



HUMAN  
RIGHTS  
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# MASSACRE BY THE RIVER

Burmese Army Crimes against Humanity in Tula Toli



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## Burmese Army Crimes against Humanity in Tula Toli

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## Summary

On August 30, 2017, Hassina Begum, a 20-year-old ethnic Rohingya woman, was among the few survivors of a massacre of unspeakable brutality. Just days after a deadly attack by Rohingya militants against Burmese security forces, hundreds of Burmese soldiers in uniform, along with ethnic Rakhine villagers armed with machetes and wooden sticks, attacked the village of Tula Toli, officially known as Min Gyi, in Maungdaw Township in Burma's Rakhine State, also known as Arakan State.

The advancing soldiers trapped several hundred unarmed Rohingya Muslim villagers, including Hassina, on the large bank of the river, which surrounds Tula Toli on three sides. As they approached, some fired at the crowd, others toward people trying to flee. While some Rohingya managed to escape, swimming across the fast-moving river or dashing to the surrounding hills, many terrified villagers could not run away or swim. Families with young children had no chance to flee.

Interviewed in a refugee camp in neighboring Bangladesh, Hassina and other survivors described to Human Rights Watch how the soldiers had then separated the women and children from the men, confined the women to the shallow water of the river, and systematically murdered the men over the course of several hours. The soldiers and Rakhine Buddhist villagers dug several deep pits on the river beach. They dumped the men's bodies inside the pits, poured on gasoline, and set them on fire.

The soldiers then turned to the women and children. Soldiers took some women and children away as soon as the men were killed, and others while the soldiers were still digging the pits and disposing of the bodies. They began killing some of the children at the beach, tossing young children into the river.

Hassina tried hiding her 1-year-old daughter Sohaifa under her shawl. A soldier noticed and tore the infant from her, throwing the girl alive on a fire. Five soldiers took Hassina, her mother-in-law, Fatima, 35, and her sister-in-law, Asma, 18, together with Fatima's three young sons, ages 7, 10, and 14, from the water to a nearby bamboo house in the village. Hassina says that on arrival a group of ethnic Rakhine men at the house beat the three boys to death. The soldiers proceeded to sexually assault Hassina and the women inside

the house. When Fatima resisted, the soldiers stabbed her to death before beating the others unconscious, and knifing Hassina.

As they left, the soldiers locked the unconscious and dead women inside the house and set it on fire. Hassina and Asma regained consciousness when their clothes caught on fire, and fought their way out through the burning bamboo walls. They were the sole survivors from that house. When interviewed by Human Rights Watch, the two women showed their wounds, which included burns and machete cuts.

What happened to Hassina and her relatives that day was repeated many times in Tula Toli. Shawfika, 24, said that six soldiers took her and four other women together with three children from the river to another nearby house. They beat to death the children, ages 5, 6, and 10, on the steps to the house. The soldiers took the women inside and raped, beat, and shot them, then left them locked inside the burning house. Shawfika said:

When we entered, they pushed us inside. We were five women and six soldiers. They took off our clothes and tried to touch us. We tried to escape, but they caught us and they raped all of us. Then they beat us, and when we were beaten down, they shot us. The shot missed me, and I pretended to be dead, and then I passed out. Then they left and put the house on fire.

I woke up and realized I was in a pool of sticky blood. I tried to wake the others up but they didn't move. Then I broke through the [bamboo] wall and escaped.... When I escaped from the house, all the houses in the area were on fire. I could hear women screaming from some of the other houses. They could not escape from the fires.

In addition to Hassina, Asma, and Shawfika, four other female survivors, including a 16-year-old girl, recounted to Human Rights Watch how they too had been taken from the water at Tula Toli, witnessed children being murdered in front of their mothers, and been raped, beaten, stabbed, and left for dead in a burning house. Three of the four were the sole survivors from the group of women and children taken to a particular house.

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Ethnic Rohingya, a largely Muslim minority, have faced decades of discrimination, repression, and violence in Burma. Most have been denied Burmese citizenship for generations, an injustice enshrined in Burma's 1982 Citizenship Law, forming one of the largest stateless populations in the world. The government of Burma denies that most Rohingya are Burmese, contending that they are migrants from Bangladesh, even though many Rohingya families have lived in Burma for generations, if not centuries.

Large-scale ethnically motivated attacks against the Rohingya have occurred repeatedly since Burmese independence. Serious attacks in 2012 and 2016 were some of the most deadly in more than 20 years, and can now be seen as precursors to the even more violent and organized attacks in 2017.

In early June 2012, sectarian clashes erupted between ethnic Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya in four townships in Rakhine State. When violence resumed in October that year, it engulfed nine more townships and became a coordinated campaign to forcibly relocate or remove the state's Muslims. The October 2012 attacks that targeted both Rohingya and Kaman Muslim communities were organized, incited, and committed by local Rakhine political party operatives, the Buddhist monkhood, and ordinary Rakhine villagers, at times directly supported by state security forces. Rohingya men, women, and children were killed, some buried in mass graves, and their villages and neighborhoods were razed. While the state security forces in some instances intervened to prevent violence and protect fleeing Muslims, more frequently they stood aside during attacks or directly supported the assailants, committing killings and other abuses.

A Human Rights Watch investigation into the 2012 violence concluded that the crimes against the Rohingya and Kaman Muslim communities amounted to crimes against humanity carried out as part of a campaign of ethnic cleansing.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Human Rights Watch, *"All You Can Do Is Pray": Crimes Against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing Against 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>. See also, *"The Government Could Have Stopped This": Sectarian Violence and Ensuing Abuses in Burma's Arakan State*, July 2012, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/07/31/government-could-have-stopped/sectarian-violence-and-ensuing-abuses-burmas-arakan>; *Perilous Plight: Burma's Rohingya Take To The Sea*, May 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/05/26/perilous-plight/burmas-rohingya-take-seas>. Although "ethnic cleansing" is not formally defined under international law, a United Nations Commission of Experts has defined the term as a "purposeful policy designed by one 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." Report of the United Nations Commission of Experts Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780 (1992), May 27, 1994.



On October 9, 2016, militants later identified as belonging to the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) attacked three police outposts in northern Rakhine State. Burmese security forces launched brutal months-long “clearance operations” in response. Human Rights Watch documented extrajudicial killings, the rape of women and girls, and the burning of at least 1,500 structures by the Burmese security forces.<sup>2</sup> The violence caused massive displacement, with more than 87,000 fleeing to Bangladesh and tens of thousands more internally displaced. A report issued by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on February 3, 2017, concluded that the attacks against the Rohingya “very likely” amounted to crimes against humanity.<sup>3</sup>

In March 2017, the UN Human Rights Council passed a resolution establishing an independent international Fact-Finding Mission with a mandate to investigate allegations of recent human rights abuses in Burma, especially in Rakhine State. To date, the Burmese government has not granted the Fact-Finding Mission access to Burma.

