sanctions on Burmese military leaders responsible for human rights abuses, including sexual violence and the failure to prevent or punish sexual violence. Sanctions should include travel bans, asset freezes, and restrictions on access to financial institutions.
- Impose a comprehensive arms embargo on Burma, including a ban on transfers of arms, equipment, technical assistance, training, financial or other assistance, including the maintenance of any arms and related material, and establish a panel of experts to monitor and report on implementation of the embargo.
- Insist that persons responsible for rape and other grave abuses be held accountable for their crimes, including under command responsibility, through a referral of the situation to the International Criminal Court and other avenues, such as universal jurisdiction.
- Draw attention to perpetrators of sexual violence and attacks on children by requesting public briefings from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict.

To UN Member Countries

- Impose bilateral arms embargoes on Burma, and create and implement sanctions regimes—including travel bans, asset freezes, and restrictions on access to financial institutions—that target individuals responsible for human rights

abuses and companies owned by individuals and institutions responsible for human rights abuses.

To the UN Secretary-General

- Add the Burmese military to the list of parties suspected of committing or being responsible for patterns of rape or other forms of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict on the agenda of the Security Council.
- Expand the reasons underpinning the inclusion of Burma's military on the secretary-general's "list of shame" for violations against children in armed conflict to include the killing and maiming of children, sexual violence against children, and the denial of humanitarian access for children.

To the UN General Assembly

- Resume scrutiny of Burma's human rights record at its Third Committee.
- Pass a resolution condemning the violence, supporting accountability and urging access for the UN Fact-Finding Mission and reauthorizing the mandate of a UN envoy or special advisor for Burma.

To the UN Human Rights Council

- Request regular updates from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Fact-Finding Mission on Burma, and the secretary-general's special representative for sexual violence in conflict for consideration of appropriate action, including through urgent debates or special sessions as needed.
- Request that the Fact-finding Mission on Burma gather information on individual perpetrators and identify command responsibility where possible, including with regard to sexual violence; include recommendations on an appropriate accountability mechanism in its final report; and transmit the final report to the UN Security Council.

Methodology

A Human Rights Watch researcher conducted research for this report in Rohingya refugee camps, both official and informal makeshift settlements, in Cox's Bazar district, Bangladesh, between October 3 and 13, 2017. It builds on other investigations by Human Rights Watch researchers into what transpired in western Burma following the ARSA attacks in late August, including multiple visits to the Bangladesh refugee camps by staff in September, October, and November 2017.

In researching this report, Human Rights Watch identified and conducted interviews with 52 women and girls who were the victims of serious violations during Burmese security forces operations in Rakhine State in late August and September 2017. Many of those interviewed were identified with the help of a Rohingya assistant and humanitarian organizations providing services to the refugees. Of those interviewed, 29 reported being raped after the start of “clearance operations” on August 25, 2017. Three women were raped by security forces in the months before the “clearance operations” and were raped a second time after they had begun. Rape survivors came from 19 different villages, mostly located in Maungdaw and Buthidaung Townships. Other interviewees described witnessing killings of family members or fleeing while pregnant.

We also conducted two focus group discussions on access to sexual and reproductive health care. Each focus group consisted of four women.

Human Rights Watch only learned of one case of sexual violence directed against men or boys. However, because of deep stigma regarding such violence, it may be much underreported.

Human Rights Watch makes every effort to abide by best practice standards for ethical research and documentation of sexual violence, including with robust informed consent procedures, measures to protect the interviewees' privacy and security, and interview techniques designed to minimize the risk of retraumatization. Interviewees were explicitly told that they could end the interview at any time and could choose not to answer particular questions. In some cases at the request of the interviewee or because of her

distress, the Human Rights Watch researcher did not ask the survivor to describe incidents of sexual violence in detail.

Most women and girls were interviewed individually, although sometimes, at the request of the interviewees, in groups of two or three. Efforts to establish privacy for interviews included renting a closed shelter for a few hours at a time. Most interviews lasted approximately one hour. Time constraints on interviewees, especially related to child care, meant that some interviews had to be conducted in shorter timeframes. In a few cases, interviews were concluded early to accommodate distress or exhaustion of the interviewee.

Interviews with victims were translated from Rohingya by a female Bangladeshi translator into English. In over half of the interviews a second female translator from the Rohingya community was present, always with the permission and often at the request of the interviewee.

For reasons of security and privacy, all survivors are identified by pseudonyms. Nongovernmental organization representatives also requested anonymity, including to protect the security of their organizations' programs in Burma.

Human Rights Watch provided referrals for post-rape medical services and in three cases transport to a clinic. Human Rights Watch provided snacks and water during the interviews but did not provide any compensation to interviewees.

Human Rights Watch also spoke to 17 representatives of humanitarian organizations working to provide health services to women and girls in the refugee camps, including representatives of major UN agencies and international and national nongovernmental organizations. We also interviewed two Bangladeshi government health officials.

In this report, we refer to all the areas where we conducted interviews as refugee camps. This includes both official Rohingya refugee camps that predate the current crisis and the sprawling informal camps nearby.

Human Rights Watch uses the following definition of rape:

Rape includes any physical invasion of a sexual nature without consent or under coercive circumstances. A “physical invasion” occurs when there is penetration, however slight, of any part of the body of the victim [or of the perpetrator by the victim] with a sexual organ, or of the anal or genital opening of the victim with any object or any other part of the body.

The term “gang rape” is used in any case where a person is raped by two or more perpetrators.

In this report, “child” refers to anyone under the age of 18, consistent with the term’s meaning in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. “Girl” refers to a female child.

Crimes Against Humanity by Burmese Security Forces Against Rohingya

Human Rights Watch field research and analysis of satellite imagery has found that serious violations committed by members of Burma's security forces against the Rohingya Muslim population in northern Rakhine State since August 25, 2017 amount to crimes against humanity.¹ Crimes against humanity are defined under international law as specified criminal acts "committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack."² The crimes against humanity alleged include a) forced population transfers and deportation, b) murder, c) rape and other sexual violence, and d) persecution as defined by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the ad hoc international criminal courts.³

Burmese security forces targeted women and girls for rape, gang rape, and other forms of sexual violence and sexual harassment during their campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya.⁴ Women and girls were also subject, along with men and boys, to killings, expulsions from their homes, and other forms of persecution. Women recounted seeing their children, husbands, and neighbors killed in front of them. Rape survivors fleeing Burma often had to walk for days in severe pain from injuries sustained from gang rapes.

¹ Human Rights Watch, Crimes Against Humanity by Burmese Security Forces Against the Rohingya Muslim Population in Northern Rakhine State since August 25, 2017, September 26, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/25/crimes-against-humanity-burmese-security-forces-against-rohingya-muslim-population>. Human Rights Watch has previously determined that the Burmese security forces were responsible for abuses that amounted to crimes against humanity against the Rohingya in 2012 and 2016. See "All You Can Do is Pray" Crimes Against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing of Rohingya Muslims in Burma's Arakan State, April 2013, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/04/22/all-you-can-do-pray/crimes-against-humanity-and-ethnic-cleansing-rohingya-muslims>; "Burma: Rohingya Recount Killings, Rape, and Arson," December 21, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/12/21/burma-rohingya-recount-killings-rape-and-arson>.

² Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC Statute), 2187 U.N.T.S. 3, entered into force July 1, 2002, art. 7, http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instrree/Rome_Statute_ICC/romestatute.html (accessed November 8, 2017). The Rome Statute entered into force on April 11, 2002 and the ICC has the authority to prosecute the most serious international crimes since July 1, 2002. Burma is not a party to the Rome Statute.

³ Murder and torture have been among the core offenses included within the definition of crimes against humanity at least since the adoption of the charter establishing the Nuremberg tribunal after World War II. Rape was not explicitly included in the charter's definition of crimes against humanity in article 6(c) although it could be derived from that definition's general prohibition against "other inhumane acts." This ambiguity was resolved in recent years: the statutes of the International Criminal Tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia as well as the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court all explicitly include rape in the list of enumerated offenses that can constitute crimes against humanity.

⁴ "Ethnic cleansing," though not a formal legal term, has been defined as a purposeful policy by an ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas.

Pregnant women who fled also recounted terrible hardship during their journeys, including giving birth en route to Bangladesh.

The Burmese security forces' brutal campaign followed coordinated attacks on August 25, 2017 by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) that targeted 30 police posts and an army camp in northern Rakhine State. The government reported that ARSA militants killed 11 security force personnel during those attacks. The Burmese military, supported by Border Police and armed ethnic Rakhine villagers, immediately began large-scale attacks on Rohingya villages ostensibly as part of counter-insurgency operations. These operations involved killing, rape and other sexual violence, looting, and mass arson, amounting to a full-scale campaign of ethnic cleansing that has forced more than 600,000 Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh. Satellite imagery analyzed by Human Rights Watch along with interviews with over 150 refugees led to the finding that Burmese security forces burned down at least 288 predominantly Rohingya villages by September 23, 2017.

While there have also been numerous reports of abuses committed by ARSA militants, Human Rights Watch has not been able to independently verify those accounts, in part because the Burmese government continues to deny independent human rights investigators and journalist access to northern Rakhine State, where most victims and their families would be located.

The government's ethnic cleansing campaign follows a similar pattern to the military's response to ARSA attacks in late 2016. After ARSA attacked three police border posts in Rakhine State on October 9, 2016, Burma's security forces carried out large-scale attacks against the Rohingya population as part of "clearance operations." Human Rights Watch documented extrajudicial killings, rape and other sexual violence against women and girls, and the burning of at least 1,500 structures.⁵ The attacks forced an estimated 87,000 Rohingya to flee from northern Rakhine State to Bangladesh.

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented many of those earlier abuses in a "flash report" released on February 3, 2017, finding that the Burmese security force operations involved: extrajudicial killing; enforced disappearance; torture and other ill-treatment, notably rape and other crimes of sexual violence; arbitrary

⁵ Human Rights Watch, "Burma: Rohingya Recount Killings, Rape, and Arson."

arrests and detention; forced displacement; and destruction and looting of homes, food, and other property.⁶ The report concluded that the 2016 attacks against the Rohingya population in Rakhine State “very likely” amounted to crimes against humanity.⁷

The United Nations and others found that in 2012 local authorities and local Rakhine residents with the backing of security forces committed numerous serious abuses against the Rohingya population. Human Rights Watch found that the 2012 abuses amounted to ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.⁸

On March 24, 2017, the UN Human Rights Council authorized a Fact-Finding Mission to Myanmar to focus “in particular” on the situation in Rakhine State.⁹ In November 2017, Burmese authorities had not yet allowed the investigators to travel to Burma.

Since August 25, 2017, an estimated one-half of Burma’s Rohingya population, which were estimated at slightly more than one million prior to the violence,¹⁰ fled to Bangladesh, joining hundreds of thousands who had fled Burma for Bangladesh because of prior government repression or during earlier violence. Thousands more are believed to be internally displaced, along with members of other ethnic groups. At the time of writing this report, many of these displaced people are without basic humanitarian assistance. The Burmese government has obstructed aid to many Rohingya areas since October 2016.¹¹

A November 6, 2017 UN Security Council Presidential Statement expressed “grave concerns about reports of human rights abuses and violations ... including by the Myanmar security forces, in particular against persons belonging to the Rohingya community, including those involving the systematic use of force and intimidation, killing of men, women, and children, sexual violence, and including the destruction and burning of homes

⁶ OHCHR, “Report of OHCHR Mission to Bangladesh, Interviews with Rohingya Fleeing from Myanmar since 9 October 2016,” February 2017, <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/MM/FlashReport3Feb2017.pdf> (accessed October 23, 2017).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Human Rights Watch, “All You Can Do is Pray: Crimes Against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing of Rohingya Muslims in Burma’s Arakan State,” April 22, 2013.

⁹ Human Rights Watch, “Q&A: UN Factfinding Mission to Myanmar”, August 2, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/08/02/qa-united-nations-fact-finding-mission-myanmar>.

¹⁰ UNFPA, “Myanmar releases population count from census”, August 30, 2014, <http://asiapacific.unfpa.org/news/myanmar-releases-population-count-census> (accessed November 10, 2017).

¹¹ Human Rights Watch, “Burma: Ensure Aid Reaches Rohingya”, September 11, 2017.

and property.”¹² In the statement, the Security Council called upon the government of Burma to end excessive use of military force in Rakhine State, to implement measures in line with Security Council resolution 2016 (2013) to prevent and respond to sexual violence, to cooperate with the UN special representative on sexual violence in conflict, and to ensure unhindered access to humanitarian aid in Rakhine State.¹³

The Rohingya have faced decades of discrimination and repression under successive Burmese governments, including restrictions on movement and access to education and health services. Effectively denied citizenship under the 1982 Citizenship Law, they are one of the largest stateless populations in the world.

¹² United Nations Security Council, SC/13055, “Security Council Presidential Statement Calls on Myanmar to End Excessive Military Force, Intercommunal Violence in Rakhine State”, November 6, 2017, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc13055.doc.htm> (accessed November 9, 2017).

¹³ Ibid.

Sexual Violence in the August and September 2017 Attacks

They were all in green uniform.... One grabbed me around the mouth, one man held me down and then they all raped me, one by one.

—Nura Naha, 27, rape survivor and mother of five, Bangladesh, October 2017

Gang Rape

Human Rights Watch research found that gang rape and other forms of sexual violence by the Burmese military against Rohingya women and girls since August 2017 has been a widespread and at times systematic practice. It was often accompanied by killings, beatings, and other abuses against both the victim and other family members. Burmese soldiers stripped, raped, and otherwise sexually assaulted women and girls during the ethnic cleansing campaign that began on August 25, but also engaged in repeated violence and harassment in the weeks prior to the military operations.¹⁴

Human Rights Watch interviewed 29 survivors of rape and heard accounts of many other rapes including group rapes. Three of the rape survivors were girls. These women and girls were from 19 different villages, mostly in Buthiduang and Maungdaw Townships. Many described the rape occurring under similar circumstances, suggesting a pattern. Human Rights Watch also learned of three Rohingya women, including one who spoke to us, who was raped by Burmese security force personnel in earlier incidents over the past year. We identified other rape survivors but were unable to interview them because of resource constraints.

