



## **Myanmar (Burma) – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 14 August 2012**

### **Information regarding tension between Buddhists and Muslims in Myanmar/Burma and the response of the authorities to such.**

The 2012 *United States Department of State* report on religious freedom in Myanmar (Burma) states:

“Muslims across the country, as well as ethnic Chinese and Indians, often were required to obtain permission from township authorities to leave their home towns. Authorities often denied Rohingya and other Muslims living in Rakhine State permission to travel for any purpose; however, permission was sometimes obtained through bribery. Muslims in other regions were granted more freedom to travel, but still faced restrictions. For example, Rohingyas living in Rangoon needed permission from immigration authorities to travel into and out of Rakhine State. Muslims in Rakhine State, particularly those of the Rohingya minority group, continued to experience the severest forms of legal, economic, educational, and social discrimination. There were reports that Buddhist physicians would not provide Muslims the endorsement required by the Ministry of Health that permits Muslims to travel outside Rakhine State to seek advanced medical treatment.” (United States Department of State (30 July 2012) *2011 Report on International Religious Freedom – Burma*)

In “Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom” this report states:

“There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Because ethnicity and religion are often inextricably linked, it is difficult to categorize many incidents specifically as ethnic or religious intolerance. Preferential treatment for Buddhists and widespread prejudice against ethnic South Asians, particularly ethnic Rohingya Muslims, were key sources of social tensions between the Buddhist majority and Christian and Muslim minorities. There were reports of a deadly attack on a Rohingya residence on December 26 by Rakhine extremists in Buthidaung Township in Rakhine State and an ensuing riot.” (ibid)

An *IRIN News* report states:

“Activists and rights groups have expressed strong concern over rising levels of violence in Myanmar’s western Rakhine State, in defiance of a state of emergency declared by Burmese President Thein Sein on 10 June. Riots, looting and killings have been reported by Burmese and international media in recent days, as long-simmering ethnic and religious tensions between the state’s majority Rakhine Buddhist population and its minority Muslim Rohingya population reached boiling point. A cycle of apparent revenge attacks has gripped the state since the alleged rape and murder of a Buddhist Rakhine woman by three Muslims on 28 May. Despite a lull in hostilities on 11 June after the army was dispatched to enforce peace, fresh attacks on the Rohingya have been reported following the departure of the troops.” (IRIN News (12 June 2012) *Myanmar: Rakhine violence sparks concern*)

A report from the *Society for Threatened Peoples* states:

“The state of emergency is in effect in Arakan since Sunday. After a Buddhist girl came to an unresolved violent death on May 29, 2012, there have been repeated clashes between Muslims, Buddhists and the security forces. On Wednesday of last week, ten Muslims were killed by Buddhists because they were falsely accused of having murdered the girl. At least nine people died last Friday, when Rohingya houses were attacked by Buddhists as a revenge for the Muslims who had been killed before. The tensions got worse after more security forces were deployed and even joined forces with armed Buddhists, fighting the Muslims and burning down their houses.” (Society for Threatened Peoples (11 June 2012) *Burma's government stirs up violence between Muslims and Buddhists*)

An *Inter Press Service* report states:

“Reports of sectarian violence in western Myanmar have exposed the plight of 800,000 Muslim Rohingya, a persecuted minority that a regional human rights body described in 2006 as facing a 'slow-burning genocide'. By Thursday, clashes between the Buddhist Rakhine and the Rohingya in predominantly Buddhist Myanmar (formerly Burma) had resulted in 29 deaths, of which 16 were Rohingya and 13 were Rakhine, and 30,000 displaced, according to official accounts of the worst communal violence in the Southeast Asian country in years. Over 2,500 houses have been torched and nine Buddhist monasteries and seven mosques destroyed since riots broke out. On Jun. 3, a mob of 300 Buddhists intercepted a bus carrying Muslim pilgrims and beat 10 of them to death. Rights groups have pointed to the event as symbolic of the hostility swirling in the Rakhine State, for decades a tinderbox of ethnic tensions.” (Inter Press Service (15 June 2012) *Ethnic Cleansing of Muslim Minority in Myanmar?*)

The Summary of a *Human Rights Watch* report states:

“In June 2012, deadly sectarian violence erupted in western Burma's Arakan State between ethnic Arakan Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims (as well as non-Rohingya Muslims). The violence broke out after reports circulated that on May 28 an Arakan woman was raped and killed in the town of Ramri allegedly by three Muslim men. Details of the crime were circulated locally in an incendiary pamphlet, and on June 3, a large group of Arakan villagers in Tougop stopped a bus and brutally killed 10 Muslims on board. Human Rights Watch confirmed that local police and soldiers stood by and watched the killings without intervening.” (Human Rights Watch (1 August 2012) *“The Government Could Have Stopped This”: Sectarian Violence and Ensuing Abuses in Burma's Arakan State*, p.1)

This summary also states:

