

Physicians for  
Human Rights

May 2013

## Massacre In Central Burma: Muslim Students Terrorized and Killed in Meiktila

PHR

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Burmese boys stand near a destroyed home  
on April 5, 2013, in Meiktila, Burma.  
Photo: Paula Bronstein/Getty Images



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2 Arrow Street  
Suite 301  
Cambridge, MA  
02138 USA  
617.301.4200

1156 15th Street, NW  
Suite 1001  
Washington, DC  
20005 USA  
202.728.5335

[physiciansforhumanrights.org](http://physiciansforhumanrights.org)

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Property destroyed during the violence in Meiktila, Burma from March 20-24, 2013.  
Photo: Hein Aung

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## Acknowledgments

This report was written by Richard Sollom, MA, MPH, director of emergencies at Physicians for Human Rights (PHR); and Holly Atkinson, MD, FACP, director of the Human Rights Program, Mount Sinai Global Health, assistant professor, Department of Medicine, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, and volunteer medical advisor and past president at PHR. Policy recommendations were written by Hans Hogrefe, Washington director at PHR; and Andrea Gittleman, JD, senior legislative counsel at PHR. Stephen Greene, senior communications advisor at PHR, drafted the introduction and copyedited the report.

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# Introduction

**A**nti-Muslim violence swept through central Burma in spring 2013, reportedly sparked by an argument at a gold shop and the killing of a Buddhist monk in the town of Meiktila in Burma's Mandalay Division, on March 20, 2013.<sup>1</sup> During the next three days, attacks spread to neighboring townships, as armed groups of men from the majority Buddhist population reportedly set fire to more than 1,500 homes,<sup>2</sup> destroyed more than a dozen mosques and three madrassas, and killed more than 100 people<sup>3</sup> among the minority Muslim population.

Investigators with Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) dispatched to the region immediately following these events interviewed survivors of a massacre of students and teachers in Meiktila on the morning of March 21. PHR investigators returned to the region in late April to conduct additional in-depth interviews and corroborate testimony from survivors, eyewitnesses, and family members of those killed. For their security, the names and identifying details of many of these informants have been changed or withheld.

This report includes the most detailed narrative to date of the attack on Muslim students, teachers, and neighborhood residents in the Mingalar Zayyone quarter of Meiktila, as compiled from interviews with 33 key informants, including 14 eyewitnesses. The accounts include testimony that local police stood by and watched while hundreds of people went on a rampage of violence and destruction, including the killing of unarmed Muslims, and that some Buddhist monks incited and even participated in the attacks.

The anti-Muslim violence in Meiktila provoked an international outcry, and local prosecutors initiated proceedings. Three Muslims were quickly convicted of theft and assault in April in connection with the dispute at the gold shop, and six Muslim men were arrested in May on charges related to the killing of a Buddhist monk in Meiktila. As of mid-May, however, no one else had reportedly been charged or convicted for assault, murder, or arson in a massacre that left dozens of people dead, thousands displaced, and many of Meiktila's Muslim homes, mosques, schools, and businesses destroyed.

At a time when the United States and European Union have been lifting sanctions against Burma and strengthening economic ties, PHR hopes this report will refocus attention on a horrific example of religious violence that has become far too common in Burma in the past several years, as PHR has documented. Unless more of that country's political and religious leaders firmly denounce such attacks and take concrete steps to hold perpetrators accountable and promote reconciliation, Burma's recent slow progress toward greater freedom, openness, and peace could be derailed.

The country of Burma (officially the Union of Myanmar) has a majority Buddhist population (approximately 82 percent, according to government figures) with a minority population of Muslims (almost 4 percent, according to government figures, but higher according to the Muslim community), who are concentrated in Arakan State and in Mandalay, Bago, Magway, Rangoon, and Irrawaddy divisions.<sup>4</sup> Meiktila, a small city in central Burma, is located roughly 125 kilometers south of Mandalay and 125 kilometers north of Burma's capital, Naypyidaw. Meiktila's population of about 110,000 people is roughly one-tenth the size of Mandalay, Burma's second-largest city.<sup>5</sup>