All but one of the rapes documented by Human Rights Watch were gang rapes, involving two or more perpetrators. In eight of the cases women and girls reported being raped by five or more perpetrators.

¹⁴ Many of the respondents were unable to provide an exact date for the recent attacks on their villages that had caused them to flee, but said they had been attacked in the week, or days before the Muslim holiday of Eid Qurban, which ended on September 1, 2017.

In every rape case described to Human Rights Watch, the perpetrators were uniformed members of Burmese security forces. In two cases, victims said the perpetrators were dressed in grey-blue camouflage uniform, probably that of Burma's Border Guard Police. In the other cases victims said those responsible were members of the Burmese military. Survivors said the men wore either green camouflage uniforms or plain dark green uniforms. Groups of soldiers sometimes included men in both types of uniform.

The rapes were accompanied by other violence or threats of violence, humiliation, and cruelty. Soldiers beat women and girls with fists or guns, slapped them, or kicked them hard with boots. In two cases women reported that their attackers laughed at them during the gang rapes. More frequently attackers threatened their victims either verbally or through actions like putting a gun to their heads. In two cases women said the perpetrators bit their breasts.

Leila Nur, 20, described passing out after being raped twice and then being slapped awake by a third soldier who then also raped her.¹⁵ Azara Younus, 28 years, from Kyein Chaung village, known locally as Boli Bazar, in Maungdaw Township, was dragged to a school toilet by a soldier after a group of soldiers had beaten her. The single soldier raped her, she said, "on the filthy water on the floor."¹⁶

Several women remarked during interviews that during the rapes they feared they would also be killed. "I thought I would be shot," said Sumera Ishak, 40.¹⁷

Fatama Begum, 33, said she was raped the day before her village of Chut Pyin, known locally as Shoppara, in Rathedaung Township, was burned on August 27.¹⁸ She said:

I was held down by six men and raped by five of them. First, they [shot and] killed my brother ... then they threw me to the side and one man tore my *lungi* [sarong], grabbed me by the mouth and held me still. He stuck a knife

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Leila Nur (pseudonym), Kutapalong refugee camp, October 11, 2017.

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Azara Younus (pseudonym), Kutapalong refugee camp, October 11, 2017.

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Sumera Ishak (pseudonym), Kutapalong refugee camp, October 4, 2017.

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Fatama Begum (pseudonym), Balukali refugee camp, October 3, 2017. Amnesty International has documented the attack on Chut Pyin village and identified the date of the attack as August 27, 2017. See Amnesty International, *My World is Finished*, October 18, 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa16/7288/2017/en/> (accessed October 23, 2017).

into my side and kept it there while the men were raping me, that was how they kept me in place. ... I was trying to move and it was bleeding more. They were threatening to shoot me.¹⁹

Human Rights Watch interviewed a Rohingya refugee who said that, before he fled for Bangladesh, he saw soldiers rape a man in Chut Pyin.²⁰ "My friend was shot in the leg and he couldn't walk. They found him and they put bamboo in his ass," he said. "They put a big stick in his ass."²¹ This is the only case of male rape Human Rights Watch documented, but because of deep stigma regarding such violence, it may be underreported.

Rabia Abdul told Human Rights Watch that she miscarried after a brutal gang rape by at least four of the roughly 20 soldiers that entered her home. "After the fourth rape I went black," she said. "After the rape I woke up ... there was so much bleeding and then two hours later the baby came out. It died right after." She said the attack took place two or three days before her village, close to Buthidaung town, was burned in the last week of August.²²

Rama Faisal, 25, was raped three days before fleeing her village, Tin May in Buthiduang Township, in late August. "There was a normal routine [in the days before the attack]. They [the soldiers] would come and look around the house and take whatever they wanted," she said.²³ "They came into my house, they asked for water, I did not understand so they kicked me so hard I fell onto the bed. At least two raped me before I went unconscious. One bit my breasts."²⁴

In some cases, soldiers conducted gang rapes in public. Most of the women and girls interviewed by Human Rights Watch were raped in their houses but in two cases they said they were dragged outside. Fifteen-year-old Hala Sadak, from Sin Thay Pyin village (known locally as Hathi Para) in Maungdaw Township said that large areas of scarring on her right leg and knee were from where soldiers had stripped her naked and then dragged her from her home to a nearby tree where, she estimates, about 10 men raped her from behind.²⁵

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Fatama Begum (pseudonym), Balukali refugee camp, October 3, 2017.

²⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, name withheld, Ukiya refugee camp, September 15, 2017.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Human Rights Watch interview with Rabia Abdul (pseudonym), Kutapalong refugee camp, October 11, 2017.

²³ Human Rights Watch interview with Rama Faisal (pseudonym), Thenkali refugee camp, October 8, 2017.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Hala Sadak (pseudonym), Kutapalong refugee camp, October 13, 2017.

"They left me where I was," Hala Sadak said. "When my brother and sister came to get me I was lying there on the ground, they thought I was dead."²⁶

Other women and girls were raped as they fled their villages, headed for the relative safety of the hills or jungle. Akash Abdul, 14, said that after the security forces killed the other members of her family, she and a younger sister fled. "As we got to the edge of the village two soldiers grabbed me," she said. "They threw me to the ground and then they both raped me."²⁷

In several cases, rape survivors said that during the rapes, soldiers struck or beat their children.

Shaju Hosin, a 30-year-old mother of three, from "Tami" or Tin May village in Buthiduang Township, said that 12 men entered her home on the morning of the arson attack on her village in late August.²⁸ She said at least five soldiers raped her before she passed out:

I was crying but they tore off all of my clothes.... They hit my children while raping me.... I went unconscious. The first thing I remember when I woke again was my children screaming that their mother was dead.... I was 4-months' pregnant [and] I bled so much I was afraid that I would lose the baby.²⁹

Rawida Zowir, 35, said that some of the 10 soldiers who entered her house beat her children before she was stripped of her clothes and raped by "at least five" of the soldiers. "The kids were clinging onto me ... I would not let go of them so they began beating me with their guns," she said.³⁰ Like many victims, Rawida Zowir emphasized how she had attempted to resist the attack.

Nura Begum, 35, from a village in Maungdaw Township, tried to protect her four children from having to see her being slapped, stripped, and then gang raped. "I kept screaming

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Akash Abdul (pseudonym), Thenkali refugee camp, October 10, 2017.

²⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Shaju Hosin (pseudonym), Thenkali refugee camp, October 8, 2017.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Rawida Zowir (pseudonym), Thenkali refugee camp, October 8, 2017.

and saying not to rape me in front of the children," she said. "But they did what they wanted to my body."³¹

Other rape survivors, as described below, also witnessed the killing of their children by Burmese security forces.

Mass Rapes

Human Rights Watch documented six cases of "mass rape" by the Burmese military, five during the "clearance operations" that began on August 25. In these instances, survivors said that soldiers gathered them together in groups and then gang raped or raped them.