Approximately 120,000 Rohingya displaced in the 2012 and 2016 attacks remain effectively trapped in internally displaced persons camps in central Rakhine State, with severe restrictions on freedom of movement and access to health care, education, and livelihoods. Even those not in camps have faced isolation from services and often dire humanitarian conditions.<sup>4</sup>

The attacks on Rohingya in 2017, including the killings at Tula Toli, were launched following a series of coordinated attacks by ARSA militants on August 25, which targeted some 30 police posts and an army camp in northern Rakhine State. According to the government, militants killed 11 security force personnel during those attacks.

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<sup>2</sup> See “Burma: Rohingya Recount Killings, Rape, and Arson,” Human Rights Watch news release, December 21, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/12/21/burma-rohingya-recount-killings-rape-and-arson>; “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>; “Burma: Military Burned Villages in Rakhine State,” December 13, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/12/13/burma-military-burned-villages-rakhine-state>.

<sup>3</sup> UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Report of OHCHR Mission to Bangladesh: Interviews with Rohingyas Fleeing from Myanmar since 9 October 2016,” February 3, 2017, <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/MM/FlashReport3Feb2017.pdf> (accessed November 29, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> World Food Programme, “Food Security Assessment in the Northern Part of Rakhine State: Final Report,” July 2017, <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000019264/download> (accessed October 23, 2017).

In the days immediately following the ARSA attacks, the Burmese military, supported by Border Police and armed Rakhine villagers, carried out a series of large-scale attacks against numerous Rohingya villages in the guise of counterinsurgency operations. The Burmese military summarily executed villagers, carried out mass rape, and engaged in mass arson, burning down at least 342 villages as documented by Human Rights Watch satellite imagery. At time of writing, the military's actions had forced more than 645,000 Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh. A report released on December 12 by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, or Doctors Without Borders) found that at least 6,700 Rohingya died due to violence in the month since military operations started on August 25, based on mortality surveys conducted in refugee camps in Bangladesh.<sup>5</sup>

On November 13, 2017, a Burmese army investigation team issued a report asserting that security forces had committed no abuses during the Rakhine State operations, and that there were “no deaths of innocent people.”<sup>6</sup> Prior investigations conducted by a government-appointed national commission and army investigators into the late 2016-early 2017 violence had similarly rejected allegations of serious abuse, finding cause only to punish three soldiers for minor incidents.<sup>7</sup>

While there have 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 journalists access to northern Rakhine State, where most victims would be located.

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Tula Toli was a massacre that left an entire village destroyed. Satellite imagery reviewed by Human Rights Watch confirms that the Rohingya villages of Tula Toli and Dual Toli—with a total of 746 buildings—were completely destroyed by arson, while the

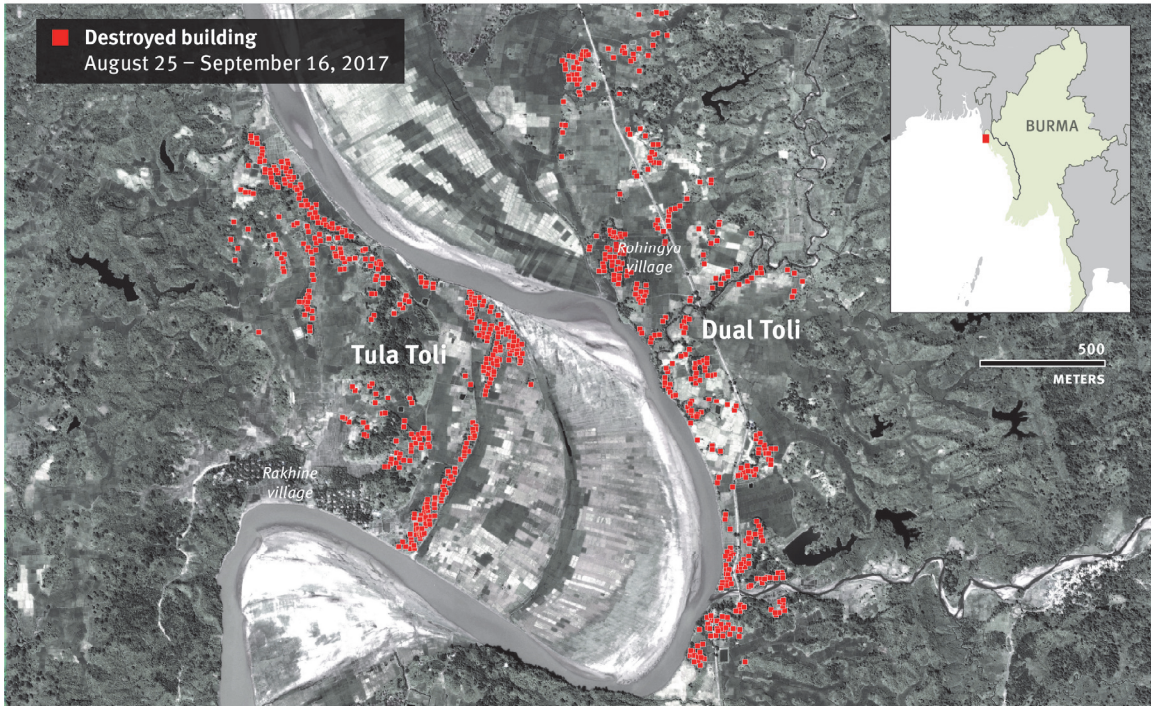
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<sup>5</sup> “Myanmar/Bangladesh: MSF Surveys Estimate That at Least 6,700 Rohingya Were Killed During the Attacks in Myanmar,” Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), December 12, 2017, <http://www.msf.org/en/article/myanmarbangladesh-msf-surveys-estimate-least-6700-rohingya-were-killed-during-attacks> (accessed December 14, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> “Burma: Army Report Whitewashes Ethnic Cleansing,” Human Rights Watch news release, November 14, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/11/14/burma-army-report-whitewashes-ethnic-cleansing>.

<sup>7</sup> “Burma: National Commission Denies Atrocities,” Human Rights Watch news release, August 7, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/08/07/burma-national-commission-denies-atrocities>; “Burma: Army Investigation Denies Atrocities,” May 24, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/05/24/burma-army-investigation-denies-atrocities>.

**746 buildings destroyed in Tula Toli, Dual Toli, and surrounding villages in Rakhine State, Burma**



Satellite imagery © DigitalGlobe 2017



Satellite imagery © DigitalGlobe 2017

neighboring non-Rohingya villages remain intact. The horrors of Tula Toli recall the very worst massacres in past decades elsewhere in the world.

Establishing the precise death toll at Tula Toli is difficult. Witnesses and survivors interviewed by Human Rights Watch estimated that between 1,000 and 2,000 villagers had gathered at the beach when the attack began. While some swam across the river to safety or managed to survive the attack, witnesses said they believe most others had been killed. Witnesses told Human Rights Watch that they were the sole survivors from their families and said that many other families were wiped out entirely. Based on witness and survivor accounts, Human Rights Watch estimates that Burmese security forces killed several hundred Rohingya villagers in Tula Toli on August 30. In an apparent effort to destroy evidence of the killings, soldiers and Rakhine villagers dug pits in which witnesses say they burned the bodies. Many of the women and children died while locked in village houses that were burned to the ground.

