



**Gradual Approach Needed for the  
Human Rights Issues in Myanmar:  
The Intertwined Causes of the “Rohingya” Crisis**

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## **Abstract**

As stateless people residing in Rakhine state of Myanmar, the Rohingya group is known to suffer from the lack of basic human rights. For the humanitarian situation in Rakhine, a part of the international community often resorts to political and economic pressures on the government of Myanmar. However, the Rohingya crisis cannot fundamentally be resolved by banal proposals such as granting citizenship or providing aid. There are at least three other factors that are vital to address the Rohingya crisis. It includes the national identity as Buddhist-Burmese in the general population, the concern about risk of instability in Rakhine posed by the armed group involving Rohingya, and the internal politics within Rakhine state. Analysis on these elements suggests that the Rohingya issue should be based on a gradual and inclusive approach. In other words, achieving social integration with sufficient timeframe for building mutual recognition and trust between social strata in Rakhine must be a priority in dealing with the humanitarian issues in Rakhine.



# **Gradual Approach Needed for the Human Rights Issues in Myanmar: The Intertwined Causes of the “Rohingya” Crisis**

By Hyuk Kim

On October 9 2016, several hundred armed people, believed to be organized by “Rohingya” attacked three Border Guard Police (BGP) posts in Rakhine (also called Arakan) state of Myanmar and caused the deaths of nine police officers. In response to the deadly attacks, Myanmar security forces launched “area clearance operations” in northern Rakhine that raise questions and doubts about Myanmar’s transition toward democracy.<sup>1</sup> In November 2016, an official of the United Nations Refugee Agency stated that the “clearance operation” in Myanmar is the “ethnic cleansing” of “Rohingya.”<sup>2</sup> Some argue that the actions taken against “Rohingya” constitute “genocide” as defined in the 1948 Genocide Convention.<sup>3</sup> Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, who is leading an advisory group for the Myanmar government on the issues in Rakhine, demurred saying that the violence in Rakhine state could be related to tensions and fighting instead of “genocide.”<sup>4</sup> Plainly, there are different interpretations that necessitate thinking how different narratives can be drawn in Rakhine state to resolve the long-lasting issues about “Rohingya” people.

Even though a breakthrough in Rakhine seemingly rests on the political will of the Myanmar government, there should be better understanding of the intertwined causes of the situations and interests of stakeholders in Rakhine. There are at least three perspectives to be considered for practical and feasible steps toward eventual unity in Myanmar. Those are Buddhist-Burmese nationalism as a national identity established during the military rule that discriminates against other races and religions; the threat to national security created by the emergence of new armed group involving “Rohingya” that recalls separatist movements of the past; and one that focuses on the internal politics in Rakhine, requiring consideration of the grievances of the local Rakhine people. None of these perspectives can be the sole prism through which clear answers for the “Rohingya” crisis can be drawn. These viewpoints as well as human rights of “Rohingya” should be taken into account together. Such considerations would suggest that achieving social integration through gradually building mutual trust between social strata in Rakhine must be a priority for relief of the pain felt by the “Rohingya.”

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<sup>1</sup> James Griffiths, “Is the Lady listening? Aung San Suu Kyi accused of ignoring Myanmar’s Muslims,” *CNN*, Nov. 25, 2016, accessed on Feb. 10, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/11/17/asia/myanmar-rohingya-aung-san-suu-kyi/>.

<sup>2</sup> “Myanmar wants ethnic cleansing of Rohingya – UN official,” *BBC*, Nov. 24, 2016, accessed on Dec. 10, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-38091816>.

<sup>3</sup> “Legal Team Finds ‘Strong Evidence’ of Rohingya Genocide in Arakan State,” *The Irrawaddy*, Oct. 29, 2016, accessed on Feb. 14, 2017, <http://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/legal-team-finds-strong-evidence-of-rohingya-genocide-in-arakan-state.html>.

<sup>4</sup> “Kofi Annan downplays claims of Myanmar genocide,” *BBC*, December 6, 2016, accessed on Feb. 14, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-38223055>.

