

## ARAKAN ROHINGYA SALVATION ARMY BRIEF

### **Introduction**

The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army operates in the the Rakhine state in northern Myanmar, where the mostly-Muslim Rohingya people have faced persecution. The Myanmar government had denied them citizenship because it views them as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. The group's spokesman spoke with the Asia Times, disclosing that the group had been training since 2013, but their first attack was not until October 2016, when they killed nine police officers. Arsa says its aims are to "defend, salvage and protect" the Rohingya against state repression "in line with the principle of self-defence".

### **History with the Rohingya/crisis**

The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) was formed in the wake of the 2012 Rakhine State riots, in which ethnic Rohingya Muslims were targeted by ethnic Rakhine Buddhists. The International Crisis Group (ICG) says Arsa members are young Rohingya men were angered by the state's response to these deadly riots. Young men trying to escape the area used to be able to reach Malaysia by sea, but the Malaysian navy blocked that route in 2015, leaving thousands of people stranded at sea and others considering violence.

Clashes have erupted periodically between ethnic groups, but in the last year, an armed Rohingya insurgency has grown. Ara, previously known by other names (including Harakah al-Yaqin), has killed more than 20 individuals, including police officers and members of security forces. The biggest attack was on the 25th of August, when it attacked police posts in the Rakhine state. 12 people were killed, making it its biggest attack yet. This in turn prompted a counter-insurgency clampdown from the security forces.

The government views ARSA as a terrorist organization, claiming its leaders have trained abroad. While some claim that the group is led by Rohingya people living in Saudi Arabia, this is incorrect and ARSA has no links to any jihadist groups, and that ARSA existed only to help fight for the Rohingya people to be recognized as an ethnic group. They lack the resources to carry out any sort of formal, organized terrorism even if they wanted to. The August 25 attack, for instance, was done with knives and home-made bombs. Even these weapons are new, as prior to 2016 bamboo sticks were the group's primary weaponry.

The attacks on security forces have prompted a crackdown from the military, who say they are fighting against not a terrorist organization, but civilian-attacking militants. More than 100,000 people have fled their villages and crossed the border to Bangladesh, where the refugee camps are still full. Many of them say the military, assisted by Buddhist monks, have razed villages and killed civilians. The government says Buddhists and Hindus have also fled attacks in the area. The insurgency has drawn attention to the refugees' situation, involving concern from campaigners and politicians regarding their lack of shelter, water, and food.

A UN representative, and the Nobel Peace laureate Malala Yousafzai, called on leader Aung Sang Suu Kyi to stop the violence. Ms Suu Kyi has previously said there is "a lot of hostility" in the area but ethnic cleansing is "too strong a term" to use.

(one page on your involvement, history with the Rohingya people)

### **Key Points**

- Protect Muslims in Rakhine state and preserve religious and cultural heritage
- Fundamental rights for Rohingya
- Put an end to the persecution of the Rohingya
- Working with the international community to secure humanitarian aid
- Empower the Rohingya people through armed resistance

### **Issues**

### Committee on Representation, Governance & Security

ARSA is deeply invested in ensuring the security of all people in Rakhine State, but is particularly involved in protecting the Rohingya Muslim people. To this end, they aim to use military means to push back on the oppression led by the Tatmadaw. Their goals are summarized in this 2016 quote from their leader, Ataullah abu Ammar Jununi:

We [Harakah al-Yaqin], the sons of Arakan[ese] soil, who are compelled by our dire situation to follow our own destiny through uprising, self-determination and self-defence, stand as an independent body which is free from all **elements of terror** in any nature, seek **fundamental but legitimate rights** and other [forms of] justice for all Arakanese, including our fellow innocent Rohingyas and other civilians dying from the continuous military assaults.

We categorically state that our people have chosen to free themselves from their oppressors, from the tragic deaths in the Bay of Bengal, in the Thai jungles and at the hands of human traffickers. We have also resolved to defend our mothers, sisters, elderly, children and ourselves.

We shall not rest until all our desired goals are achieved with the genuine help of the **civilised world**.

As such, while ARSA welcomes greater international visibility for the crisis, they prefer taking matters into their own hands to international humanitarian intervention.

### Committee on Human Rights, Law, & Reconciliation

The situation in Myanmar is dire, and something must be done as soon as possible to secure rights and rule of law for the Rohingya people. The international community must condemn the persecution of the Rohingya. While ARSA fights to defend the rights of their people through military means, humanitarian aid from the international community is welcome.

While ARSA is an insurgent group and as such has had unfortunate casualties as part of their mission (such as the killing of 99 Hindu villagers in May 2018 in Rakhine State), these pale in comparison to the gross human rights violations of the Tatmadaw. Local law in Myanmar is loosely implemented and enforced, especially in smaller communities and villages, which allows groups like ARSA to continue to exist and fight for rights through ground work and self-advocacy, rather than policy work. This loose enforcement of Myanmar's legal and law

enforcement systems also allows groups like ARSA to more or less self-govern. Myanmar's legal position is only more confused by the mass atrocity at hand, allowing ARSA to escape the formalized laws of Myanmar and hold autonomy - not to make its own laws, but to live by its own laws. Reconciliation to ARSA would mean tracing the roots of the conflict - once groups are returned to Bangladesh, how do minimize existing ethnic tensions? Could we negotiate a cease-fire- both so ARSA will stop its violence, and violence against the Rohingya will cease? How are the perpetrators of the genocide going to be held accountable, so we can fully see that our goals as an organization are met?

#### Committee on Development & Repatriation

The government of Myanmar must address its longstanding discrimination against its Muslim population, denial of their rights and lack of citizenship. The Rohingya people must be given full citizenship and the 1982 Citizenship Law should be repealed as quickly as possible. In addition, they should be allowed home to Rakhine State and their safety on their journey and once in their villages must be guaranteed. If their homes were destroyed in conflict, the government must provide new ones. Furthermore, when the people of Myanmar prosper, the Rohingya must not be left behind or discriminated against. To ensure that this happens, the Tatmadaw must be reformed or disbanded and a new, more equitable government must be put into place without economic or diplomatic ties that hurt or otherwise exclude the Rohingya people. In particular, the mining and oil industries should be de-linked from the military so that the Rohingya are not economically punished on top of already brutal repression.