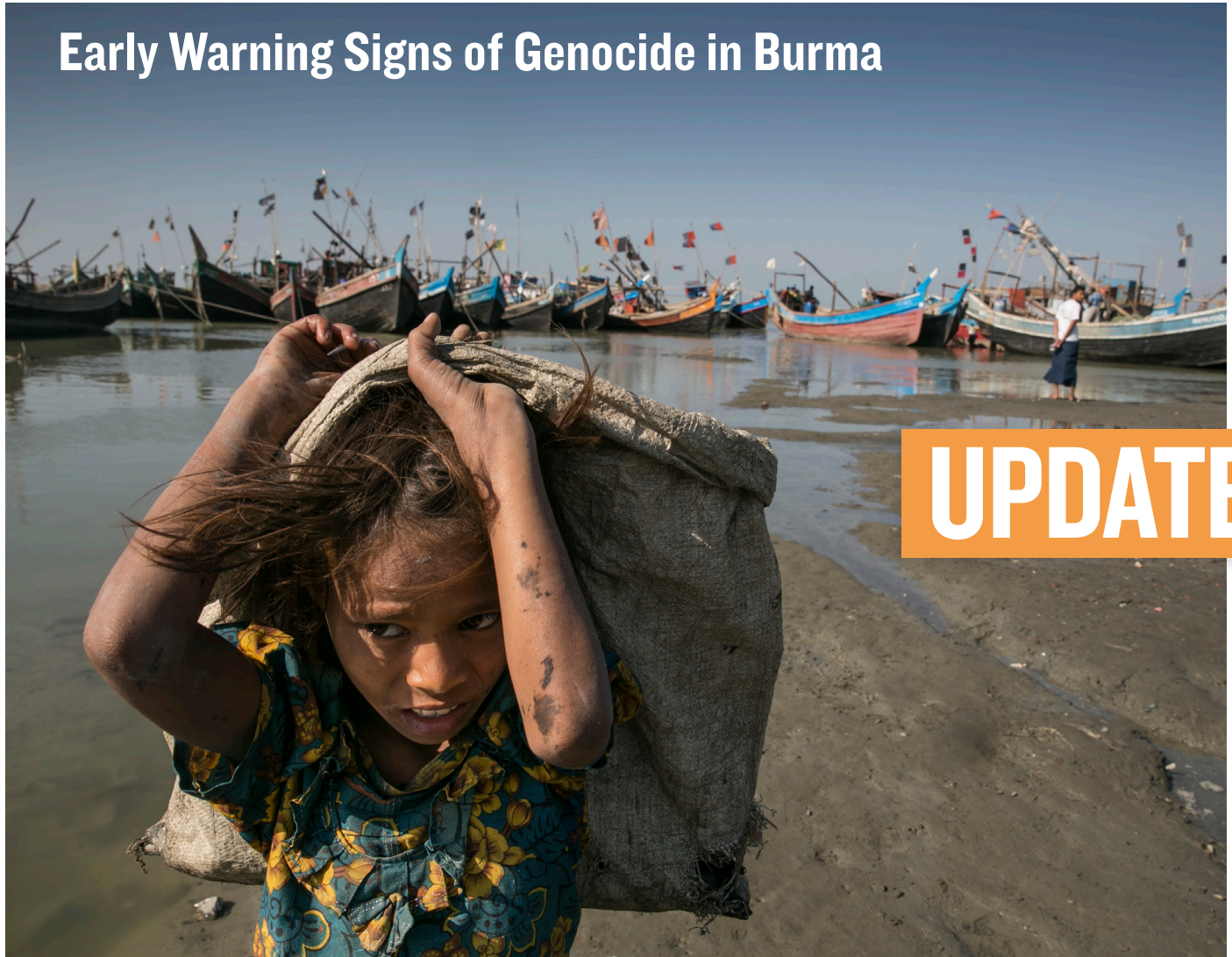


“THEY WANT US ALL TO GO AWAY”

Early Warning Signs of Genocide in Burma



UPDATE

UNITED STATES
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SIMON-SKJODT CENTER
FOR THE PREVENTION OF GENOCIDE



Cover: This Rohingya girl walks along the beach in Rakhine State in the northwest of Burma, where members of the group have been forced into camps. Above: Rohingya living in the camps lack access to sanitation, health care, education, or any way to make a living. Below: Many Rohingya have fled their desperate circumstances. Fishing boats like these ferry them to meet up with human traffickers and smugglers in international waters.

