



FIDH - International Federation for Human Rights

its member organization for Burma

Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma (ALTSEAN-Burma)

and its member organization in Bangladesh

Odhikar

Joint press release

Burma: UN body urged to establish a Commission of Inquiry into recent atrocities in Rakhine State

Paris, Bangkok, Dhaka, 3 March 2017: The Human Rights Council should establish a United Nations (UN)-mandated Commission of Inquiry or similar international mechanism to investigate serious human rights violations in Burma, particularly the country's northern Rakhine State, FIDH, its member organizations Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma (ALTSEAN-Burma) and Odhikar, and 10 other leading organizations said today.

In a letter addressed to the members of the UN Human Rights Council, the organizations called on the body to adopt a resolution during its 34th session to establish a Commission of Inquiry or similar international mechanism, tasked with determining facts, identifying alleged perpetrators, and making recommendations for appropriate remedies for the victims in northern Rakhine State.

“The gravity and scale of documented human rights violations against Rohingya necessitate a UN-mandated independent investigation. The Human Rights Council must live up to its name and fulfil its mandate to address atrocities committed by Burma’s security forces against Rohingya,” said FIDH President Dimitris Christopoulos.

Since October 2016, four official commissions have been set up to investigate the situation in northern Rakhine State. Regrettably, all of these commissions lack the independence, impartiality, human rights and technical expertise, and mandate necessary to conduct a credible and effective investigation, the letter said. These four commissions are in addition to an advisory commission established by Burma’s State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi on 24 October 2016. However, this commission, composed of nine members, including three international experts with former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan as its chair, excludes any investigation into reports of human rights violations.

Both the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein and the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burma Yanghee Lee have recently recommended the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry to investigate the situation in Rakhine State.

“The Burmese government is either unable or unwilling to investigate the widespread and systematic human rights violations against Rohingya. A Commission of Inquiry is the only viable option to create an impartial body to establish facts, identify perpetrators, and make recommendations for appropriate remedies for the victims,” said ALTSEAN-Burma Coordinator and FIDH Secretary-General Debbie Stothard.

Since 9 October 2016, Burma’s security forces have carried out large-scale attacks against the Rohingya population in Rakhine State’s Maungdaw, Buthidaung, and Rathedaung Townships, as part of what the government has euphemistically described as ‘clearance operations’ in response to attacks on three police border posts by armed assailants.

These ‘clearance operations’ have resulted in widespread and systematic human rights violations against men, women, and children, including: extrajudicial killings; enforced disappearances; torture and other ill-treatment, notably rape and other crimes of sexual violence; arbitrary arrests and detention; forced displacement; and destruction and looting of homes, food, and other property.

A ‘flash report’ released on 3 February 2017 by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented serious human rights violations against the Rohingya population in northern Rakhine State and concluded that the attacks against Rohingya during the prolonged crackdown could “very likely” amount to crimes against humanity. UN officials estimated that more than 1,000 Rohingya might have been killed in the crackdown. In addition, military and police operations resulted in the displacement of at least 97,000 Rohingya, including approximately 73,000 who fled to Bangladesh.

“The statements by Rohingya refugees who recently fled to Bangladesh provide compelling evidence of the shocking brutalities to which they were subjected at the hands of Burma’s security forces. The international community must urgently address these atrocities,” said Odhikar Secretary and FIDH Vice-President Adilur Rahman Khan.

At such a critical juncture in Burma’s history, the establishment of a UN-mandated international Commission of Inquiry or similar international mechanism is a minimum requirement and a measure that can significantly contribute to preventing further atrocities against Rohingya and other minorities at risk in Burma, the letter concluded.

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