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## **SCALING UP HUMANITARIAN AGENDA WITHIN COMMUNAL VIOLENCE IN MYANMAR**

Mega Ayu Lestari<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

Following the historical origins, social triggers, and ethics about their status of citizenship, the Rohingya should be treated properly as human-being. Even there are contradictions between the Burma Citizenship Law who did not admit them as an ethnic group of Myanmar, and Rohingya leaders who claimed as the descendants of the precolonial Muslim community of Rakhine State, it could not allow discrimination, confiscation of land, violence, and any other forms of injustice against the Rohingya. Hence, this paper would like to explain how they can be recognized in achieving their rights and reshaping the importance of humanitarian agenda, in which these are able to address the on-going abuse and exploitation within them and the needs of both critical agents and strong political solutions to alleviate the suffering of Rohingya. It also might be considered as an effort to broaden perspective among society in the meaning of refugees' law and protection. In case of promoting humanitarian agenda of the Rohingya, the paper has underscored this steps: 1) understanding the root cause of the stateless of Rohingya, 2) redefining values of solidarity; especially in ASEAN countries, 3) identifying the best feasible humanitarian action and initiatives, 4) reframing media and communication strategy to help encourage public opinion; and ultimately public policy to end the crisis of Rohingya.

Through science-policy interface, it provides networking schemes and humanitarian programs designed to activate their voices and initiatives, to invest for capacity- building and creating local leaders within Rohingya community. This paper can contribute to build a greater accountability at national and international level while measuring the impact of multisectoral partnerships that use an interdisciplinary approach. As a result, it will affect on the Rohingya recognition, and close their gaps and needs as a move towards well-being community.

**Keywords:** *Rohingya, humanitarian, policy, and science.*

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## **Introduction**

Rohingya is a generic term referring to the Sunni Muslim inhabitants of Arakan, the historical name of a Myanmar border region which has a long history of isolation from the rest of the country.<sup>2</sup> They claim their name based on reference to their indigenous roots to Rakhine State (also known as “Arakan” or “Rohang”). Since 1989, this region has been officially declared as the Rakhine State, close to the border with Bangladesh. However the majority of people are concerned from the northern part of the Rakhine State; Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Rathedaung.

The group is believed to be of mixed ancestry, tracing its origins both to outsiders (Arabs, Turks, Persians, Moguls and Pathans) and to local Bengali and Rakhine.<sup>3</sup> They speak a version of Chittagonian, a regional dialect of Bengali, which is also used extensively throughout southeastern Bangladesh.<sup>4</sup> The Rohingya are not only present in Myanmar: estimates show there are 250,000– 350,000 in Pakistan; 250,000–500,000 in Saudi Arabia; 200,000–500,000 in Bangladesh; 20,000–45,000 in Malaysia; and 3,000–20,000 in Thailand who are displaced as refugees.

They are not recognized by the Government of Myanmar and many in Burmese society, who consider them as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and therefore refer to them as “Bengalis”. The Rohingya are widely seen in Myanmar as the country’s most unwanted ethnic group, and they are excluded from citizenship laws and restricted in their movements and activities, including marriage and reproduction.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, this act legitimized any forms of injustice or discriminations against the Rohingya, which continue today.

## **What’s The On-Going Process within Humanitarian Agenda of the Rohingya?**

The Rohingya are deprived of humanitarian assistance due to their statelessness. In Rakhine State today must be seen in the broader context of Myanmar’s failures at nation-building, in which it is one of the poorest and most isolated parts of the country with a tremendous poverty rate: 78 per cent, a reflection of the neglect and exclusion it has faced during the post-colonial period. This legacy of poverty and exclusion was the backdrop to the intercommunal violence that erupted in Rakhine State in 2012.<sup>6</sup> The rape and murder of a Buddhist woman by Muslim men on 28 May led long-simmering tensions between the Buddhist Rakhine and Muslim communities to flare the following month.<sup>7</sup> Thus, hostility had already been high in the months leading up to the

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<sup>2</sup> Esther Kiragu; Angela Li Rosi; and Tim Morris, “States of denial”, A review of UNHCR’s response to the protracted situation of stateless Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, (Geneva, 2011), p.7.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Measures, “Who Are the Rohingya?”, Tony Blair Faith Foundation (03 June 2015), <http://tonyblairfaithfoundation.org/religion-geopolitics/commentaries/backgrounder/who-are-rohingya#overlay-context=religion-geopolitics/commentaries/opinion/nigeria-under-buhari>

