

Burma denies soldiers killed, raped Rohingya Muslims

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Updated Thu Aug 2, 2012



The Burmese Government has denied allegations its security forces opened fire on Rohingya Muslims, committed rape and failed to intervene as sectarian violence erupted in western Burma.

A new report by Human Rights Watch says the Burmese military failed to protect both Muslims and Buddhists during the clashes in June, and then "unleashed a campaign of violence" and mass arrests against Rohingya Muslims.

The ethnic clashes in Rakhine state, formerly known as Arakan, has left about 80 people dead from both sides.

But the US-based human rights group says the official figures appear "grossly underestimated".

It says when security forces did step in they targeted minority Rohingya people who were killed, raped and arrested.

The Burmese Government has strongly denied the claims.

Foreign Minister Wunna maung lwin has slammed those he accuses of 'politicising' the unrest.

"Myanmar strongly rejects the accusations made by some quarters that abusive and excessive uses of force were made by the authorities in dealing with the situation," he said.

The violence has displaced more than 100,000 people and focused new attention on the plight of about one million members of the Rohingya who live in Burma but are not accepted as citizens there or in neighbouring Bangladesh.

The Burmese President, Thein Sein, says the government is only responsible for third-generation Rohingyas whose families had arrived before independence in 1948, and that it was impossible to accept those who had "illegally entered" Burma.

Mr Thein Sein has recommended that the United Nations refugee agency UNHCR take care of them in camps or resettle them in third countries.

Human Rights Watch says the resettlement of the group would be a human rights "disaster".

HRW's deputy Asia director Phil Robertson says Burma must rewrite its citizenship law to include the Rohingya and count them in its 2014 census.

"There's a need now really to make sure that people understand that democracy, human rights and a multi-ethnic Burma is going to require respect for all ethnic groups, of all religions, and that the Burmese Government can't pick and choose who it wants to include and exclude in the union of Burma," he said.

The HRW report has also accused western countries of turning a blind eye to the abuses in Rakhine state, while easing sanctions in response to human rights reforms.

It has called for strong international reaction to the "atrocities" committed during last month's bloody unrest.

"The international community has expressed concern but has not really responded with the urgency that's needed...so it seems like there's a business first approach to Burma that is missing the point," Mr Robertson said.

"That stability and ethnic reconciliation is still not complete and there needs to be a much more focus on this to prevent further outbreaks of sectarian violence like we saw in Arakan state."