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Rep. Christopher Smith
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Re: September 13 hearing on “Human Rights in the Aftermath of the Coup”

Date: Wednesday, September 13, 2023 - 2:30pm

Location: H-313, the Capitol

On behalf of Amnesty International and our millions of members and supporters worldwide, we submit the following statement on the state of human rights in the aftermath of the February 2021 military coup in Myanmar, as well as on the protracted displacement and resettlement needs of Rohingya communities.

Human Rights Crisis in Myanmar

Following the 2021 military coup in Myanmar, Amnesty International has documented widespread [human rights violations](#) perpetrated by security forces. The military has inflicted collective punishment on civilians, attacked villages with shelling and air strikes, killing and injuring civilians and damaging homes, schools, hospitals, and religious buildings. Soldiers have unlawfully detained, tortured, and extrajudicially executed people who tried to return home and have burned villages and pillaged everything of value that displaced families had to leave behind. Security forces have arrested protesters and activists, subjecting detainees to [torture](#) and other ill-treatment in detention.

Between February 1, 2021, and September 30, 2022, the first twenty months following the coup, reports [estimate](#) that more than 6,000 people have been killed by security forces, including children. On 10 March 2021, after examining over 50 clips from the ongoing crackdown, Amnesty International found that the Myanmar military uses lethal tactics and weapons normally seen on the battlefield against peaceful protesters and bystanders across the country. On 2 May 2021, there were reports of security forces flinging grenades into a crowd of protesters in northern Kachin state.

The thousands of people injured during the protests were forced to seek treatment in secret locations because they feared being arrested if they went to the hospitals. Thousands of doctors and health care workers have joined the protests against the military and refused to work under the military. There have

been reports of the military targeting the health care workers on strike, raiding voluntary medical facilities, severely beating the workers, and arresting and detaining them.

Since the coup, there has been a massive increase in surveillance, with informers reporting to the military authorities about people suspected to be aiding or supporting the anti-military/pro-democracy movement. Night raids have become common, and more people are picked up from their homes by the military.

More than [24,800 individuals](#) have been arrested and detained by the military. There are reports of those detained experiencing torture and ill-treatment, including sexual and gender-based violence. In addition, many of those detained are deprived of their right to the immediate assistance of a lawyer and/or access to family.

Recommendations:

Amnesty International has urged international action, including efforts by the UN Security Council to impose a comprehensive global arms embargo on Myanmar that covers the direct and indirect supply, sale or transfer, including transit, trans-shipment and brokering of all weapons, munitions, and other military and security equipment, and the provision of training and other military and security assistance; the embargo should cover law enforcement equipment and dual use goods, such as surveillance technologies, used for internal repression; be strictly monitored and include robust enforcement mechanisms.

Amnesty further urges the US government to ensure strict enforcement of measures taken to ban individuals and entities involved in the military's provision of aviation fuel, including employing the recent U.S. determination on the jet fuel sector to ensure a ban on the military's access to fuel.

Rohingya Displacement and Resettlement

Amnesty is also deeply concerned with the ongoing threats facing Rohingya communities, particularly those communities in Bangladesh, many of whom have been displaced since 2017 and who have been denied access to basic welfare including adequate healthcare, educational opportunities, and psychosocial support. The security situation in Cox's Bazaar, the refugee camp where most Rohingya families live, has deteriorated in the last years. There have been sixty-nine murders in 2023 – double number of killings that took place last year and on pace to eclipse the total number of killings for 2018-2021.

The US publicly [announced](#) the establishment of a refugee resettlement program for Rohingya in December 2022. Since this announcement, however, the US has resettled fewer than one hundred Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh. Moreover, a lack of clear information and communication about the resettlement program created unrealistic expectations among Rohingya refugees about the scope and pace of the program.

While much of the recent focus on Rohingya resettlement to the U.S. has been on establishing a regular cadence of arrivals from Bangladesh, the U.S. has welcomed an estimated 12,000 Rohingya refugees through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). These arrivals primarily came through Malaysia, and are successfully integrating into their new American communities.

Recommendations

The US government has been a leading actor in responding to violence towards and displacement of Rohingya communities. However, the protracted crisis requires ongoing and increasingly level of funding support, international advocacy, and expedited resettlement.

We hope to see an increase in resettlement in 2024, which should be possible as a result of further development of the necessary infrastructure in Bangladesh to support significant resettlement numbers, as well as the establishment of a P2 designation for the refugees who arrived in Bangladesh in 1992, are registered with UNHCR, and participated in the registration reverification process during the summer of 2023.

We continue to urge the administration to prioritize P1 cases for individuals and families who do not qualify for P2 consideration but are in urgent need of resettlement due to any number of protection concerns, including targeted threats of violence; medical cases; and, women-led households.

We encourage the administration to continue to welcome Rohingya refugees through the USRAP and from Malaysia and other countries in the region, as well as expanding the number of arrivals from Bangladesh. In doing so, the U.S. will set a strong example for other resettlement countries to follow suit and make robust commitments to also resettle meaningful numbers of Rohingya refugees. The resettlement process is a demonstration of the US commitment to provide durable solutions to the crisis and to ease the burden on Bangladesh.

Additionally, we urge the US to convene the diplomatic community to address the funding crisis. Funding shortfalls for the 2023 Joint Response Plan (JRP) are a significant concern, with cuts to food rations from \$12pp/month to \$8pp/month (just \$0.26pp/day) likely to have a devastating impact on Rohingya well-being. Bangladeshi security and intelligence agencies, among others, have also expressed concerns about the impact the cuts will have on the security environment in the camps. Moreover, some in the government of Bangladesh have sought to link the cuts to repatriation, with officials threatening Rohingya that further cuts loom if they do not return. The US could more effectively leverage its position as the largest donor to the response to garner additional support from other donors and to ensure at least a minimum of life-sustaining support is provided to the JRP.

We thank the Committee for its continued attention to the human rights crisis in Myanmar.