Despite its small size, Meiktila has a diverse population of Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh communities.<sup>6</sup> Meiktila's Muslim community accounted for roughly one third of the city's population prior to its March 2013 displacement.<sup>7</sup> Muslim residents of Meiktila form a sizable portion of the city's commercial sector.<sup>8</sup>

Violence against Muslims in Burma may have roots in decades-old propaganda campaigns that linked Buddhism with Burmese national identity.<sup>9</sup> Over the past decade, repeated incidents of violence against Muslims have been documented in the areas surrounding Meiktila. In 2006, Buddhists reportedly attacked homes, businesses, and mosques belonging to Muslims in the neighboring province of Magway, resulting in three deaths.<sup>10</sup> In 2003, riots erupted between Buddhists and

Muslims in the nearby town of Kyaukse, which killed 11 people and resulted in the destruction of two mosques and dozens of homes.<sup>11</sup> In 2001, anti-Muslim violence that broke out across central Burma resulted in the destruction of numerous mosques, businesses, and homes.<sup>12</sup>

These simmering tensions erupted again in three waves of violence against Muslims from June 2012 through April 2013. The first, in early June 2012, occurred when sectarian violence erupted in Burma's Arakan State between Rakhine and Muslim communities, with Muslim communities comprising both the widely persecuted Rohingya Muslims and non-Rohingya Muslims.<sup>13</sup> The alleged rape and murder of a Rakhine woman by three Muslim men and the murder of 10 Muslims by Rakhines in a reprisal attack are commonly cited as the proximate cause.<sup>14</sup> Muslims reported cases of discriminatory and arbitrary arrest as well as "physical abuse, rape, destruction of property, and unlawful killings by mobs of Rakhine Buddhists and security forces."<sup>15</sup> Instead of protecting civilians at risk, Burmese police either stood by and allowed the attacks to continue or actively contributed to the violence.<sup>16</sup>

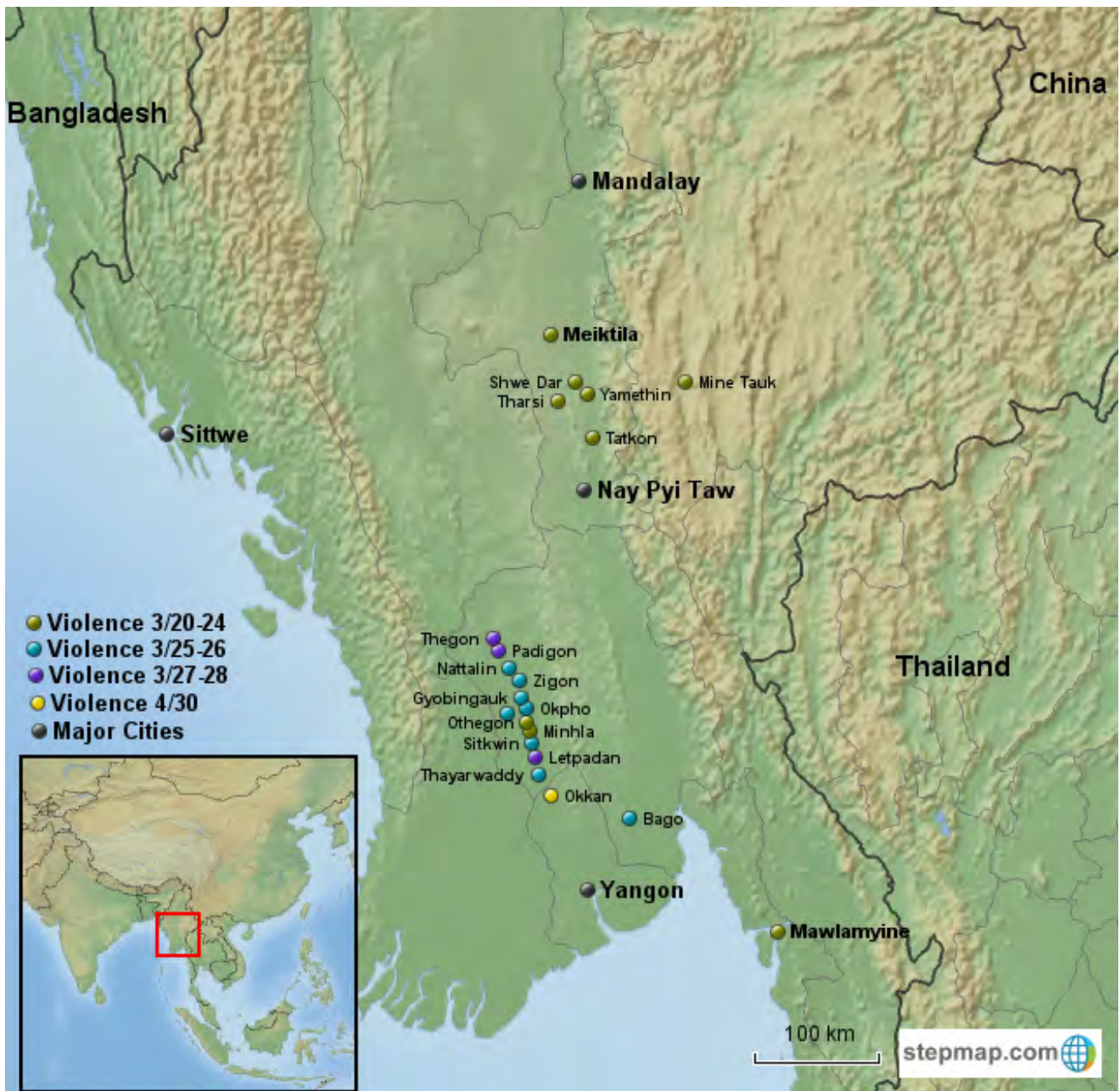
The second wave of violence broke out in Arakan State on October 21, 2012, in nine townships. Over 35,000 people were displaced by the violence in October alone, over 97 percent of whom were Muslim.<sup>17</sup> More than 100,000 people were displaced by violence occurring since June 2012.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, on March 20, 2013, a seemingly organized and coordinated wave of anti-Muslim violence erupted in Meiktila and swept through Mandalay and Bago Divisions, sporadically affecting