We cannot determine how many women were raped or otherwise sexually assaulted during the attack on Tula Toli. Human Rights Watch interviewed nine women and girls who said soldiers raped or sexually assaulted them, after the soldiers forced them to leave the beach area and took them to nearby houses. All of these survivors said they also saw other women and girls being raped by soldiers, as well as other groups of women being taken to other houses.

The women survivors interviewed by Human Rights Watch had their own young children or those of others taken from them and killed in front of them. Soldiers, and in one case Rakhine villagers, killed children, including infants and toddlers, using machetes, spades, and wooden sticks, and in several cases threw children into fires or the river.

The conduct of the security forces at Tula Toli shows strong evidence of military planning, including uniformed soldiers surrounding the village, the separation of the men from the women and children, the systematic killing of the men, and the transfer of the women and children from the river to nearby houses where they were often raped and killed, the bamboo houses burned down.

The massacre at Tula Toli supports the findings of Human Rights Watch and others that the Burmese military since August 25 has committed forced deportation, murder, rape, and

persecution against Rohingya Muslims in northern Rakhine State that amount to crimes against humanity. 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.” Burmese military attacks on the Rohingya, such as at Tula Toli, have been both widespread and systematic. Statements by Burmese military and government officials have indicated an intent to attack this population.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, has described the military campaign in northern Rakhine State as “a textbook example of ethnic cleansing.”<sup>8</sup> A report issued by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on October 11, 2017, based on interviews with Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, concluded that the attacks demonstrated a deliberate strategy to force Rohingya out of Burma and prevent their return.<sup>9</sup>

The mandate of the UN Fact-Finding Mission created prior to the eruption of the August 25 violence has been extended until September 2018, but Burma has thus far refused to grant the mission access to Burma.<sup>10</sup> Establishing the human cost of the killing at Tula Toli should be a priority for the Fact-Finding Mission and other investigations into the recent violence.

Since the start of Burmese military operations, humanitarian aid has been largely denied to populations in northern Rakhine State. While tens of thousands of other ethnic minorities were evacuated by the government, the Rohingya have suffered from serious deprivations. In Bangladesh, the massive influx of almost exclusively Rohingya refugees has strained an already difficult humanitarian situation in Cox’s Bazar, near the border with Burma. While delivery of vital aid and services in the refugee camps is improving, most refugees live in abysmal conditions with limited access to basic services, including health care, water, sanitation, and education.

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<sup>8</sup> Stephanie Nebehay and Simon Lewis, “UN Brands Myanmar Violence a ‘Textbook’ Example of Ethnic Cleansing,” Reuters, September 11, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-rohingya/u-n-brands-myanmar-violence-a-textbook-example-of-ethnic-cleansing-idUSKCN1BMoQF> (accessed November 29, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Mission Report of OHCHR Rapid Response Mission to Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, 13-24 September 2017,” October 11, 2017, <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/MM/CXBMissionSummaryFindingsOctober2017.pdf> (accessed November 29, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Extension of the Mandate of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, September 27, 2017, A/HRC/36/L.31/Rev.1, <http://undocs.org/A/HRC/36/L.31/Rev.1> (accessed November 29, 2017).

# Recommendations

## To the Burmese Government

- Immediately cease the campaign of ethnic cleansing against Rohingya in northern Rakhine State, issue clear orders to security forces to stop all violence, and commit to protect all those in its territory without discrimination.
- Provide safe and unhindered humanitarian access for United Nations agencies and international and national humanitarian organizations to all affected populations in Rakhine State, including to camps for previously displaced Rohingya in central Rakhine State.
- Allow full and unimpeded access to the UN Fact-Finding Mission to investigate the events in northern Rakhine State, and cooperate fully with its investigations.
- Take steps to implement the Kofi Annan-led Rakhine Commission's recommendations in accordance with international human rights standards, including immediately amending the 1982 Citizenship Act to eliminate provisions that have a discriminatory impact on determining citizenship for reasons of ethnicity, race, religion, or other protected status.

## To the United Nations Security Council and Concerned Member States

- Impose targeted sanctions on Burmese military leaders and key military-owned enterprises, including travel bans and restrictions on access to financial institutions, and impose a comprehensive military embargo on Burma.
- Call for those responsible for grave abuses to be held accountable for their crimes.
- Press Burmese authorities to cooperate with the UN Fact-Finding Mission and grant unfettered access to its staff to Burma, including Rakhine State.
- Send a clear message that it stands ready to take additional steps to ensure justice including through the International Criminal Court (ICC), and urge member states to pursue other mechanisms that might provide justice for recent abuses.

## Methodology

This report is based largely on in-depth Human Rights Watch interviews with 18 Rohingya survivors and witnesses to events in Tula Toli who had fled to Bangladesh, which were conducted during a three-week research trip to the Cox's Bazar border area of Bangladesh in late September and early October 2017. It also draws on a broad investigation by Human Rights Watch researchers into the Rakhine State operations following August 25, including numerous visits to the Bangladesh refugee camps in September, October, and November 2017, and interviews with over 200 Rohingya refugees.

All survivors and witnesses were interviewed separately, in different parts of the massive Kutupalong camp housing newly arrived refugees. Interviews were conducted in the Rohingya language, with the assistance of an English-Rohingya interpreter. Each witness interviewed for this report gave oral consent for their testimony to be included in the report. Human Rights Watch is withholding names of some witnesses and using pseudonyms where indicated for their security.

The Burmese authorities are currently preventing nongovernmental human rights researchers, United Nations investigators, and other independent monitors from accessing the affected areas of northern Rakhine State and carrying out on-the-ground investigations.

Human Rights Watch conducted satellite imagery analysis to corroborate the eyewitness testimony that the villages of Tula Toli and Dual Toli were completely burned. Human Rights Watch also reviewed open source information relating to the events at Tula Toli, including international and local media accounts and Burmese government statements.

This report builds on decades of Human Rights Watch research on the discrimination, statelessness, and violence faced by the Rohingya population in Rakhine State.

## I. Killings in Tula Toli

Prior to its destruction, Tula Toli village comprised approximately 375 structures, most of which were homes, bordered on the north, east, and south by a river.<sup>11</sup> It is located in Maungdaw Township in northern Rakhine State, about 15 kilometers from the border with Bangladesh. The estimated 4,300 ethnic Rohingya villagers living there were mostly farmers,<sup>12</sup> growing rice and chilies along the river.<sup>13</sup> Wet Kyein, an ethnic Rakhine village with a population estimated at 350 people, abuts the village to the south. A river divides Tula Toli and another Rohingya village known locally as Dual Toli, which is located on the eastern side of the river. Prior to its destruction, Dual Toli had approximately 370 structures spread along the banks of the river.<sup>14</sup> Local names are used in this report for clarity.

In the early morning of August 25, 2017, Rohingya militants claiming allegiance to the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) carried out coordinated attacks on some 30 police posts and one army base in northern Rakhine State.

Government accounts suggest that several security incidents attributed to ARSA militants took place in the vicinity of Tula Toli starting on August 25. The government reported that a soldier was lightly injured at 11:05 a.m. on August 25 near Wet Kyein when he set off a trip-wire that detonated a landmine.<sup>15</sup> On August 28, government sources reported that 30 homes in Wet Kyein were burned by “50 extremist Bengali terrorists”<sup>16</sup>—a reference to ARSA militants—although subsequent Human Rights Watch satellite analysis showed that Wet Kyein was untouched by arson.