## Who are the “Rohingya” and why their identity matters?

“Rohingya” people are often described as the most persecuted Muslim minority ethnic group in the world.<sup>5</sup> About 1 million “Rohingya” reside in northern Rakhine state of Myanmar, which shares a border with Bangladesh. Most “Rohingya” in Myanmar are stateless people since enactment of the Citizenship Law in 1982. According to the Citizenship Law, citizenship status is categorized as full citizenship, associate citizenship, and naturalized citizenship. In general, full citizenship by birth is available to the officially recognized 135 ethnic groups: the “Rohingya” group is not included. In other words, “Rohingya” can only be citizen by descendent status or associate/naturalized citizens. The National Registration Cards (NRCs) held by “Rohingya” were surrendered for the citizenship inspection processes. However, a proper verification process had not been followed for about two decades.<sup>6</sup> As temporary registration card (TRC) holders, “Rohingya” are deprived of the right to vote, subject to forced labor and a denial of freedom of movement and marriage, and suffer from lack of education and limits in choice of professions.<sup>7</sup> The international community, non-governmental organizations, and individuals have been urging the Myanmar government to grant citizenship to “Rohingya” people to solve human rights abuses, noting that the root cause of the lingering pain of “Rohingya” people is ethnic and religious discrimination by Myanmar majority, Buddhist Burmese people.<sup>8,9</sup>

There are various understandings of the identity of “Rohingya.” The “Rohingya” community places emphasis on the Muslims’ centuries of settlement in the Arakan region. They describe “Rohingya” as descendants of Muslims such as Arabian, Persian, Turkish, Mughal, and Bengali who came to Arakan in the eighth century mainly as traders, saints, and warriors and developed their own culture and language, and sometimes mixed with the local Arakanese.<sup>10</sup> The other communities in Myanmar, including local Rakhine people, insist that “Rohingya” is a descriptive term for “Bengali” or “Chittagonian” people who immigrated during the British rule in Arakan between 1826 and 1948 instead of a term for historically indigenous ethnic group. Some Myanmar locals highlight the distinction between “Rohingya” and other Muslim ethnic groups holding Myanmar citizenship such as Kamanese in Ramree Island of the Rakhine state.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> “The most persecuted people on Earth?” *The Economist*, June 13, 2015, accessed on Feb. 14, 2017, <http://www.economist.com/news/asia/21654124-myanmars-muslim-minority-have-been-attacked-impunity-stripped-vote-and-driven>.

<sup>6</sup> “Myanmar: The Politics of Rakhine State,” *International Crisis Group*, Oct. 22, 2014, Asia Report No.261, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/myanmar-politics-rakhine-state>.

<sup>7</sup> “Arakan Report,” *The Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief*, July 2012, accessed on Feb. 14, 2017, <https://www.missionislam.com/conissues/books/fogotmuslimburma.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*

<sup>9</sup> “Who are the Rohingya refugees?” *The Amnesty International*, Dec. 8, 2016, accessed on Feb. 14, 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org.au/who-are-the-rohingya-refugees/>.

<sup>10</sup> Mohammed Ali Chowdhury, “The advent of Islam in Arakan and the Rohingyas,” *Kaladan Press Network*, Oct. 22, 2006, accessed on Feb. 14, 2017, <http://www.kaladanpress.org/index.php/scholar-column-mainmenu-36/36-rohingya/217-the-advent-of-islam-in-arakan-and-the-rohingyas.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Aya Chen, “The Development of a Muslim Enclave in Arakah (Rakhine) State of Burma (Myanmar),” *SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Autumn 2005, accessed on Feb. 14, 2017, <https://www.soas.ac.uk/sbbr/editions/file64388.pdf>.



Acknowledgment of a particular indigenous ethnicity is a sensitive issue in Myanmar. The different understandings of “Rohingya” and insufficient historical records with a clear reference to the term “Rohingya” contributed to the humanitarian situation in Rakhine. For example, “Rohingya” are seen as “illegal immigrants” by most people in Myanmar.<sup>12</sup> And the fact that the term “Rohingya” has appeared only since the 1950s resulted in suspicion about their identity.<sup>13</sup> In addition, there are social and economic aspects of recognition of a certain ethnicity. Religion and ethnicity of each person are written in their national identification card, and each indigenous ethnic group with a population of more than 0.1 percent of the national total is entitled to one representative in regional and state parliaments.<sup>14</sup> Also, each state or region has authority to manage the budget and to raise revenue in a centralized federal system.<sup>15</sup> Given that the estimate for the population of “Rohingya” groups is about 1 million, about 2 percent of the Myanmar population, there could be significant impact in social, political, and economic dimensions if citizenship is immediately granted to all “Rohingya.”

Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) articulates that everyone has a right to a nationality. Former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon asserted that “Rohingya” are entitled to a right to Myanmar citizenship.<sup>16</sup> In this regard, it is imperative to understand why citizenship hasn’t been granted to “Rohingya” despite generations of presence. The following sections introduce three viewpoints on the humanitarian situation in Rakhine state, followed by recommendations.

### **Viewpoint 1: national identity**

One of the main causes for the problems in Rakhine stems from a Myanmar national identity as Buddhist-Burmese nationalism, the dominant idea in the period of military rule between 1962 and 2011 given the fact that Burmese and Buddhist respectively accounted for about 70 and 90 percent of the total population in the past.<sup>17</sup> Especially during the period of the Burmese Way to Socialism, national unity was pursued in a way to disband diversity of language, culture, and religions such as halting the teaching of other languages than Burma,

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<sup>12</sup> Paul Keenan, “Questionable Motives: Myanmar Security Operations in Rakhine State,” *EBO Myanmar*, EBO Background Paper, No.6/2016, December 2016, accessed on Feb. 14, 2017, [https://euroburmaoffice.s3.amazonaws.com/filer\\_public/5f/45/5f45f014-335e-4cef-81e5-60cff80fd54c/ebo\\_background\\_paper\\_no\\_6\\_2016\\_-\\_rakhine\\_state.pdf](https://euroburmaoffice.s3.amazonaws.com/filer_public/5f/45/5f45f014-335e-4cef-81e5-60cff80fd54c/ebo_background_paper_no_6_2016_-_rakhine_state.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Aya Chen, “The Development of a Muslim Enclave in Arakah (Rakhine) State of Burma (Myanmar).”

<sup>14</sup> Article 161. (b), Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. <http://www.president-office.gov.mm/en/sites/default/files/myanmarconstitution2008en.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Yash Ghai, “The 2008 Myanmar Constitution: Analysis and Assessment,” *Online Burma/Myanmar Library*, accessed on Feb. 14, 2017, [http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs6/2008\\_Myanmar\\_constitution--analysis\\_and\\_assessment-Yash\\_Ghai.pdf](http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs6/2008_Myanmar_constitution--analysis_and_assessment-Yash_Ghai.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> “UN says Rohingya entitled to Myanmar citizenship,” *PressTV*, Aug. 30, 2016, accessed on Feb. 14, 2017, <http://www.presstv.ir/DetailFr/2016/08/30/482436/UN-Rohingya-Myanmar-citizenship>.

<sup>17</sup> M.Ismael Khin Maung, “The population of Burma: An analysis of the 1973 Census,” *East-West Population Institute*, no. 97, April 1986, accessed on Feb. 14, 2017, <https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/handle/10125/22656/PapersOfTheEastWestPopulationInstituteNo.097PopulationOfBurma1986%5Bpdfa%5D.PDF?sequence=1>.

prohibition of Christian missionary activities and nationalization of public schools.<sup>18</sup> In the case of the humanitarian situation in Rakhine, the national identity-driven perspective can be viewed as discrimination against Muslims by Buddhist Burmese.

As examples, since independence from British rule, Myanmar maintained a parliamentary democratic system until the military coup in 1962. During this time, Prime Minister U Nu promised to give autonomy to the residents of northern Rakhine to obtain Muslim votes in the region.<sup>19</sup> However, the pledge by U Nu was overturned immediately after the military took over the government. In 1978, hundreds of Muslims were killed and about 300,000 people were displaced during Operation King Dragon, which was initiated to tackle “illegal immigrants.”<sup>20</sup> In 1982, the government enacted the Citizenship Law, which some believe rendered “Rohingya” people stateless even though the law was not intended to target only “Rohingya” as other groups were also affected by that law, such as descendants of Chinese and Indians.<sup>21,22</sup> In addition, the political rights of “Rohingya” were significantly undermined as their political parties were dismissed in 1991.

Even after military rule, national identity transpires as anti-Muslim sentiment among the general population in Myanmar. The 2012 communal clashes between local Rakhine Buddhists and “Rohingya,” triggered by the murder and rape of the local Rakhine woman by the Muslims, spurred anti-Muslim riots nationally. Creation of the Patriotic Association of Myanmar by nationalist monks and their legislative lobbies to protect their race and religion in 2014 are other noticeable indications of the anti-Muslim sentiment in Myanmar.