Sagaing, Rangoon, and Magway divisions as well as Mon and Shan States.<sup>19</sup> Anti-Muslim propaganda, often preached by the prominent Buddhist monk Sayadaw Wirathu, was reported in many of these areas as well as in the Irrawaddy Division during the same period. Largely Buddhist mobs devastated numerous Muslim quarters, resulting in the partial or full destruction of an estimated 1,200<sup>20</sup> to 1,600 houses,<sup>21</sup> 77 shops, and 37 mosques.<sup>22</sup> In late April and early May, anti-Muslim violence and threats of violence resumed temporarily in parts of Rangoon and Mandalay Divisions.<sup>23</sup>

According to official figures, the violence in March claimed the lives of 44 people<sup>24</sup> and another 86 to 93 people were injured,<sup>25</sup> while the attacks on April 30 reportedly left one person dead and nine more injured.<sup>26</sup> Alternative unverified estimates indicate that as many as 148 persons may have been killed between March 20 and 24.<sup>27</sup> Burmese authorities claim that the violence displaced 12,846 people,<sup>28</sup> of whom 8,441 remained in seven temporary camps in Meiktila as of April 9.<sup>29</sup> The UN has received reports that at least 3,000 more displaced people await assessment in affected areas within and outside of Meiktila Township.<sup>30</sup>

# Map: Anti-Muslim Violence in Burma March – April 2013



The findings of this report are based on field investigations PHR conducted in Burma from March 26 to 28, 2013, and from April 20 to May 2, 2013. The PHR team comprised Richard Sollom, MA, MPH, director of emergencies at PHR; Holly Atkinson, MD, FACP, director of the Human Rights Program, Mount Sinai Global Health, and assistant professor, Department of Medicine, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai; and Bill Davis, MPH, former Burma project director at PHR.

#### **Qualitative interviews with eyewitnesses and other key informants**

The team conducted 33 interviews with students and teachers of the Mingalar Zayyone madrasa in Meiktila, as well as religious leaders, civil society representatives, and government authorities. Among these 33 respondents were 14 eyewitnesses to the Meiktila massacre, whose accounts this report details, including eight male students. The eyewitnesses range in age from 9 to 72 (median 18), and include men, women, boys, and girls. The eyewitnesses are nearly all Muslim, although one man—a member of Parliament—is not Muslim.

