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Myanmar: Investigate death and alleged rape of Rohingya woman

The Myanmar authorities must ensure a prompt, independent, impartial and effective investigation into the death and alleged rape of a Rohingya woman. The alleged refusal by the police to investigate the case, and to bring those responsible to justice is a violation of their human rights obligations and sends the message that crimes against Rohingya, including unlawful deaths, rape and other crimes of sexual violence, will continue to go unpunished.

On the morning of 18 August 2016, Raysuana, a Rohingya woman in her mid-twenties, was found unconscious in a ditch close to a military compound, named locally as Bandula Hall, in Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine State. According to local sources, Raysuana's body was found by military personnel, however, instead of taking her directly to a hospital, they called leaders from nearby Thet Kay Pyin village and asked them to come and pick her up. The village leaders then took her to Thet Kay Pyin clinic, where clinic attendants discovered Raysuana was bleeding from her vagina and mouth, and had bruises and swelling on her back. She died later that evening, at around 7:45pm.

Local police, called to the clinic, reportedly refused to open an investigation saying that it would be "too complicated" given that she was found close to a military compound. Instead, they ordered villagers to bury her body, which they did the following day. According to credible sources no post-mortem examination was carried out.

Amnesty International calls on the Myanmar authorities to immediately initiate an investigation into the death and alleged rape of Raysuana, ensuring that it is independent, impartial and effective. The results should be made public. All those suspected of being responsible must be brought to justice before independent, civilian courts, in proceedings which meet international standards of fairness and which do not impose the death penalty. Should any of the suspected perpetrators be members of the Myanmar security forces, they should be immediately suspended from duties.

Amnesty International also calls on the authorities to secure the crime scene and ensure the safety of any witnesses and those reporting information about the incident. Amnesty International further calls on the authorities to launch an inquiry into allegations that the police refused to open an investigation into this case; and if this is the case, to institute disciplinary or other measures against those responsible. The authorities must also provide effective remedies and reparations to Raysuana's family.

Thet Kay Pyin village is located in an area of Sittwe which is home to tens of thousands of people, mainly Rohingya, who remain displaced four years after violence swept Rakhine State in 2012. The Rohingya and other Muslims living there face severe restrictions on their freedom of movement, and are effectively segregated from neighbouring communities. Because of these restrictions accessing medical care, in particular life-saving medical treatment, can be very difficult.

Raysuana's case take place in a wider context of human rights violations against the Rohingya, including unlawful killings, torture and other ill-treatment and arbitrary arrest at the hands of

the security forces. Independent and impartial investigations into such allegations are rare and suspected perpetrators are seldom held to account.

The case also highlights wider concerns about rape and other crimes of sexual violence against ethnic minority women, which have been well-documented by women's organizations in Myanmar. In its 2016 Concluding Observations, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee) expressed concern about the "wide spread impunity enjoyed by perpetrators of such violence" and called on the Myanmar government to "expedite the investigation and prosecution of crimes of sexual violence perpetrated by the military and armed groups".

Ongoing impunity which allows human rights violations to go unpunished only serves to perpetuate the cycle of abuse. The authorities must ensure perpetrators are not shielded from accountability and ensure that victims and their relatives lodging complaints and seeking redress do not face reprisals.