

Letter of Concern to Oxford University Press
regarding Dr Jacques Leider and ORE Asian History Series

5 February 2018

We, the undersigned group of scholars and rights campaigners, are disturbed by the fact that OUP's Oxford Research Encyclopedias (ORE) Asian History series has commissioned Dr Jacques Leider, head of the Bangkok-based Ecole Française de l' Extrême-Orient (EFEO) and a well-known advisor to the Myanmar military's Armed Forces Historical Museum in Naypyidaw, to write a reference article on the subject of the Rohingya people in the forthcoming series: the ORE Asian History (under "Political", see "Rohingya: Emergence and Vicissitudes of a Communal Muslim Identity in Myanmar (Jacques Leider), forthcoming Jan–Mar 2018", found 03 February 2018 at: <http://asianhistory.oxfordre.com/page/forthcoming/>).

As you know, the Tatmadaw (the official name of the Myanmar armed forces) has been credibly accused of committing crimes under international law including crimes against humanity and even the crime of all crimes, genocide, against the predominantly Muslim Rohingya.

As you also know, the Oxford University Press (OUP) has a very well-earned reputation for fairness and authority in the fields in which they publish reference material. Anything published by OUP online about the Rohingya and Myanmar will be given a great deal of credibility by both scholars and the general public and carry a great deal of weight in any ongoing disputes over the exact legal name of the crimes against this world's largest stateless population whose group identity and historical presence is being erased officially and popularly in Myanmar.

We therefore draw your attention to our following concerns regarding your selection of Dr Jacques Leider to write a reference article for the ORE Asian History series:

(1) We find that positions taken by Dr Leider in interviews with the press, in public talks and in published articles raise serious questions about his objectivity regarding the Rohingya and their history. His well-documented pattern of denials that the Myanmar military-directed mass violence and scorched-earth military operations against the Rohingya community – the subject of his ORE article – is challenged by the growing body of legal analyses

and human rights research reports which point to the fact that Myanmar's persecution of the Rohingya as a group amounts to international crimes including crimes against humanity and genocide.

(2) We believe that televised appearances by Dr Leider with military and government officials condoning state policies against the Rohingya give the appearance to the viewing public that he validates views that underlie the Myanmar military's ousting in 2017 of 680,000 people and the massacre of Rohingya for which the military has recently admitted responsibility. A recent English-Burmese bilingual book entitled "Talk on Rakhine Issue: Discussion on Finding Solutions" published by the Ministry of Defence's Myawaddy News Group in Myanmar highlights the fact, in photos and text, that Dr Leider was the only foreign expert to participate in the strategic discussion organized by this official propaganda organ of the Myanmar MOD in the first month of what the United Nations officially described as "ethnic cleansing" of the Rohingya. On 7 and 8 September 2017, Dr Leider was on stage seated with two ex-Lt-Colonels named Than Aye and Ko Ko Hlaing (respectively, ex-officer-in-charge of the strategic affairs unit and the ex-adviser to the former General and former President Thein Sein 2010-15) in the Myanmar capital Naypyidaw at the said invitation-only event billed as "Talk on Rakhine Issue: Discussion on Finding Solutions".

In the introduction of the aforementioned book published by the Myanmar Military, the position of Myanmar regarding the actions taken against the Rohingya – which have been abundantly documented and assessed as egregious human rights violations by six successive UN Special Rapporteurs on the human rights situation in Myanmar since 1992 as well as by the world's leading human rights monitors such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch – is presented as a legitimate course of action (that is, by the Myanmar military to defend the country against Islam's attempt to expand its demographic power base and dominate the world; see supra at p. 4 "Talk on Rakhine Issues", Ministry of Defence Myawaddy News Group).

In these strategic discussions, ex-Colonel Ko Ko Hlaing openly singled out Oxford University as a very influential institution which hosted an international conference on the Rohingya where knowledge about the Rohingya (history, identity and repression) was discussed and disseminated. By this, he implied that Oxford University – and other similarly influential entities – is somewhere that the Myanmar military needs to try to make strategic inroads to promote

its official denial both of Rohingya identity and history, and of the state-directed terror and expulsion.