To select these 14 information-rich cases, field researchers conducted purposeful intensity sampling to garner cases that highlighted individual involvement and observation of various incidents comprising the event (student versus teacher versus families living in the Mingalar Zayyone quarter). To strengthen the qualitative research design, field investigators further employed chain (or snowball) sampling to locate corroborating witnesses, who were interviewed independently, and

away from the original source, for probative evidence. Qualitative inquiry domains primarily centered on the events that occurred in the 24-hour period from noon on March 20 to about noon on March 21, 2013, in the Mingalar Zayyone quarter in Meiktila. To ensure consistency, investigators followed an interview format with probes to elicit who, what, where, when, and how a reported abuse took place. To facilitate documentation of unanticipated issues, investigators combined semi-structured questions with open-ended questions. Interviews were conducted in English with a bilingual interpreter in private settings. Interviews lasted typically between one-half hour and three hours.

Individuals who claimed to have witnessed the massacre were deemed credible based on several factors, including (1) reporting events that coincided with dates and times of known events; (2) giving a consistent account of events following redundant inquiries from different vantage points; (3) citing neutral or positive actions on the part of individual Buddhists, such as policemen or civilian residents; (4) declining to answer a question when not knowing the answer; and (5) presenting information in an emotionally congruent way. For example, most of the eyewitnesses spoke hesitantly at the most graphic parts of their testimonies or they showed emotion (e.g., cracking of the voice, tearing up, or crying) while describing violent events.

Based on these criteria, all 14 eyewitnesses referenced in this document were considered credible. The PHR team cross-referenced all testimonies and found the accounts consistent regarding both the specific incidents that took place and the timeline of events. Based on these testimonies and analysis of the physical destruction at the

scene, PHR investigators established a nuanced sequence of events that constitute the composite narrative.

#### **Location of the interviews**

The PHR field team conducted the interviews in four primary locations in Burma: (1) Mandalay and two outlying villages; (2) Meiktila and three surrounding villages; (3) Naypyidaw, and one nearby village; and (4) the city of Rangoon. Specific village names are withheld to ensure the security of witnesses.

The PHR field team exercised security precautions while driving to the various locations and interviewing study participants. When visiting Muslim villages, establishments, and homes, the team engaged a Muslim driver and the interpretation services of two Muslim translators. But while in predominantly Buddhist enclaves—such as the city of Meiktila itself—the team engaged an interpreter self-identified as Buddhist. Because tensions remain high in Meiktila, many Muslims were fearful of entering the city, and community leaders advised them not to do so. Names of interviewees were never written down, nor were photos taken of either the interviewees or the houses in which they were interviewed. All field notes were uploaded to a secure site nightly, and duplicates were made of all photographic evidence.

#### **Ethics Review Board approval of methods of the investigation**

An independent PHR ethics review board (ERB) approved the methods used for this investigation prior to the study. In reviewing the investigators' plan to protect human subjects, the ERB was guided by the World Medical Association's *Declaration of Helsinki: Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects*.<sup>31</sup>



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As the cohort of most of the reported survivors of the alleged school massacre is under age 18, PHR field investigators anticipated interviewing minors who were eyewitnesses to the event. Since this cohort is considered a vulnerable population with respect to human-subject research, the ERB specifically addressed the selection and interviewing of children as part of the study. Standards that the field team followed for interviewing minors were guided by ESOMAR's *World Research Codes and Guidelines for Interviewing Children and Young People*,<sup>32</sup> The Population Council's *Ethical Approaches to Gathering Information from Children and Adolescents in International Settings: Guidelines and Resources*,<sup>33</sup> and UNICEF's *Guidelines for Interviewing Children*.<sup>34</sup> All in-person medical evaluations of torture and ill treatment were conducted in accordance with the United Nations Manual on Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (also known as the "Istanbul Protocol").

Precautions were taken to protect the privacy and anonymity of the eyewitnesses and the confidentiality of their personal information. To minimize the impact on their physical, mental, and social integrity, interviewees in this report are provided with single-name pseudonyms, and some identifying information has been withheld.

