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WATCH

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Burma: Rohingya Recount Killings, Rape, and Arson

Video Testimony Matches Satellite Images of Attacks

(New York) – The Burmese military has conducted a campaign of arson, killings, and rape against ethnic Rohingya that has threatened the lives of thousands more, Human Rights Watch said today. Refugees who fled the recent violence told Human Rights Watch that since the October 9, 2016 attacks by Rohingya militants on government border guard posts in northern Rakhine State, Burmese security forces have retaliated by inflicting horrific abuses on the Rohingya population.

Burma's government should immediately allow unfettered humanitarian access to all parts of northern Rakhine State as the United Nations and others have urged, in order to reach people without adequate access to food, shelter, health care, and other necessities. Governments with influence in Burma should press the military and civilian authorities to urgently end abuses and grant access.

"Refugee accounts paint a horrific picture of an army that is out of control and rampaging through Rohingya villages," said Brad Adams, Asia director. "The Burmese government says its crackdown is in response to a security threat, but what security advantage could possibly be gained by raping and killing women and children?"

Human Rights Watch interviewed a dozen Rohingya refugees who had recently arrived in Bangladesh after fleeing Rakhine State's Maungdaw Township. In video testimony, Rohingya residents described Burmese soldiers using automatic weapons, looting and burning homes, killing villagers, including entire families, and raping women and girls.

"Kasim," 26, described the military's destruction of homes in the village of Kyet Yoe Pyin, also known as Kari Paraung, and other abuses. "The military came into the village and shot indiscriminately whomever they found. Elderly and children were shot dead.... Many people were killed," he said. "[The soldiers] dragged the women from the houses by their hair. They took off the women's clothes and *longyi* [sarongs]. They trampled their necks. They pulled up their blouses and removed their bras. They raped them right there in the yard."

Another resident of the same village, "Jamal," 24, watched soldiers arrest Shukur, a 55-year-old man: "I saw that he was arrested by four soldiers. Then I saw him lying on the ground. After that, I saw them



People stand among debris after fire destroyed shelters at a camp for internally displaced Rohingya Muslims in the western Rakhine State near Sittwe, Myanmar.

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Rohingya Tell Horror Stories of Rape, Killings by B



The Burmese military has conducted a campaign of arson, killing

slaughter him with a knife that was about one-and-half feet long.”

and rape against ethnic Rohingya that has threatened the lives of thousands.

“Jawad,” 23, a resident of Dar Gyi Zar village, said that soldiers were shooting indiscriminately when they entered his village. “They didn’t spare the young ones,” he said. He watched from an embankment as soldiers killed his older brother and his two children, and then tossed their bodies into a fire. The soldiers also burned crops and dispersed cultivated rice so that it could not be harvested. No crops were spared and cows were shot, he said.

Several refugees said that government security forces were sometimes accompanied on raids by ethnic Rakhine Buddhist civilians, and *Mro* or other non-Rohingya villagers. They were often involved in looting Rohingya homes but also took part in other abuses. Kasim said that during a raid he and his neighbors recognized some non-Rohingya people from nearby villages wearing ordinary clothes.

The Burmese government has failed to keep its public commitment to allow the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to open an office with a full protection mandate despite the UN General Assembly urging it to do so in a December 2015 resolution that was adopted without a vote. The UN special rapporteur on Burma, Yanghee Lee, reported in August 2016 that the prompt creation of such an office “could give vital assistance to the Government in addressing the complex and wide-ranging human rights challenges” facing the country. Burmese authorities should immediately invite the UN human rights office to send staff to northern Rakhine State to investigate and publicly report back on abuses by all sides.

On December 1, the government announced the creation of a committee to investigate the situation in Rakhine State and report by January 31, 2017. On December 16, the Myanmar Times reported that the committee, after a three-day visit to Maungdaw Township, concluded that military clearance operations had been conducted “lawfully.” This summary rejection of allegations, as well as concerns about the committee’s composition and mandate, raise serious doubts that its investigation will be thorough and impartial. A similar commission created by the Rakhine State parliament in October has also thus far failed to seriously investigate alleged military abuses.

