



9 April 2014 - The alarm bell has gone off in Myanmar. The human rights situation in the Rakhine State is deteriorating even further since the beginning of hostilities in 2012. After recent attacks on UN and NGO sites in Sittwe, the capital of the Rakhine state, aid workers are being evacuated from the area. This withdrawal will increase the vulnerability of the Rohingya community, already victims of persecution and sectarian violence.

Myanmar's Rakhine state has experienced sectarian violence since 2012 as Rakhine Buddhists turned against the Rohingya Muslims. Conflicts have also occurred in other parts of the country, such as in the Kachin state and in South East Myanmar. "Recent developments in Rakhine State are the latest in a long history of discrimination and persecution against the Rohingya community, which could amount to crimes against humanity", said Tomás Ojea Quintana, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Myanmar. In addition to erupting conflicts there have been a string of natural disasters. These, combined with Monsoon rains falling on displaced populations, have steadily deteriorated the humanitarian situation on the ground.

Aid workers in the area provide essential life-saving support, including health services, water and food. "The withdrawal of these workers will have severe consequences on the enjoyment of fundamental human rights, including the right to life" [underlined Mr. Ojea Quintana](#) . With over 140,000 people in displacement camps and nearly 700,000 vulnerable people outside them, the withdrawal of aid workers will create a water shortage within a week along with a healthcare

crisis.

The government of Myanmar has committed to ensuring the safety and protection of UN and other international agencies' personnel. The Special Rapporteur said that crimes against humanity may have been committed and that aid workers need to return to their life saving work as soon as possible. Yet, the government continues some practices, which are not in compliance with international human standards, such as the census. In the Myanmar census the Rohingya community cannot self-identify. This issue has been at the root of many protests, which have led to violence between communities. This violence has led to human rights abuses and violations, yet no one has been held accountable.

Self-identification, argues Mr. Ojea Quintana, is related to the respect of an individual's right to assert his or her own identity. "To deny self-identification is therefore a violation of human rights", he says. Numerous Special Rapporteurs from several divisions within the UN share Mr. Ojea Quintana's views on the census, and support his calls for the prompt return of all humanitarian staff. This underlines the recognition by the international community that the current situation is volatile and that outside aid is required to ensure the lives and safety of the Rohingya community.

UNRIC related links:

UNRIC's backgrounder on [Myanmar](#)

UNRIC's backgrounder on [Human Rights](#)

UNRIC's article on the [humanitarian situation](#) at the end of 2013

UNRIC's article on the [Rohingya community](#)