A perspective that focuses on the ultra-nationalistic Buddhist Burmese and Muslim “Rohingya” minority is helpful in describing the humanitarian situation in Rakhine. However, the immediate granting of Myanmar citizenship to “Rohingya” doesn’t solve the problem since political good will or politicians cannot generate a political decision without endorsement by the majority of society. Although it may take a while for the general population to embrace the meaning of diversity, there are stakeholders more closely related to issues in Rakhine.

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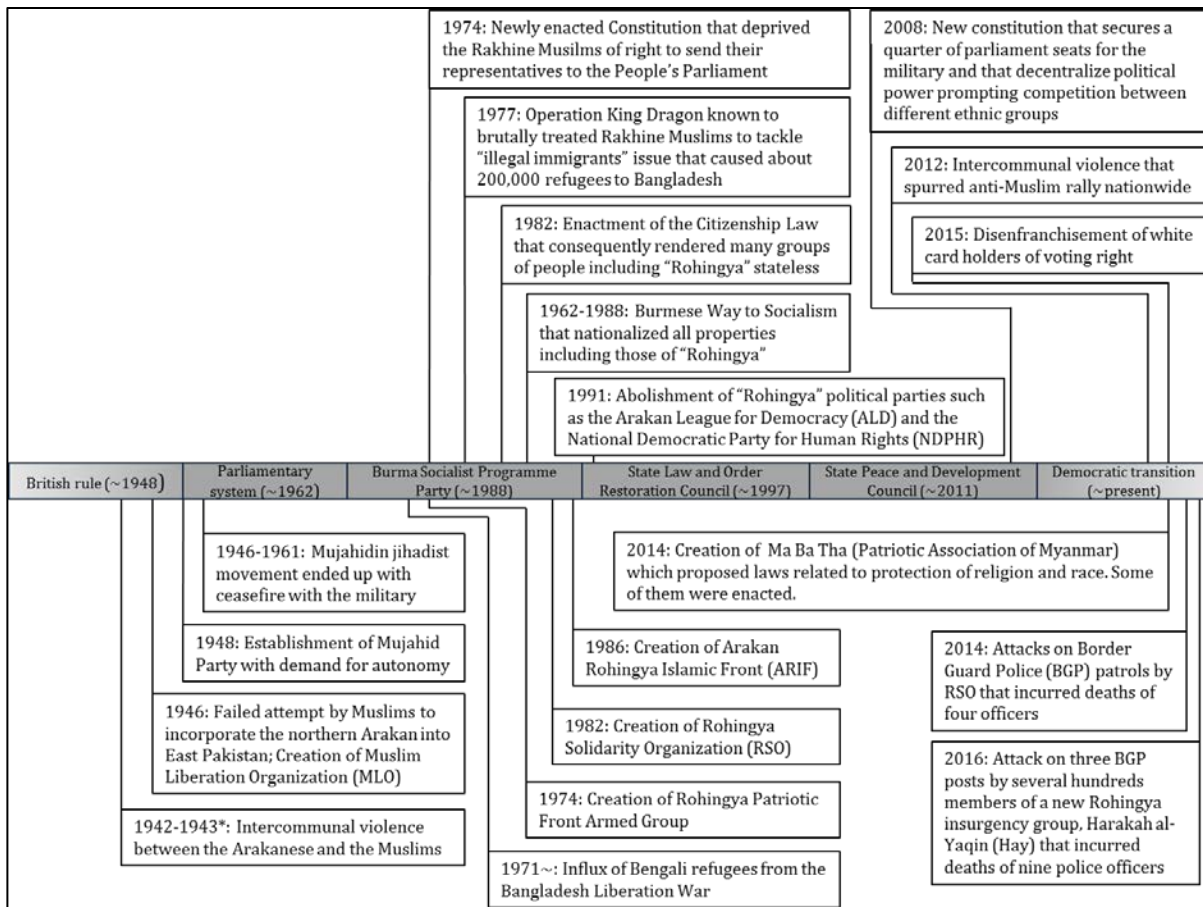
<sup>18</sup> Robert H. Talyor, “Pathways to the Present,” in *Myanmar Beyond Politics to Societal Imperatives*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asia Studies, 2005), p.1-29

<sup>19</sup> “Myanmar: The Politics of Rakhine State,” *International Crisis Group*.

<sup>20</sup> “Arakan Report,” *The Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief*.