The audience was mainly composed of officials from the Ministry of Defence. Myanmar's official and popular Islamophobia – whereby Muslims have been scapegoated in the same way as the Jews were in the old Europe – is well-documented in scholarly and human rights literature. These discussions took place at the time Leider's host organization (the Myanmar military) was responsible for the violent deaths of "at least 6,700 Rohingya, in the most conservative estimations [...] including at least 730 children below the age of five years," in the first month alone of the military operations conducted in Northern Rakhine state of Myanmar (i.e. from 25 August to 24 September 2017), according to the findings from a limited survey carried out by the international humanitarian NGO Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) among the survivors of this wave of ethnic cleansing who are now in refugee camps in Chittagong, Bangladesh (see "Myanmar/Bangladesh: MSF surveys estimate that at least 6,700 Rohingya were killed during the attacks in Myanmar" <http://www.msf.org/en/article/myanmarbangladesh-msf-surveys-estimate-least-6700-rohingya-were-killed-during-attacks>).

(3) Dr Leider's insistence (see "History Behind Rakhine State Conflict" <https://www.irrawaddy.com/from-the-archive/history-behind-rakhine-state-conflict.html>, "The Frictions in the Rakhine State Are Less About Islamophobia Than Rohingya-Phobia" <https://thewire.in/182611/frictions-rakhine-state-less-islamophobia-rohingya-phobia/>, and "The Truth About Myanmar's Rohingya Issue" <https://thediplomat.com/2016/03/the-truth-about-myanmars-rohingya-issue/>) that Rohingya identity – not Rakhine or the majority Burmese – be critically scrutinized as a political identity born out of political and communal conflict indicates a bias against Rohingya claims of their long documented history of settled existence in Rakhine state. This pronounced bias (in addition to his evident relations with the Myanmar military) should have raised doubts about his appropriateness to write a reference article about the Rohingya. We perceive in Dr Leider's writings and public statements an unconcealed bias against Muslim Rohingyas, which results in his dismissal or wilful ignorance of irrefutable (and easily accessible) evidence that effectively undermines his thesis which is that the Rohingya, unlike other "genuinely ethnic identities", were manufactured by Muslim fighters or Mujahideens in the post-independence period of the 1950's. For instance, Dr Leider labels it a "delusion" that the Government of the Union of Burma recognized the Rohingya as a constitutive ethnic group of the Union following the surrender of

the separatist Mujahideen in July 1961. The irrefutable fact is this: as late as 1964, the Government of Burma officially included the Rohingya as an ethnic group of Burma in its official Burmese language “Encyclopaedia Myanmar” (V. 9). In addition, the Rohingya were granted a slot on the country’s sole broadcasting station known as the Burma Broadcasting Service (BBS) as an indigenous language programme, broadcast three times per week, alongside other indigenous languages such as Shan, Lahu, etc., until the 3rd year (1964) of the military rule of General Ne Win.

The readily accessible official documentation supports the Rohingya’s collective claim that they were officially recognized as an ethnic group of the Union of Burma, from which follows the conclusion that it is the State of Myanmar that has embarked on the project of erasing Rohingya ethnic identity, their history and presence which predates the formation of the post-colonial state of the Union of Burma in 1948. Dr Leider’s choice to ignore these primary and official sources regarding Rohingya ethnic identity and nationality further reinforces Myanmar’s institutionalized propaganda and Fake News that the Rohingya do not exist as an ethnic nationality, while lending a veneer of objective scholarly authority. We observe, further, that there is an alarming parallel between Myanmar’s de-nationalization and identity destruction and the German de-nationalization of the Jewish population under Nazi rule.

(4) Genocide denial is a crime in countries such as Germany. Although there is no UK or international law against which the denial of state-directed crimes against humanity, including genocide, of the Rohingya can be judged, the consensus is emerging among the world’s leading institutions and scholars in the field of genocide studies – from the US Holocaust Memorial Museum and Yale University Human Rights Law Clinic, the University of Washington Law School, the Queen Mary University of London International State Crimes Initiative to the Russell-Sartre-inspired Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal on Myanmar – that Myanmar is responsible for genocide. Even the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has expressly stated that he is “not ruling out” that genocide is being committed against the Rohingya. Yet, despite the well-publicized findings by world-renowned research institutes and scholars of genocide, Dr Leider dismisses them. He also fails to acknowledge that Myanmar’s majoritarian racism among the country’s Buddhists is violent. He characterises Buddhist racism towards the Rohingya as merely “strong sentiment”.

We do not deny that Dr Leider, like anyone else, has a right to comment on the Rohingya or any other topic, but when someone takes such a strong position against the historicity of one group's claims regarding ethnicity/identity (and only one group's in a context of conflict between two or more groups), it seems unfair that they should be commissioned for a project to write an article on the ethnic group in question that seeks to present itself as a fair and unbiased reference source. The ORE is certainly not an appropriate vehicle in which to publish such views. Indeed, OUP should have nothing to do with them.

