

Myanmar Religious Cleansing: Crime Against Humanity

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Described as the Palestine of Asia by the UN, the Rohingya Muslim community in Myanmar is currently going through an unutterable ordeal at the hands of the Rakhine extremist Buddhists in Arakan who are targeting the Muslim minority with the worst form of religious cleansing.

Ethnic cleansing is rife in Myanmar and is turning into a human tragedy of colossal proportions. A confidential United Nations report dated May 29, 2011 and marked “Not for Public Citation or Distribution”, defines ethnic cleansing as a “purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas.”

What is happening in Myanmar to the Rohingya Muslims violates international laws and is to be categorized as crime against humanity.

Unfortunately, the Myanmar peace prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi has turned a blind eye and a deaf ear to the plight of the Rohingya Muslims. Maybe she has forgotten her own words on democracy and human rights that, “The struggle for democracy and human rights in Burma is a struggle for life and dignity.”

Reportedly, the settlement of the Rohingya Muslims in this region dates back to the eighth century. However, in the seventies, the junta embarked on a systematic program of religious cleansing of the Rohingya Muslims who are denied their basic rights, i.e. the right to freedom of movement, marriage, faith, identity, ownership, language, heritage and culture, citizenship, education etc. Deplorable as it is, the Muslims in Myanmar are among the most persecuted minorities in the world according to UN.

According to reports, 650 of nearly one million Rohingya Muslims have been murdered as of June 28. On the other hand, 1,200 others are missing and 90,000 more have been displaced.

US photographer Greg Constantine has recently released a book of black and white photography titled “Exiled to Nowhere: Burma’s Rohingya.” He believes that “One of the things that is lost in the discussions of the issues of statelessness—particularly with the Rohingya—are human stories.”

He relates the story of 20-year-old Kashida who had to “flee to Bangladesh with her husband. The Burmese authorities had denied her permission to get married, but when they discovered she had married in secret and was pregnant they took away all her family’s money and cows and goats. They forced Kashida to have an abortion, telling her: “This is

not your country; you don't have the right to reproduce here.”

The dire humanitarian crisis has already begun to assume tragic proportions and Muslims and non-Muslims alike are beginning to respond with perturbation and fear.

Iran's Foreign Ministry has called for an end to violence in Myanmar.

“It is expected that the Myanmar government will prepare the ground for solidarity, national unity and asserting the rights of Muslims in the country and that it will avert violence and a human catastrophe in this regard,” Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast said on Monday.

Iranian lawmaker Hossein Naqavi-Hosseini has suggested that the Islamic Republic of Iran should call on the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to hold an ad hoc meeting concerning the Muslim massacre in Myanmar.

Also, the president of India's Jamiat Ulma-i-Hind has voiced concern about the massacre, calling for an end to the humanitarian crisis in the country. Maulana Syed Arshad Madani lashed out at the Myanmar government for being indifferent to the massacre of Muslims by extremist Buddhists. He also criticized the silence of the international community and human rights organizations across the world about this humanitarian tragedy.

The International Union for Muslim Scholars (IUMS) has strongly condemned the brutal massacre perpetrated against the Rohingya Muslims and has demanded that the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) take necessary and urgent steps to prevent religious cleaning and these crimes against humanity in this region.

The statement reads, “The IUMS is reviewing in all concern what has befallen the Muslims in the Muslim region of Arakan, Burma, of fierce killing, displacement and persecution since a long time, not to mention displacement of them, and demolition of their homes, properties and mosques at the hands of the religious extremists in the Buddhist community. Unfortunately, the Buddhist government acts as a bystander in face of the heinous massacres escalating day after day against the Muslim minorities in the country. The numbers of casualties, in the attacks that are considered the most ferocious in the history of targeting the Muslims in Burma, are countless.”

In view of the ongoing inhumane violations in Myanmar, the US and its western allies, which keep pontificating about human rights in the world, have feigned ignorance about this humanitarian catastrophe. Why? Because they will not be able to reap any benefits of their future efforts in the country as they do in the Middle East and elsewhere. To crown it all, they have kept an agonizingly meaningful silence over the massacre.

It is certainly incumbent upon every person who cares about human dignity to fly in the face of this inhumanity and give a helping hand to the downtrodden Myanmar Muslims.

As the great Persian poet Sa'di says, “Human beings are members of a whole, In creation of one essence and soul. If one member is afflicted with pain, Other members uneasy will remain. If you've no sympathy for human pain, The name of human you cannot retain!”

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