PHR investigators obtained informed oral consent from each participant following a detailed explanation of PHR, the purpose of the investigation, and the potential benefits and risks of participation. Oral rather than written consent was obtained to ensure anonymity and security. In the case of a minor, permission was additionally

obtained orally from the child's parent or guardian to ensure that he or she was confident that the safety, rights, and interests of the child were being safeguarded during the interview. At least one parent of all the children interviewed by the PHR field team was either present or nearby during the interview. Interviews were halted if the child became distraught in any way. Of the nine interviews conducted with minors who were eyewitnesses, the PHR field team terminated three of them early because of emotional distress. PHR investigators employed additional safeguards for respondents under age 12: The investigators listened to their uninterrupted narrations and did not ask probing questions. Those two interactions were kept purposefully short. PHR obtained additional consent to conduct a physical evaluation of one survivor. This evaluation was based on the Istanbul Protocol.

#### **Limitations of the study**

By its nature, this study is subject to certain limitations. The field team's qualitative research was designed to yield an in-depth understanding of an incident in which abuses were committed by armed groups of civilians and complicit officials, including police, at one specific location in March 2013. The non-random selection of survivors of the massacre does not permit generalization of PHR's findings to all acts of violence against Muslims in Burma. Furthermore, seven survivors of the Mingalar Zayyone massacre did not agree to be interviewed. Anecdotally, the PHR field team was told that these people had witnessed some of the most heinous acts committed, were suffering from insomnia, nightmares, and other symptoms of psychological distress, and were fearful of reprisal by the authorities. Thus, the testimonies included in this report may not reflect the total number or variety of crimes

allegedly committed. This study is also subject to sampling bias as only one non-Muslim person is included among the 14 witnesses. Moreover, the investigation's limited focus does not permit a full analysis of the human rights situation in Burma at the time.

To mitigate recall bias among interviewees, investigators conducted all interviews within six weeks of the incident. As some trauma survivors are known to experience memory impairment (dissociation), corroboration was sought among eyewitness sources. Further corroboration of witness testimony was sought and obtained from objective sources (e.g., physical evaluations, crime scene analysis, and review of photographic and video evidence).

This investigative study should thus be construed as a snapshot in time, providing partial rather than complete accounts or prevalence reports of human rights violations. Notwithstanding these limitations, the study produced sufficient data on which to base informed recommendations.

## 8 Composite Narrative of Mingalar Zayyone Massacre

The following chronological account of the killings in the Mingalar Zayyone quarter of Meiktila on March 20-21, 2013, is assembled from the separate accounts of 14 eyewitnesses, who experienced the violence from a variety of locations and perspectives. They included one member of Parliament, eight students who were able to flee from their madrasa after it was attacked at night, and five residents of the Mingalar Zayyone quarter who were caught up in this targeted violence.

The resulting narrative is a composite constructed from their testimonies and verified to the extent possible by the PHR field team as described in the Methods and Limitations section. The names are pseudonyms to protect the witnesses' identities. Each statement is attributed to the informant(s) who provided it; even when paraphrased, the language and descriptors used are their own. Time references were facilitated by a number of factors, including the daily routine of established meal times at the school, the prevalence of cell phones among the students, and the Buddhist practice of marking prayer time with the ringing of bells.

### Pseudonyms and reference numbers of the 14 eyewitnesses

#### Preteen students:

- Soe (no. 08)
- Myint (no. 09)

#### Teenage students:

- Thant (no. 01)
- Maung (no. 02)
- Aung (no. 04)
- Phyu (no. 13)

#### Older students:

- Htun (no. 10)
- Htay (no. 21)

#### Residents of Mingalar Zayyone:

- Thiri (no. 17) – mother and wife of slain man
- Hla (no. 18) – teenage daughter of Thiri
- Yon (no. 19) – teenage daughter of Thiri
- Lwin (no. 20) – teenage son of Thiri
- Sein (no. 21) – young son of Thiri

#### Member of Parliament:

- Win Htein (his real name; no. 25)

### Scene of the massacre: An Islamic boarding school in Mingalar Zayyone

The town of Meiktila, situated halfway between the cities of Mandalay and Rangoon in central Burma, had four Islamic schools (madrassas). In the town's Muslim quarter of Mingalar Zayyone, the well-regarded Himayathol Islamic boarding school for boys was unique in offering instruction in English, Burmese, mathematics, and computer science in addition to Islamic studies.<sup>35</sup> The founder of the school, which was formerly an orphanage, established the madrasa in 2009.<sup>36</sup> The school was divided into five classes, from beginner to advanced, that were taught by 10 male teachers.<sup>37</sup>