We note also that OUP appears only to have commissioned an article on the Rohingya and not on the Rakhine Buddhist community whose ethnic claims, we understand, are no stronger than those of the Rohingya. It is hard to interpret this as other than OUP's taking a stand in favour of the Myanmar military and against the Rohingya for reasons unclear and that OUP supports, at least indirectly, the current ethnic cleansing which Dr Leider's writings and media appearances are used to deny.

Finally, it needs to be stressed that there is something more consequential than our objection *per se* to OUP's commissioning a reference article by Dr Leider on the target of the Myanmar military's repression. That is the question whether Western educational institutions of worldwide influence should allow themselves, wittingly or not, to be used as a platform by illiberal regimes through academics and scholars whom the regimes view as supporters of their views (and hence as, in effect, their proxies for propaganda). The well-reported cases of Cambridge University Press and China, or the LSE and the Ghaddafi regime, spring to mind.

It is worth quoting the recent words of Ruth Barnett, a Jewish Kindertransport survivor in Britain:

“‘Never Again’ is unlikely to be achieved in our lifetime but it is we who need to make an effective input towards making it happen. Each and every one of us can do something. It is essential to learn to contain our own violent impulses so that we can talk and negotiate instead of exacerbating and increasing the violence of others.

“Perhaps the most poisonous factor is the toleration and cover-up of denial. Denial opens the door for others to commit crimes against

humanity, as we clearly see others getting away with it. We need to enthuse and stimulate curiosity and an insistence to expose the truth.

“We live with so much denial that many people can no longer distinguish between misinformation, disinformation and truth.”

(Ruth Barnett, 27 January 2018, "I Survived The Holocaust. Merely Remembering It Is No Longer Good Enough", RightsInfo.org, <https://rightsinfo.org/why-remembering-the-holocaust-isnt-enough/>)

We sincerely urge OUP to reconsider your editorial decision to commission Dr Leider to write a reference article on the subject of the Rohingya. We ask that if this article goes ahead, it includes a clear disclaimer that Dr Leider is not a distant observer and that the article should be considered as an opinion piece, not as an unbiased reference source, regarding a controversial subject which has already been documented by MSF to have caused the deaths of over 6,700 Rohingya in the first month of Myanmar's 2017 military attack and the flight of 680,000 refugees over several months.

1. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, University Professor and a founding member of the Institute for Comparative Literature and Society, Columbia University, USA
2. Nursyahbani Katjasungkana
National Coordinator of Indonesia Legal Aid Association for Women, Indonesia
3. Noam Chomsky, American linguist, philosopher and activist (Institute Professor, MIT), USA
4. Mofidul Hoque, author and activist
Director, Center for the Study of Genocide and Justice, Liberation War Museum, Bangladesh
5. Tapan Bose, filmmaker, human rights defender, India

6. Richard Falk, Professor of International Law, Emeritus, Princeton University, USA
7. Barbara Harrell-Bond, OBE
Emerita Professor and Founding Director of The Refugee Studies Centre,
University of Oxford 1982–1996, UK
8. Barbara Harriss-White
Emeritus Professor of Development Studies, Oxford University
Emeritus Fellow of Wolfson College, Oxford, UK
9. Ritu Dewan
Vice President
Indian Society of Labour Economics
Director
Centre for Development Research and Action
Executive Director
Centre for Study of Society and Secularism
President
Indian Association for Women's Studies (2014-17)
10. Prof. Gregory Stanton, Founding Chairman, Genocide Watch & George Mason University. Arlington, Virginia, USA
11. Johan Galtung, Founder, Peace Studies
12. Youk Chhang, Chairman, Genocide Documentation Center of Cambodia/The Sleuk Rith Institute, Cambodia
13. Abdul Malik Mujahid, Chair Emeritus Parliament of the World's Religions
14. Karen Jungblut
Director of Global Initiatives, USC Shoah Foundation, USA
15. María do Mar Castro Varela, Professor of Pedagogy and Social Work and activist, Alice Salomon University, Berlin, Germany
16. C Abrar, Professor of International Relations, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

17. John H. Weiss, Associate Professor of History, Cornell University, USA
18. Khin Mai Aung, Burmese American civil rights lawyer and writer, New York, USA
19. Maung Zarni, Burmese human rights activist and scholar, Genocide Documentation Center of Cambodia/The Sleuk Rith Institute
20. Harn Yawng hwe, Executive Director, Associates to Develop Democratic Burma Inc./Euro-Burma Office, Canada
21. Bilal Rashid, Past President of Burmese American Muslim Association, USA
22. Swagato Sarkar, DPhil (Oxford), Associate Professor, O.P. Jindal Global University, India
23. Sumeet Mhaskar, DPhil (Oxford), O.P. Jindal Global University, India
24. Prof. Donesh Mohan, Academic, India
25. Dr. Peggy Mohan, Author, India
26. Prof. Ranabir Samaddar, Academic, India
27. Rita Manchanda, Feminist writer, India
28. Samsul Islam, Author, India
29. Neelima Sharma, Theatre activist, India
30. Jawed Naqvi, journalist, India
31. Seema Mustafa, journalist, India
32. Ashok Agrwaal, lawyer, India
33. Dr. Walid Salem, Al Quds University & the Director of The Centre for Democracy and Community Development, East Jerusalem, Palestine

