



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Agenda item 2

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner  
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the  
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

## **Written statement\* submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[5 February 2024]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



## **Third Anniversary of the Coup D'etat in Myanmar – Society for Threatened Peoples Calls on the International Community to Take Action to Protect Lives in Myanmar and the Indian Ocean**

1 February 2024 marked the third anniversary of the military coup d'etat in Myanmar carried out by the unelected State Administration Council (SAC) under military command. The country has been under a state of emergency ever since. Elections due in 2023 have been postponed. Widespread and brutal suppression of human rights and indiscriminate attacks by government forces have led to civilians abandoning peaceful protest and joining the resistance movement. Various ethnic groups are in a state of armed revolt. The junta and its supporters continue to use divisive and hateful rhetoric to demonise non-Buddhist religious groups and divide the opposition.

Myanmar's Rohingya are a long-persecuted Muslim minority, mostly living in Rakhine state, who have been denied official citizenship since 1982. The majority of Myanmar's Muslim Rohingya, between 700,000 and 1.1 million, were forced by a campaign of genocidal violence to flee the country in 2017. Those Rohingya who remain in the country continue to be the target of harsh official discrimination. They are not recognised as an official ethnic group and their national identity registration documents class them as foreigners.

In Rakhine the remaining Rohingya are caught in the crossfire between the ethnic Arakan Army and the military regime's forces. They are subject to arbitrary arrest, torture, gender-based violence and murder. Their freedom of movement is severely restricted by official curfews. They are largely denied access to food, healthcare and other basic necessities, including humanitarian relief. Internally displaced refugees also experience harassment and coercion at the hands of Rohingya militants.

The Rohingya in Myanmar are the subject of protective measures ordered by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the genocide proceedings brought against Myanmar by The Gambia. The junta has ignored the ICC's requirements and shown its disregard for international sanctions. When Cyclone Mocha severely devastated areas of Rakhine in May 2023, the junta blocked access for humanitarian aid for the Rohingya.

In the face of ongoing persecution in their homeland, some Rohingya continue to attempt the journey by sea to neighbouring south-east Asian countries, often relying on human traffickers and risking their lives in unseaworthy vessels. During the past year, more than 3,500 Rohingya set out to make the dangerous sea crossing; 350 died or disappeared during the journey. Those who succeed in reaching their intended destination are often met with hostility and turned away.

Most of the Rohingya refugees who have found shelter abroad, in Bangladesh in particular, face an uncertain future coping with harsh conditions in giant camps. In Bangladesh their security situation remains poor; refugees are vulnerable to extortion, arbitrary detention and torture by local armed police and criminal gangs. Freedom of movement in the camps is heavily restricted by fences and checkpoints. There are severe food shortages. Government restrictions on educational provision in the camps is damaging children's future prospects. Refugees in the camps are not allowed to work in order to earn an income. Overcrowding is exacerbated by catastrophic fires that have left thousands homeless. In order to relieve overcrowding, a total of 100,000 people are to be compulsorily relocated from the camps in Cox's Bazar to the remote and previously uninhabited offshore island of Bhasan Char. By mid-2023, around 35,000 Rohingya had been resettled there. People who try to escape from the refugee camps fall victim to human traffickers and some have been illegally forced to return to Myanmar. The refugees are losing hope of ever being able to return home.

The humanitarian and security situation for the Rohingya in the other major countries of refuge - Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia - is disastrous. Many refugees from Myanmar are being turned away, often violently. In Malaysia, refugees are used as political scapegoats, vilified, persecuted and attacked; gender-based violence is increasing. In Thailand there is no legal framework for the recognition and protection of refugees, so they are vulnerable to arbitrary arrest and extortion.

Increasing numbers of Rohingya arriving in Indonesia, many of them women and children in a hungry and weakened condition, are being greeted with hostility and rejection by local communities resentful of the rising number of new arrivals.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the UN Human Rights Council to call for the following measures:

- The military junta in Myanmar must commit itself to taking urgent measures to end human rights abuses against its citizens, negotiate a halt to internal conflict and return to democratic rule. ASEAN countries should bring pressure to bear on Myanmar aimed at countering the destabilising impact of the junta's repressive and racist internal policies on regional security.
  - The ongoing situation in Myanmar should be referred back to the International Criminal Court (ICC). The government of Myanmar must be compelled to respect ICC measures intended to prevent genocide and protect the Rohingya. The international community must step up and coordinate sanctions against the junta, notably by targeting major sources of income for the military junta such as Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise.
  - Western nations should leverage their relations with ASEAN to persuade member countries such as Thailand and Singapore to end their large-scale support for the military government in Myanmar.
  - The international community should increase the scope of humanitarian aid for Myanmar and press for humanitarian and civil society aid organizations to be allowed unrestricted access. Living conditions in IDP camps in Myanmar must significantly improve.
  - Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand must improve the security and living conditions of refugees from Myanmar. The Thai government in particular should ratify the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its Protocol and in the meantime offer official registration of refugees. Rohingya refugees must not be resettled or repatriated except voluntarily and in accordance with humanitarian principles.
  - Finally, the international community must step up efforts to rescue refugees stranded at sea, prevent loss of life and ensure that they are allowed to land and exercise their right to claim asylum.
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