

Briefing Note – 14 October 2016

# MYANMAR

## Violence in Rakhine state



Need for international assistance	Not required	Low	Moderate	Significant	Urgent
		X			
Expected impact	Insignificant	Minor	Moderate	Significant	Major
		X			

### Crisis overview

Three border posts along the Myanmar–Bangladesh border were attacked on 9 October. Nine police officers were killed, as well as eight attackers. It remains unclear who the assailants are, but reports indicate that at least 90 people were behind the seemingly well-coordinated operation. In a response, the Myanmar Army has deployed more troops into the northern Rakhine area, comprised of Maungdaw, Buthidaung, and Rathedaung townships, and has conducted a security operation. At least 26 people have since been killed in raids and skirmishes. A state of emergency has been declared.



Northern Rakhine, Radio Free Asia 10/10/2016

### Key findings

#### Anticipated scope and scale

At least 26 people have been killed by the Myanmar Army in northern Rakhine. Some are accusing the Rohingya of having perpetrated the border post attacks, and there are concerns that the Myanmar Army will focus its operations on the Rohingya, and that tensions between majority Buddhist population and minority Rohingya may again descend into violence.

In 2012, at least 100 people, mainly Rohingya, were killed when intercommunal tensions escalated.

#### Priorities for humanitarian intervention

**Protection:** The state of emergency and curfew limit the population's mobility. Raids have reportedly killed 26 people.

**Livelihoods:** Restrictions on the freedom of movement, and the closure of shops and markets, make it difficult for the population of northern Rakhine to pursue livelihood opportunities.

**Education:** Over 400 schools in northern Rakhine have been ordered to close on 10 October.

#### Humanitarian constraints

Access into northern Rakhine has reportedly been restricted. In order to conduct raids, the military has reportedly closed roads and waterways. The border with Bangladesh has also been closed.

#### Limitations

There is limited information available on the immediate consequences from the border attacks and ensuing military raids. As the raids are ongoing and the perpetrators of the attack have not yet been identified, it remains unclear how wider society will react to the Rohingya community after the recent incidents.

## Crisis impact

On 9 October, three border posts along the Myanmar–Bangladesh border in northern Rakhine were attacked starting at 0130 local time (1800 GMT 8 October) by unknown assailants (Myanmar Times 10/10/2016). At least nine police officers were killed, and four were injured; eight attackers were also killed (New York Times 10/10/2016; Myanmar Times 10/10/2016). One policeman is missing (Bernama 10/10/2016).

In response to the attack, the Myanmar Army has airlifted more troops to the area and launched a security operation on 10 October. Raids have been carried out in all three townships: Maungdaw, Buthidaung, and Rathedaung (Reuters 10/10/2016). As of 13 October, the Myanmar Army is believed to have killed 26 people – and claims that all were perpetrators of the border post attacks (Reuters 13/10/2016).

During the raids, the Myanmar Army met resistance from armed men in Pyaung Pit village, Maungdaw township. On 11 October, four soldiers were killed. They were reportedly ambushed by 300 armed attackers, who were presumably involved in the raids (Reuters 11/10/2016; Myanmar Times 13/10/2016).

The attacks appear to have been well-coordinated. The number of assailants reported varies from 90 to 800 (Business Insider 11/10/2016, International Crisis Group 12/10/2016). They reportedly seized 51 weapons and 10,000 rounds of ammunition (Myanmar Times 10/10/2016). State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi stated on 13 October that no allegations will be made as long as the identity of the attackers remains unclear (Mizzima 13/10/2016). However, local authorities and other local sources have claimed the attacks were carried out by the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation, an armed group representing the Rohingya Muslim minority, who are mostly located in northern Rakhine (Myanmar Times 10/10/2016). Videos have circulated, reportedly made by the attackers, where Rohingya are called upon to join jihad (International Crisis Group 12/10/2016).

**Protection:** A state of emergency was declared in Maungdaw, Buthidaung, and Rathedaung townships after the attacks (Irrawaddy 10/10/2016). A previous state of emergency had been lifted at the end of March, having been in place since the intercommunal violence of 2012 (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect 15/09/2016). An existing curfew was extended on 9 October and now runs from 1900–0600 (Myanmar Times 10/10/2016). Gatherings of five people or more are not allowed (Business Insider 11/10/2016). People living in Maungdaw township are reportedly not allowed to leave the area (NY Times 12/10/2016). On 12 October, villagers reportedly attempted to flee Maungdaw township (Frontier Myanmar 12/10/2016).