The boarding school housed 120 students ranging in age from 11 to 27.<sup>38</sup> Some of the older students had already obtained a university degree, but were attending Himayathol for advanced religious studies. Htun, for example, is an older student who began his studies when the school opened in 2009. He had previously graduated from a secular school and then matriculated at Mingalar Zayyone for religious studies. There were also approximately 20 day students, like Soe, a young boy who was a student there for the past year and a half along with his older brother, Myint. Soe and Myint live with their family in a small house near the school, where their father [name withheld] was one of the teachers. [Their father was killed during the violence on March 21.]

# Composite Narrative of Mingalar Zayyone Massacre

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## Students hide while violence spreads throughout Muslim neighborhoods

On the morning of March 20, Myint walked to school with his father and younger brother as usual. They had their midday meal at school and afterwards he played in his uncle's [name withheld] home next to the school with three classmates. One of the women who cleaned the school came to tell them that there was violence in town and a problem at a gold shop.<sup>39</sup> Myint was across the street, and his father called for him to come back to school. Shortly thereafter, Myint saw smoke rising in the direction of the center of town.<sup>40</sup> Maung said he and the other students did not realize the seriousness of the situation at the time and were joking around.<sup>41</sup>

A man who lived in the quarter also came to the school and told the teachers to "keep everyone in the school and don't go into town."<sup>42</sup> One of the teachers then told all the boys to go to the mosque next door, as they were going to make an announcement. The boys were told that they were all to stay in the school and not venture out as it was not safe.<sup>43</sup> Three other students each similarly reported that the teachers informed them that "it was not a good situation in town" and that a mosque had been attacked and destroyed.<sup>44</sup> Sensing there was a problem between Buddhists and Muslims, the teachers told the students to take off their caps (*taqiyah*) so as not to call attention to their Muslim identity.<sup>45</sup> They also told the students to remain calm and quiet.<sup>46</sup> The teacher decided that if their madrassa was attacked they would not resist and instead would plead for the attackers not to harm the students. The teachers told the students "not to raise a fist" if the "terrorists" came.<sup>47</sup>



In the foreground a Muslim home in Meiktila, Burma that has been destroyed while the Buddhist home and temple behind were unscathed.

Photo: Richard Sollom

After the announcement, all the boys—about 120 of them—went back to school to attend classes.<sup>48</sup> Later that afternoon, Phyu saw black smoke rise from the center of town. The teachers told Phyu and the other students to gather their ID cards and any money they had. The group stayed inside the building with the lights off.<sup>49</sup>

At around 4 p.m. they received word that the Muslim quarter close to theirs was ablaze and that a mosque near the main market had been burned down.<sup>50</sup> The situation was apparently worsening.<sup>51</sup> Fear spread throughout the school, and some of the students began to cry.<sup>52</sup> Upon receiving this news, the teachers decided to divide the school into groups of five students, with one teacher or older student charged with looking after each group of students.<sup>53</sup>

# 10 Composite Narrative of Mingalar Zayyone Massacre

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A sign showing the prayer times is burned inside a mosque in Meiktila, Burma.  
Photo: Paula Bronstein/Getty Images

## Attack on Islamic school and mosque

At approximately 7:30 p.m., after eating dinner, the students heard news that Buddhists were congregating and organizing up on the main road, with the intent to attack the school.<sup>54</sup> The main road can be seen from the school, and Htay said it was terrifying to watch the crowd form. He could hear them chanting, “Kill the Kalars!” (Kalar means “foreigner” and is used as an anti-Muslim slur.) Htay couldn’t estimate the size of the crowd—he said there were too many to count.<sup>55</sup>

At about 8 p.m., Phyu heard a crowd of people outside. Someone shouted, “We must not surrender all the time to the Kalars!” Some students and teachers were receiving phone calls warning them that crowds of armed Buddhists were coming to the school.<sup>56</sup> At about 8:30 p.m., the teachers closed the main door of the school and put all the younger boys in the back room for safety.<sup>57</sup> The teachers told Soe and the other students to try to get some sleep. But five minutes later, Soe heard a lot of noise coming from outside the school. Myint also heard loud voices and the sound of blowing whistles coming closer.<sup>58</sup> Both were afraid.<sup>59</sup>