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<sup>11</sup> The village is identified in official government records as Min Gyi.

<sup>12</sup> BBC Newshour interview with documentary filmmaker Shafiur Rahman, October 25, 2017. Rahman told the BBC he had interviewed the current secretary of the administration of Tula Toli, who told him that the Rohingya population of the village totaled 4,360, and the population of the neighboring Rakhine village was 350.

<sup>13</sup> Oliver Holmes, “Massacre at Tula Toli: Rohingya Recall horror of Myanmar Army Attack,” *Guardian*, September 7, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/07/massacre-at-tula-toli-rohingya-villagers-recall-horror-of-myanmar-army-attack> (accessed November 29, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> All Human Rights Watch interviewees consistently identified Dual Toli and Wet Kyein as separate hamlets with separate ethnic make-up, Rohingya and Rakhine, respectively, but Dual Toli is identified on official Burmese maps as Wet Kyein.

<sup>15</sup> “Maungdaw under Attack: Police Posts Are Being Attacked By Radical Terrorists,” *Myanmar International TV*, August 25, 2017, <http://www.myanmarinternationaltv.com/news/maungdaw-under-attack-police-outposts-are-being-attacked-radical-terrorists> (accessed October 25, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Burmese Office of the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Facebook post, August 28, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/Cincds/posts/1439927706128090> (accessed November 29, 2017).



On the morning of August 28, Burmese security forces headed toward the hamlet of Dual Toli, located across the river from Tula Toli. According to Hamid Musaem, a 29-year-old day laborer from Dual Toli, a village leader asked about 100 young Rohingya men from the village to gather at the entrance of the village to try and persuade the army not to attack them.<sup>17</sup> The Rohingya men were unarmed, aside from a few bamboo poles some had brought.<sup>18</sup>

Musaem said that as the soldiers approached they immediately began firing on the men, fatally shooting Mohammed Salim, 23, in the back as he ran away.<sup>19</sup> The panicked villagers fled the village after the shooting, crossing the river by boat and by swimming to Tula Toli, which they thought would be safe.<sup>20</sup> Many other Rohingya from the area had sought shelter in Tula Toli, as they had assumed it was safer and were reassured by the ethnic Rakhine *ukhata* (chairman) of the cluster of villages, Aung Ko Sing, who had told the villagers that they would not be attacked by the army.<sup>21</sup> Witnesses said that he told the villagers they should gather the next day at the beach next to the river at the village's edge. Shawfika, 24, said that Aung Ko Sing had told the village leaders on the evening of August 29 to tell everyone to go to the beach for their own safety. Shawfika said:

The *ukhata* said we are all like brothers and sisters, and we should gather in that place, and that “nothing will happen to you.” ... Aung Ko Sing didn't make a public announcement to everyone, but the evening before, he personally called all of the prominent people of the village and told them to gather at the beach. He called them to a meeting and they decided to gather at the beach if there was an attack.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Hamid Musaem, 29, Kutupalong camp, September 21, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. See also, Human Rights Watch interview with Hafez Mohammed Akram, 30, Kutupalong camp, Bangladesh, September 21, 2017. A resident of Tula Toli who sheltered some of the villagers from Dual Toli told the *Guardian* that at least ten people drowned in the river while fleeing Dual Toli. Holmes, “Massacre at Tula Toli: Rohingya Recall Horror of Myanmar Army Attack,” *Guardian*, September 7, 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Rajuma Begum, 20, Kutupalong camp, Bangladesh, September 26, 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Shawfika, 24, Kutupalong camp, Bangladesh, October 1, 2017. Other villagers also told Human Rights Watch that the village chairman had told them to go to the beach and promised them that they would be safe. Nur Mohammed, 19, said: “In the morning when I was having breakfast with my family, there was suddenly shooting and we ran to the beach. Our village chairman, Aung Ko Sing, told us it would be safe for us there.” Human Rights Watch interview with Nur Mohammed, Kutupalong camp, Bangladesh, October 2, 2017. In a BBC Newsnight video, Rohingya refugees from Tula Toli reported that shortly before the August 30 attack, the village chair drew up a written accord between local Buddhist Rakhine and Rohingya village leaders, which the Rohingya viewed as a guarantee of protection, even as violence flared up in surrounding villages. In a filmed phone interview, the chair claimed he did not have prior knowledge of the attack, and had

On the morning of August 30, Burmese security forces returned to the area, accompanied by armed Rakhine villagers from the area. Khotija, a 42-year-old resident of Tula Toli, said that on August 29, a military helicopter had landed in a nearby Rakhine village, and that the helicopter returned with the security forces on August 30.<sup>23</sup> In an interview with CNN, another survivor from Tula Toli, Omar Ali, said that he had witnessed the landing of the helicopter and the distribution of weapons and uniforms to the Rakhine villagers from the helicopter.<sup>24</sup>

At about 8 a.m., Burmese security forces and armed Rakhine villagers approached Tula Toli from three different directions and began to burn homes on the outskirts of the village. As the terrified villagers gathered at the beach, Burmese security forces and armed Rakhine villagers quickly surrounded them and began shooting into the crowds, killing many. Some panicked villagers decided to swim across the fast-moving river to seek safety on the opposite bank in Dual Toli. Many were shot while attempting the crossing, while others drowned. For the families with small children and members who could not swim, escape was impossible, and they became trapped on the beach. Over the course of the day, the security forces and armed men systematically gunned down hundreds of men, women, and children on the beach.

Following the initial assault, soldiers and armed Rakhine villagers surrounded the Rohingya families on the beach and began to separate the women and children from the men. Witnesses estimated that about 400 women and children were held under guard nearby in the shallow water.

Rajuma Begum, 20, was cooking breakfast at home when she noticed a large number of Burmese soldiers accompanied by Rakhine villagers approaching the village from the north. The soldiers were firing guns and explosives in the direction of the village. She immediately ran to the beach with her family. “The military came to the beach and there was lots of shooting,” she said. As the soldiers approached the beach, her husband, Mohammed Rafiq, 24, was shot and wounded, but managed to swim across the river and

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no capacity to influence the military’s actions, stating: “That’s not up to me. This is government policy.” See BBC Newsnight, “Rohingya Crisis: The Tula Toli Massacre,” November 14, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HRpooofzB2l> (accessed November 30, 2017).