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Shibani Mahtani, “Muslim Nations Take On Myanmar over Rohingyas”, *The Wall Street Journal* (07 August 2012), <http://blogs.wsj.com/indonesiarealtime/2012/08/07/muslim-nations-take-on-myanmar-over-rohingyas/>

<sup>6</sup> International Crisis Group, “Myanmar: The Politics of Rakhine State”, *Crisis Group Asia Report* N°261, (Brussels, 2014), p.8; for a detailed analysis, see also “The Dark Side of Transition: Violence Against Muslims in Myanmar”, *Asia Report* N°251, October 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Myanmar Conflict Alert: Preventing communal bloodshed and building better relations”,

incident, and extremist propaganda was circulating. The murder sparked a wave of violence, which mostly took place in the northern part of the state and around the provincial capital of Sittwe.

On 3 June, ten Muslim pilgrims from central Myanmar were killed by a mob in Toungup township. This followed the anonymous distribution of provocative leaflets attacking followers of Islam. As violence then spread including in some cases attacks on Buddhist communities by Muslims, a state of emergency was imposed on 10 June and additional troops dispatched to enforce it.<sup>8</sup> According to government figures, 98 people were killed and 123 injured, from both communities.<sup>9</sup> In addition, 5,338 homes, mostly of Rohingya Muslims, were destroyed and some 75,000 people, again mostly Rohingya, were displaced.

While longer-term solutions are sought, it is vital to address the urgent life-saving needs of populations that are vulnerable, discriminated, and persecuted. More than 137,000 people, mostly Rohingya, remain in displacement camps in Rakhine State following the 2012 violence.<sup>10</sup> These have essentially become internment camps, described by the UN's deputy relief coordinator as "appalling", and where access to basic services; including health, education, water and sanitation, is "wholly inadequate".<sup>11</sup> There are also critical humanitarian needs outside the displacement camps.

In total, the UN estimates that 310,000 people in Rakhine State are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance; almost 10 per cent of the total population of the state.<sup>12</sup> In northern Rakhine State, life-threatening forms of malnutrition remain well over the 15 per cent emergency threshold, requiring an urgent and sustained intervention.<sup>13</sup>

In February 2014, the authorities ordered Médecins sans frontières (MSF) Holland; the largest provider of humanitarian medical services, to suspend its operations in Rakhine State, amid allegations of bias that the organisation has insisted are unfounded.<sup>14</sup> The humanitarian situation became more crucial when on 26-27 March an ethnic Rakhine mob attacked international humanitarian agencies in Sittwe, with one local observer killed in police fire, and prompting the evacuation of over 300 humanitarian workers from the city. According to eyewitnesses, the attackers had maps marking the location of UN and international NGO premises, indicating advance planning.<sup>15</sup> In total, 33 premises, including offices, residences and warehouses were looted and ransacked,

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Asia Crisis Group Report, 12 June 2012.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> "Final Report of Inquiry Commission on Sectarian Violence in Rakhine State", Asia Crisis Group Report, 8 July 2013.

<sup>10</sup> "Internal displacement in Myanmar", UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) map, 1 June 2014.

<sup>11</sup> See "Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Kyung-wha Kang Press Remarks on Myanmar", OCHA, 17 June 2014.

<sup>12</sup> "2014 Strategic Response Plan - Myanmar", UN, December 2013.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> MSF stressed that its services are "guided by medical ethics and the principles of neutrality and impartiality" and "based solely on need, irrespective of race, religion, gender, HIV status or political affiliation". See "Tens of thousands of patients at risk in Myanmar after MSF ordered to cease activities", press release, MSF, 28 February 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Crisis Group interviews, eyewitnesses, Yangon, April 2014.

causing over \$1 million in losses.<sup>16</sup> Since the attacks, humanitarian access has improved, although it has yet to return to previous levels, which were themselves far from adequate.<sup>17</sup> The main obstacle to scaling up is insufficient staff on the ground to cope with needs; a cumulative effect of the attacks, restrictions by the authorities and obstruction by local communities.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, the government needs to facilitate the work of humanitarian agencies, including by making it easier to re-establish offices and residences in Sittwe, and defining to Rakhine activist groups that they cannot disapprove on life-saving aid. The Myanmar society have to be selective towards media reporting and international commentary that has cast the Rakhine community, especially Rohingya as a whole as violent extremists, ignoring the diversity of opinions that exist, the fact that they themselves are a long-persecuted minority, and rarely attempting to understand their perspective and concerns. This is counterproductive which promotes a siege mentality on the part of Rakhine and obscures complex realities.