On December 16, the UN high commissioner for human rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, said: “The repeated dismissal of the claims of serious human rights violations as fabrications, coupled with the failure to allow our independent monitors access to the worst affected areas in northern Rakhine, is highly insulting to the victims and an abdication of the Government’s obligations under international human rights law.” He further characterized the Burmese government’s response as “short-sighted, counterproductive, even callous.”

The ongoing military operations have had a major impact on the local population. Since October 9, authorities have kept Maungdaw Township in a state of virtual lockdown, curtailed freedom of movement, blocked humanitarian aid, and denied entry to journalists and human rights monitors. Tens of thousands of people have been displaced internally, but government and military restrictions on aid agencies have prevented them from conducting adequate needs assessments. The UN has reported that an estimated 27,000 Rohingya have become refugees in Bangladesh. Humanitarian organizations told Human Rights Watch that while some aid is reaching Maungdaw Township, the worst affected areas are still receiving no assistance. Since early October, the UN and other international NGOs have been unable to reach 130,000 highly vulnerable people in northern Maungdaw Township who previously received food, cash, and nutrition assistance. Limited government access has allowed some assistance to resume for only 20,000 of the 150,000 people that normally receive aid.



A Rohingya Muslim woman looks on as she waits to enter the Kutupalang Refugee Camp in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh.

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Burma’s failure to end military abuses against Rohingya and hold those responsible to account demands an independent inquiry with UN participation. National and state governments have appointed commissions that are neither credible nor independent to

look into allegations of abuses.

"The government's failure to appoint credible commissions to thoroughly and impartially investigate the allegations undermines claims that it is building a country based on the rule of law," Adams said. "However, it is not too late to reverse course and allow aid agencies and impartial observers into affected areas to document what has happened and ensure the delivery of food, medicine, and other life-saving services."

Testimonies by Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh

The accounts below are drawn from interviews Human Rights Watch carried out in Bangladesh between December 2 and 6, 2016. All names are pseudonyms unless stated otherwise. Interviews were conducted with interpreters.

Abu Hafsah

Abu Hafsah and his family endured a 43-day journey from their village before reaching Bangladesh. On October 9, Hafsah, 46, heard distant gunfire while at home in Kyet Yoe Pyin, a village within the Kyet Yoe Pyin village tract of Maungdaw Township. Frightened, he moved his family into hiding among the bushes and, when gunshots got closer, to hills around the village. They returned home on October 11, but the gunshots continued sporadically. Soldiers entered the village that day. He said he later heard loud explosions coming from an adjacent village and saw hundreds of soldiers: "There was no place where there was no military."

On October 12, the soldiers returned. In the evening they started firing rocket launchers and automatic weapons at villagers and their homes. Villagers fled to escape injury. Abu Hafsah said that bullets were whizzing past him and he jumped into the forest to avoid being hit: "They shot [ordinary people]. Not anyone else. We have nothing. They fired [rocket] launchers from some distance and more closely with guns. We thought that day they would kill all of us."

Abu Hafsah said that the next morning, soldiers fatally shot six of his acquaintances when they emerged from hiding to tend to their cattle. Abu Hafsah and his family then decided to flee Kyet Yoe Pyin, leaving with only with the clothes they were wearing. They sought refuge in a nearby village, where they stayed for about 10 days. Abu Hafsah then returned briefly to Kyet Yoe Pyin, hoping the situation had improved. He estimates that hundreds of homes and shops in the village were burned to the ground. [Satellite imagery analyzed by Human Rights Watch](#) shows large burn scars consistent with arson attacks confirming that at least 245 buildings were destroyed in Kyet Yoe Pyin between October 9 and 14.

