

TO: PRESS OFFICERS
FROM: IS PRESS OFFICE
DATE: 19 MARCH 1992

RE: @MYANMAR REFUGEES IN BANGLADESH, URGENT NEWS RELEASE

Dear friends,

Here is an urgent, unscheduled news release on human rights violations against the Muslim ethnic minority in Myanmar, the Rohingyas, 200,000 of whom have fled to Bangladesh.

As you probably know, the story has been very much in the news internationally. A delegate has just returned from Bangladesh, where she interviewed around 100 refugees - because we were getting a lot of queries about the situation, we decided to rush out a news release so that at least we have some comment to make in response to requests.

Of course many of you are very busy right now, and we don't expect you to send this out to all your contacts. As it could get onto the international wires, though, it may be best to be prepared for requests.

Hope you are all well,

Best regards - Anna

16/05/92

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MYANMAR: HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS CAUSE THOUSANDS TO FLEE

Amnesty International today called on Myanmar's ruling military council to halt its campaign of terror and violence against the country's Muslim minority.

The organization, which recently sent a fact-finding team to interview refugees in Bangladesh, said it had confirmed reports of widespread human rights violations, including torture and killings. "It is clear that the Muslim minority in Myanmar's western Rakhine (Arakan) State, is being targeted by the Burmese army," said the worldwide human rights organization..

"Muslim men have been rounded up in large numbers and pressed into forced labour for the military, often as porters. They are ill fed and abused, many are reported to have been beaten to death when they became too weak to carry their loads. Muslim women have been gang raped in their homes, others have been held in army barracks and repeatedly raped."

Rape and forced labour are part of a general pattern of repression by the Burmese army against the Muslim minority population, known as Rohingyas. Troops have entered Muslim villages, occupying mosques and burning religious texts and seizing food and crops. Whole villages have

been driven from their homes after the army issued written orders confiscating their land.

The forced labour imposed by the army often leads to death. One refugee interviewed by Amnesty International told how he, his brother and uncle were captured by the army and forced to be porters for the army, carrying heavy loads.

They were fed starvation rations and were repeatedly beaten. His brother was hit in the face with a gun, he himself was kicked and his arm was broken. "They also beat my uncle, who collapsed unconscious" said the man. "When he was lying on the ground the army burnt him with a cigarette on his legs to see if he was alive or not. We were not allowed to help him but just had to leave him there and keep on walking.

"That night my brother and I managed to escape, and we went back to where my uncle had been left so that we could take him home. When we got there we found that he was already dead. I saw at least 20 porters die on the trip."

The army has also arrested Muslim villagers who protested at such ill-treatment and torture. Some have reportedly been sentenced to up to 14 years in prison. Amnesty International has documented cases of deliberate killings by the army of people who resist their demands - in one case, a farmer was shot dead because he refused to hand over his cows, his only means of support, to the army.

More than 200,000 Rohingyas have fled Myanmar to Bangladesh since the start of the military campaign against them in late 1991. "This is simply the latest in a long series of repressive actions against Myanmar's ethnic minorities," said Amnesty International. "Moreover, it is part of a long-standing pattern of gross human rights violations intended to suppress all dissent in Myanmar."

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 19 MARCH 1992