<sup>23</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Khotija, 42, Kutupalong camp, Bangladesh, October 2, 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Kathleen Prior, “I Knew Them, Yet They Were Killing Us,” *CNN*, September 18, 2017, <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/09/18/asia/ethnic-cleansing-rakhine-rohingya/> (accessed October 23, 2017).

survive. Her brother Musali, 10, said farewell to her before trying to get away, but approaching soldiers shot him dead.<sup>25</sup> Rajuma said:

We were put in a female group on the beach, and they took us to a low area where there was water, and we were made to sit in the water up to our chests. The men were first shot, and then attacked with long wooden sticks, and some were killed with knives and machetes. They killed the men for hours. Then they dug big holes, with the help of local [Rakhine]. There were about 200 to 250 [Rakhine] with the army, and they dug a big hole. They put all the bodies inside, and then used leaves and bamboo to start a fire. They also threw grenades on them, and then finally they threw sand on top of them.<sup>26</sup>

Shawfika (mentioned above) said she was at home on August 30 when, at about 8 a.m., soldiers and Rakhine villagers began setting fire to houses in her neighborhood. She and her family gathered some belongings and fled to the beach. They were soon surrounded by soldiers, who began killing the men around them. She said that when they arrived at the beach:

The military began surrounding us. They started shooting and killing the men. When we reached there, they were already shooting, and people were falling down. We sat down in a lower area, and in front of me my husband was killed. A soldier came very close to us and he shot my husband and father-in-law from close up. They were Jamal Hussein, 23, and Sultan, 60. He shot both of them in the chest with a single shot, and that is how they died.<sup>27</sup>

Shawfika said the killings of men on the beach continued for hours:

They shot many men all around us, and also brought some men they had captured in the village to the beach and killed them as well. After those killings, they took us women and children and put us in the water. First they

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<sup>25</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Rajuma Begum, September 26, 2017.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Shawfika, October 1, 2017.

searched me for valuables and took all my gold and money, and then we were made to go in the water.

There were still a lot of men alive, and also some men with us. First, they killed the men who were with us, and then they began killing the others.... We had 30 soldiers surrounding us, and maybe 150 soldiers and Rakhine were killing the men. They just kept catching men, making them kneel down and killing them. Then they put their bodies on a pile. First they shot them, and if they were still alive they were killed with machetes.

Then they dug three holes. I saw them digging the holes. They pulled the dead bodies and put them in the holes. It took them one-and-a-half hours to carry all the bodies.<sup>28</sup>

Rajuma Khatoum, 35, said the village chairman had told the villagers to go to the beach for their safety. When soldiers opened fire as they approached the crowd on the beach, she said she immediately realized the danger they were in. But because so many families had many young children with them, it made flight across the river nearly impossible:

People were gathered near the river, sitting down, because we had a lot of family members and infants, so we couldn't take everyone across the river. Also, the village chairman told us to stay and not to move, and that we would make peace with the [Rakhine community].<sup>29</sup>

When soldiers reached the beach they opened fire. Rajuma said that when two of her sons, Jamal Hussein, 17, and Jamalullah, 7, tried to swim across the river, soldiers shot them dead in the water. Rajuma and her husband then hid behind a fence near the beach with their remaining two children. Rajuma described what she saw on the beach:

The soldiers separated the men from the women and the children. They put the women and children near the bank of the river, and they put the men in a different place on the beach. Some of the men were seated, others were

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. Some witnesses said two holes were dug; several others, including Shawfika, said three holes were dug.

<sup>29</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Rajuma Khatoum, 35, Kutupalong camp, Bangladesh, September 25, 2017.

trying to run away in fear. They were being slaughtered, killed with shovels and the army was also shooting them and killing them with sharp weapons [knives and machetes]. That was around noon.

They dug a big hole and then also used the natural holes in the beach [depressions in the beach caused by the river, visible in satellite imagery] to put bodies in, and then they burned them with gasoline. I saw them slide the bodies in.<sup>30</sup>

Rajuma and her husband escaped from their hiding place and swam to safety with their young daughter and surviving son.<sup>31</sup>

Hafez Mohammed Akram, 30, was on the beach when the soldiers began shooting at the crowds. His wife Tasmina, 19, urged him to swim across the river, afraid that the soldiers would kill adult men. After Hafez swam across the river, he watched as the soldiers fired into the terrified crowds until only piles of bodies remained on the beach. He said he saw 20 to 30 bodies of villagers floating in the river, shot while trying to escape.<sup>32</sup> He then watched the soldiers dig holes in the soft sand to put the bodies in before burning them with fuel.<sup>33</sup>

Mohammed Zakaria, 51, was on the beach when the soldiers first arrived. “Before, we thought that if the women and the men gather together at the beach, the soldiers wouldn’t kill us,” he said. “We thought we would be safe.” However, when the soldiers opened fire on the crowd as soon as they arrived, he realized that many would be killed, and swam across the river to save himself.<sup>34</sup> From a wooded graveyard across the river, he watched as the soldiers killed those on the beach:

The men were killed by bullets. They started with the strongest men, they killed those with bullets. Some of the old people, they killed with their

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Hafez Mohammed Akram, September 21, 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Mohammed Zakaria, 51, Kutupalong camp, Bangladesh, September 26, 2017.

machetes, and the children among them were stabbed with knives, hit by machetes, and beaten with wooden sticks.<sup>35</sup>

Hassina Begum, 20, said she was at the beach when the attack began. She said the people on the beach were surrounded by soldiers, who immediately began killing the men, while ordering the women and children to stand nearby in the water. Hassina saw the soldiers stab her 40-year-old father-in-law, Sabir, to death.<sup>36</sup>

Hassina said she saw Rakhine villagers dig holes in the sand, put the bodies inside, and cover them with dried bamboo sticks, leaves, and gasoline, before setting them on fire.<sup>37</sup>

“Fatima” (not her real name), 15, told Human Rights Watch she was among the women and girls who had been at the beach and separated from the men by soldiers. The women and girls, together with their children, were told to sit in the water in a shallow area, where they watched the soldiers kill the men:

In the morning, the army came [to the river bank]. Some [Rakhine villagers] were with them as well. They were nearly 200 in number. The women were taken to a swampy area. They gathered all the men to another area and killed them, and then covered their bodies with cloths.

The men were taken away. Some were sitting, others were standing. The soldiers killed them by shooting them, and they slaughtered them with machetes, wooden sticks, and stabbing them. The killings went on from when they arrived to the time of the Juhur prayer [approximately 2 p.m.]. They killed all the men.

After the men were killed, the [Rakhine villagers] with the army dug a big hole, and they put the bodies inside and covered them with leaves and cloths. They hadn’t burned the bodies yet [by the time I was taken away].<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Hassina Begum, 20, Kutupalong camp, Bangladesh, September 22, 2017.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with “Fatima” (not her real name), 15, Kutupalong camp, Bangladesh, September 27, 2017.

