



BURMESE ROHINGYA COMMUNITY IN AUSTRALIA.

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Introduction:

Burmese Rohingya Community in Australia Inc. (BRCA) was established on 10th November, 1999; however it was officially registered on 1st May, 2000 by Rohingya residents in Australia. It is a non profitable organization; moreover, it is not affiliated with any other political parties but it is very keen to cooperate with any other organization that has a greater degree of emphasis in enhancing the activities regarding the restoration of democracy and the improvement of the human rights in Burma.

The Rohingya, the Muslim ethnic minority, are amongst one of the ethnic minorities who are always subjected to persecutions by the ruling junta in Burma. The Rohingyas are generally living in the northern Arakan State, western Burma where as they are majority inhabitants however the authorities in Burma do not acknowledge the Rohingyas as the citizen of Burma. As a result of the maltreatment by the Burmese government there have been two major Rohingya refugee crises that took place in 1977 and 1992.

The Missions and the Goals:

To work towards the realization of the national democratic rights of the Rohingyas in solidarity with national democratic movements and the organization of the Rohingyas in Burma as well as the other Burmese minority organizations who are seeking to establish the recognitions of their rights as the citizens of Burma.

Objectives:

- 1) To propagate promote and publicize the genuine cause of the Rohingya indigenous nationals of Arakan, Burma and work towards the realization of their national democratic rights in solidarity with the national democratic movement(s) or organization(s) of the Rohingya in Burma.
- 2) To deliver lectures hold cultural events and slide shows concerning the plight of the Rohingya.
- 3) To provide forums for Rohingya refugees to tell their stories.
- 4) To maintain regular update information about the Rohingyas in and outside Burma.
- 5) To act for the restoration of true democracy in Burma.
- 6) To endeavour to bring the diverse forces of Rohingya community into a unified platform so as to attain their unflagging moral and material support contributing to the wellbeing of the entire community in all spheres of life viz socio-politics, culture, economics, education, thoughts and technology.
- 7) To represent the Rohingya community in socio-political platforms such as meetings, forums, seminars, assemblies, conferences and conventions etc. in and outside Australia.
- 8) To collaborate with other organizations, which subscribe to similar objective(s) thereby to forge fraternity, harmony and unity on national and international level.

- 9) To look after and take care of the welfare of members of the Rohingya community
- 10) To uphold democracy, justice, fair-play, egalitarianism, righteousness and oppose to despotism, oppression, repression, and wrongdoing.
- 11) To uphold the laws of Australia in word and spirit in all its activities.
- 12) To develop and strengthen friendship with multicultural Australia people.

The Current Situation of Rohingyas:

There are about 8million Muslims in Burma forming 15% of the country's 50million population. The Muslim population nearly half of them are in Arakan and they are ethnically known as Rohingya. The rest of the Muslims are scattered all over Burma. Due to continued persecution and ethnic cleansing about 1.5million Rohingyas have been living in exile, particularly in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Malaysia, Thailand etc.

Denial of Citizenship

The military regime has declared the Rohingya as the non-national under the pretext of the Burma Citizenship Law of 1982, which is just a tool for isolating and alienating the Rohingyas from benefiting the privileges as a citizen of Burma and in addition, the so-called the 1982 law violates the fundamental rights of human rights. Furthermore, it has striped the citizenship from the Rohingyas and labeled them as the stateless people.

The National Registration Cards (NRC) was issued to the Rohingyas earlier had been confiscated under the pretext of issuing new ones to them and as the replacement of the NRC cards the authorities have issued the Temporary Registration Cards (TRC) known as "White Card" to some Rohingyas. The most drastic point is that it downgrades the national status of Rohingya by putting them in a state of uncertainty.

Religious Persecution

The SPDC troops have intensified their attacks on Rohingya. Many mosques and Madrasas (religious schools) have been demolished. Repairs, renovation and construction of any mosques or religious institutes are prohibited. Many Waqf lands (religious Land) and graveyards are taken over by the authorities.

Furthermore, Buddhist-Muslim riots have been engineered by the ruling junta and often end up in heavy casualties of Muslims' live and properties. Anti-Muslim propagandas have been projected in media for example in February 2003, books and taped speeches that supports in the anti-Islamic activities, such as insulting Islam and Muslims had been publicly sold and distributed throughout the country.

Ethnic Cleansing

The regime very regularly launches drastic operations, creates riots, and makes forced relocation to sweep off the Muslim population such as the arbitrary arrest of Rohingyas and those particular individual who were arrested by the local authorities, never returned back to their families. The regime is therefore committing genocide against the Rohingyas.

Confiscation of land

Many lands that belonged to the Rohingyas' which includes farmlands, Waqf properties and numerous numbers of private properties were confiscated by the local authorities. Most of the Rohingya villagers were evicted from the villages where they were living for at least couple of decades and forcibly relocated into more remote area quiet often. In addition, those confiscated lands were distributed to the Buddhist settlers, who migrated to Maungdaw and Buthidaung from various parts of Burma and some Buddhist immigrants even migrated from the Bangladesh who were very much encouraged by ruling junta in settling down in the territories where the Rohingya people are living. The Rohingya therefore have become increasingly displaced, homeless and very much compelled to flee to neighboring Bangladesh.

