



STAND Statement on the Escalation of Violence Against the Rohingya

One year ago today, we at STAND: The Student-Led Movement to End Mass Atrocities wrote a letter to President Barack Obama urging him not to lift sanctions on Burma due to “a number of pressing issues threatening the stability of the country and its most vulnerable people.” Tragically, we are now writing once again to express our grave concern regarding the widespread crackdown by the Burmese military against Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine state.

After the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), an insurgent group fighting against the continued denial of human rights to the Rohingya, attacked several police posts and an army base on August 25, the Burmese military began a vicious military campaign, indiscriminately targeting Rohingya communities. Soldiers are burning villages to the ground as well as raping and killing hundreds of Rohingya civilians, some of whom have been beheaded or burned alive.

According to multiple Bangladeshi officials, including Lieutenant Colonel Ariful Islam, Burmese security forces have planted land mines along the border with Bangladesh, targeting the over 300,000 Rohingya refugees attempting to escape the violence. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum recently condemned these atrocities as “ethnic cleansing,” affirming a widely-held belief that warning signs on the ground suggest an impending genocide.

Given the gross human rights abuses in Burma as well as the regional implications caused by the escalating humanitarian crisis, STAND calls on both the United States and the international community to undertake five specific actions essential to ending the current violence and establishing the structural conditions for peace.

While STAND does not condone the violence of any party to the conflict, we are particularly alarmed by the disproportionate and indiscriminate force employed by the Burmese military against Rohingya civilians. A few policymakers in the House and Senate have attempted to draw attention to the violence targeting this Muslim minority and United States Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley recently called on the Burmese military to abide by international and humanitarian law. Yet both President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson have remained appallingly silent. Both must publicly **condemn violence being committed against Rohingya in Burma.**

The regional implications of the violence in Burma are significant. Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya are living in horrid conditions in refugee camps just inside Bangladesh. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, there is no remaining shelter capacity and numerous refugees, many of whom are starving or wounded, have been forced to build makeshift shelters. Moreover, there is some indication that the violence against the Rohingya will worsen ethnic tensions throughout the region among Muslims and Buddhists. As such, STAND believes the United States must **allocate increased aid to the region, particularly to organizations on the front lines of the displacement crisis in Burma and neighboring countries.**



It is also imperative that actors within the United States government draw attention to the one year anniversary of the decision to lift sanctions on Burma due to the lack of promised human rights progress and calling for key improvements to the status and treatment of the Rohingya.

One year ago, STAND led the opposition to lifting sanctions, viewing the move as preemptively permissive and perhaps emboldening. The inaction of the Burmese government and attacks by the Burmese military have confirmed this prediction. Any future conversations between the two countries should reference and apply pressure on this point. At a minimum, Congress must not follow through a legislative proposal to increase military cooperation with Burma as a geopolitical strategy intended to reduce Chinese influence in the region. Instead, STAND calls on senators to support Senate Amendment 607 in the National Defense Authorization Act, which would **defund military assistance to the Burmese military**. Geopolitics must not reign supreme over respect for human rights and international law and justice.

While other organs of the United Nations have begun to mobilize, the United Nations Security Council has yet to take definitive action in Burma. In light of the recent statement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein "call[ing] on the government to end its current cruel military operation, with accountability for all violations that have occurred and reverse the pattern of severe and widespread discrimination against the Rohingya population," the Security Council must **conclude its meeting on Wednesday with a resolution demanding that the Burmese military allow humanitarian aid into the country and permit humanitarian groups, journalists, and third-party fact-finding missions into the country** to investigate the extent of the alleged human rights abuses.

Finally, all involved parties should **support and advocate for the provision of full Burmese citizenship to the Rohingya**. The statelessness of the Rohingya prevents them from accessing employment, housing, government benefits, and beyond, adding to their collective powerlessness and persecution. STAND calls on all parties interacting with the government of Burma to raise this issue in addition to a cessation of violence and discriminatory targeting.

For the last year, STAND has focused on early warning, prevention efforts and fundraising for local peacebuilding projects. The recent escalation of violence, however, has demonstrated that these efforts alone are insufficient. Stronger action is required from the international community in order to ensure the steadfast promise of "never again."