Interviewees described the horror of witnessing other women being beaten and gang raped during a massacre in the village of Maung Nu in Buthidaung Township on August 29, which Human Rights Watch documented.³² "They came to the women's building, they were pulling off our clothes, *lungyi*, all the women in the room were raped, even me," said Someera Kamal, 40, who survived the massacre. "The women were all over, everywhere there were women being raped."³³

Daulu Osman, a 15-year-old girl, said she fled her home after her village of Shwe Zarr (known locally as Gunapara) in Maungdaw Township was burned at the end of August. She said she witnessed the killing of five family members, managed to swim across a river, get two villages away, and evade multiple dangers before a group of soldiers forcibly gathered her and other women and girls who were fleeing and raped them. "There were women being grabbed, there were 10 or 12 of us, being grabbed and raped on the ground," Daulu Osman said. "That is what they did to me." She said that two soldiers raped her.³⁴

Also in late August, Mamtaz Yunis, 33, and other women and men fled to the hills from their village of Mee Chaung Zay (known locally as Ming Gizi) in Buthidaung Township. Burmese soldiers trapped her and about 20 other women for a night and two days without

³¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Nura Begum (pseudonym), Thenkali refugee camp, October 8, 2017.

³² See Human Rights Watch, *Burma: Military Massacres Dozens in Rohingya Village*, October 4, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/10/03/burma-military-massacres-dozens-rohingya-village>.

³³ Human Rights Watch interview with Someera Kamal (pseudonym), Kutapalong refugee camp, October 4, 2017.

³⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Daulu Osman (pseudonym), Thenkali refugee camp, October 10, 2017.

food or shelter on the side of a hill.³⁵ She said the soldiers raped women in front of gathered women, or took individual women away, and then returned them to the group, silent and ashamed. "The men in uniform, they were grabbing the women, pulling a lot of women, they pulled my clothes off and tore them off," Mamtaz Yunis said. "There were so many women ... we were weeping but there was nothing we could do."³⁶

Rape, Sexual Harassment, and Looting Leading Up to the Attacks

The "clearance operations" that began in August took place in the context of a long history of persecution and abuse of ethnic Rohingya by the Burmese government, including sexual abuse of Rohingya women and girls. Three of the women interviewed said they had been raped twice by Burmese soldiers—both during the recent attacks but also during earlier operations or visits in their villages prior to the ARSA attacks. Many others reported longstanding sexual harassment and other forms of harassment.

Interviewees said that soldiers had harassed them in their homes in the weeks and even months before the attacks on their villages began in August. "They came to my house and took money," said 21-year-old Munara Amir Hussein from Maungdaw Township. "I never left the house I was so scared of them."³⁷

Many interviewees reported that before the arson attacks in August, some local Rakhine sexually harassed and robbed them and other women of money or gold jewelry and stole chickens and other animals. Human Rights Watch heard nearly a dozen accounts of soldiers and Rakhine villagers grabbing or fondling Rohingya women's breasts when ostensibly searching for money. In every case reported, the soldiers and Rakhine villagers stole any money they found.

More than half of the women interviewed complained of harassment and looting before or during military-led attacks on their villages in late August and September. Hala Sadak, a 15-year-old gang rape victim from Sin Thay Pyin (known locally as Hathi Para) in Maungdaw Township, said, "They were coming and harassing us before [the attack]. They were taking

³⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Mamtaz Yuni (pseudonym), Kutapalong refugee camp, October 11, 2017.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Munara Amir Hussein (pseudonym), Kutapalong refugee camp, October 11, 2017.

whatever they wanted. They touched me, pulled my clothes and felt my breasts and then they took all our money and they took my gold earrings.”³⁸

Numbers of Reported Cases

Humanitarian organizations assisting Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh have together reported receiving hundreds of recent rape cases. These likely represent only a small proportion of the actual number of women and girls raped because they do not include those who were raped and subsequently killed, because the deep stigma attached to sexual assault makes survivors reluctant to seek assistance, and because various other factors discourage reporting, including concern about paying fees for medical care and lack of confidence in future criminal investigations.³⁹

UN humanitarian reports also indicate that sexual violence has been widespread in the recent attacks against Rohingya, with a cumulative total of 1,644 incidents reported since August 27, 2017, including, but not limited to, sexual forms of violence. Between October 22 and 28 alone, 306 gender-based violence cases were reported, 96 percent of which included emergency medical care services.⁴⁰ These UN figures aggregate different organizations’ cases. One Bangladeshi organization that does outreach work with survivors of sexual violence said they had received hundreds of new cases of rape and other sexual violence since the August 25 attacks.⁴¹ Another organization said they were currently providing services to 58 survivors of rape and 12 survivors of sexual assault that had arrived since August 2017.⁴² A third organization said they had identified 50 recent rape survivors.⁴³

³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Hala Sadak (pseudonym), Kutapalong refugee camp, October 13, 2017.

³⁹ For a discussion of the challenges of estimating prevalence of sexual violence in conflict, see Tia Palermo and Amber Peterman, “Undercounting, overcounting and the longevity of flawed estimates: statistics on sexual violence in conflict,” *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 2011, 89:924-925, <http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/89/12/11-089888/en/> (accessed October 30, 2017).

⁴⁰ “Situation Report: Rohingya Refugee Crisis, 29 October, 2017, Cox Bazar,” Inter Sector Coordination Group, hosted by the International Organization for Migration, October 29, 2017, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/171029_weekly_iscg_sitrep.pdf (accessed November 5, 2017).

⁴¹ Human Rights Watch interview with staff member from a Bangladeshi NGO, name withheld, Cox’s Bazar, October 13, 2017.

⁴² Human Rights Watch email correspondence with staff member from an international humanitarian organization, name withheld, November 7, 2017.

⁴³ Human Rights Watch interview with staff member from an international humanitarian organization, name withheld, Cox’s Bazar, October 13, 2017.

Representatives of humanitarian agencies, national and international nongovernmental organizations working with survivors, as well as Bangladesh government officials have said that they believe that only a small proportion of recently arrived refugee rape survivors had reported their rapes to medical providers, in either Bangladeshi government or humanitarian facilities. Of the survivors that Human Rights interviewed, almost two-thirds had not reported their rape to authorities or humanitarian organizations. Only one of the women we contacted independently without the assistance of a humanitarian organization had sought appropriate health care or reported their rape.

Human Rights Watch and other organizations have previously documented sexual violence, including brutal gang rapes, against Rohingya women and girls by Burmese military and other security forces.⁴⁴ Abusive security operations conducted in Rohingya villages in northern Rakhine State in late 2016 featured rape and other forms of sexual violence.⁴⁵ A report released by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) found that more than half of the 101 women they interviewed in January of 2017 who had fled those abusive operations said they were raped or suffered other forms of sexual violence. The UN report said that rape seemed to have been “widespread as well as systematic.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch, Burma: Security Forces Raped Rohingya Women, Girls, February 6, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/02/06/burma-security-forces-raped-rohingya-women-girls>

⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch, Burma: Security Forces Raped Rohingya Women, Girls, February 6, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/02/06/burma-security-forces-raped-rohingya-women-girls>

⁴⁶ OHCHR, “Report of OHCHR Mission to Bangladesh, Interviews with Rohingya Fleeing from Myanmar since 9 October 2016.” February 2017.