Abu Hafsah and his family then decided to flee Burma and go to Kumar Khali along the border in Bangladesh. He said throughout the journey, military patrols, forcing the family to move from one place to another and hide in the hills or forest. Throughout their 43-day journey, food was scarce and they often only had water to drink. Once in Kumar Khali, they pleaded with local villagers to help them cross the border. Eventually, the family put together the 25,000 Burmese kyat (US\$18) per person to pay an agent to get them across the Naf River. They crossed by boat, eventually reaching Tolatuli in Bangladesh on November 24.

Rohima

Rohima, 50, from Yae Khat Chaung Gwa Son village, said the military entered her home, tied up her husband, and shot and killed him. She then watched as soldiers dragged her four adult sons out of the house. She and the other women in the house were crying, but she could not do anything to stop them, she said. The soldiers then moved the women into another house and fired rocket launchers at the house, but she survived. She came out of that house and saw the soldiers set fire to her property.

Rohima said she then went to the pond beside her house and found piles of bodies that had been set on fire with straw. She could smell burning skin. She said that soldiers killed her four sons and her husband: Shoona Ali, 35; Ijjod Ali, 25; Syed Ali, 30; Musa Ali, 45; and Yusuf Ali, 60.

Hiding in someone else's home, Rohima watched soldiers rampage through the village. "They cut the children with their knives. Then they threw them into the fire," she said.

She said she saw Rakhine villagers entering with the military, including some whose faces she recognized wearing military

uniforms. They were dragging people from houses and using belts to beat people, she said.

Rohima decided to flee Burma with her extended family and eventually reached Kumar Khali. They did not have any money to pay for the crossing, but others helped them to cross. All 15 family members crossed the river and arrived in Bangladesh on November 25.

Abdul

Abdul, 30, fled his home in Kyet Yoe Pyin village when soldiers entered the town and began firing their weapons. "They shot at us while we were escaping from the village," he said. Some were killed while others managed to escape.

Making it to the outskirts of Kyet Yoe Pyin, Abdul hid on a hillside. The gunfire increased throughout the day. He said soldiers were beating and shooting at villagers. The next day, he watched from the hillside as soldiers in green uniforms with red shoulder patches set homes on fire and shot at people. "At first, they fired at the houses with rocket launchers from some distance," he said. "When they fired, people ran away. Then they came into the village and poured gasoline and set fire to the houses."

Abdul said he watched as the soldiers burned a mosque. He saw them physically abuse women. Fearful of further violence, he fled north: "We understood that we had no way to return." He traveled through several villages, but soldiers were present until he reached Kumar Khali. There he was reunited with his wife, who told him that soldiers had slit the throat of their 4-year-old son when they were trying to flee the village. The couple then crossed by boat to Bangladesh.

Kasim

After the October 9 violence, Kasim, 26, watched the military approach Kyet Yoe Pyin from the south in vehicles. After arriving, they encircled his village. Kasim said that when soldiers entered the village on October 12, he watched them destroy homes. Soldiers started firing rocket launchers, causing the men to flee and the women to hide in their homes. Kasim said he hid in a nearby paddy field. Before noon, soldiers set the local market on fire. "On the first day, the military came into the village and set fire to the houses by shooting rocket launchers," he said. "Some set fire to the houses. Some went inside the houses and looted them."

Kasim said the soldiers also attacked local residents:

The military were shooting indiscriminately at whomever they found. Elderly people and children were being shot dead... Many people were killed. They killed many people. The bullets hit people in the chest, stomach, back, head and neck. They shot from 100 yards, 200 yards, and longer distances.

The abuses continued. Because soldiers were tearing down the fences that surrounded homes, he had a clear view as soldiers dragged women out of houses:

They dragged the women out of the houses by their hair. They took off the women's clothes and *longyis* [sarongs]. They trampled their necks. They pulled up their blouses and removed their bras. They raped them right there in the yard.

Kasim said he saw soldiers shoot his wife in the chest, killing her and his young daughter whom she was carrying in her arms. He said he also saw a nearby house, occupied by six women, being looted. He said soldiers shot all six women inside.