The Myanmar Army claimed to have killed four armed attackers during raids on 10 October, yet human rights groups stated that they killed seven unarmed Rohingya villagers who were reportedly fleeing (Radio Free Asia 11/10/2016).

The Myanmar Army and local state authorities hold the Rohingya responsible for the attacks, giving rise to concerns that the Myanmar Army will scapegoat the Rohingya population and use the attacks as a pretext for a violent crackdown on the Rohingya (Wall Street Journal 11/10/2016; AFP 14/10/2016).

**Livelihoods:** Shops in Maungdaw have closed following the attacks, restricting access to food and causing losses to shopowners (Myanmar Times 10/10/2016). Markets also remain closed (Business Insider 11/10/2016). The increased restriction of movement hinders Rohingya access to work and income.

**Education:** Over 400 schools in Maungdaw, Buthidaung, and Rathedaung townships were ordered closed on 10 October. Teachers have reportedly fled the area (AFP 12/10/2016; Myanmar Times 11/10/2016).

**Shelter:** Houses and villages have reportedly been burned (AFP 14/10/2016; Libération 12/10/2016). The Myanmar Army accused some of the alleged assailants of burning 25 houses on 12 October in Kyetyoepyin village, Maungdaw (Reuters 13/10/2016).

## Humanitarian and operational constraints

- Waterways in Rakhine have been closed by naval forces (Myanmar Times 10/10/2016).
- Several roads have reportedly been closed in order for the army to conduct raids (Radio Free Asia 10/10/2016).
- The border between Myanmar and Bangladesh has been closed (Reuters 10/10/2016).
- Journalists are reportedly not allowed in the area (BBC 12/10/2016).
- Curfews and the state of emergency may affect aid agencies' ability to operate.

## Contextual information

### Status of Rohingya minority

The Rohingya are a Muslim minority of around 1.1 million people, who are widely discriminated against by the predominantly Buddhist society. The 1982 Citizenship Law, which excluded Rohingya from the list of national races, and stripped them of their citizenship, exacerbated discrimination. The Myanmar government refers to Rohingya

as 'Bengali', indicating that they are illegal immigrants (OCHA 30/11/2015). Rohingya are allowed to have a maximum of two children, but birth certificates are not issued to Rohingya children (HRW 01/16). Rohingya are restricted in their movement, with limited ability to leave their townships or IDP sites (ECHO 29/05/2016).

Nationalist Buddhists maintain their hardline stance against Rohingya, and protests have erupted in 2016 over any form of acknowledgment of the Rohingya. These include the US ambassador's referral to the Rohingya by their name, rather than as 'Bengali' or 'illegals', and Aung San Suu Kyi's announcement that the UN will conduct research on the human rights situation of the Rohingya (AFP 06/09/2016).

In late September, the Rakhine state government announced a plan to demolish mosques and other religious buildings constructed without permission in northern Rakhine. These include 12 mosques, 35 religious schools, and 2,500 houses (Radio Free Asia 11/10/2016; Radio Free Asia 20/09/2016). Some believe the attacks were carried out in response to this announcement.

## Intercommunal violence in 2012

Intercommunal violence between Buddhists and Rohingya surged in 2012, after a Buddhist woman was found raped and murdered (CfE-DMHA 2014). At least 100 people, mostly Rohingya, died in attacks by both sides. Over 140,000 Rohingya were displaced to camps in Rakhine state. Since then, they have been forbidden to leave their townships and do not have access to basic services (HRW 01/16). An estimated 94,000 Rohingya fled to other countries via the Bay of Bengal (OCHA 30/11/2015).

**Protracted displacement:** An estimated 119,800 IDPs remain since 2012. 95% are in camps, and the remainder are located in host communities (OCHA 03/09/2016). As of 1 July, some 1,378 Rohingya IDPs were in nine camps in Maungdaw township (Myanmar Times 10/10/2016).

## Relevant stakeholders

**Myanmar Army:** The army, also known as the Tatmadaw, operates separately from the government, as part of the agreement that gave way to elections in 2015. Myanmar was governed by a one-state military party and later a junta from 1962 until 2010. In addition, the 2008 constitution ensures that 25% of seats are allocated to military officials, ensuring that the military enjoys an effective veto (Human Rights Watch 01/16). Next to the defence department, the military remains in control of internal affairs through the GAD, but also of policing and immigration through border and security affairs (Joliffe 27/08/2015). Over 510,000 soldiers are thought to be in the army (Myanmar Times 28/04/2016). Officially,

all soldiers are volunteers, yet according to soldiers themselves only 5–10% signed up voluntarily (Human Rights Watch 2007).

**Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO):** State authorities and local media have suggested the RSO is behind the attacks. However, international analysts have stated that this group is not known to have been active since 1990 (International Crisis Group 12/10/2016). The group has been described as defunct, and is not known to have bases in Myanmar (Asean Economist 09/10/2016). The RSO was also accused of being behind an attack on a police camp near the Bangladesh border on 18 May, which killed four police officers (Myanmar Times 26/05/2016).

## International and neighbouring countries' relationship to the conflict

Local state authorities and the Myanmar Army had suggested that the assailants hail from Bangladesh, where a large Rohingya community is present just across the border. Bangladeshi officials have denied this possibility (AFP 14/10/2016).

## Potential aggravating factors

### Underlying vulnerability

Rakhine is one of the poorest states in Myanmar, and livelihood opportunities and basic services are limited for all inhabitants (UN Human Rights Council 20/06/2016).

### Arakan Army conflict

Another conflict taking place in Rakhine is between the Arakan Army (AA) and the Myanmar Army. The AA, a non-state ethnic armed group, fights for the right to the self-determination of the Rakhine people (Buddhist Rakhine). The Myanmar Army and the AA clashed in mid-April, leading to the displacement of around 1,900 people in Buthidaung, Kyauktaw, and Rathedaung townships (OCHA 30/06/2016).

## Key characteristics in Rakhine state

**Population:** Rakhine state has around three million inhabitants (Wall Street Journal 11/10/2016). The exact number of Rohingya in Myanmar remains unclear as they are not included in official censuses, yet estimates put them at over one million. 90%–95% of Rohingya live in northern Rakhine, where they make up the majority of the population (International Crisis Group 12/10/2016; Physicians for Human Rights 11/10/2016).

**Shelter:** Displaced Rohingya in Rakhine have been living in shelters designed in 2013. The shelters were built to last for two years. During the May–October rainy season, these shelters are prone to flooding due to inadequate draining systems. Multiple families share one longhouse (IOM, UNHCR, CCCM Cluster & Shelter Cluster 23/09/2016).

**Food security and livelihoods:** Food security in Rakhine is impacted by movement restrictions, which mean Rohingya are unable to find legal work and provide for themselves. When Rohingya travel they often have to pay bribes at checkpoints that can be more than a month's wage. Work licences are difficult to obtain (Physicians for Human Rights 11/10/2016).

Food distributions to IDPs were halted as of July; only vulnerable IDPs received food assistance. The cut was aimed at preventing tensions between IDPs in camps who receive food rations, and host communities who do not. Food distributions in Rakhine are highly politicised as Rohingya who are outside IDP camps are not counted as displaced, and therefore not entitled to assistance (IRIN 11/10/2016).

**Nutrition:** Limited information is available on nutrition, although OCHA estimates that around 100,000 people in Rakhine are in need of nutrition assistance. Malnutrition is most prevalent in Maungdaw and Buthidaung townships. In Maungdaw, SAM levels were at 3.9% and in Buthidaung they stood at 2% at the end of November 2015 (OCHA 30/11/2015).