## Decimated Families

Khotija said she lost her entire family in the massacre. Her elderly father, Abu Shama, and husband, Nur Kobir, 50, died with the men on the beach. Her son, Sayed Alam, 18, was shot dead while he tried to swim across the river. Her infant daughter, Nur Kaida, 3 months old, was ripped from her arms and smashed to death by the soldiers. When soldiers took her away, she left behind four children on the beach, and later learned from other survivors that they too had been killed: her three daughters Homeira, 10, Shehana, 5, and Nur Hassina, 3; and her son Jahedu Rahman, 4.<sup>39</sup>

Mohammed Zakaria, whose experience is described above, said that soldiers killed 11 of his close relatives, including his father Mauwlawi Ahamad Hussein, 90, and his mother Aisha Khatoum, 73; his children Mohammed Salem, 21, Mohammed Asim, 19, Umar Faisal, 15, and Mohammed Yahiya, 12; his brother Mohammed Tayeb, 41, and his brother's wife, Shaheda, 31; and his brother's children Noem, 14, Mohammed Anas, 12, and Mohammed Isa, 4.<sup>40</sup>

"Abdulaziz" (not his real name), 9, who fled to Bangladesh with his younger brother "Zahid," 6, said that they had been at the beach when the soldiers began shooting, and had swam to the other side of the river to escape. From a nearby hillside, they watched the soldiers executing the men on the beach, including their father Mufiz, 35.<sup>41</sup> They saw soldiers lead their mother, Rabu, 30, and their siblings Janatullah, 10, Shabiullah, 5, and Mumtaz, 3, to a nearby home and later saw the house on fire, and believe they were all killed inside.<sup>42</sup>

Relatives of "Ali" (not his real name) said that the 10-year-old had not spoken since witnessing the killing of his family members on the beach. Relatives said that 11 members of Ali's family were killed, including his widowed mother Habiba Khatoum, 45; his sister Sura, 16; his stepbrother Sobiullah, 35, his wife Laila, 25, and their three children Arkanullah, 4, Suhail, 3, and Khala Putuni, 2; and his other stepbrother Soyodullah Amin, 32, his wife Senu Ara, 20, their daughter Minu Aktar, 4, and their infant Purminu Aktar.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Khotija, October 2, 2017.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with "Abdulaziz" (not his real name), 9, Kutupalong camp, Bangladesh, September 25, 2017.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with relatives of "Ali," Kutupalong camp, Bangladesh, September 25, 2017.

Rajuma Khatoum, whose experience is described above, said that 13 members of her family were killed on the beach: her sons Jamal Hussein, 17, and Jamalullah, 7; her mother-in-law Farida Khatoum, 60; her brother-in-law Kairul Amin, 25, his wife Adjada, 20, and their son Arfatullah, 1; and her brother-in-law Nurul Amin, 32, his wife Kashida, 30, and their five children Tasmeeen Ara, 10, Murtaza, 8, Arkanullah, 7, Hassanullah, 3, and a yet to be named newborn boy.<sup>44</sup>

Rajuma also provided the names of 11 killed family members of her cousin and neighbor Dilniwaz, whom she saw raped and murdered on the beach: Dilniwaz's father Sabir Ahmed, 45, and mother Fatima Khatoum, 40; and her 9 siblings Duloni, 18, Minara, 17, Usman, 15, Ismail, 8, Ridwan, 7, Shakira Bibi, 5, Zaved Khan, 4, Jamila, 3, and a 4-month-old baby who had not yet been named.<sup>45</sup>

Hafez Mohammed Akram, whose case is also described above, said he lost 12 family members on the beach, including his mother Aisha, 50; his wife Tasmina, 19; his son Usman, 2; his sister Khadija, 40, her husband Mohammed Idriss, 45, and their son Jamalullah, 17, and daughter Fatima, 19; Fatima's husband Sayed Karim, 25; and his nephews Mohammed Ridwan, 6, Mohammed Shawfiq, 8, and niece Shahida, as well as a 5-month-old niece whose name he did not remember.<sup>46</sup>

Rajuma Begum said that her father Kala Mia, 70, was among the men killed on the beach, as were three children of her brother Mohammed Yousuf: his sons Hubaib, 11, and Soaib, 7, and his daughter, Romida, 8. In addition, her mother Subi Khatoum, 50, and her son Mohammed Sadeq, 16 months, died in the house where she was sexually assaulted (a case detailed in the next section of this report), and she learned from other survivors that her two sisters Rukiah, 19, and Rumina, 15, as well as her sister-in-law Khalida, 25, and her sister-in-law's son Radja Ali, 2, were killed by soldiers in a similar fashion in another house.<sup>47</sup>

Mohammed Ayas, 16, said he saved his life by swimming across the river when the shooting started. He was wounded while running toward the river, but two men helped him cross and make it to the other side. He witnessed the killing of his entire family: his mother

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<sup>44</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Rajuma Khatoum, September 25, 2017.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Hafez Mohammed Akram, September 21, 2017.

<sup>47</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Rajuma Begum, September 26, 2017.



Janu, 45; his brothers Mohammed Yunus, 19, and Mohammed Tufail, 10; and his sisters Rajija, 14, and Hassina, 11. “I saw them kill my mother and sisters,” he said. “They were hit with sticks and cut with machetes and killed. After this I saw them kill my brothers with machetes. It was a very inhuman thing.”<sup>48</sup>

Mohammed Suleiman, 43, said his wife, Rabeya, 40, and his daughters Romida, 21, and Hassina, 12, were killed at the beach that day, although he did not know how they had died.<sup>49</sup>

Zaheed Hossein, 35, said he lost 11 members of his family in the massacre: his father Fakir Ahmed, 65, and mother Ambia Khatoum, 63; his wife Nur Begum, 23; his son Mohammed Anous, 2, and daughter Faiza Bibi, 10 months; his three sisters Nur Ayesha Begum, 43, Fatima Khatoum, 28, and Sara Khatoum, 26; his brother’s son Mohammed Sadek, 7, and unnamed baby, 28 days; and his other brother’s son Choku Tara, 2.<sup>50</sup>

Mohammed Amin, 25, said that nine members of his family were killed that day: his mother Farida Khatoum, 50; his wife Hassina Begum, 22; his daughters Faresa, 3, and a newborn baby; his sisters Tosmin Ara, 20, and Senoara, 12; his sister’s daughter Shahida, 18 months; his brother’s wife, Momtaj Begum, 26; and his brother’s son, Shu Shu, 5.<sup>51</sup>

Nur Mohammed, 19, said he had fled to the beach with his entire family, and that his parents had told him to swim across the river to escape when the killings began. But his family had many young children who could not swim, and his parents did not want to abandon them. He said he was the only survivor from his family, and that 12 members of his family died on the beach: his father Abdul Malik, 60, and mother Nur Jehan Begum, 50; his brother Hussan Ahmed, 35, Hussan Ahmed’s wife Nur Bahar, 25, and their yet unnamed newborn daughter; his brother Sultan Ahmed, 30, Sultan Ahmed’s wife Samjun Nahar, 28, and their sons Mohammed Shahed, 4, and Alum Shah, 3; his sister Rukiya Begum, 12; and his sister-in-law Fatima Khatoum, 30, and her son Mohammed Farouk, 4.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Mohammed Ayas, 16, Kutupalong camp, Bangladesh, October 2, 2017.

<sup>49</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Mohammed Suleiman, 43, Kutupalong camp, Bangladesh, September 27, 2017.

<sup>50</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Zaheed Hossein, 35, Kutupalong camp, Bangladesh, September 27, 2017.

<sup>51</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Mohammed Amin, 25, Kutupalong camp, Bangladesh, September 27, 2017.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

## II. Mass Rape and Killing of Women and Children

Hundreds of women and children in Tula Toli, after being separated from the men, remained under armed guard in the river by the beach while Burmese security forces and armed Rakhine villagers summarily executed the men. Nine female survivors told Human Rights Watch that the soldiers then began ordering small groups of women and their children out of the water. The soldiers killed some of the children at the water's edge by throwing them in the river or into nearby fires, or hacking them to death with machetes. But the soldiers took most of the children away with their mothers to empty houses in the village.