Kasim said he saw people in ordinary clothes enter the town with the soldiers. He and his neighbors recognized some people from nearby villages among them. These villagers, together with the soldiers, looted homes and in some cases dragged women from houses.

Kasim then decided to flee to Bangladesh. He moved from village to village, hiding in the surrounding hills for days at a time while trying to avoid the military at nearly every village in which he stayed. After reaching a village near the border, he escaped across the Naf River to Bangladesh with 13 members of his extended family. He arrived in Bangladesh on November 30.

Jamal

Jamal, 24, saw the military approach from the eastern side of Kyet Yoe Pyin village two days after the October 9 attacks. Some came on foot, while others rode dark-colored trucks, the kind, he said, that were used for transporting goats and other livestock. A set of different trucks carrying people others recognized as ethnic Rakhine villagers arrived about the same time. When the military entered the town, Jamal hid in a prawn lake (a small pond where shrimp is produced and farmed) with others, covering himself with palm leaves so that the soldiers could not see them, but he could see what was happening.

He said that the soldiers first deployed on a hill next to the village and fired rocket launchers at structures. They then entered the village and began setting fire to houses, fired rocket launchers and shot at people as they swept through the village. Villagers were either beaten or shot in the streets.

Jamal said that the previous night his uncle brought two female family members home. One was pregnant and gave birth that night. When the soldiers came in the morning, the men left, assuming that the women would not be harmed. From their hiding place, Jamal and the others watched soldiers kill and rape the female villagers. "First, they slaughtered two women. One woman wasn't dead, so they tried to rape her. She pretended to be dead. They raped her and left her. Then they slaughtered three more [women]." Jamal and others returned the next day, they found the woman who had given birth recently to be alive. However, he says she died shortly thereafter, but her newborn baby survived. He said he also saw soldiers throw three children into a burning house.

Jamal said that Shukur, 55, who was hiding with them in a field, attempted to walk back to the village, but he was stopped along the way and killed by four soldiers. Jamal said:

We all told him not to go. We warned him how the military was killing people. His sons and daughters also tried to stop him. He said, "I am an old man, what will they do to me?" Then he left. The military stopped him when he reached a shop. I saw that he was arrested by four soldiers. Then I saw him lying down on the ground. After that, I saw them slaughter him with a knife about one-and-half feet long.

Jamal described seeing many women assembled in an area after the men fled, and soldiers rushing to the area. He said the soldiers "repressed" the women (a common euphemism for rape) and otherwise abused them, causing some women to faint.

Jamal fled Kyet Yoe Pyin and later saw the military in several other villages. In at least two villages, including Dar Gyi Zar, Jamal saw helicopters firing automatic weapons from the air. The gunshots, he said, were like a flurry of sparks. He watched the helicopter firing at people hiding and trying to flee from the military. "They would shoot anything moving," he said.

Jamal was eventually able to flee to Bangladesh from a village bordering the Naf River in Maungdaw Township. His family had no money, but received help from other villagers to pay the 25,000 Burmese kyat (US\$18) per person to have someone help them across. Jamal arrived in Bangladesh on December 1 with 13 other members of his family.

Kamal

Kamal, 32, said that when the military entered Kyet Yoe Pyin village on October 11, he ran from the advancing soldiers, attempting to hide. He watched soldiers burn houses, beat people, and shoot them as they fled. Eight to 10 soldiers surrounded his house. Then they soaked articles of clothing in jars of gasoline, lit them on fire, and threw them on the roof, setting his home ablaze.

He said that his brother, who had recently contracted malaria, was lying in the yard outside his house when the soldiers arrived. Kamal watched as they tied his brother up with a rope and then shot him. He then fled to a nearby home shared with relatives and from this vantage point watched soldiers arrest other villagers, tie them up with rope, and carry some away to waiting vehicles. He saw about five soldiers enter an uncle's house, adjacent to his hiding place, and arrest two of his uncles. In total, he saw about nine people taken away, and heard that another 60 had been arrested. The soldiers then torched the market by firing rocket launchers at it. He saw metal scraps he believes were from the rockets on the ground and lodged in the coconut trees.