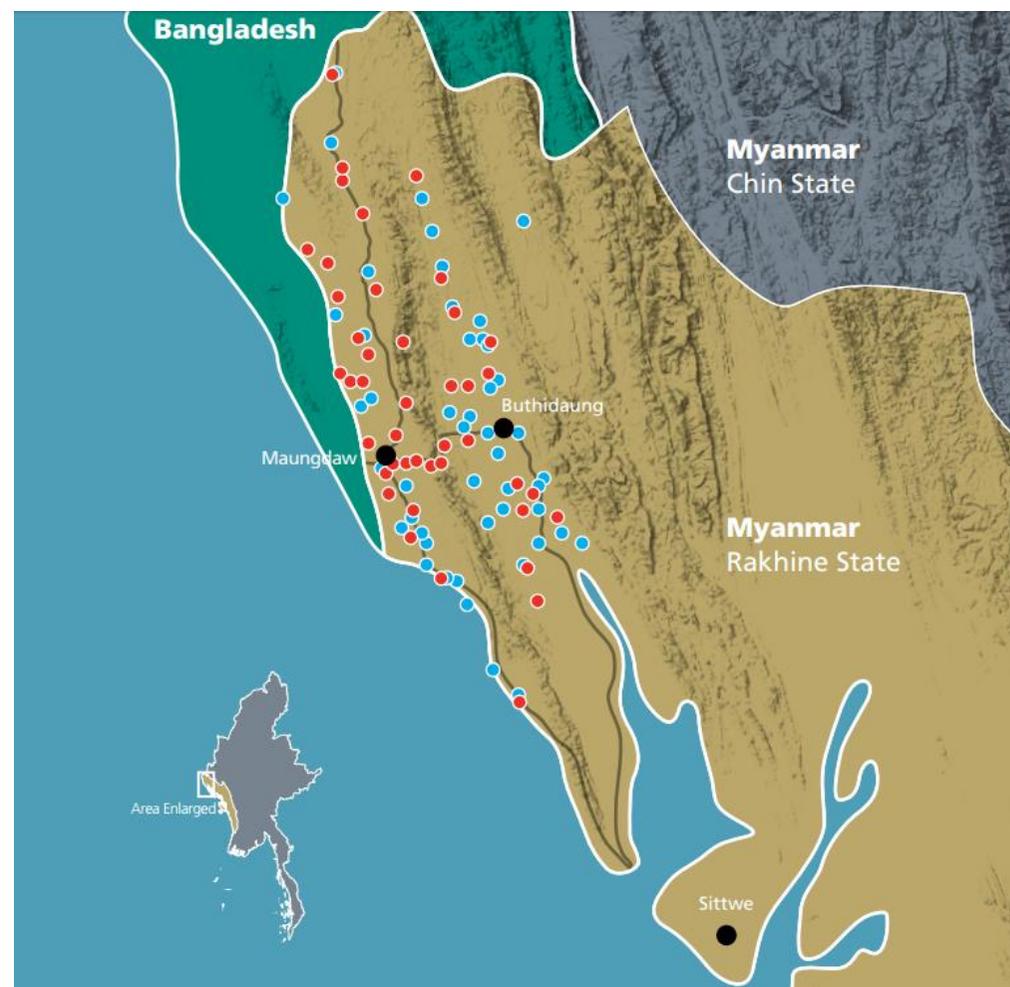
**WASH:** Water and sanitation infrastructure is in need of repair and maintenance in IDP camps in Rakhine. Every rainy season there is an increased risk of diarrhoeal diseases (OCHA 01/03/2016).

**Health:** Rohingya have limited access to health services or lifesaving healthcare (UN Human Rights Council 20/06/2016). In Buthidaung and Maungdaw townships, military checkpoints need to be passed in order to access most government clinics. Many Rohingya cannot access healthcare services for fear of abuse at the checkpoints (Physicians for Human Rights 11/10/2016).

**Education:** Rohingya are not allowed to attend university (UN Human Rights Council 20/06/2016; Physicians for Human Rights 11/10/2016).

**Protection:** Human rights abuses against Rohingya are common. They include, but are not limited to land confiscation, forced labour, extrajudicial killing, extortion, arbitrary arrest, and sexual violence (Physicians for Human Rights 11/10/2016). While reports on human rights abuses against the Rohingya are widespread, the Rakhine Buddhist population has also faced human rights abuses by the Myanmar Army. The army has often been accused of using divide-and-rule tactics to pit groups against each other (Physicians for Human Rights 11/10/2016).

## Location of military checkpoints and health clinics in northern Rakhine



**Key**  
 ● Checkpoint  
 ● City  
 ● Government Clinic

Physicians for Human Rights 11/10/2016

## Response capacity

### International response capacity

Since February 2016, at least 217 organisations are present in Myanmar. Of these, 16 are UN agencies, eight Red Cross organisations, 90 INGOs and 60 NNGOs (The MIMU 2016).

## Information gaps and needs

- Limited sectoral information on direct impacts of the recent violence.
- Limited information on how Rohingya undertake livelihood activities (legally or illegally).
- Unclear to what extent international organisations operate in northern Rakhine.

## Lessons learned

- Constrained access for international NGOs makes capacity building and institutional strengthening of local actors valuable (ALNAP 12/2008).
- Authorities have in the past accused Rohingya of involvement with armed extremists, and have used these accusations to impose further restrictions on their movement (Reuters 10/10/2016).
- The presence of state security forces is associated with increased human rights abuses and impacts on health and livelihoods in the same area (Physicians for Human Rights 11/10/2016).

Map of affected area

Myanmar: IDP Sites in Rakhine State (Jul 2016)

