



Testimony for the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)

Honorable Commissioners, thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. My name is Yasmin Ullah, and I am currently the executive director of a Rohingya led, women-led and refugee-led organization called Rohingya Maiyafuinor Collaborative network. Our mandate focuses on protection and rehabilitation of Rohingya in Burma and in exile.

Out of the 3 million Rohingya population today, only 1 percent live in freedom according to Doctors without Borders.¹ Majority of that 1 percent is resettled in various parts of the US. Our community has faced decades of systemic violence, displacement, and persecution, most recently during the 2017 genocidal campaign by the Burmese military. As of today, the crisis for the Rohingya people continues, both within Burma and in the refugee camps across Southeast Asia. We are at a pivotal moment in history, and it is crucial that the United States, alongside the international community, take immediate and decisive action to address our plight.

Over 90% of the Rohingya population remains displaced, both internally within Burma and externally in neighboring countries like Bangladesh. This displacement is a direct result of the genocidal campaign waged against us by the Burmese military in 2017, and it continues due to the instability within Burma, exacerbated by the junta and armed groups like the Arakan Army (AA). The situation is dire, and recent developments have only worsened our conditions.

Current Conditions for Rohingya in the Asia Pacific region:

- **January 8th Airstrikes in Ramree Township:**
 - The military launched airstrikes on Kyauk Ni Maw village in AA-controlled Ramree Township, killing at least 41 people and injuring 52, both Rohingya and Rakhine civilians.
 - Over 600 homes were destroyed, and it is believed that the military specifically targeted densely populated civilian areas.
- **Detention and Deportation in Bangladesh (Jan 5-25):**
 - Bangladesh detained at least 124 Rohingya refugees who crossed the border from Burma, with 94 deported back to Burma.
 - On January 26, the US government exempted its nutrition aid program for Rohingya from a funding freeze, and on January 28, a global waiver was issued for essential lifesaving services.
- **Rohingya Boat Arrivals in Southeast Asia (January):** heightened trends of online **misinformation, disinformation and hate speech against Rohingya** as researched by my

¹ Doctors without Borders. (2023). *Behind the Wire* | Doctors Without Borders APAC. Doctorswithoutborders-Apac.org. <https://doctorswithoutborders-apac.org/en/behind-the-wire>



network has resulted in real-life violence against Rohingya refugees in ASEAN region especially in the following forced deportation and detainment of Rohingya refugees– 75% of which are women and children².

- **January 3 (Langkawi, Malaysia):** Malaysian police detained 196 Rohingya, including 57 women and 71 children, after their boat ran aground. The Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) increased patrols and was aware of two other boats with Rohingya, though their locations were unknown.
- **January 5 (Langkawi, Malaysia):** MMEA intercepted two boats with nearly 300 Rohingya off the coast and expelled them from Malaysian waters. The agency provided food and water before expelling them and was coordinating with Thai authorities to track further boats.
- **January 5 (East Aceh, Indonesia):** Two boats carrying 264 Rohingya, including 147 women, arrived near West Peureulak. One boat sank offshore, but all passengers made it ashore. Indonesian authorities coordinated with UNHCR for their safety.
- **January 21 (Phuket Province, Thailand):** Thai police detained 49 Rohingya found along a beach. Originally, 75 passengers had departed from Bangladesh. The group was held in temporary shelter and planned to be sent to a third country.
- **January 29 (East Aceh, Indonesia):** A boat with 75 Rohingya, including 32 women and 4 toddlers, landed in Peureulak. Locals initially prevented it from landing but later allowed it. Local officials prevented disembarking until UNHCR and IOM staff arrived. Locals provided food while the passengers waited. Indonesian authorities claimed smugglers had intentionally damaged the boat's engine to avoid returning them to sea. The refugees stated they were heading to Malaysia from Cox's Bazar.³
- **Sri Lanka's Detention and Deportation (Dec-Jan):**
 - A boat with 102 Rohingya was detained in Sri Lanka in December 2024. Despite initial shelter, they faced deportation, leading to protests and calls for relocation. Sri Lanka's Human Rights Commission urged proper registration of refugees.
- **Rohingya's Concerns about Repatriation:**

² UNHCR. (2024, August 22). *Rohingya Refugee Crisis Explained*. [www.unrefugees.org](https://www.unrefugees.org/news/rohingya-refugee-crisis-explained/).
<https://www.unrefugees.org/news/rohingya-refugee-crisis-explained/>