The survivors said they saw Burmese soldiers, sometimes assisted by armed Rakhine villagers, beat or knife children to death in front of their mothers. The women were then taken into houses.

Half of the women and girls Human Rights Watch spoke to reported being raped or sexually assaulted inside the houses, and nearly all said they saw other women and girls being raped.

The women all described how soldiers took them to the houses, sexually assaulting many of them, and then beat them or cut them with knives and machetes until they were dead or unconscious. The soldiers then left the houses, closed the doors with the women and children inside, and set the houses on fire. Most of the women interviewed by Human Rights Watch who had been left for dead inside burning houses said they were the only survivors from a particular house.

Rashida, 25, told Human Rights Watch that she was among hundreds of women who were forced to stand in the water by the beach with their children:

The women and their children were made to sit in the water. We women and children were more than 400 in the water. They took us away in groups of five women, five at a time, and there were more than 200 taken away by the time they took me. About half of the women and children remained in the water when they took me away. I don't know what happened to them.

They brought five of us women to a room [in a house]. They tortured us with knives and rifle butts. I had my 28-day-old baby, Mohammed Eukhan, on my chest and when they hit me, the baby fell. They hit the baby, and later I found he was dead. They hit me in the neck and they cut my throat with a knife and then stabbed me in the stomach. The other four girls died in that room. They burned the room and they couldn't escape.

When the fire started, I woke up and found my baby with his head swollen, and he was no more.<sup>53</sup>

Rashida's mother Lalo Begum, 55, and her sister Rafika, 18, were still standing in the water when Rashida was taken away. She believes they were later killed in one of the houses, as they have not been heard from since that day.<sup>54</sup>

Rajuma Begum said that soldiers took her from the group of women standing in the water to a three-room bamboo house nearby, together with her mother-in-law and infant son. She said:

In our group, we were three women with children, one young girl, and an older woman. Between 7 and 10 soldiers took us to a room in a house. There were other women in other rooms in the house, as we could hear them. I could hear women and girls screaming from the other rooms.

She said they grabbed her 16-month-old toddler, Mohammed Sadeq:

They first took my child and threw him down on the ground. He was still alive then, and I had to watch as they slaughtered him. The children of the other two women were killed the same way, thrown to the ground and [killed with machetes]. They were both boys, about 5 and 7. A few minutes later, they took the bodies of the children and threw them on a fire outside.

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<sup>53</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Rashida, 25, Kutupalong camp, Bangladesh, September 23, 2017.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

Then the soldiers raped all three of us women. I was on my back [being raped] for an hour. It was four or five soldiers. When they were done, I was hit twice afterward [with a heavy wooden stick], on my head and my chin. They beat us all until we were half dead, and then they set the house on fire.

[When I regained consciousness,] I saw that one of the corners of the bamboo wall had a hole in it. I made it bigger by kicking it, and I escaped from the house. No one else came out of that house. They all burned to death inside the house.<sup>55</sup>

Shawfika described how six soldiers took her and four other women and their three children from the water to a bamboo house. They beat the children to death, then raped all five women, beat them, and set the house on fire:

The soldiers took eight of us. It was me, my mother Dolu, 60, my sister-in-law Majuma, 28, her daughter Janatana, 10, her son Mukhtar, 5, my aunt Mabija Khatum, in her 60s, my neighbor Fatima, 22, and her son Sayed Nur, 6. The kids were just walking with us and when we got near the house, the soldiers just started hitting them with their gun butts and wooden sticks. They beat them to death. Then they took the bodies and put them inside the house. They were killed just on the doorsteps.

The soldiers took us into the house. We were kept in the corridor of the house, but we could hear moaning and sounds from the other rooms. When we entered, they pushed us inside. We were five women and six soldiers. They took off our clothes and tried to touch us. We tried to escape, but they caught us and they raped all of us. Then they beat us, and when we were beaten down, they shot us. The shot missed me, and I pretended to be dead, and then I passed out.

The soldiers then left the house and set it on fire:

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<sup>55</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Rajuma Begum, September 26, 2017.

I woke up and realized I was in a pool of sticky blood. I tried to wake up the others but they didn't move. Then I broke through the [bamboo] wall and escaped. I ran through the paddy fields and could see huge fires on the beach [where the bodies had been put in pits]....

When I escaped from the house, all the houses in the area were on fire. I could hear women screaming from some of the other houses. They could not escape from the fires.<sup>56</sup>

Hassina Begum was standing with other women in the marshy area by the river, clutching her 1-year-old daughter Sohaifa under her scarf. She said:

[The soldiers] were taking the children from their mothers, killing some of them and throwing them into the fire. So I tried to hide my daughter under my headscarf so no one could see her. I acted like I didn't have any children with me.

While I was hiding my child, one of [the soldiers] saw, and asked me, "Where are you taking her?" He took my daughter from me and threw her alive into the fire.

What could I do? I was standing there and crying. But they forced us to leave, they took us away by force.... [The soldier who took my daughter] had a knife in his hand and a rifle over his shoulder.<sup>57</sup>

Hassina said that at about 2 p.m., the soldiers began taking groups of five to seven women from the river's edge to nearby houses. She could hear other women and children screaming from burning houses where they had been locked inside:

Five soldiers took us to a house. There were other military [men] there to direct them where to go. They were leaving the dead bodies inside the empty houses. They locked down the places wherever they killed [women

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<sup>56</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Shawfika, October 1, 2017.

<sup>57</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Hassina Begum, September 22, 2017.

and children]. People were screaming from the houses they had put on fire. Mostly women and little children were screaming out loudly.

The soldiers left them inside the locked houses thinking they were dead, then set the houses on fire. People inside the houses would pretend to be dead, but when the military set the house on fire, they started to scream.<sup>58</sup>

Hassina said that five soldiers took her, her sister-in-law Asma, 18, her mother-in-law Fatima, 35, and her three brothers-in-law Sayedul Mostapa, 14, Shirajul Mostapa, 10, and Hassan Mostapha, 7, to a house. Once inside, a group of Rakhine men beat the three children to death with shovels. She said the soldiers then told the Rakhine men to leave the house. The soldiers attempted to rape the three women inside the house, stabbing Fatima to death when she resisted. After the sexual assault, they beat Hassina and Asma unconscious with wooden sticks. The two women regained consciousness to find the house burning around them and managed to escape. They were the only survivors.<sup>59</sup>

Rajuma Khatoum said she witnessed soldiers at the beach rape her 16-year-old cousin, Dilniwaz, who was her neighbor and who had been hiding with them before the soldiers discovered her:

[Dilniwaz] was raped by three soldiers. Two stood over her while the third one raped her. She was a beautiful 16-year-old girl. We were hiding together and then the soldiers discovered her and she ran toward the men. She was thrown to the ground, and they opened her [sarong] and the soldier got on top of her and raped her. All of her family had already been killed, and she was the only survivor. When the soldier was done, he stood over her and shot her in the chest.<sup>60</sup>

Mumtaz Begum, 30, said the soldiers had ordered her to sit in the water alongside hundreds of other women and children, while the soldiers killed their male relatives

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Rajuma Khatoum, September 25, 2017.

nearby. The soldiers then took her, her four children, and her mother, along with five other women and their children, to a nearby house:

We were taken in a group of seven women, but so many were taken before us. Three or four soldiers took us to a room. They had machetes, and when we entered, they hit my 7-year-old daughter on the head twice.

