



Press Release: Police Killing of Rakhine Protesters Demands Investigation and Repercussions

19 January 2018, London -- The Burma Human Rights Network is calling for an investigation into the killing of nine ethnic Rakhine protesters in Rakhine State's Mrauk U Township. Protests began after authorities canceled celebrations for the 233rd anniversary of Mrauk U Kingdom. Mrauk U Kingdom was a Rakhine kingdom which was conquered by the Burmese and resentments among Rakhine remain as many feel treated as second class citizens with little or no autonomy in Rakhine State. Protests reportedly turned violent as protesters numbering in the thousands gathered outside of Mrauk U Police Station and the district administrator's office and attacked empty police vehicles. Police stated they initially fired into the air to disperse protesters, but then responded to attacks on police vehicles by opening fire into the crowd, killing nine and severely injuring at least 12.

“The use of lethal force by police was by all indications absolutely unnecessary and will only worsen tensions and distrust between ethnic Rakhine and the authorities. While rule of law is important to maintain, there appears to have been no need for civilians to die in order to achieve it,” said Kyaw Win, Executive Director of BHRN.

Protesters were also said to have been responding to the arrest of nationalist writer Wai Hun Aung while the ultra-nationalist political figure Dr. Aye Maung was also be arrested on 18th January.

Burmese authorities must understand that every citizen has the right to protest and freedom of speech is very basic human rights in a Democratic society. Use of excessive police force proved Burma's skin deep Democratic reforms has taken U-turn to some extents. Intolerance towards freedom of speech getting worse under NLD government. If the 2008 constitution allow the military to control the ministry of home affairs and NLD government claim no responsible in the shooting, as a responsible government that elected by the public vote, NLD should at least protest the killing of civilians.

The Burmese Government must investigate these killings and those responsible for the use of excessive force resulting in the death of civilians must face repercussions. Burma must also review its current policies regarding when to use lethal force and train police, particularly in ethnic regions where minorities face increased persecution, on how to control and disperse crowds while preserving human life. Finally, the Burmese Government must take steps towards addressing the grievances of its ethnic minorities and work towards a peace process which can equitably and peacefully approach a federalist system where it has been requested and fought over through civil war for decades.

Editors' note

Mrauk U is an ancient kingdom and religious site in Burma's Rakhine State. The city is majority ethnic Rakhine, who are also Buddhist. Despite sharing religious beliefs with the Bamar majority in Burma the Rakhine feel oppressed and exploited by the Burmese government and issues connected to Bamar conquering of Mrauk U are very sensitive. Nationalist figures have become very popular in Rakhine State as they are seen as standing up to the Government and also often because of the hardline stance they take against the Ethnic Rohingya in the state who most Rakhine view as 'invaders'. The various tensions occurring simultaneously create an often volatile situation in the state, typically witnessed in communal tensions, but more recently the state has seen the emergence of both Rakhine and Rohingya Militias, which had been absent in the state for over a decade prior and their remnants were unarmed or defunct for years prior to that.

Background on the Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN)

Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN) is based in London, operate across Burma and works for human rights, minority rights and religious freedom in Burma. BHRN has played a crucial role advocating for human rights and religious freedom with politicians and world leaders.

Media Enquiries

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