In order to have a tight control in reducing the number of population of Rohingya and preventing the prosperity of Rohingya the ruling junta is very determined in increasing the number of army bases in Maungdaw and Buthidaung by building it through forced labor of Rohingya people such as the Rohingya people were forced to build the bridges, apartments, and the road that are required for the military facilities however during the course of those government projects the Rohingyas were never get paid for their labor and the Rohingyas therefore always remained jobless and experienced very sever economic hardship which eventually lead them in fleeing to neighboring Bangladesh.

Restriction of traveling

The traveling of Rohingyas is severely restricted and it has become more tightened over the last couple of years i.e. the Rohingyas are required to apply for the permission if they want to travel to the surrounding villages for visiting their relatives and with respect to, traveling to Rangoon is almost impossible for the Rohingyas therefore the Rohingyas people who are away from their families are experiencing extremely difficult situations in regard to the reunifications of their family members.

Education

Since Rohingyas were not acknowledged as the citizens of Burma and severe restriction of traveling has played a vital role in the sharp drop out in continuing their studies, for instance approximately 1200 students were not able to pursue their education due to the above cited factors.

Restriction on Marriage of Rohingyas

Since the creation of NaSaKa in 1992, the authorities in Northern Arakan State have reportedly introduced a regulation that the Rohingya populations in Northern Arakan State are required to ask for permission to get married. This restriction appears to be only enforced on the Muslim population in this area, and not on the Buddhist Rakhine population, nor on any of the other smaller ethnic minority groups living in the region.

Rohingyas and Muslims living in other parts of Arakan State, including the capital Akyab (Sittwe), also do not seem to be affected by this policy. In recent years, particularly during 2003, the authorities have begun to demand large amounts in taxes from people who ask for permission to get married. The authorities also appear to have limited the number of permissions given each year. In some cases people have had to wait for two to three years to get permission, even after paying large sums of money, and they had to go to the authorities for several times.

In general, most Rohingya couples must pay a substantial amount of money to the NaSaKa, varying from 50,000 to 300,000 kyat. Usually the bride and groom must each pay the same amount of money. After payment, permission is not always given. This restriction especially affects poor people, who are unable to obtain such large amount of money. There are also consistent reports of

young couples fleeing to Bangladesh because this is the only way for them to get married. Once in Bangladesh it is very difficult for them to return.

Sexual assault and Harassment

The authorities are forcibly organizing the Rohingya girls from the villages under the pretext of women development and there are reports of incidents of code of misconduct of these girls during the training. Under various pretexts, SPDC armed forces intruded the houses of Rohingya villagers in odd times and seized and carried away the women to their camps for unholy purpose. There were many instances that women were raped in their houses at the presence of their husbands and children.

Arbitrary Taxation

Rohingyas in northern Arakan State are subjected to extortion and arbitrary taxation at the hands of the authorities. These vary from tax on collecting firewood and bamboo to fees for the registration of deaths and births in the family lists, on livestock and fruit-bearing trees, and even on football matches. The type of taxes and the amounts people have to pay appear to be applied in an arbitrary fashion and vary from place to place, depending on the local authorities.

Other Human Rights Abuses

Widespread violations of human rights against Rohingya continue unabated even in places not out of the sight of UNHCR. False or cheap propaganda is often circulated that the Rohingya are leaving Arakan for economic reasons. But the truth is never spoken. In fact, there is no security of life, property, honour and dignity of the Rohingya. Extra-judicial killing and summary executions, humiliating movement restriction, rape of women, arrest and tortures, forced labour, forced relocation, confiscation of moveable and immovable properties, religious sacrileges etc. are regular occurrences in Arakan.

Severe poverty, unemployment, lack of education and official discrimination affecting mainly the youths and workforce of the Rohingya people and the future of the community therefore seems to be bleak and the exodus into Bangladesh is in cyclic order. Any democratic changes in the country are accepted to be a breathing space for the Rohingyas-but, it is serious concern that the leaders of the main stream democracy movement and opposition forces of the country are still ambivalent towards Rohingya and are not accommodating to them on democratic principle.

The BRCA is willing to address that lives of thousands Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh will be in jeopardy once they return to Burma through the forcibly repatriation program by the government of Bangladesh and the BRCA therefore is obliged to stress the followings issues into kind attention of the local authorities in Bangladesh that the ruling government in Burma has been fostering the hostile policy towards the Rohingyas by punishing them very severely regardless of whether such people involvement in the anti government activities had been low or high profiles. Furthermore, Rohingyas have been denied their fundamental human rights in Burma and thus the circumstances had become very compelling for them to flee Burma and thus it is the obligation of any democratic government, particularly Bangladesh that it should embrace the poor, desperate, and grieve stricken Rohingya refugees upon their arrival to the refugee camps.

BRCA also appeals to the international community, that it should the Rohingya issue into a very serious consideration and that is because the government in Burma regrettably committing the crime against humanity by applying a very systematic method of persecutions which I have stated above. Finally, we are seeking the intervention of the international community in preventing the ruling government from the assimilation of the Rohingya in Burma.

Executive Committee, Burmese Rohingya Community in Australia

Date: 25th November 007