All Photos: *Paula Bronstein/ Getty Images Reportage for the US Holocaust Memorial Museum*

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide published a report in May 2015 detailing early warning signs of genocide against the Rohingya, a religious and ethnic minority group in Burma. Since the publication of the report, there has been no alleviation of the threats Rohingya face and no effort on the part of the Burmese government to dismantle the structures of persecution against them. As the nation prepares for elections scheduled for November 8, 2015, the Simon-Skjodt Center’s concerns about the early warning signs of genocide are all the more pressing.

The Center is especially concerned that even with increased media attention and upcoming elections, there has been no sincere effort on the part of the Burmese government to address the persecution Rohingya face. Dedicated action is required—and is so far lacking—on the part of the Burmese authorities to take steps to mitigate the early warning signs of genocide against the Rohingya.

Upcoming Elections and Stripping of Voting Rights

Despite heightened international attention on the plight of the Rohingya, they are in a more precarious position today than in the run-up to previous elections. The Burmese government’s repression of political dissent and the rights of minorities has created a climate in which the upcoming elections may trigger violence. Furthermore, for decades, Rohingya were allowed to vote even as they were denied other basic rights. As the Simon-Skjodt Center’s report details, the revocation of “white cards”—the identification cards distributed to most Rohingya—leaves Rohingya without the ability to vote in the upcoming national elections. The stripping of this fundamental right demonstrates the Burmese government’s persistent plan to neither recognize Rohingya nor promote



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their basic freedoms. We might see an election in which approximately one million Rohingya are kept from voting and in which those ushered to power make little effort to protect Rohingya rights.

The international community has lauded the elections as a turning point in Burma's transition to democracy, but many Rohingya the Simon-Skjodt Center interviewed expressed little hope that an election, however peaceful, would result in necessary changes for their community. No matter the outcome of the November 8, 2015, election, newly elected leaders will need to tackle long-standing issues of persecution of the Rohingya and develop ways to include Rohingya and all minority groups into the political and social fabric of the country.

EARLY WARNING SIGNS

STARKEST EARLY WARNING SIGNS OF FUTURE MASS ATROCITIES

The list below represents some of the concerns the Simon-Skjodt Center heard the most often from Rohingya leaders and survivors. Since the publication of the Center's report in May 2015, there has been no measurable improvement on any of these issues:

- Physical violence targeted against Rohingya people and homes
- Physical segregation of the Rohingya from members of other ethnic groups
- Blockage of humanitarian assistance, including necessary health care
- Deplorable living conditions for those displaced from their homes
- Rampant and unchecked hate speech against Rohingya and other Muslims
- Restrictions on movement
- Purposeful statelessness
- Destruction of mosques, onerous processes for Rohingya to maintain or fix mosques, and other restrictions on freedom of religion
- Extortion and illegal taxation
- Land confiscation
- Two-child policy and restrictions on marriage in some areas of Rakhine State
- "Supply checks" or raids by security forces on Rohingya homes
- Sexual violence and arbitrary arrest and detention
- Abuses in detention
- Revocation of legal or other documents
- Inability to pursue livelihoods and restrictions on business opportunities
- Lack of opportunities to pursue education
- Restrictions on voting
- Government blockage of information flow in and out of Rohingya communities

Right: Rohingya living in internment camps told the Museum they have little hope their lives will get better.



Humanitarian Crisis

The situation for Rohingya within Burma remains dire, and the absence of efforts to mitigate the risks of future violence has driven a mass exodus of Rohingya from Burma. Stories of Rohingya fleeing persecution only to end up stranded by smugglers, or in the clutches of traffickers, made headlines in the spring of 2015. After a mass grave of Rohingya was discovered in southern Thailand, the Thai government began cracking down on traffickers and smugglers who were bringing Rohingya from Burma to the Thailand/Malaysia border. To escape arrest in Thailand, traffickers and smugglers abandoned their boats—filled with Rohingya men, women, and children—at sea.

The flight of Rohingya from Burma is nothing new. For decades, networks of traffickers and smugglers have brought Rohingya out of Burma with minimal attention from regional authorities or the international media. The numbers of those fleeing recently have increased; according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 25,000 people departed from the Bay of Bengal in the first three months of 2015, which is double the rate of departure for the same time period in 2014 and 2013. Despite increased international attention in 2015 to the plight of trafficked and smuggled Rohingya, the underlying conditions of persecution and violence that drive so many to flee remain unaddressed.

The Way Forward

The Burmese government can take immediate steps to end the persecution of Rohingya by restoring voting rights and by eliminating restrictions on movement and other basic freedoms. These reforms, led by the national government and supported by the international community, must be complemented by efforts to address the deep social divides between ethnic groups. Ending distrust between groups and promoting tolerance and respect for equal rights will be a long-term process in Burma, and will require significant attention from the Burmese government.

For more information and to read the full report visit ushmm.org/rohingya.



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