³ Alternative ASEAN Network for Burma. (2025). *Coup Watch*. Alternative ASEAN Network for Burma.
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/18kaqPTzSxlibK15XkcyXrKD9xsSvAtV/view>



- Refugees in Cox's Bazar are uncertain about returning to their homes due to safety concerns under AA control. AA's historical persecution of Rohingya does not reassure that AA can engage with the sustainable repatriation of Rohingya in a good-faith manner.
- **Current Conditions for Rohingya in Burma:**
 - **Forced Conscription and Violent Displacement:**
 - In Rakhine state, the military junta controls only Sittwe, while most of the region is under the control of the Arakan Army (AA).
 - Rohingya men and boys, particularly those in IDP camps, are being forcibly conscripted by both the junta and AA to serve as human shields.
 - The junta recently transported over 600 Rohingya prisoners to Sittwe, raising concerns about forced conscription.
 - **Arakan Army's Forced Relocation of Rohingya:**
 - The AA is forcibly relocating Rohingya from northern Buthidaung Township to overcrowded "refugee camps" in southern Badaga village tract.
 - Rohingya are being threatened with relocation by February 28, 2025, and will not be allowed to return to their homes.
 - The AA's actions are part of what some describe as a "second wave of Rohingya genocide," with violence, dispossession, and forced conscription of men and boys.⁴
 - **Armed Robberies in Refugee Camps:**
 - Conditions for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh's camps are deteriorating, with increasing armed robberies and violence.
 - Recently, a robbery in the Kutupalang refugee camp left four people, including three children, seriously injured.
 - There is a growing need for enhanced security and protection within the camps to ensure the safety of the refugees.

Call to Action:

While the United States and its allies have shown support for the Rohingya in various ways, there are still significant gaps in addressing the ongoing crisis. I present the following action items for immediate action and continued pressure:

1. Accountability for Political Entities and Armed Groups, Including the Arakan Army:

The **Arakan Army (AA)**, like the military junta, must be held accountable for their violence against civilians. The AA has used Rohingya civilians as pawns in their conflict, increasing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) against Rohingya women and forcing displacement. **The National Unity Government (NUG)** and the **National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC)** must set an example of "no

⁴ Alternative ASEAN Network for Burma. (2025). *Coup Watch*. Alternative ASEAN Network for Burma. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/18kaqPTzSxlibK15XkcyXrKD9xsZSvAtV/view>



tolerance for impunity" especially within the resistance movement. They must take action to prevent further violations by armed groups and ensure the protection of civilians, especially the Rohingya. If Rakhine political entities seek legitimacy in a future democratic Burma, they must demonstrate a commitment to the rights and safety of the Rohingya. **Any political group** involved in the abuse or persecution of the Rohingya and other ethnic or religious groups must not be allowed to maintain power or influence in a future Burma.

The U.S. stakeholders should continue to apply pressure on the NUG and Rakhine political entities to demonstrate genuine commitment to human rights and to hold the AA accountable for its actions.

2. Regional Action and ASEAN's Role:

The Rohingya crisis is not confined to Burma alone but is a regional issue. ASEAN has been ineffective in responding to the ongoing atrocities. **The United States must continue to push ASEAN** to step up its response, ensuring that countries like **Bangladesh**, Indonesia, **Malaysia** and Thailand provide protections to Rohingya refugees. The U.S. should also push ASEAN to end the **complicity of regional governments** that support or ignore the actions of the military junta and armed groups like the AA.

3. Support for Transitional Justice and Accountability Mechanisms:

The U.S. must continue to advocate for a meaningful transitional justice process for the Rohingya people. Support for **international mechanisms**, like the **International Criminal Court (ICC)** and **International Court of Justice (ICJ)**, is critical to ensure accountability for crimes against humanity committed by both the Burmese military and armed groups like the AA.

Conclusion:

The situation for the Rohingya is beyond urgent. **We remain displaced, disenfranchised, and threatened by the ongoing violence from both the junta and the Arakan Army.** The international community, led by the United States, must act decisively to ensure the protection and inclusion of the Rohingya in the future of Burma. We demand **recognition of our ethnic nationality, accountability for all perpetrators of violence**, and the inclusion of the Rohingya in a **democratic, inclusive Burma**. The U.S. must continue its support for our people, holding both the military junta and armed groups like the Arakan Army accountable, while pressuring regional actors to protect refugees and work toward a peaceful, voluntary return for displaced Rohingya.

We are at a crossroads. The time to act is now. The Rohingya community stands firm in our demand for justice, peace, and a place at the table in Burma's future. Thank you for your continued support and for listening to our plea for action.