“Mobs from both communities soon stormed unsuspecting villages and neighborhoods, killing residents and destroying homes, shops, and houses of worship. With little to no government security present to stop the violence, people armed themselves with swords, spears, sticks, iron rods, knives, and other basic weapons, taking the law into their own hands. Vast stretches of property from both communities were razed. The government claimed that 78 people were killed—an undoubtedly conservative figure—while more than 100,000 people were displaced from their homes. The hostilities were fanned by inflammatory anti-Muslim media accounts and local propaganda. During the period after the rape and killing was reported and before the violence broke out, tensions had risen dramatically in Arakan

State. However, local residents from each community told Human Rights Watch that the Burmese authorities provided no protection and did not appear to have taken any special measures to preempt the violence.” (ibid, p.1)

Regarding the response of the authorities the report’s summary states:

“Witness after witness described to Human Rights Watch how the Burmese authorities failed to provide protection to either side in the early days of the violence and that Arakan and local security forces colluded in acts of arson and violence against Rohingya in Sittwe and in the predominantly Muslim townships of northern Arakan State.” (ibid, p.2)

The summary refers to a campaign by Buddhist monks as follows:

“Some Rohingya in displacement camps told Human Rights Watch that some Burmese soldiers had shown great compassion and gone to the market on their behalf to purchase rice and other necessities, but that their willingness to do so has since stopped. The soldiers’ refusal to informally help Rohingya buy food correlates with a local campaign by Arakan Buddhist monks—the most revered members of local Arakan society—who have distributed pamphlets advocating for separation of the communities and imploring the Arakan people to exclude Muslims in every way. ‘They are eating our rice and staying near our houses,’ the author of one pamphlet told Human Rights Watch. ‘So we will separate. We need to protect the Arakan people.... We don’t want any connection to the Muslim people at all.’” (ibid, p.4)

In a section titled “Violence in Arakan State since June 2012” this report states:

“The immediate cause of the violence can be traced to a series of violent incidents, beginning with the May 28 rape and murder of Thida Htwe, 27, an ethnic Arakan Buddhist woman, in Ramri in southern Arakan State, allegedly by three Muslim men. On June 3, in reaction to incendiary pamphlets that were circulated locally detailing the rape and killing, a large group of Arakan villagers in Toungop town, southeast of Ramri, stopped a bus and beat and killed ten Muslims who were on board. At the time of the attack on the bus, three Muslim men suspected of involvement in the rape and killing were in the custody of authorities in Kyaukphu, near Ramri. The three were found guilty of the offenses. One suspect reportedly committed suicide in prison, while the other two were sentenced to death on June 18. In contrast, there have been no convictions in connection with the killing of the 10 Muslims in Toungop, despite hundreds of witnesses to the attack. On June 8, thousands of Muslims in Maungdaw town in northern Arakan State rioted after Friday prayers, destroying property of Arakan residents and killing an unknown number of Arakan. Violence then quickly spread to Sittwe, the capital of Arakan State, where Rohingya and Arakan mobs attacked each other. In numerous cases groups from one side attacked unsuspecting villages of the other.” (ibid, p.18)

An *International Crisis Group* report, in a section titled “The Potential For Unrest”, states:

“Deadly clashes erupted recently between Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State. Communal violence is a concern in many parts of the country where there is a history of tensions – suppressed under authoritarian rule – with both Indian and Chinese communities. This particular episode of violence began when three Muslims allegedly raped and murdered a Buddhist woman in late May. In revenge, on 3 June a mob stopped a bus carrying Muslim pilgrims, and ten passengers were

beaten to death. Rival Buddhist and Muslim gangs then set fire to houses and attacked and killed people from the other community, in the three northern townships near the border with Bangladesh (a Muslim-majority area) and in Sittwe (capital of the Buddhist-majority state). A government investigation was formed to look into the bus killings and prosecute those responsible for committing or instigating the violence. When clashes continued to escalate, curfews were imposed, then a state of emergency was declared in Rakhine State, giving the army wide powers to restore law and order. The situation is now under control, but tensions are still high and the underlying grievances are yet to be addressed.” (International Crisis Group (27 July 2012) *Myanmar: the Politics of Economic Reform*, p.18)

An *Amnesty International* report states:

“Amnesty International has also received credible reports of other human rights abuses against Rohingyas and other Rakhine Muslims- including physical abuse, rape, destruction of property, and unlawful killings - carried out by both Rakhine Buddhists and security forces. The authorities should stop these acts and prevent others from occurring. On Tuesday, a large group of local Rakhine Buddhists killed 10 Muslims in Taung Gouk township in Rakhine State, who were returning by bus to their homes in Yangon. Myanmar’s National Human Rights Commission said on 11 July that at least 78 people have been killed since the violence began, but unofficial estimates exceed 100.” (Amnesty International (19 July 2012) *Myanmar: Abuses against Rohingya erode human rights progress*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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