Killing of Women and Family Members

Killing of Women

The Burmese security forces' ostensible counterinsurgency operations since August have not spared Rohingya women from extrajudicial killing. One interviewee said that her friend, Shona Mer, about 40, died while they both fled Shoppara village in Rathedaung Township: "She was shot in the stomach, she ran to the other village with us but she died as soon as we got there."⁴⁷

"I saw a woman being shot as she fled," Hamida Amir, a rape survivor from Maungdaw Township said about her neighbor called "Dolu." "Her father was running in front of her. He stopped and ran back and took [Dolu's] child."⁴⁸

Shaju Hosin, a rape survivor from Tin May village in Buthidaung Township, said that she saw the shooting of her neighbor, Shamsung Naher.⁴⁹ Security forces shot both Shamsung Naher and her husband as they tried to flee their house.⁵⁰

Killing of Children and Other Family Members

My child has died, my husband has died, I just want to die. I have no idea about my future. Why ask me about my future?

—Hadija Jamal, 25, survivor of Chut Pyin massacre, Bangladesh, October 2017

Many rape survivors and other women and girls interviewed said that the Burmese security forces' killing of their family members was the most traumatic part of the attacks. One

⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Shona Mer (pseudonym), Kutapalong refugee camp, October 11, 2017. See Amnesty International, *My World is Finished*, October 18, 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa16/7288/2017/en/> (accessed October 23, 2017).

⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Hamida Amir (pseudonym), Thenkali refugee camp, Cox's Bazar district, October 8, 2017.

⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Shaju Hosin (pseudonym), Thenkali refugee camp, Cox's Bazar district, October 8, 2017.

⁵⁰ A Human Rights Watch researcher visited Shamsung Naher's surviving baby shortly after the interview. The baby, only a few months old, had loose skin sagging off its extremely thin frame and a deeply sunken fontanel (the top of a baby's head), which can be a sign of severe dehydration or malnutrition.

woman, for example, said she was haunted by having seen her cousin's brain after he was shot in the head and witnessing a soldier picking up and tossing part of his skull over a wall.

Especially devastating were the killing of spouses and children, including infants and toddlers. In 13 interviews women or girls said they had seen soldiers murder close family members, often in cruel ways. In another five cases women and girls had heard that their close family members had been killed. In one case a woman said two of her children were missing. Others reported that they had heard that neighbors, or others with whom they were close had been killed or were missing.

Three of Toyuba Yahya's six children were killed just outside her house in Sin Thay Pyin village (known locally as Hathi Para) in Maungdaw Township before seven men in military uniform raped her, she said. She said that two of her sons, 2- and 3-years-old, were killed when soldiers beat their heads against the trunk of a tree outside her home. The soldiers then killed her 5-year-old daughter. "My baby ... I wanted him to be alive but he slowly died afterwards," Toyuba Yahya, who is 30 years old, said. "My daughter, they picked her high up and then smashed her against the ground. She was killed. I do not know why they did that."⁵¹

Shaju Hosin, saw one of her children killed when she fled their home village of Tin May (known locally as Thami) in Buthiduang Township.⁵² She said:

I have three kids now. I had another one—Khadija—she was 5-years-old. When we were running from the village she was killed, in the attack. She was running last, less fast, trying to catch up with us. A soldier swung at her with his gun and bashed her head in, after that she fell down. We kept running.⁵³

Isharhat Islam, a 40-year-old woman who said she had been raped twice over the past year by Burmese soldiers, said she lost her two young adult sons in the shootings in her village, Sin Thay Pyin.⁵⁴ She did not witness the killings. "There were other men who went back to

⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Toyuba Yahya (pseudonym), Kutapalong refugee camp, October 13, 2017.

⁵² Human Rights Watch interview with Shaju Hosin (pseudonym), Thenkali refugee camp, October 8, 2017.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Isharhat Islam (pseudonym), Thenkali refugee camp, October 7, 2017.

the village afterwards,” she said. “They saw a pile of bodies and saw the faces of my two sons.” She added that she had been told that local Buddhist residents of the village stopped Rohingya returnees from burying the bodies.

Dilda Abdulrahmin, a survivor of the Chut Pyin massacre in Rathedaung Township, said that soldiers threw her daughter Yasmina, a toddler, onto a fire. “I was shot in the arm, I fell backwards. It was like I was unconscious,” Dilda Abdulrahmin said. “Then my child was crawling on me, I remember she was on me and then they snatched her and threw her into the burning house.”⁵⁵

Hadija Jamal, another survivor of the same massacre and 25 years old, showed Human Rights Watch a severe injury on her left arm, near her wrist, where she said a bullet grazed her before striking her baby. “As we were fleeing my son kept trying to stay alive, he kept opening his eyes and then they would close again,” Hadija Jamal said. “We buried him in Ure [a nearby village].”⁵⁶

In the chaos of the attacks and because they often had several children to try and rescue, some women were forced to leave one or more children behind as they fled. Although women agreed in interviews that there was nothing they could have done otherwise, interviewees expressed feelings of guilt, as well as intense grief, about these losses.

Sakina Khatum was alone in her home in Sin Thay Pyin village when it began burning during a security force attack in late August. She said that a “rocket launcher” hit her home.⁵⁷ “I grabbed one son, I left one. I was senseless,” she said. “I never knew what happened to the other son. I never heard from anyone but he must have burned in the fire.”⁵⁸ Sakina Khatum said that eight months earlier Burmese soldiers had taken her husband without providing any reason for his arrest.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Dilda Abdulrahmin (pseudonym), October 3, 2017. Her account of the attack on her home did not include any information about rape or other sexual violence.

⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Hadija Jamal (pseudonym), Balukali refugee camp, October 3, 2017. Her account of the attack on her home did not include any information about rape or other sexual violence.

⁵⁷ Witnesses have frequently referred to “rocket launchers” in interviews, both after the 2016 violence and during clearance operations since August 2017. The phrase is believed to refer to mortars or grenade launchers.

⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Sakina Khatum (pseudonym), Kutapalong refugee camp, October 13, 2017.

⁵⁹ Ibid. The interviewee’s husband was taken away by soldiers without any explanation. The interviewee does not know where he is being held, or if he is still alive. As far as she knew when we spoke with her in October 2017, no formal charges have been filed against him.

Anwara Sanchita, also from Sin Thay Pyin village, believes that her one-year-old twins were killed when an explosive projectile from a “rocket launcher” landed near them when they fled the village. “I wanted to go and see if they were ok, but I just ran,” she said. “I think there was nothing left of them.”⁶⁰

Human Rights Watch has documented the use of mortars and other man-portable explosive weapons, such as grenades and rocket launchers, against Rohingya villages in multiple attacks during counterinsurgency operations in October 2016 and since late August 2017.⁶¹

Women and girls also saw other children from the community killed. “Three children [that I know of] were thrown into fires,” said Nura Begum, a rape survivor from Maungdaw Township. “I myself saw one of them being thrown into fire [of a burning house], the child of Rehanna.”⁶²

Human Rights Watch interviewed eight women who said that their husbands had been killed or were missing, while six said they had been arrested during the military operations that started in late August or in the weeks or months before the operations. Four others said that they had become separated in the chaos, or that their husbands had chosen to remain in Burma.

