

The Ethnically Cleansed
The Plight of Myanmar's Rohingya

By Meeri Koutaniemi/Echo



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Myanmar's first years as a democratic state haven't been rosy for everyone. Instead of new opportunities the country's Muslim Rohingya minority has become victims of ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity brought upon them by their Buddhist countrymen and Myanmar's government officials. The Rohingya, already discriminated in Myanmar for decades by moving restrictions, family size limitations, marriage restrictions, limitations on education and negation of Myanmar's citizenship unless able to prove ancestorship prior to British rule, sees their future now more darker than ever. During the sectarian clashes of 2012 5000 houses and entire Rohingya villages were destroyed with arson all over Rakhine state.

Hundreds of people were killed as the buddhist Rakhine citizens armed with machetes and boosted into killing frenzy by buddhist monks looted the Muslim quarters. Mass graves were dug up by government officials to store the brutally murdered Rohingyas. Now over 100 000 Rohingyas have been living in the refugee camps across the state for almost two years. "I was lucky to jump into the sea and hide underwater. Otherwise I would have been shot by the police," says Aung Min, a 28-year old Rohingya father of three and a community leader in a Rohingya refugee camp near Sittwe. Human rights organization Human Rights Watch accuses Myanmar's officials of committing ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity on the Rohingya population. Empty slots that stand in place of the torched Rohingya villages dot the landscape of Sittwe. The state's capital air is filled with fear and suspicion as the rumors of Rohingya terrorists being trained at Al Qaida camps spread around. We are afraid that the Muslims want to kill us all, says a market seller in Sittwe harbor market, which has now been emptied of it's Muslim vendors.

The international aid organizations responsible for the maintenance of the refugee camps are terrified about the future conditions of continuing the aid work as the contempt of the Rakhine Buddhist population towards the "helpers of the Muslims" grows. The Buddhists see the aid NGOs as being partial to the Rohingya, despite the fact that 95% of the internal refugees caused by the conflict are Rohingya, and only 5% Buddhists. With the coming Myanmar's population census the situation is not getting any brighter for the Rohingya.

The government has shown no interest in including the estimated 1 000 000 strong minority into the list of the official Myanmar's citizen minorities. Already now the question of census heats the discussion among the Myanmar people, Buddhist and Rohingya. The future clashes seem inevitable.







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