<sup>21</sup> Discrimination in Arakan,” *Human Right Watch*, accessed on February 14, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/burma/burm005-02.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> Aung Lwin Oo, “Aliens in a Bind,” *The Irrawaddy*, Vol.12 No.7, July 2004, accessed on February 14, 2017, [http://www2.irrawaddy.com/print\\_article.php?art\\_id=3795](http://www2.irrawaddy.com/print_article.php?art_id=3795).



**Figure 1 Events affecting perspectives of stakeholders involved in Rakhine**

## Viewpoint 2: national security

The concern about national security is often interpreted as a justification for the military's influence on national affairs. Some NGOs expressed apprehension that the lack of transparency in security operations in Rakhine could be a prelude to a state of emergency that requires a transfer of government powers to the military. In their view, the situation in Rakhine would bring Myanmar back to military rule.<sup>23</sup>

However, the term, "area clearance operations," which is viewed as "ethnic cleansing" by some, is a product of the decision made at a special meeting between Myanmar government officials including President Htin Kyaw, Aung San Suu Kyi, and the commander-in-chief. The operations are conducted in a form of "joint operations" by "security forces" consisting of the BGP, the military, and the local militia under the western commander. Article 40 (c) and Article 314 (b) of Myanmar Constitution stipulate that a state of emergency, declared under an approval of the National Defense and Security Council, would transfer the judicial and executive powers to the military in case that there is a risk of

<sup>23</sup> Paul Keenan, "Questionable Motives: Myanmar Security Operations in Rakhine State."

disintegration of national unity.<sup>24</sup><sup>25</sup> According to a report by the International Crisis Group, Aung San Suu Kyi refused to declare state of emergency as she considers the Council is not politically legitimate.<sup>26</sup> These facts indicate that the military is unlikely to regain state sovereign power anytime soon although the civilian government seeks assistance of the military to manage the threat and risk of instability in Rakhine. Therefore, it is necessary to look into the latest position of the government on the security aspects in Rakhine.

The perspective of Myanmar government can be described as anxiety about national security that is guided by a fear of separatist and jihadist movements. The deadly attacks by Harakah al-Yaqin (HaY) in October 2016 recalls separatism and jihadism waged by “Rohingya” or some of those people around the time of independence from the British rule. The perceived threat to national security obliges the secular government to cooperate with the military to ensure stability in Rakhine region.

Some “Rohingya” leaders claim that their recent armed attacks on the BGP were not driven by religious reasons but from a desire for basic human rights.<sup>27</sup> However, from the viewpoint of the government, the creation of HaY could be an indication of possible radicalization of “Rohingya” as in the period of 1940-60s. In 1946, Muslims in Rakhine state, who didn’t refer to themselves as “Rohingya” at the time, sent a delegation to Pakistan to pursue integration of northern Rakhine into Pakistan. This attempt was unsuccessful, and Muslims in Rakhine declared jihad by establishing a Mujahid guerilla group which launched attacks for about decade and a half until a ceasefire in 1961.<sup>28</sup> In addition, in 1960, the Arakan Muslim community claimed that it would not support statehood unless the government accepted demands that included autonomy for northern Rakhine and prohibition of settlement by non-Muslims in that region.<sup>29</sup>

From the government’s view, the armed aggression by the Mujahid and their demand for autonomy for northern Rakhine region free of non-Muslims were not acceptable as it was fundamentally different from other states like Chin, Shan, and Kachin who also sought autonomy. During the period of divide-and-rule by the British, these areas were categorized as Frontier Areas with a great level of autonomy due to the unfavorable and remote geographical conditions while Rakhine was considered as Burma Proper that was under direct control by the British.<sup>30</sup> Northern Rakhine was designated as Mayu Frontier Area by the civilian government in 1961 in return for the ceasefire with the Mujahid. However, the fact that it was mostly administered by Arakanese Buddhists could be an indication that there

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<sup>24</sup> Article 40.(c), Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. <http://www.president-office.gov.mm/en/sites/default/files/myanmarconstitution2008en.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> Article 314.(b), Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. <http://www.president-office.gov.mm/en/sites/default/files/myanmarconstitution2008en.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> “Myanmar: A New Muslim Insurgency in Rakhine State,” *International Crisis Group*, Dec. 12, 2016, accessed on Feb. 14, 2017, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/283-myanmar-new-muslim-insurgency-rakhine-state>.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*

<sup>28</sup> Aya Chen, “The Development of a Muslim Enclave in Arakah (Rakhine) State of Burma (Myanmar).”

