

The Genocide Happening Right Now That Nobody Is Talking About
By Dom Hammond
28 August 2013



The Genocide Happening Right Now That Nobody Is Talking About
© AP

Over the last two years, the positive news of Myanmar embracing democracy and engaging with the developed world has been consistently offset by reports of [sectarian violence](#) between Buddhists and the minority Rohingya Muslim population. Estimates suggest that 300 Muslims have been killed and up to 300,000 displaced since the military junta nominally ceded power in 2011. No longer is this violence restricted to the state of Rakhine where the majority of Burmese Muslims live. Major incidents are reported in states as far south as Thaketa, just a few miles from Yangon, the cultural, historic and business capitol of the country which is now awash with western businessmen drinking expensive cocktails in expensive hotels. This worrying trend of more frequent and more widely spread violence threatens to derail the country's turnaround.

As violence in Myanmar creeps closer to the capitol, shown below, the genocide taboo creeps closer to the consciousness of the West.



(Image via [Amazonaws](#))

The violence we are forced to consider here is of the most disturbing kind — indiscriminate, brutal, and deadly. A further disturbing element is the widespread belief that government forces are supporting the violence by turning a blind eye. There are many reports of government forces standing by and, if not actively encouraging, being less than heavy-handed with Buddhist perpetrators. There is some convincing [video evidence](#) of this around the news sites and on YouTube. Convictions relating to sectarian violence have been proportionately more prevalent for Muslims who have also seen [harsher sentences](#) handed down. Despite political reforms, power is still in the hands of the military, and currently concentrated in the hands of exclusively ethnic Burmese Buddhists.

For those who believe that "genocide" is too shocking a term to use here, I would respond: The Rakhine Buddhists refer to the Rohingya as Bengali rather than Burmese and believe they are illegal immigrants despite their having settling in the Rakhine region centuries ago. By denying their history and denying the Rohingya's right to call Myanmar home, I believe the term "genocide" can be used without hyperbole to describe this systematic approach to removing an ethnic minority. Human Rights Watch (HRW) [agrees](#).



(Image via www.presstv.ir)



(Image via www.scmp.com.)



(Image via newsinfo.inquirer.net)

This makes my recent Sunday morning browse of the papers all the more extraordinary:

1. The Travel section of the *Sunday Telegraph* ran a [feature](#) on why you should consider a river cruise as the most relaxing way to take in the sites of Burma.

2. A McKinsey Global Institute's [report](#) reminded me why global corporates are desperate to deploy capital in the region (in short: natural resources, geographic position and large, young workforce that can become more productive).

3. My Twitter feed reminded me that [Hugo Swire](#), the UK's FCO minister, is working hard to interact with Thein Sein's government.

HRW has compared the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya to that of the Tutsis in Rwanda. I did not spend my Sunday mornings reading the paper in 1994, but the idea that travellers would be vacationing in Kigali, investors throwing money at coffee plantations, and President Clinton welcoming [Juvenile Habyarimana](#) to the White House seems far-fetched.



(Image via rawstory.com)

It is wholly incumbent on the government of Myanmar, its law enforcers, and the robustness of its judiciary to stamp out this violence. For Muslims in Myanmar, it increasingly obvious that their lives are at stake, but wherever the government sits on the scale of indifference too complicity, they must know the future prosperity of the country is at stake too, for the following reasons:

1. The flourishing tourist industry is likely to stall if the violence continues to encroach on the most popular visitor sites. While attacks remained in Rakhine state it could be dismissed by tourists as “a skirmish among locals, hundreds of miles from our hotel”. But if the stunning, temple-laden plains of Bagan and the banks of the Irrawaddy play host to burning schools and mobs with machetes, the Ray-banned, camera-toting tourists will direct their wanderlust back to Thailand.

2. Global corporates who are serious about putting down roots in Myanmar to profit from the massive economic potential of this genuine frontier market will have to consider their [responsible investment](#) obligations far more carefully. Doing business in Myanmar will, for many years to come, rely on opaque local connections and relationships with government. The legal and reputational risk of being seen to be in cahoots with factions remotely connected to the notion of genocide would be disastrous.

3. Efforts of Western nations and ASEAN to engage with Thein Sein and his government, laudable as they are, must go hand-in-hand with pressure to react to the ethnic cleansing of its people in the manner expected of a democratic government being offered a seat at the table of global trade and diplomacy.

Just two days after my rose-tinted reading, I woke up to reports on Tuesday that a 1,000 strong Buddhist mob had torched Muslim homes and shops in Sagaing. To avoid points 1, 2 and 3 above, the Myanmar government should issue a statement condemning the attacks, confirming the legitimacy of the Rohingya as an indigenous ethnic group, and committing to investigating and enforcing the full extent of the law in convicting any offenders.

Hope springs eternal.



(Image via ganashakti.com)

© 2013 Polycymic