### ***Understanding the root cause of the stateless of Rohingya***

The historical origins of Rohingya in Northern Rakhine State are tangled and complex. While Rohingya leaders claim to be the descendants of the precolonial Muslim community of Rakhine State, the term Rohingya only appeared in 1799 in an article on the comparative vocabulary in the Burma Empire to describe the indigenous people of Rakhine State.<sup>19</sup>

After the first of three Anglo-Burmese wars ended in 1826, Rakhine State was brought under British colonial administration, which had an open immigration policy that allowed an influx of Bengali Muslims into the newly colonized territory.<sup>20</sup> The British also welcomed wealthy money lenders (chettys) from South India to help manage colonial Burma. In his book on integration and secession in Western Myanmar, Moshe Yegar noted that “the Burmese (Buddhist) peasants became landless because the chettys took control of much of the Burmese lands,<sup>21</sup> particularly during the great depression in 1929.

Then, racial riots occurred during the 1930s between the majority Burman Buddhist ethnic group and Muslim migrants of Indian descent, ultimately leading to the nationalist Doh Bama (We Burma) movement. This pivotal event subsequently saw the

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<sup>16</sup> “Humanitarian Bulletin, Myanmar”, UNOCHA, Issue 3, March 2014, p. 1-31.

<sup>17</sup> <sup>17</sup> The UN reports that services have reached 60 per cent of the level they were at prior to the attacks. Crisis Group interview, UN humanitarian officials, Yangon and Sittwe, July 2014. See also “Humanitarian Bulletin”, *op. cit.*

<sup>18</sup> Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian workers, Sittwe, July 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Francis Buchanan, “A Comparative Vocabulary of Some of the Languages Spoken in the Burma Empire,” *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. 5 (1799), 237, <http://www.networkmyanmar.com/images/stories/PDF12/rohingya-origins-1-re...>

<sup>20</sup> Jacques P. Leider, “Rohingya”, *Rakhaing and the Recent Outbreak of Violence -A Note*,” *Bulletin of the Burma Studies Group*, 16 (2012), 8, <http://www.networkmyanmar.org/images/stories/PDF15/Leider-Note.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> Moshe Yegar, “Between Integration and Secession: The Muslim Communities of the Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand, and Western Burma/Myanmar”, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002), p.103

beginnings of Burman-Buddhist ethno-nationalism and the start of nationwide anti-Indian sentiment, which later evolved into anti-Muslim attitudes.<sup>22</sup>

In fact, the perception that foreigners ran much of Burma's finance and commerce was seen as unacceptable. Anti-Indian and anti-Muslim attitudes were compounded during both the Japanese occupation of Burma (1942–1945); when Muslims in British Burma, going against the leanings of the Burmese Independence Movement, sided with the colonial British,<sup>23</sup> and the subsequent Rohingya Mujahideen Rebellion (1948–1961), in which the Rohingya waged an unsuccessful secessionist campaign to create a separate Islamic State that would eventually join East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).<sup>24</sup>

However, from 1962, since General Ne Win seized power in a *coup d'état*, successive military-backed regimes in Myanmar have oppressed the Rohingya. The first major assault accompanied the Bangladeshi War of Independence in 1971, which led to many Bengalis fleeing to Myanmar.<sup>25</sup> In 1978, a Myanmar government campaign known as Naga Min aimed to force the refugees from the country and caused arbitrary arrests, mosques desecration, villages destruction, and lands confiscation. Close identification of Rohingya with Bangladeshi refugees led to large numbers of Rohingya fleeing to Bangladesh, where the government set up makeshift camps and appealed to the United Nations for aid and assistance.

While the official camps were set up, an agreement between Bangladesh and Myanmar in July 1978 allowed for the repatriation of 200,000 refugees back to Myanmar. By the end of 1979, roughly 180,000 Rohingya had returned to Rakhine state, despite refugee protests that ended in hundreds of deaths. But in 1982, The Burma Citizenship Law was enacted and did not recognize the Rohingya as an ethnic group of Myanmar, stating that any ethnic group that settled in Myanmar after 1823 (the beginning of the First Anglo-Burmese War) was not entitled to citizenship.