He and his family left Kyet Yoe Pyin for eight days. They decided to return to the village, but soldiers also soon returned. He said

the military attempted to gather and abuse the “sisters and daughters” of the village. The villagers resisted by screaming at the soldiers.

When it became clear that there was not enough food to feed all his family members, Kamal and his family decided to leave for Bangladesh. “Subsistence was not possible,” he said. They evaded security forces in Burma, and paid 26,000 Burmese kyat (US\$19) to be taken across the border by boat.

Ali

Ali, 52, said the military arrived in Kyet Yoe Pyin on a night when he and his family of 13 were leaving on foot to deliver some business documents to Bora Para, a neighboring village where his father-in-law lives. As they set out, they saw the military approaching in vehicles. Although it was hard to tell, he thinks there were about 100 soldiers.

After Ali and his family arrived in Bora Para, they heard gunfire. There was so much shooting that he said “the soil was trembling.” They were so panicked they decided to stay with his father-in-law. The gunshots lasted for four days. When the gunfire intensified, Ali and his family fled to Jamoinna, a neighboring village. From there, he could see soldiers – he estimates about 400 to 500 – moving around Kyet Yoe Pyin.

After eight days in Jamoinna, Ali went back to Kyet Yoe Pyin. He found that about three-quarters of the homes were burned. Other villagers that returned to Kyet Yoe Pyin had to borrow cooking utensils just to eat because theirs had been destroyed or were gone.

Ali said he and the other villagers found corpses all over the village. Some were in shallow graves. Foxes dragged some of the bodies out of the graves, while others had various body parts protruding from shallow earthen tombs. One grave had four corpses, all of which had been beheaded. Some of the limbs appeared to have been eaten by foxes and dogs. Ali and the others identified the bodies as those of Kadir Hussein, 60; Nur Alam, 50; Kala Mian, 30; and Mohamed Rashid, 26. He heard that Shukur, 55, had been executed, but they never found his body. They dug deeper graves and placed the bodies they could find in them. Many bodies of the missing were not found, but the *longyi* and other garments of those missing were found among the dead and throughout the village. Ali and the other villagers tried to gather the names of those that no one had heard from or seen since the violence. In total, they counted 76 people missing.

Ali said that on a subsequent Saturday, the military raided the village and arrested about 80 men. Several of his relatives were arrested, including three cousins and his son-in-law.

Ali and his family eventually fled to Bangladesh. He paid a trafficker 25,000 kyat (US\$18) per person to get his family across the river. They arrived in Bangladesh on December 3.

Kháled

Kháled, 26, said that the military first came to Myaw Taung village tract to impose a curfew. They returned the next day and started shooting people “without giving them a chance.” People were fleeing in every direction they could, he said.

Kháled saw the military firing rocket launchers at homes, setting them on fire. After the soldiers would fire rocket launchers, ethnic Rakhine and Mro villagers, whom Kháled said he saw alongside the soldiers, would loot the homes.

While he was hiding in a nearby outdoor toilet, his elder brother came out of his house to investigate what was happening. Kháled heard gunfire and fled up the hill behind his house. When he looked back, he saw that his brother had been shot and killed. The soldiers, he said, left his brother’s wife half-dead after raping her and shot and killed Kháled’s 5-year-old son. He said that the soldiers threw the bodies of his brother and 5-year-old son along with others into the fire.

After the violence, Kháled decided to flee to Bangladesh. While he was waiting to cross a river at the border, he saw that people in another boat had been caught by Burma’s Border Guard Police and “beaten to black and blue.” So Kháled’s group waited. Three days later, on November 28, they crossed into Bangladesh.

Jawad

Jawad, 23, cannot remember the exact date that the military first entered his village, Dar Gyi Zar, but said that about 500 soldiers arrived during morning prayers. He said the soldiers shot people and set fire to houses. They fired rocket launchers and threw lit bamboo sticks onto rooftops. By the time they were done, all the houses in his village were burned down, he said. He watched them shoot an old man sitting in front of his door. "They didn't spare the young ones," he said. "They slaughtered infants with large knives and threw the bodies of the dead into fires."