The beautiful girls were taken away to another room and raped.... Us older women, we were stripped naked and they hit us on our breasts and private parts. They just hit and hit, demanding our money and gold. All four of my children were with me, I was holding them. They smashed the baby first, then they killed the two boys, first hitting them with sticks and then with machetes. They asked for our money and gold and then suddenly started hitting us with wooden sticks and machetes.

I was unconscious, and when I woke the house was fully on fire. It was when the fire was already burning my legs and my body that I came to. I broke through the wall, and my daughter was already outside. I tried to go back to get the bodies of my children, but they were already on fire so we had to leave them.<sup>61</sup>

Mumtaz suffered horrific burns over most of her body, and her daughter suffered from a deep gash on her head.<sup>62</sup>

“Fatima” said that soldiers took her to a house with her mother Farida, in her 40s, and sister Senwara, 10. After the soldiers killed the men, they began taking the women to the houses:

About 200 women were taken away before us. Some of their children were thrown in the river. Those that could swim swam away, but others drowned.

About 10 soldiers took us away [to a house]. I was with my mother, my sister, and four other women, two of whom had children with them. It was

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<sup>61</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Mumtaz Begum, 30, Kutupalong camp, Bangladesh, September 26, 2017.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

light in the room where they took us. There were many dead bodies of women already there, and they were searching the bodies for valuables. If they found children alive, they shot them or beat them to death. When we first entered, we couldn't even really enter the room because of the number of bodies already there, there were so many.

I was the first to enter the room. One of the soldiers had a big wooden stick, and he hit me on the head and knocked me semi-unconscious. Then they were hitting the children. They stripped us naked, searching for our valuables. It is all blurry, but I remember them beating my 10-year-old sister-in-law—they hit her in the head with a big stick. Her face was swelling up and she was just screaming loudly in pain. Then she was just breathing loudly, and then she was barely breathing. And then she died.

The house was already on fire when I woke up. When I first woke up, I saw another woman on fire. She tried to stand up, but she fell down again. Burning objects were falling on us from the roof. So I stood up and stepped over the bodies of the others, and broke the [bamboo] wall with my leg and escaped. The other woman burned to death inside. Only I managed to escape, no one else came out alive from the house.<sup>63</sup>

Fatima said she escaped the home about 7 p.m., initially hiding in the latrine next to the burning house. The soldiers were still inside the village. When the heat from the burning house made it impossible to remain, she fled to another latrine, spending the night there before escaping the next morning and slowly making her way to the Bangladesh border.<sup>64</sup> She showed Human Rights Watch extensive burns to her hands, arms, shoulders, feet, and lower legs, which she had suffered while trapped inside the burning house.

Khotija described how soldiers brought her to a house where they killed her daughter:

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<sup>63</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with "Fatima," September 27, 2017.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.



I was taken out of the water with five other women. I had my 3-month-old infant, Nur Kaida, on my chest. Two other women also had babies with them, 3 or 4 months old. Seven soldiers surrounded us and took us.

They pushed us into the room. When we entered the house, they pulled my daughter from me and threw her hard to the ground, and she died. They did the same with the other two infants. Then they stripped us naked and raped four of us. Then they began hitting the others with wooden sticks, beating them to death. I was not raped myself. They hit us on the head with the sticks and made us unconscious. [One] soldier had cut some of us with his machete. One girl was begging for water, and the soldier came and stabbed her to death.

Khotija said that when she regained consciousness, she saw the soldiers had left and locked the doors. She could tell that the soldiers were burning a nearby house because she could hear women screaming from inside. She and another woman who had regained consciousness managed to leave the house and escape.<sup>65</sup>

“Senzida” (not her real name), 16, said she saw a group of nine women and girls assaulted by soldiers on the beach:

They separated the women and made some of them sit in the water and others on the shore nearby. I saw the soldiers do some bad things to some of the girls. They took some girls away to the nearby trees and tore off their clothes and touched them everywhere. They did this on the beach to nine girls.

They made them lie down and they were stripped naked. Some of the soldiers were holding them down while others were raping them. Only one of the girls returned, the others were killed there and we could see their bodies. I was watching the girls being raped on one side, and the soldiers killing the men on the other side.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Khotija, October 2, 2017.

<sup>66</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with “Senzida” (not her real name), 16, Kutupalong camp, Bangladesh, October 2, 2017.

Senzida said that six or seven soldiers then ordered her and four other women—her sister-in-law Sainu, 25, and three other female relatives, Romida Begum, 20, Sura Khatum, 18, and Chemon Khatum, 30—to come with them. The soldiers grabbed Sainu’s 2-year-old son from her arms and threw him into the river, where he drowned.<sup>67</sup> The soldiers took the five women to a nearby house:

They tore off our clothes. One man was holding me and another one raped me. When they were finished, they started to hit me. They took away all of our valuables [sewn into our clothes]. All five of us were raped. Then they beat us with rifle butts and big wooden sticks and I became unconscious.

I woke up naked. The house was on fire. I tried to wake up my sister-in-law, but they were all dead. So I ran out of the house. Most of the houses around me were burning. There was a lot of fire. I was burned on my back inside the house.<sup>68</sup>

For two days, Senzida hid at a nearby graveyard, still naked. She finally approached a house in a village close by and was given some clothing, then fled to Bangladesh. She said that four other members of her family, including her mother Amina Khatum, in her mid-30s, were killed at the beach.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

## **Acknowledgments**

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# MASSACRE BY THE RIVER

## Burmese Army Crimes against Humanity in Tula Toli

On the morning of August 30, 2017, hundreds of uniformed Burmese soldiers arrived in the village of Tula Toli, in northern Rakhine State, where they carried out a brutal and systematic attack of killings, rape, and arson against the Rohingya Muslim villagers. The massacre at Tula Toli came days after coordinated attacks on police posts by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). Following those attacks, the Burmese military launched a large-scale campaign of ethnic cleansing, forcing more than 645,000 Rohingya to flee across the border to Bangladesh.

*Massacre by the River* details the Burmese army's attack on Tula Toli, based on in-depth interviews with 18 Rohingya survivors conducted in refugee camps in Bangladesh. The report reveals strong evidence of military planning: soldiers rapidly confined villagers on the riverbank, separated men and women, executed the men, and rounded-up groups of women and girls in nearby houses to be raped and killed. Analysis of satellite imagery confirms the village was completely destroyed by arson. The documented abuses contribute to Human Rights Watch's conclusion that the Burmese military's atrocities against Rohingya amount to crimes against humanity.

Human Rights Watch calls on the Burmese government to immediately cease its campaign of ethnic cleansing and urgently provide unimpeded access to Rakhine State for humanitarian aid groups and human rights monitors. The United Nations Security Council and foreign governments should impose targeted sanctions on Burmese military officials, and demand that Burma allow the UN-created Fact-Finding Mission to visit the country.



*Survivors of the Tula Toli massacre  
in Rakhine State, Burma.*

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