Then, the Myanmar government launched another campaign against the Rohingya in 1991; Operation Pyi (Clean and Beautiful Nation), which was to scrutinize each individual within the state, to determine whether they were a citizen or “illegal immigrant.” This led to around 250,000 Rohingya Muslims fleeing to Bangladesh and could be seen as a beginning of the refugee situation, which has affected to many Rohingya today living in makeshift camps as stateless people.

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<sup>22</sup> Eliane Coates, “Sectarian Violence Involving Rohingya in Myanmar: Historical Roots and Modern Triggers”, Middle East Institute, (04 August 2014), <http://www.mei.edu/content/map/sectarian-violence-involving-rohingya-myanmar-historical-roots-and-modern-triggers>

<sup>23</sup> Imtiaz Ahmed, “The Plight of the Stateless Rohingyas” (Bangladesh: The University Press Limited, 2010).

<sup>24</sup> Moshe Yegar, “Between Integration and Secession: The Muslim Communities of the Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand, and Western Burma/Myanmar” (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002), p.37.

<sup>25</sup> Anthony Measures, “Who Are the Rohingyas?”, Tony Blair Faith Foundation (03 June 2015), <http://tonyblairfaithfoundation.org/religiongeopolitics/commentaries/backgrounders/who-are-rohingya#overlay-context=religion-geopolitics/commentaries/opinion/nigeria-under-buhari>



Rakhine state has for several years seen violent clashes led by Buddhist nationalists, who believe, according to one slogan, “to be Burmese is to be Buddhist”.<sup>26</sup> More violence broke out in 2012 between Buddhist nationalists and Rohingya, and by November 2014 the United Nations was reporting that over 100,000 Rohingya had been displaced since 2012, with an average of 900 per day fleeing the country.

### ***Redefining values of solidarity; especially in ASEAN countries***

It is a serious breach of IHR principles where the Rohingya rights are denied based on racial and religious ground, they also have limitation to access education, employment opportunities, and freedom of association among others. Hereby, The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) entered a new phase in its development in late 2015, when its members announced the creation of the ASEAN Community which can be a hope to maintain peace and prosperity. ASEAN’s 10 member states are diverse in terms of race, religion, culture, economic development and political systems.<sup>27</sup> The rationale for the new community is that, in the light of the rapid rise of China and India, to strengthen cohesion among its members. Moreover, they should consider the short term and long term practical solution as well, to play an active role through encouragement and peace-building negotiations within the prolonged communal violence in Myanmar.

To explore the opportunities for minimizing political instability that exist in Myanmar, ASEAN’s dialogue partners subscribe to the principles for interstate relations that it upholds in its key political documents.<sup>28</sup> Next, this also indicates an acceptance of ASEAN’s central role as the convener of regional forums where key external partners participate.

Myanmar had passed a significant milestone of political change and transition in November 2015 elections. In the next decade of regional integration efforts, ASEAN’s role may find greater traction in engaging Myanmar through regional and bilateral channels. The ASEAN countries can employ cooperation programmes under the ASEAN framework, as well as through bilateral relations with Myanmar, to assist the country’s continued opening up. There are also existing platforms like, ASEAN-Japan dialogue relations and its bilateral cooperation programmes for Myanmar to support the transition process.

A former ASEAN secretary-general, Rodolfo Severino, has outlined the organization’s characteristics and the “ASEAN Way” as preferring: (1) informal, loose arrangements over treaties and formal agreements; (2) personal relations and peer influence over institutions; and (3) consensus and common interests over binding commitments.<sup>29</sup> The “ASEAN Way” emphasizes the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of a fellow member state, and has dominated not only in many

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Masahiro Kawai, “Challenges for the ASEAN Economic Community and ASEAN-Japan Relations (ASEAN’s Regional Role and Relations with Japan: The Challenges of Deeper Integration),” Research paper, Grad. School of Public Policy, Univ. of Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan, 2013.

