

## PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT

The Oslo Conference to End Myanmar's Persecution of the Rohingyas

Venues: The Nobel Institute and Voksenaasen

Oslo, Norway

26-28 May 2015

Refugees International (RI), Justice for All (USA), the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), Harvard Global Equality Initiative (HGEI), and International State Crime Initiative Queen Mary University of London (ISCI) and Den norske Burmakomiteé will be holding a 3-day international conference to discuss the plight of over 1-million Rohingyas of Myanmar (Burma) and explore concrete ways to end their decades-long persecution.

George Soros who escaped Nazi-occupied Hungary sees a parallel between his experience of life under the Nazis in 1944 and the human conditions for the Rohingyas in Western Myanmar, which he witnessed first-hand during a recent visit to the country.

At the conference, iconic leaders from diverse backgrounds including Soros, Nobel Peace laureates Mairead Maguire, Desmond Tutu, and Jose Rose-Jorta, and the former prime ministers of Malaysia and Norway - namely Tun Dr Mahathir Mohammad and Kjell Magne Bondevik - will join hands with the representatives of the two generations of Rohingya refugees and activists as well as international human rights researchers and scholars of genocides and mass atrocities. They will push for the end to Myanmar's policies of discrimination, persecution and oppression.

Tomas Ojea Quinta and Yanghee Lee, former and present UN Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights in Myanmar respectively, will also share their expertise with the audiences and other participants.

The first day of the Oslo Conference is open to the public and will be webcast LIVE.

To register, please RSVP by sending an email to [OsloConference@yahoo.com](mailto:OsloConference@yahoo.com) . Be sure to include your full name, organizational affiliation (if any), and country of residence.

For further information including the program (draft) visit the conference's Facebook page at [https://www.facebook.com/OsloConferenceOnRohingyas/posts/959355314097439?\\_mref=message\\_bubble](https://www.facebook.com/OsloConferenceOnRohingyas/posts/959355314097439?_mref=message_bubble) .

### **A 3-day Conference**

**26 May 2015:** The first day of the conference – open to the public - will be held at the Nobel Institute and Voksenaasen conference center on 26 May 2015.

**27 May 2015:** The second day of the conference – *by invitation-only* – will be devoted to exploring concrete ideas and proposals to help push for the restoration of basic human rights, nationality, and citizenship to the Rohingyas.

**28 May 2015:** On the third and final day, the conference will host a Burma Forum in central Oslo, a public roundtable with select group of Rohingya leaders, other religious leaders and human rights experts to discuss Myanmar's rising anti-Muslim hate campaign as well as other contemporary issues of relevance. For more information about the Burma Forum email Norwegian Burma Committee at [info@burma.no](mailto:info@burma.no) .

## **Backgrounder to the Oslo Conference**

### **Rakhine Action Plan**

In July 2014, Myanmar government floated a comprehensive plan, known as the “Rakhine Action Plan”, to erase both Rohingya identity and the group’s legal residency in their own ancestral land and sent a 3-member advocacy team – made up of President’s adviser and former academic Dr Kyaw Yin Hlaing, Immigration Minister and ex-Brigadier Khin Yi, and Rakhine Chief Minister and ex-Major General Maung Maung Ohn - to lobby western governments and relevant international organizations to accept Myanmar’s official plan to solve “the Rohingya problem”.

Thein Sein’s government in Myanmar is currently implementing the Rakhine Action Plan. This is evidenced from the further illegalization and disenfranchisement of the vast majority of ethnic Rohingya since March this year, by forcibly confiscating their White Cards, the only documentation that Rohingyas had of their legal, permanent residency. Meanwhile, the international community’s attention is diverted to the fighting along the country’s Sino-Burmese borders between Myanmar army and Kokant Chinese armed resistance organization and its allies, as well as Aung San Suu Kyi’s attempts to push for changes in the military’s 2008 Constitution in time for this year’s planned elections

### **Myanmar’s Policy of Official Denial and Persecution of the Rohingyas**

Following the large scale violence against the Rohingyas in June 2012, Myanmar’s “reformist” government officially proposed two solutions to the Rohingya issue to the visiting head of the United Nations Refugee Agency or UNHCR António Guterres - either the “resettlement” of the Rohingyas to third countries, or placing Rohingya in UN-financed camps on their own ancestral soil in Western Myanmar. In his widely reported address to the Royal Institute of International Affairs (or Chatham House), in London, UK on 17 July 2013, Myanmar President Thein Sein officially denied the existence of Rohingyas as either legal residents or an ethnic group while his government has made consistent attempts to pressure INGOs, foreign missions and the United Nations agencies and officials – including the UN Special Rapporteurs on the human rights situation in Myanmar - to stop recognizing the Rohingya as a distinct ethnic group of Myanmar.