<sup>29</sup> “Arakan Muslims Ask For Constitutional Safeguards: Will Not Support Statehood Unless ANUO Meets Their demands,” *The Nation*, Vol.13, No. 177, Oct. 27, 1960.

<sup>30</sup> Robert H. Talyor, “Pathways to the Present,” in *Myanmar beyond Politics to Societal Imperatives*.

was still a certain level of distrust by the civilian government at that time.<sup>31</sup>

The national security perspective explains Kofi Annan's description of the situation in Rakhine as related to tension and fighting instead of "genocide." During operations, security forces were attacked by the HaY with some support from armed "Rohingya" villagers, and those armed conflicts resulted in casualties for both security forces and "Rohingya."<sup>32</sup> However, allegations of indiscriminate shooting against the HaY and the villagers and that the BGP normally brutally treats villagers should trigger alarm about possible "ethnic cleansing."<sup>33</sup> In addition, the lack of progress in the human rights of "Rohingya" for decades can lead to concerns about the democratic transition of the Myanmar government and the military.

### **Viewpoint 3: local politics in Rakhine**

The sentiment of local Rakhine people can be considered as a combination of hatred of Muslims and a historical feeling of deprivation of land and opportunities. The feeling of deprivation was formed during British rule. Arakan was an independent kingdom until it was invaded by Burma in 1784 and annexed to British India in 1826. During British rule, there were an immense number of immigrants from Bengal to Arakan, driven by economic opportunities and hunger for land. At that time, the wage level in Arakan was much higher than in Bengal, and seasonal work in Arakan replaced Arakanese with "Chittagonians" Also, the British encouraged "Chittagonians," to immigrate to Arakan for agriculture purposes and vast arable lands were granted to them. When the Arakanese who had fled Arakan due to oppressive Burma rule came back to their homeland, the lands in Arakan were no longer theirs.<sup>34</sup>

The feeling of deprivation, laced with deep religious and ethnic rift, erupted into communal violence. In the period of 1942-43 when there was anarchy between the British withdrawal and Japanese invasion, some NGOs and "Rohingya" community claim that there was a "Massacre" by the local Rakhine Buddhists against "defenseless Muslims" in southern Rakhine.<sup>35</sup> In the meantime, in northern Rakhine, Force V, a force consisting of mainly "Chittagonians" created by the British to fight Japanese troops, killed thousands of Arakanese civilians and burnt their houses and pagodas.<sup>36</sup> A British Army Liaison officer described such violence as "a war" between two sects, and interestingly some historians described the mass killings of Arakanese by Muslims in northern Rakhine as "ethnic cleansing," which is used in an opposite way this time around.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> "Burma: repression, discrimination and ethnic cleansing in Arakan," *International Federation of Human Rights Leagues*, No.290/2, April 2000, accessed on Feb. 14, 2017, <https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/arakbirm.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> "Myanmar: A New Muslim Insurgency in Rakhine State," *International Crisis Group*.

<sup>33</sup> "Myanmar detains police officers over Rohingya beating video," *BBC*, Jan. 2, 2017, accessed on Feb. 14, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-38487067>.

<sup>34</sup> Aya Chen, "The Development of a Muslim Enclave in Arakah (Rakhine) State of Burma (Myanmar)."

<sup>35</sup> "Arakan Report," *The Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief*.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*

In addition, for the local Rakhine people, “Rohingya” are seen as an immediate threat to unity and the preservation of culture and language.<sup>38</sup> In other words, Muslims, including “Rohingya,” are demographic threat to local Rakhine people. In the past, according to the British census, the population of Mahomedan that includes all “Chittagonian” and Muslims without any official recognition of “Rohingya” skyrocketed from 58,255 to 178,647 between 1871 and 1911 while that of Arakanese increased from 171,612 to 209,432 during the same period.<sup>39</sup> At present, the “Rohingya” group is already a majority in northern Rakhine, and local Rakhine people are concerned about the high birth rate of Muslim communities and illegal Bengali immigrants that can render them further outnumbered by Muslims.<sup>40</sup>

Local politics in Rakhine is one of the most important factors to consider in addressing the “Rohingya” crisis. The tension between local communities in Rakhine is a tinderbox that can explode as seen in the communal clashes in 2012. Together with the historical separatism and jihadism of the Muslims, the local Rakhine people have deep distrust of “Rohingya” since they worry about the establishment of Islamic law by Muslims in the region. Even the Kamanese, the Muslim community in Rakhine holding Myanmar citizenship, fears that “Rohingya” might seek a self-administered zone or separatism.<sup>41</sup> Given that the emergence of HaY can further deepen the cleavage between peoples in Rakhine, it is important that social integration and building mutual trust should be immediately pursued in advance to any discussion on granting citizenship to “Rohingya.”