<sup>28</sup> Moe Thuzar, “The Role of ASEAN and Japan in Minimizing Political Instability (ASEAN’s Regional Role and Relations with Japan: The Challenges of Deeper Integration),” Research paper, ASEAN Studies Centre, ISEAS, Singapore, 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Severino, R. (2006), “Southeast Asia in Search of an ASEAN Community”, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, p. 11.

meetings that ASEAN convenes at various official levels, but also in regional institutions such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) instituted in 1994, the ASEAN Plus Three process that emerged in the aftermath of the 1997-1998 Asian financial crisis, and the more recent construct of the East Asia Summit (EAS) launched in 2005 and expanded to its current composition in 2011.<sup>30</sup>

At all these forums, and possibly more so in the EAS, ASEAN strives to maintain its central role as a convener of meetings where all of participants are consolidating to have a common voice in addressing how crucial is the humanitarian agenda of the Rohingya. Secondly, they can check thoroughly, investigate, and bring into justice for those who organize or participate in violence. Just a few of the perpetrators in 2012 violence, especially the ringleaders, have been prosecuted. By doing so will help ensure not only that justice or independent judiciary is done; it can also contribute to political stability, enhance the prospects for a political solution, and prevent further violence.

### ***Identifying the best feasible humanitarian action and initiatives***

Based on the Rakhine Buddhist perspective, they have increasingly felt that the most immediate and obvious threat in rebuilding their communities and reasserting their ethnic identity is the Muslim population of the state. The threats are demographic concerns, politics, socio-cultural dilution, economics, and violence. Accordingly, the Myanmar government must consider the worst impact within their act against Rohingya such as full embargo with ASEAN countries, they also might be imposed economic and political sanctions by ASEAN and the international communities.

Under domestic and international pressure to set out a comprehensive approach to dealing with the crisis in Rakhine State, the Myanmar government is creating a “Rakhine State Action Plan” which has established by President Thein Sein in the wake of the 2012 violence. The draft action plan, which remains confidential, was presented to domestic and international stakeholders in July and is now being amended further.<sup>31</sup> As part of identifying the best feasible humanitarian action and initiatives, I decided to adopt this draft and eventually lift up the humanitarian agenda on mass media in Myanmar.

Thus, it consists of five parts, covering these:

- (1) “Security, stability and rule of law” deals with better border and maritime security; protection at sea to provide a rescue and safe disembarkation, and to prevent illegal immigration, increased and better-trained police deployment across the state, improved rule of law and conflict management

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<sup>30</sup> The ARF is where diverse interests converge around discussions on regional security and stability; the ASEAN Plus Three mainly serves the need to build relationships around economic and functional priorities in East Asia; and the EAS adds a broader geopolitical dimension to discussions on strategic issues that are relevant to ASEAN’s role and relations with external partners. See Moe Thuzar, “ASEAN’s Regional Role and Relations with Japan: The Challenges of Deeper Integration”, Chatham House, February 2016.

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<sup>31</sup> Copies of this end-July version, a shorter 7 July text, as well as previous versions are on file with Asia Crisis Group Report.



of the Rohingya in order to ensure that registered refugees can be safe; whether from any kinds of persecution or from weak political decisions in Myanmar and neighborhood countries. The police who is supposed to grant safety is taking big advantages on the Rohingya plight, in which they are not only asking money in return of favours, but also mistreating physically and psychologically the IDPs. It is not a secret, according to reports and press agencies, that the police and the army were involved in the destruction and fire of Rohingya's villages and that they did not intervene to stop the violence.<sup>32</sup>

- (2) "Rehabilitation and reconstruction" deals with the on-going provision of shelter and services to displaced people in existing camps. They should also be educated to sustain their livelihoods in the new existing environments such as to access food, health services, good water, sanitation, and hygiene, to fulfill their social and psychological needs, to get employed, and to prevent confrontation with local communities.

"Permanent resettlement", starting in January 2015, envisages the relocation of displaced people to new permanent resettlement sites, but apparently not to their original places of residence and provision of infrastructure, services and livelihood support.<sup>33</sup>

"Citizenship verification", identifying information is to be collected from all "Bengalis" in Rakhine State, and temporary registration documents (TRC or a case number) issued to those who do not already have them.<sup>34</sup>

Those who refuse to register as "Bengali" will be excluded from the citizenship verification process, and those who register will have their details verified against existing government records and a decision made on their citizenship status that they will not necessarily have to provide documentary proof of status, it can be established from government records. Those who refuse to go through the process, or who are found not to be citizens, will be relocated to detention camps with a view to resettlement in third countries or to live for a short time in transit countries. Thus, UNHCR needs to be more effective in terms of transforming Rohingya status from Asylum Seeker to Refugee.

"Socio-economic development", to build their skills and capacity, to boost agricultural and fisheries productivity, tourism, environmental management, provision of health and education services and improved infrastructure for Rakhine State as a whole, then to provide security and voluntary return of Rohingya back to their communities.