34. Jun Nishikawa, PhD, professor emeritus, Waseda University, Japan
35. Dr Ravi P Bhatia, an educationist and peace researcher & Retired professor, Delhi University, India
36. Gill H. boehringer, Honorary Senior Research Fellow Macquarie University School of Law, Sydney , Australia
37. Paul Copeland, C M, (Recipient, Order of Canada), Lawyer, Toronto, Canada
38. U Kyaw Win, Professor Emeritus, Orange Coast College, California, USA
39. Professor Michael W. Charney, Academic, UK
40. Dr Amit Upadhyay, Assistant professor, TISS Hyderabad, India
41. Dr. Nicola Suyin Pocock, United Nations University International Institute of Global Health, Malaysia
42. Rezaur Rahman Lenin, Academic Activist, Adjunct Faculty, Eastern University Bangladesh & Executive Director, Law Life Culture, Bangladesh
43. Natalie Brinham, ESRC PhD scholar, Queen Mary University of London School of Law, UK
44. Niranjana Sahoo, PhD, Senior Fellow, Observer Research Foundation, India
45. Prof. Dr. Célestin Tagou
prof. of PS, IR P&D Studies
Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and International Relations
Protestant University of Central Africa
Executive Secretariat of the Network of Protestant Universities of Africa
46. Dr. Tilman Evers, Germany
47. Jørgen Johansen, Deputy Editor of Journal of Resistance Studies, Sweden

- 48.Sarah Tobiah, philanthropist & activist, Canada
- 49.Miki Lanza, Movimento Nonviolento c/o Centro Studi Sereno Regis ,
Torino, Italy
- 50.Oskar Butcher, human rights activist and scholar, Germany
- 51.Professor Emeritus George Kent, University of Hawai'i and Deputy
Editor, World Nutrition, USA
- 52.Sebastian Eck, Galtung-Institut, Switzerland
- 53.Robert J. Burrowes Ph.D., co-founder 'The People's Charter to Create a
Nonviolent World', Australia
- 54.Shadi Sadr, Executive Director of Justice for Iran, UK
- 55.Tasnim Nazeer, Award-winning journalist and Universal Peace
Federation Ambassador for Peace, UK
- 56.Emir Ramic, Academic, Ph.D., Chairman of the Institute for Research of
Genocide, Canada
- 57.Nadeem Haque, P.Eng. - Director of the Institute of Higher Reasoning
(IHR), Canada
- 58.Diana de la Rúa Eugenio,
President of Asociación Respuesta para la Paz -ARP-, member NGO of
OAS
President of International Peace Research Association Foundation -IPRA
Foundation, Argentina
- 59.Dr. Syeda Hamid, Academic and Author, India
- 60.Dr. Siddiq Wahid, Historian and Educationist, India
- 61.Dr. Syed Ahmed Haroon, Psychiatrist, Pakistan
- 62.Anis Haroon, Poet, Pakistan

- 63.Sushil Pyakurel, Adviser to President of Nepal
- 64.Porf. Noor Ahmad Baba, Academic, India
- 65.Anand Patwardhan, Filmmaker, India
- 66.Rodolphe Prom, President, Destination Justice, Cambodia
- 67.Doreen Chen, Co-Director, Destination Justice, Cambodia
- 68.Syed Zainul Abedin, Painter, Poet, Journalist, Bangladesh
- 69.Dr. Navsharan Singh, Researcher and author, India
- 70.Leo fernandez, IT Specialist, India
71. Feroz Medhi, Filmmaker social activist, Canada
- 72.John Packer, Associate Professor of Law and Director, Human Rights Research and Education Centre, University of Ottawa, Canada
- 73.Fathima, MA Women's Studies Student, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India
- 74.Rana Jawad, University of Bath, UK
- 75.Prof. Dr. Sami A. Al-Arian Director and Public Affairs Professor, Center for Islam and Global Affairs İslam ve Küresel İlişkiler Merkezi, Turkey
- 76.Penny Green, Professor of Law and Globalisation and Director of the International State Crime Initiative, Queen Mary University of London, UK