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

At the time of independence, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar was established primarily based on the “unity in diversity” principle as building a union was imperative.<sup>42</sup> However, due to the long military rule legitimized by social instability, Myanmar is still a rudimentary democracy that hasn’t had time to harmonize the different values and interests of the 135 ethnic groups and other communities, including people in Rakhine. Even though the Myanmar government is accountable for the “Rohingya” crisis, there are obstacles such as unwelcome legacies of British rule including social, economic, and cultural imparities between social strata in Rakhine, nationalistic Buddhism, and fearful memories of jihadist and separatist movements that stimulate suspicion of the identity of “Rohingya.” In the meantime, the priorities of the “Rohingya” community are recognition, citizenship, and human rights.<sup>43</sup> The objectives of “Rohingya” should be met in a way that addresses the causes of the impasse in the humanitarian situation in Rakhine, which is a gradual social integration.

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<sup>38</sup> “Myanmar: The Politics of Rakhine State,” *International Crisis Group*.

<sup>39</sup> Aya Chen, “The Development of a Muslim Enclave in Arakah (Rakhine) State of Burma (Myanmar).”

<sup>40</sup> “Myanmar: The Politics of Rakhine State,” *International Crisis Group*.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid*

<sup>42</sup> Martin T. Smith, “Ethnic Politics and Regional Development in Myanmar: The Need for New Approach,” in *Myanmar Beyond Politics to Societal Imperatives*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asia Studies, 2005), p.62

<sup>43</sup> “Myanmar: The Politics of Rakhine State,” *International Crisis Group*.

It is important to find a neutral term for referring to “Rohingya.” Flexibility has already been seen in the positions of the Myanmar government and the “Rohingya” group. In 2016, Aung San Suu Kyi called on government officials to not call “Rohingya” “Bengali.”<sup>44</sup> Some leaders of the “Rohingya” expressed willingness to compromise on the term “Rohingya” while they expressed a firm opposition to the label of “Bengali.”<sup>45</sup> With new terminology, the Myanmar government can reduce their discomfort incurred from use of “Rohingya” by the international community, and the “Rohingya” group can make other demands more legitimate. However other peoples in Rakhine are opposed. In the middle of 2016, there were anti-Muslim protests against a neutral terminology in Rakhine by saying, “Bengalis should be called Bengalis.”<sup>46</sup> In addition, Kamanese don’t support “Rohingya” identity due to suspicion about separatism although they expressed their sympathy for “Rohingya” as another Muslim group.<sup>47</sup> In this regard, the recognition issue should be addressed through enhancing social acceptance of “Rohingya” by people in Rakhine.

The Myanmar government might not be able to control all national affairs given the military’s power and influence. However, they can play their role as a facilitator and initiator to enhance the social acceptance of “Rohingya” with a long-term perspective. These processes can begin with education encompassing the cultures and social values of each community. In so doing, the Buddhist community in Rakhine can learn about the meaning of diversity while “Rohingya” can understand social values of Myanmar, including the Burmese language, as preparation for becoming full members of Myanmar society. When it is necessary, interfaith dialogue can be promoted to bridge religious gaps to achieve mutual recognition.

As to citizenship, the Myanmar government should consider full citizenship for babies of parents living in Myanmar. The strong political will of the National League of Democracy (NLD) can lead to amendment of the Citizenship Law of 1982 although this option may take a while to gain support. A transformation of the partially descendent-based citizenship system to a birth-based one has three significant implications. First, full citizenship to newborns will be a strong signal to the international community that Myanmar is fully abiding by the Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which they are party since 1991. Second, full citizenship can assure “Rohingya” of basic human rights that might be subject to deprivation in case of associate and naturalized citizens.<sup>48</sup> Third, a transition to a birth-based citizenship system indicates a concrete and sincere commitment by the Myanmar government, which can contribute to preventing ideologically driven radicalization of the HaY.