### ***Reframing media and communication strategy to help encourage public opinion***

As the media are so prevalent in industrialized countries, they have a massive impact on how these populations view the world. In case of Myanmar, they have to

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<sup>32</sup> "Situation of the Rohingya in Myanmar", Written statement submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status, 18 February 2014.

<sup>33</sup> International Crisis Group, "Myanmar: The Politics of Rakhine State", Crisis Group Asia Report N°261, (Brussels, 2014), p.34.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

remain a balanced and comprehensive projection of government's thought and institutions, reflecting the diversity of country's culture and society to explore issues affecting on Rohingya community and give citizens enough information to understand the conflict and get involved, or use the power of social media to help resolve conflict.

To be effective in encouraging public opinion, they must lead a public information campaign promoting tolerance and religious non-discrimination, condemn and dispel hate speeches and propagandas against all ethnic and religious groups within Myanmar. Before that, the Myanmar government must allow domestic and international media, special rapporteur, non-governmental organizations, and foreign diplomats access to the areas where asylum seekers are arriving, or conduct an independent investigation into the on-going abuses in Arakan state, then governments should immediately provide information about the fate of hundreds of people detained since the security operations in northern Arakan State began, and make clear public statements in mass media to address the high tension and commit to equal protection of all individuals in Arakan State.

In August 2012, in a significant step forward, pre-publication screening and censorship by the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division (PSRD) was brought to an end, and in January 2013, the PSRD was replaced with the Copyright and Registration Division (CRD).<sup>35</sup> Yet, the press are still required to send printed copies of their publications to the CRD after publication, and the CRD can summon journalists to its headquarters and threaten newspapers with suspension. The Special Rapporteur also has concerns over the current registration process for print publications, where the threat of the revocation of licences could be used by state authorities as a tool for censorship, as well as concerns over the misuse of defamation laws to secure censorship.<sup>36</sup>

In September, the Government established a 28-member Interim Press Council, which subsequently created four working committees to perform the tasks of resolving disputes and complaints, drafting the code of ethics and the new media law, finance and management, and information and public relations.<sup>37</sup> The Chair of the Human Rights Council is a retired Supreme Court Judge Khin Maung Aye and the Deputy Chair is journalist and writer Maung Wuntha. The Special Rapporteur is also encouraged to see that membership is largely made up of independent journalists, some of whom he met in Yangon during his latest visit. The Council has been proactive in carrying out its tasks, such as engaging in mediation between the government and two journals, *The Voice* and *Snapshot Journal*, for the withdrawal of government lawsuits against the publications.<sup>38</sup>

The Special Rapporteur commends the Government's decision to pass the responsibility of drafting a new media law to the Interim Press Council, which will help to ensure meaningful consultation with relevant stakeholders, key figure, and a law that meets international standards which will establish a permanent Press Council and new

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<sup>35</sup> Human Rights Council Twenty-second session, "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar", Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), (Myanmar, 2013), p.5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p.6.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*

publishing guidelines, and should help to protect the freedom of expression of reporters and editors.

Through understanding the co-cultural communication techniques people used in this study, suggests that people are negotiating ways to enact certain communication strategies within the dominant cultural space; Rakhine Buddhist. Therefore, mass media and the Special Rapporteur believe that it is the time to address these shortcomings before they become further entrenched and destabilize the reform of humanitarian agenda.

## **Conclusion**

In-depth collaboration within the Member State, ASEAN countries, NGOs, international organizations and communities across the world can play a critical role in addressing the humanitarian agenda of the Rohingya which also contribute to freedom of expression which remains fair and objective media coverage towards all individuals in Myanmar, joint-advocacy, sharing of knowledge and resources, rebuilding public opinions that are bias; discriminate the Rohingya, and shortly, assessing religious schools while developing next non-discriminative generations and identify criteria for which should remain open and which be closed down; taking action against extremist teachers, and reforming the curricula in madrasas to ensure the teaching of the Burmese language and citizenship awareness (civic education). It also provides for interfaith and intercultural dialogues and exchanges between Buddhist, Muslim, and any religious groups in Rakhine State to advance reconciliation and peacebuilding process.

The Special Rapporteur also highlights these concerns and support the Government in addressing them, which help to remind the international community of the importance of prioritising human rights in its bilateral relations with Myanmar. And ultimately, it encourages a public policy where can stop the animosity toward the Rohingya and the international human rights standards are met.