Some women said that their rapes took place along with arrests or attacks on husbands or other men in the family. Burmese soldiers took Baanu Salam’s husband from their home in a village in Buthidaung Township, and then gang-raped her. “They were all in uniform,” she said. “They beat me and when my daughter began crying, they beat her too. I was begging them to stop but they kept beating her.”⁶³

⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Anwara Sanchita (pseudonym), Kutapalong refugee camp, October 13, 2017.

⁶¹ Human Rights Watch, “Burma: Rohingya Recount Killings, Rape and Arson”, December 21, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/12/21/burma-rohingya-recount-killings-rape-and-arson>, and “Human Rights Watch, Burma: Rohingya Describe Military Atrocities”, September 8, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/08/burma-rohingya-describe-military-atrocities>. Amnesty International has also documented the use of grenade launchers and rocket propelled grenades by Burmese security forces in northern Rakhine State during clearance operations in August and September 2017. See Amnesty International, “*My World is Finished*” October 18, 2017, p. 38., <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa16/7288/2017/en/> (accessed November 9, 2017).

⁶² Human Rights Watch interview with Nura Begum (pseudonym), Thenkali refugee camp, October 8, 2017.

⁶³ Human Rights Watch interview with Baanu Salam (pseudonym), Kutapalong refugee camp, October 11, 2017.

Yasmine Ahmed, 25, said that three days before her village, Sin Thay Pyin in Maungdaw Township, was burned in late August, security forces, “took my husband away. I never saw him again. Two [of our] kids followed him out and then they all disappeared. ... I have no idea where they are, usually [the security forces] don't take children.”⁶⁴ The children, a boy and a girl, were 4 and 6 years old.

Women who had lost their husbands said that they were profoundly affected by the recent attacks on their villages and their arduous journeys to Bangladesh, but were also full of anxieties about how to manage the present. “I am so scared,” said Hasina Begum. “How am I to cope with the kids and no husband?”⁶⁵

Human Rights Watch and others have documented the Burmese army's attacks and killing of older people during their ethnic cleansing campaign.⁶⁶ Three interviewees talked about older people being left behind, or seeing older people killed.

Akash Abdul, said that after she and her younger sister managed to escape their burning house, soldiers pushed her father and her mother back into the burning home.

“I saw them push my husband's uncle into the fire. I saw them push him back into the burning house,” Hasina Begum said.⁶⁷ “He is weak, maybe 80 years.... I think they wanted everyone to leave and those that could not leave they put into the fire.”⁶⁸

Leila Nur, from Maungdaw Township's Fokira Bazar village in Kha Maung Zeik village tract said:

My husband returned to the village two days [after the attack] and found his mother there. But there was just blood there from his father. He had been

⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Yasmine Ahmed (pseudonym), Kutapalong refugee camp, October 13, 2017.

⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Hasina Begum (pseudonym), Kutapalong refugee camp, October 11, 2017. A United Nations High Commission for Refugees household survey of Rohingya refugees found that 14 percent of all households were headed by single women. See, United Nations High Commission for Refugees, briefing note, “First Results of Family Counting in Bangladesh Find Every Third Refugee Family Vulnerable,” November 7, 2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2017/11/5a0192138/first-results-family-counting-bangladesh-find-third-refugee-household-vulnerable.html> (accessed November 10, 2017).

⁶⁶ Amnesty International, *My World is Finished*, October 2017.

⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Hasina Begum (pseudonym), Kutapalong refugee camp, October 11, 2017.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

shot and taken away. His father was going to carry his mother into the hills...He loved her very much.⁶⁹

Leila said that her mother-in-law survived and was carried to Bangladesh by her son.

⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Leila Nur (pseudonym), Kutapalong refugee camp, October 11, 2017.

Hardships Faced by Pregnant Women and Rape Survivors While Fleeing

I cannot even tell you how we suffered.

—Hasina Begum, 25, Kutapalong refugee camp, Bangladesh, October 2017

When this report was written, the Burmese military’s ethnic cleansing operations against Rohingya in northern Rakhine State have forced some 600,000 Rohingya to flee their homes into neighboring Bangladesh. Several interviewees said they were in a state of shock at how much they had lost all at once: their families, houses, land, and all nearly all their possessions. “I don’t even have a jug to collect water,” one woman said.⁷⁰

After surviving horrific attacks on their villages, Rohingya women made grueling walks to Bangladesh over hills and through valleys and thick vegetation, often with little or nothing to eat. Many said their journeys lasted between three and 10 days. In interviews with Human Rights Watch, the women expressed strong emotion and recounted visceral memories of intense physical pain and psychological suffering during their journeys.

Two women said that words could not adequately convey the minute-after-minute, hour-after-hour pain of walking up and down hills on severe injuries after being gang raped. Almost every rape victim said they experienced physical agony during their flight. “I cry at night because the journey was so hard,” Rehanna Khatum, 22, said.⁷¹

“All of my body was pain,” Zohra Shaju, 25, said.⁷²

“I just wanted to stop, I was so tired.... I cannot even tell you the pain of walking,” Hasina Begum said.⁷³

⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Rohingya refugee, name withheld, Kutapalong refugee camp, October 10, 2017.

⁷¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Rehanna Khatum (pseudonym), Thenkali refugee camp, October 7, 2017.

⁷² Human Rights Watch interview with Zohra Shaju (pseudonym), Kutapalong refugee camp, October 11, 2017.

⁷³ Human Rights Watch interview with Hasina Begum (pseudonym), Kutapalong refugee camp, October 11, 2017.

Hala Sadak, a 15-year-old child who survived a gang rape said her genitals were swollen like a big fist. “And I was bleeding,” she said. “I could not pass urine without passing blood.”⁷⁴

Rape survivors said they walked more slowly because of their injuries and that they often dropped behind others fleeing to Bangladesh.

Women and girls reported both physical and psychological trauma. Fatama Begum, who was stabbed in her side while she was raped, said that she felt herself give up during the journey. “After five days of walking I became suicidal. I did nothing, I did not move. My children were shaking me, trying to make me move,” she said.⁷⁵

Women in advanced stages of pregnancy also endured pain during the long walk to relative safety.

“The pain in my muscles from walking, it's not yet stopped,” said Shamshide Begum, a 25-year-old survivor of the massacre at Chut Pyin, nearly a month and a half after she arrived in Bangladesh. “I can't even describe the pain I was in as I walked. My legs! Especially my ankles. When I got here my legs were like trunks.”⁷⁶

Hala Ahmed, a 40-year-old mother of five children, was eight months pregnant when she walked to Bangladesh. She fell on her belly while crossing a river, and then later fell backwards onto a sharp stick that a man had to pull out of the back of her leg. The wound became infected and “made blood and pus for the rest of the journey,” she said.⁷⁷

Some pregnant women also went into labor and gave birth on their flight to Bangladesh. Shamina Yasmine, 25, described her experience:

For the first four days there was no food. We just had to walk like that. I had to stop when the labor pain came. When the water broke my family put clothes up in trees to make like a tent for privacy. My labor lasted from 5 p.m. one day to 8 a.m. the next morning. The pain was a lot but normal, but

⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Hala Sadak (pseudonym), Kutapalong refugee camp, October 13, 2017.

⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Fatama Begum (pseudonym), Balukali refugee camp, October 3, 2017.

⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Shamshide Begum (pseudonym), Thenkali refugee camp, October 5, 2017.

⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Hala Ahmed (pseudonym), Kutapalong refugee camp, October 6, 2017.

there was more than usual blood. To tie the cord we took a thread from a rice sack that a man was carrying as he passed us. For the bleeding I tied a lot of cloth between my legs.⁷⁸

Asia Khatum, 20, gave birth to her first child during her journey to Bangladesh. After her water broke, she stayed behind with her mother and sister and the rest of her family continued on. She gave birth some distance away from the road, “between the plants.” Because she anticipated the birth might take place during the journey, she had brought a pair of scissors and some string in her blouse to tie the cord.⁷⁹

Rehanna Azuli, 18, said she believes she almost died giving birth to her baby, her first. She had just arrived in Bangladesh and was on a sandbank when she gave birth. She said she lost a lot of blood. Her husband ran to find help after she and the baby lost consciousness immediately after the birth. “My mother-in-law was there, there was nothing she could do, she was massaging the placenta that came out, to try and give the baby blood,” she said. “She was putting water on my face, there was nothing else she could do.”⁸⁰ Her husband returned with some Bangladeshi villagers who carried her to their home, and then helped her and the baby reach a local hospital. The baby survived.

⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Shamina Yasmine (pseudonym), Kutapalong refugee camp, October 6, 2017.

⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Asia Khatum (pseudonym), Kutapalong refugee camp, October 6, 2017.

⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Rehanna Azuli (pseudonym), Thenkali refugee camp, October 7, 2017.

Access to Services and Documentation of Sexual Violence

Physical and Emotional Trauma

There is still so much pain ... My vagina is rotten, there is a lot of pus and it hurts to pee.

—Nura Naha, 27, Thenkali refugee camp, Bangladesh, October 2017

About 10 women reported still having serious injuries or illnesses at the time we spoke with them, including vaginal tears, bleeding, or infections as a result of rape. Some women reported additional injuries caused by walking so soon after the attacks. Two rape survivors said they were trying not to drink liquids because it hurt so much to urinate.

Isharhat Islam, who was raped by soldiers during military operations in her village in October 2016 and then again during the recent military operations, said that her injuries were worse the second time.⁸¹ "First time I was raped I bled for three days," she said. "After the second time I still bleed, on and off, after walking in the camp. I also have a cough, my hands, my hips: are all aching."⁸² She said she only sometimes had enough cash to buy paracetamol (a painkiller) for the pain.

Shaju Hosin, from Tin May village, said that she was still bleeding vaginally from the rape. "Two days ago it stopped, but it will come again if I move a lot," she said.⁸³

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other psychosocial disabilities are often associated with rape. Many of the women Human Rights Watch interviewed said they were suffering from poor sleep, loss of appetite, and depressed mood and thoughts. Rape survivors also often describe bodily pain without a clear physical reason. Akash Abdul said that she was still feeling pain in her hips, roughly six weeks after she was raped.⁸⁴ "I used to be healthy but now I have lost a lot of weight.... I think all the time, all the time the thoughts are coming. I can't sleep well ... I do not go out," she said.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Isharhat Islam (pseudonym), Thenkali refugee camp, October 7, 2017.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Human Rights Watch interview with Shaju Hosin (pseudonym), Thenkali refugee camp, October 8, 2017.

⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Akash Abdul (pseudonym), Thenkali refugee camp, October 10, 2017.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Toyuba Yahya, who survived gang rape and the killings of family members said she was facing feelings of sadness and desperation, her thoughts spinning, as well as anxiety about the future.

I can't eat, I can't sleep. Instead: thoughts, thoughts, thoughts, thoughts. I can't rest. My child wants to go home. He doesn't understand that everything has been lost.⁸⁶

Barriers to Post-Rape Care

I have had to deal with disgust, others looking away from me,”
—Isharhat Islam, 40, Thenkali refugee camp, Bangladesh, October 2017

Most of the survivors Human Rights Watch interviewed had not sought post-rape care. Those who had received care were introduced to us through a humanitarian agency.

Many of the women and girls we met had little or no history of contact with health services in Burma. They often did not know that medical care is strongly recommended for survivors of rape. Women and girls also said they thought that they would have to pay for the care, for which they had no money. Human Rights Watch found a similar lack of familiarity with health services and fear of costs when interviewing Rohingya rape survivors in December 2016 and January 2017.⁸⁷

However, the primary reasons that interviewees gave Human Rights Watch for not reporting rape or seeking health care was stigma and shame, even when they were experiencing severe pain.⁸⁸ Representatives from eight different humanitarian organizations working on the crisis also said that stigma was a serious barrier.⁸⁹

“People even avoided me when we were walking,” said Nura Naha, a mother of five.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Toyuba Yahya (pseudonym), Kutapalong refugee camp, October 13, 2017.

⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch, Burma: Security Forces Raped Rohingya Women, Girls, February 2017.

⁸⁸ Two interviewees emphasized that they had received support and care from their family and community and were able to be open about their rape.

⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch, interviews with humanitarian organizations, Cox's Bazar, October 2017. See also Fiona MacGregor, “Rohingya Girls Under 10 Raped While Fleeing” *The Guardian*, October 25, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/25/rohingya-children-fled-myanmar-violence-charity> (accessed October 30, 2017).

⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Nura Naha (pseudonym), Thenkali refugee camp, October 8, 2017.

“People are living all around me [in the camp] and they all know, but they are not my family. It is so hard,” said Fatama Begum, 33. “They told the kids, ‘Wash your mother’s body.’”⁹¹

According to an organization that has been locating rape survivors and referring them to humanitarian organizations for treatment, family members and mostly male camp leaders sometimes prevent women and girls from talking openly about rape. “[They] say to them, ‘Don’t share information,’” said a case worker. “They have a lot of power in the camps.”⁹²

“As an example, I had a patient, but she stopped coming. Another woman came to her and told her to ‘Be quiet, why are you telling people about this,’” said a doctor from a Bangladeshi health organization who had been working on the crisis since late August.⁹³

Another barrier to access to post-rape care has been chaos in the refugee camps, the makeshift nature of the settlements, and a lack of privacy. Nura Naha said that the lack of privacy near tented health clinics in the camp had dissuaded her from seeking help. “There was one clinic but there were so many people and I could not face to tell the doctor,” she said.⁹⁴

Others echoed these concerns. Shaju Kadir, 30, said:

I got some medicine in Thenkali [refugee camp], some syrup for the baby. I had five seconds with the doctor, it was so quick. People were trying to explain [to him about their needs] but there was nothing I could say about my situation.⁹⁵

“The truth is almost everyone is traumatized,” a psychologist working with a Bangladeshi health organization said. She said that PTSD will be “very hard to treat” in the camps, in part because of a lack of infrastructure that can provide confidentiality.⁹⁶ Other health workers also noted that addressing psychosocial needs or trauma is especially challenging

⁹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Fatama Begum (pseudonym), Thenkali refugee camp, October 8, 2017.