Jawad watched from an embankment as the military shot his older brother, Mohamed. He says that Mohamed was with his son and daughter when the military called out. He stopped and they shot him. They then took Mohamed's son and daughter and killed them with a large knife, Jawad said, tossing their bodies into a fire. He doesn't know why his brother was killed. "The military did this, they should know," he said.

Jawad said the military "tortured" and abused women and girls, especially those that looked pretty. Two women who saw the deaths of Mohammed and his children were taken by the military. One was beaten with the bottom of the soldier's rifle. The other was dragged into a house. Jawad saw altogether about 15 soldiers enter the house. From his hiding place he could hear the woman screaming. The soldiers emerged one hour later. After another hour, Jawad and an elderly woman entered the house to tend to the victim. They tried to get the woman to a doctor, but she died. He believes the soldiers gang-raped her.

In mid to late November, Jawad saw soldiers going into the fields disguised as farmers and then arresting people harvesting their crops with machetes. The soldiers then set fire to the crops. Other soldiers took stored rice and threw it away in such a manner that it could not be gathered. No crops were spared and cows were shot, he said.

After being sent back once by the Border Guard Bangladesh force, Jawad crossed into Bangladesh in late November after paying an agent 25,000 kyat (US\$18).

Chomi

Chomi, 35, watched on November 13 as approximately 400 soldiers encircled his village of Dar Gyi Zar. He fled and watched from a field as the military fired rocket launchers at homes and saw at least 10 people shot. "They shot whomever they saw," he said.

Chomi said that during the raid, the soldiers killed entire families including Abul Hussein and his family of eight, the Yusuf family of similar size, and Moulavi Saleh Ahmed's family.

Chomi fled Dar Gyi Zar with his family on November 13 and headed north. They stayed with relatives for two days, but the village administrator asked them to leave, so the family lived in a field. Chomi estimates that about 2,000 other people lived with them in the field for 10 days. The township and district then ordered them to return home.

On November 23, before being ordered to return home, Chomi watched from a hill to see the situation in his village. He said he saw about 200 soldiers and smoke rising from the village. When he returned to his home, he found many things missing or destroyed: clothes, cooking kettles, and food had been taken. Of the 419 houses in his village, he said, only 12 were not burned. His own home, he learned, was spared until a further round of burnings on November 23. He said now it was a pile of ash and warped corrugated metal.

He went back, gathered his family and fled to Bangladesh. After crossing some barbed wire, they joined other Rohingya who made their way to two waiting boats, each carrying about 20 people, including children. Just as they began to cross the river, they were spotted by a boat full of Burmese security forces, who fired their guns in the air in the direction of the two boats. The boat then sped toward them; the wake from the speeding boat caused both Rohingya boats to capsize. Tossed from the boats, some people swam to Bangladesh, while others swam back to Burma. Some couldn't swim and drowned. Chomi swam back to the Burmese side and hid from the military and Border Guard Police patrols. Eventually, he was able to evade the patrols and cross the border in the early hours of December 5 on a boat with eight other people.

Ahmet

In mid-November, the military entered Yae Khat Chaung Gwa Son village. Ahmet said that helicopters fired as 200 to 250 soldiers encircled the village. Soldiers who entered the town gathered together a large group of women. They dragged the women by their hands and scarves, tearing their clothing. He said the soldiers told the villagers they would “take” the women.

Ahmet said some villagers confronted the soldiers. In response, a helicopter flying overhead started firing. He watched the helicopter fly low, the guns on either side firing down on the villagers. The soldiers then began burning houses. They carried gasoline in jars and threw them on rooftops, burning them one by one. He learned that about 450 houses were burned and only 35 survived.

When the burning of the village started, he and his family fled to a village on the border with Bangladesh. They waited for about 15 days and then left for Bangladesh, arriving on December 1.

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