In regard to human rights, it is imperative for “Rohingya” to persuade the HaY to stop armed aggression since it can legitimize persecution and greater involvement of the

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<sup>44</sup> “Mass anti-Muslim protests in Rakhine,” *The Straits Times*, July 4, 2016, accessed on Feb. 14, 2017, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/mass-anti-muslim-protests-in-rakhine>.

<sup>45</sup> “Myanmar: The Politics of Rakhine State,” *International Crisis Group*.

<sup>46</sup> “Mass anti-Muslim protests in Rakhine,” *The Straits Times*.

<sup>47</sup> “Myanmar: The Politics of Rakhine State,” *International Crisis Group*.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid*

military in northern Rakhine.<sup>49</sup> In addition, if the aggression continues, it can attract external jihadists such as ISIS into Rakhine under the justification of helping “Rohingya.” In the worst cases, “Rohingya” can be exploited by external jihadists for ideological purposes.<sup>50</sup> When the “Rohingya” community achieves its goals, it might be hard to ask the jihadists to leave Rakhine since they may pursue establishment of Islamic law in Rakhine. Also, if “Rohingya” give an impression to the outside world that their goals were obtained through armed aggression, it could galvanize religious terrorism globally.

While the Myanmar government can make better efforts to provide support for basic human rights such as education and health care to “Rohingya,” there should be enhanced cooperation both regionally and globally. At the regional level, all ASEAN member states should demonstrate solidarity for the “Rohingya” crisis as they did when Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar in 2008. Instead of closing their door to “Rohingya” refugees, ASEAN countries need to provide shelter and basic human needs to “Rohingya” refugees. In addition, it is desirable for ASEAN members to collaborate in the areas of border controls and fight against terrorism since any connection with external jihadists and possible radicalization of the HaY can pose a threat to regional stability.

At the international level, humanitarian aid by NGOs and international agencies should be provided in an impartial manner. Rakhine is one of the most underdeveloped states in Myanmar, and the poverty incidence in Rakhine was increased while most of other states were decreased.<sup>51</sup> The local Rakhine people are suffering from economic marginalization while they perceive that more attention is given to “Rohingya” by the international community.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to ensure that aid is provided based on better understanding of local sentiment to avoid deepening grievances in Rakhine. All those activities need to be conducted in close consultation with the Myanmar government to enhance effectiveness by dismissing distrust among stakeholders. At the same time, there should be continuing vigilance on the humanitarian situation in Rakhine as well as in Myanmar to prevent complacency on the part of the government to help Myanmar achieve national unity.

There are multiple and intertwined causes of the “Rohingya” problems in Myanmar. The Myanmar government may regard the “Rohingya” issue as one of many social imperatives but it should show more political will to resolve it. In the military’s view, the HaY is a new enemy but not all “Rohingya” belong to the HaY and all persons deserve human dignity. For the general population and the Buddhists in Rakhine, they should try to learn and practice the meaning of diversity. Leaders of “Rohingya” must make clear that they are not interested in establishing a self-administered zone or an independent state to

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<sup>49</sup> “Myanmar: A New Muslim Insurgency in Rakhine State,” *International Crisis Group*.

<sup>50</sup> Eilish O’Gara, “ISIS look to recruit Rohingya Muslims fleeing Myanmar,” *Newsweek*, June 2, 2015, accessed on Dec. 13, 2016, <http://europe.newsweek.com/isis-look-recruit-rohingya-muslims-fleeing-myanmar-328087?rx=us>.

<sup>51</sup> Stephan Schmitt-Degenhardt, “A regional perspective on poverty in Myanmar,” *United Nations Development Programme*, August 2013, accessed on Feb. 14, 2017, <http://www.se.undp.org/content/dam/sweden/Rapporteur/A%20regional%20perspective%20on%20poverty%20in%20Myanmar.pdf>.

<sup>52</sup> “Myanmar: The Politics of Rakhine State,” *International Crisis Group*.



relieve the concerns of separatism and jihadism that can block any possibility for breakthrough for their pain. Lastly, the international community should not judge the “Rohingya” issues solely based on its standards and prisms without understanding domestic issues. There must be patience and understanding that the grievances and discomforts of all communities in Rakhine as well as national sentiment should be addressed. Without patience, prudence, and public support, any political decision on the “Rohingya” issues in Rakhine would generate more social, economic, and political problems and violence.



# APPENDIX A

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## **APPENDIX B**

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