



## Myanmar

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# UN official likens Rohingya living conditions to Nazi concentration camps

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Hundreds of thousands of [Rohingya](#) muslims in Myanmar are living in concentration camps and urban ghettos like those in Nazi-occupied Europe, a UN investigator has said.

Christopher Sidoti, a member of the UN fact-finding mission into crimes against the Rohingya that last year accused Myanmar's military of genocide, warned the crisis is far from over for the persecuted minority.

Sidoti said 128,000 people forced from their homes by violence are now in camps in central Rakhine and urban ghettos, living in conditions that he likened to those endured by Jewish people under the Nazis.

Rohingya people remaining in Myanmar live in villages where their movements are severely curtailed and their rights to get married and have children are strictly controlled, he said.

“There are concentration camps - let's call it what it is - with 128,000 internally displaced people in central Rakhine, outside Sittwe,” said Sidoti. “In Sittwe, there are three areas where

Rohingya people live and they have become urban ghettos like those Jews lived in under Nazi-occupied Europe.”

Sidoti, a keynote speaker at a conference on the Rohingya crisis at University College London on Thursday, added: “The mass expulsions and shootings may have stopped, the military may have achieved their purpose - the makeup of the Rakhine state has changed - but the crisis is not over.”

There are only an estimated 400,000 to 500,000 Rohingya left in Myanmar, he said, compared with 2 or 3 million in 2012.

“We said a year ago there were circumstances to give rise to an inference of genocidal intent,” Sidoti said.

“What has happened in the past two years has strengthened the genocidal intent. Villagers are still isolated, and their movement restricted; fishermen can’t go to fish and kids can’t go to school. They need written permission from the authorities to travel any distances, and permission to marry and have children. You might need six different written approvals, from six different authorities, to go to hospital. The whole thing has been calculated to watch them fade away.”

Sidoti said he expected the panel’s new report, which will be published in the next few months, to say that the inference of genocide has “strengthened”.

His comments came as the UN warned that civilians in Rakhine and Chin states may be suffering fresh war crimes and human rights violations as fighting between military and rebel groups intensified.

Speaking to the UN human rights council (UNHRC), Yanghee Lee, the UN special rapporteur on Myanmar, detailed accounts of abduction and torture of civilians by both the Myanmar army and the rebel insurgent group the Arakan Army, which is fighting for greater autonomy in the region.

“The conflict with the Arakan Army in northern Rakhine state and parts of southern Chin state has continued over the past few months and the impact on civilians is devastating,” Lee told the UNHRC on Tuesday. “Many acts of the *Tatmadaw* [Myanmar armed forces] and the Arakan Army violate international humanitarian law and may amount to war crimes, as well as violating human rights.”

Speaking to the Guardian after her address to the council, Lee said the situation was worsening by the day and that the UN security council needed to draw up a resolution swiftly condemning the actions of the Myanmar military.

It was in Rakhine state that the Myanmar military carried out its violent clampdown on the Muslim Rohingya community in August 2017, razing villages, killing thousands and sending almost 800,000 Rohingya over the border to Bangladesh in attacks that the [UN has since described](#) as ethnic cleansing and having “genocidal intent”.

The fresh wave of violence in the state is now between security forces and the rebel army of ethnic Rakhine Buddhist fighters, which has been escalating since January, resulting in more than 35,000 people fleeing their homes.

With media and humanitarian organisations barred from entering the conflict areas, accurate information is hard to verify, though it is thought that the Tatmadaw have now posted about 35,000 troops in the area, with more arriving in recent days.

Lee recounted numerous incidents of human rights violations, including reports of the Myanmar military opening fire from a helicopter on civilians collecting bamboo, forced labour, looting of houses and attacks on monasteries suspected of housing those fleeing violence.

There have also been multiple deaths of civilians taken into custody by the Tatmadaw, most recently Zaw Win Hlaing, who was detained in mid-June and died from injuries on Monday, which his mother told local media had been caused by him being beaten by rocks.

The Arakan Army was also culpable for abuses, added Lee, including the abduction of 12 construction workers in the village of Paletwa and another 52 villagers living near the Bangladesh border.

In an unprecedented move, in June the Myanmar military ordered a [telecommunications blackout across eight townships in Rakhine](#) state and one in neighbouring Chin state, cutting access to phones and internet, which is still in place. Lee and other human rights groups such as Human Rights Watch and Fortify Rights said the blackout was being used to cover up the abuses being carried out in the region.

It is thought the internet blackout is also being used by the Myanmar military to prevent financial transactions going through to the Arakan Army.

Lee, who has been banned from visiting Myanmar by the government, repeated her previous call for Myanmar to be referred to the international criminal court (ICC) for war crimes. Myanmar is not a signatory to the Rome statute and is not under the jurisdiction of the ICC, but the [court ruled last year that it could prosecute Myanmar](#) for alleged crimes against humanity against the Rohingya people.

Lee said: “So long as impunity for alleged atrocity crimes prevails, we will continue to bear witness to flagrant violations of rights perpetrated against ethnic minority populations in the name of counterinsurgency, entrenching grievances and prolonging insecurity and instability.”

On Thursday, Fatou Bensouda, the international criminal court prosecutor, filed a request to open a formal investigation of crimes against humanity allegedly committed against the Rohingya.

Bensouda said she wants to investigate crimes of deportation, inhumane acts and persecution allegedly committed as the Rohingya fled Myanmar - which is not a member of the global court - into Bangladesh, which is an ICC member.