⁹² Human Rights Watch interview with staff member at a Bangladesh NGO, Cox’s Bazar, October 4, 2017.

⁹³ Human Rights Watch interview with staff member at an NGO, name withheld, Cox’s Bazar, October 5, 2017.

⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Nura Naha (pseudonym), Thenkali refugee camp, October 8, 2017.

⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Shaju Kadir (pseudonym), Kutapalong refugee camp, October 3, 2017.

⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Mukti Biswas, psychologist and NGO worker, Cox’s Bazar, October 5, 2017.

for a population whose future is so uncertain. “People need to know that they can stay, if they need it, that’s the most important thing,” the head of one organization said.⁹⁷

In recent years, nongovernmental organizations working with rape survivors have had some success with providing women-friendly spaces next door to clinical medical services, making access to physical and mental health care as well as psychosocial activities far easier than at facilities specifically known for providing services for survivors of gender-based violence. Some relief organizations have provided such facilities at the camps in Bangladesh, and they are already being used by hundreds of women, including rape survivors.

Response by the Burmese Authorities

Despite the growing evidence collected by humanitarian organizations about sexual violence perpetrated by the Burmese security forces against Rohingya women and girls, Burmese authorities have made public statements denying or crudely attempting to cast doubt on these reports. In early September, the Rakhine State minister for border security, Col. Phone Tint, denied reports of military abuses involving sexual violence. “Where is the proof?” he asked. “Look at those women who are making these claims – would anyone want to rape them?”⁹⁸

Burmese authorities have made similar denials in the past. When the United Nations and nongovernmental organizations, including Human Rights Watch, documented widespread rape and other sexual violence by security forces during military operations in Rakhine State starting in October 2016, officials cursorily dismissed the allegations.

On December 26, 2016, the Information Committee of State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi issued a press release addressing “the rumours that some women were raped during the area clearance operations of security forces following the violent attacks in Maungdaw [Maungdaw] Township.” Accompanied by an image with the tagline “Fake Rape,” the release claimed that village leaders contested two rape survivors’ accounts and that the women provided conflicting testimony. Human Rights Watch assessed the evidence the Burmese government put forward at that time, finding fundamental flaws in methodology

⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with the head of an NGO, name withheld, Cox’s Bazar, October 13, 2017.

⁹⁸ Jonathan Head, “Rohingya Crisis: Seeing Through the Official Story in Myanmar,” BBC, September 11, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41222210> (accessed November 5, 2017).

and reasoning that seriously undercut the credibility of the conclusions the government drew from it.⁹⁹

In August 2017, a national-level investigation commission on the situation in Maungdaw Township following the October 2016 attacks headed by the first vice president and composed of current and former government officials released an interim report claiming they found insufficient evidence for legal action against anyone in connection with the allegations of rape and other abuses.¹⁰⁰

Documentation of Rape

Documentation of sexual violence, including collection and proper storage of evidence, is critical for investigations and any potential prosecutions or redress process. However, sexual violence survivors often face formidable barriers when seeking justice. As discussed above, sexual violence is often underreported. When survivors are able to report, sometimes too much time has passed for collection of forensic evidence. In other cases, police or healthcare providers may not be trained in proper collection or storage of forensic evidence.¹⁰¹

Bangladesh and all humanitarian medical actors should also ensure that survivors receive medical certificates of rape as part of their care and that copies are kept securely by medical organizations or through secure digital storage systems.¹⁰²

Creating an environment where sexual violence survivors can safely and confidentially report rape and other forms of sexual assault in a timely manner is essential for future accountability efforts and to connect survivors to medical and psychosocial services.

⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch, Burma: Security Forces Raped Rohingya Women, Girls, February 6, 2017.

¹⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch, Burma: National Commission Denies Atrocities, August 7, 2017.

¹⁰¹ The International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict provides useful guidelines and best practices on documenting sexual violence as a crime under international law. See *Second edition of the International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative, August 2016, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-protocol-on-the-documentation-and-investigation-of-sexual-violence-in-conflict> (accessed November 5, 2017).

¹⁰² This is in accordance with best practices for post rape care. See World Health Organization et al., “Clinical Management of Rape Survivors,” 2004, p.14, <http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/emergencies/924159263X/en/> (accessed October 30, 2017).

Acknowledgments

This report was researched and written by Skye Wheeler, researcher in the Women's Rights division. Burma researcher Richard Weir provided guidance and additional research. Nisha Varia, advocacy director of the Women's Rights division, Richard Weir and Michael Bochenek, senior counsel to the Child Rights division, edited and reviewed the report. James Ross, senior legal advisor, and Joseph Saunders, deputy program director, provided legal and program reviews. Adelaida Tamayo, associate in the Women's Rights division, provided additional editorial assistance. The report was prepared for publication by Madeline Cottingham, publications associate, and Fitzroy Hepkins, administrative manager.

Human Rights Watch is grateful for the valuable time and insights of the many frontline social workers and other non-governmental organization staff who generously met with us during the first weeks of a major humanitarian crisis.

We would especially like to thank the victims who agreed to speak with us and shared their stories.

“All of My Body Was Pain”

Sexual Violence against Rohingya Women and Girls in Burma

Burmese soldiers committed widespread rape against women and girls during the military’s campaign of ethnic cleansing against Rohingya Muslims in Burma’s Rakhine State. Since August 25, 2017, more than 600,000 Rohingya have fled killings, sexual violence, and mass arson, seeking refuge in neighboring Bangladesh.

“*All of My Body Was Pain*” is based on 52 interviews with women and girls, including 29 survivors of rape. In many of the cases women and girls reported being raped by six or more soldiers. Women also described with great distress seeing security forces murder their young children or other relatives or neighbors. The journey to Bangladesh was particularly painful and difficult for survivors of gang rape walking with serious injuries and for pregnant women.

Bangladesh and international donors have provided funds and critical services to assist the refugees. But numerous crimes against humanity have been committed without accountability for senior military officials or others responsible for the worst abuses. The United Nations Security Council should urgently implement a full arms embargo on Burma, impose targeted sanctions against leaders responsible for grave violations of human rights, and refer the situation to the International Criminal Court.

Attention to sexual violence and other abuses suffered by Rohingya women and girls should be integrated into every aspect of the response to this human rights and humanitarian crisis. This includes rigorous investigations of the scope of sexual violence against the Rohingya, provision of medical and psychosocial services to survivors, and measures to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in refugee camps.



Rohingya women refugees who crossed the Naf River from Burma into Bangladesh continue inland toward refugee camps.

*@2017 Anastasia Taylor-Lind,
Tek Naf, Cox's Bazar district, Bangladesh*