Such statements and policies have been met with stiff opposition from the international community, including the highest level of leaderships such as UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and US President Barack Obama. In sharp contrast to the international recognition of the Rohingya as an ethnic group, deserving non-discrimination, equal rights, dignity, and the same basic respect as any other indigenous peoples of Myanmar, the country’s Bama or Myanmar Buddhist majority and Rakhine nationalists label the Rohingyas as “illegal Muslim migrants” from the impoverished Bangladesh. As such, Rohingya have popularly been dehumanized and referred to by terms such as “viruses”, “leeches”, (ugly) “ogres”, “dogs” etc.

Sadly, Myanmar’s pro-democracy opposition leaders and human rights organizations including Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy and other iconic human rights the leaders of the 88 Generation Group also share this anti-Rohingya sentiment. The Myanmar government has, misleadingly, portrayed the plight of Rohingyas as the result of a communal conflict between the predominantly Buddhist Rakhine and the Muslim Rohingya and a supposedly inevitable consequence of the “transition” from dictatorship. Periodically, unsubstantiated claims are made by Myanmar

President's Office attempting to link the Rohingya community to global "Islamic fundamentalism", and worse still, "terrorism".

### **The Worsening Plight of the Rohingyas**

The plight of the Rohingyas in Myanmar has worsened since the two bouts of organized attacks on the Rohingya in June and October 2012. In her 9-March-2015 report to the United Nations Human Rights Council, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar Professor Yanghee Lee stated that Rohingya refugees inside Internally Displaced Persons (or IDP) camps feel they have two (equally risky) options: "to stay and die (in Myanmar) or leave by boat". According to the UN High Commissioner for the Refugees (UNHCR), approximately 53,000 Rohingyas, including women and children, left Myanmar (and Bangladesh) by boats bound for Thailand and Malaysia in the 11-month period between January and November 2014. International visitors to Rakhine state have described the human conditions for the Rohingyas, both inside and outside IDP camps, as "deplorable". Even by Myanmar's official report of Myanmar President's Rakhine Inquiry Commission, doctor-patient ratios among the Rohingyas in the two majority Rohingya towns in Western Myanmar are 1: 76,000 and 1:83,000 (vis-à-vis 1: 1,000 for the national average). Some local Rakhine groups routinely threaten international humanitarian organizations and attempt to disrupt and stop the delivery of basic humanitarian aid to the Rohingyas.

### **International Responses**

Human rights organizations including Human Rights Watch have assessed Myanmar's treatment of Rohingyas as 'crimes against humanity' and 'ethnic cleansing'. UN Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights in Myanmar including Tomas Quintana Ojea and Yanghee Lee have highlighted the official nature of discrimination and persecution of the Rohingyas that condones popular racism and violence against Myanmar's Muslims. The Pacific Rim Law and Policy Association has published a 3-year academic study entitled "The Slow Burning Genocide of Myanmar's Rohingya" in its peer-reviewed journal "Pacific Rim Law and Policy Journal" (Spring, 2014). Currently, two independent teams of researchers from the International State Crime Research Initiative at Queen Mary University of London, UK and Yale University Human Rights Law Clinic and Fortify Rights are investigating the Rohingya situation using the genocide framework.

Renowned academics, for instance, Harvard's Amartya Sen have characterized Myanmar's treatment of Rohingyas as a "slow genocide". Likewise, at the conference on the Rohingyas at the London School of Economics held in April 2014 the then outgoing UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar Tomas Ojea Quintana observed reportedly "genocidal acts" in the case of Rohingyas.

At this Oslo Conference, global leaders including George Soros and Desmond Tutu will call on the international community, both international investors, European Union and governments with close ties to Myanmar, to help end Myanmar's Rohingya persecution. They will also call for the restoration of basic human rights, nationality and citizenship to one of the world's most vulnerable and oppressed peoples who, as a group, do have the fundamental right to self-identity under international human rights law.