At around 9 p.m., a local official from Mingalar Zayyone quarter came to the school and informed them that he would not be able to protect them. The “Buddhist terrorists” arrived minutes later, according to Maung.<sup>60</sup>

At about 9:30 p.m., Aung heard loud voices coming from a group of men outside the school.<sup>61</sup> One of the older students heard what sounded like buildings being destroyed a few blocks away.<sup>62</sup> Students and teachers stayed at the school until the armed men surrounded the school.<sup>63</sup> There was chaos, and some students were crying.<sup>64</sup> Fearing for their lives, all of the students and teachers ran out the school’s front gate and hid in a nearby area called Wat Hlan Taw a few minutes away on foot.<sup>65</sup> This boggy area, measuring 95 by 80 meters, is overgrown with a variety of vegetation, including tall grasses.<sup>66</sup>

As the group fled the school and headed to the grassy area, Htay said, they split into smaller groups to hide. Phyu and the others hid in small groups among the bushes until the early hours of the morning.<sup>67</sup> Other people from the quarter were already hiding in the tall grass when they arrived.<sup>68</sup>

At that time, a Muslim resident of Mingalar Zayyone quarter and mother of five children heard a group of people coming toward her. At first, Thiri and her family were very frightened, but then she realized that the students from the school had evacuated and were joining them in the tall grass.<sup>69</sup> Htay said that the grass was “very high, almost up to my armpits,” and that they were able to sit in the mud and be completely hidden by the grass.<sup>70</sup> Sein said the grass was “like a jungle, with very deep water.” They remained there the whole night, standing up and not sleeping.<sup>71</sup>

# Composite Narrative of Mingalar Zayyone Massacre

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Not long after the students joined local residents in the grass, a mob set fire to the mosque and started to destroy the school.<sup>72</sup> They were chanting, "Find the Kalars and kill them!" Gangs of men went door to door in the quarter, searching for Muslims. Unable to find any in their homes, the gangs left the immediate vicinity.<sup>73</sup> Thiri's husband became very fearful at this point and said he thought they were going to be killed. He asked her forgiveness for "all the misery he had caused her in life." She said she tried to reassure him, and said, "We are safe among the students; they wouldn't kill them."<sup>74</sup>

At one point, Thiri said, a car pulled up in the quarter, and a local authority stepped out and instructed the mob, "Don't set fire to the Kalars' houses. The fire might jump to Buddhist homes. But you can destroy all the Muslim homes that you want."<sup>75</sup> A 13-year-old boy reported that the following morning he heard a Buddhist monk make a similar comment.<sup>76</sup>

## Students watch their school burn to the ground

In the dark, the students and other Muslim residents from Mingalar Zayyone quarter hid in the bushes. Maung was with a group of six other students and a teacher. At around 3 a.m., the teacher and two students in his group left their hiding place to see if it was safe to return to the school. They did not return. Later, while it was still dark, he saw people with flashlights around the school, and thought it was not safe to go back.<sup>77</sup>



Site of the Mingalar Zayyone madrasa which was burned to the ground in March 2013. Photo: Richard Sollom

Myint heard men near the school yell, "Where are you, Kalars? If you have courage, come out!" Myint was with his father, who told him and the others to be very quiet.<sup>78</sup> No one slept that night as they hid in the bushes.<sup>79</sup> Lwin's family stayed awake and alert the entire night, unable to sleep, as they were standing in mud and water and were very afraid.<sup>80</sup>

Thiri said her group was exhausted and growing more terrified, as fire in the quarter moved closer to them in the grass. They were unable to sleep, as the area they were standing in was waterlogged, muddy, and filled with snakes. Thiri tried to comfort her 9-year-old son, who clung to her until the early morning. All the time they stood in the tall grass, they could hear roving bands of men destroying homes.<sup>81</sup>

Hiding in the bushes about 100 meters away from the school in Wat Hlan Taw, the students watched men attack and burn their school and neighboring Muslim homes.<sup>82</sup> The school was set on fire by the men throwing "fire sticks."<sup>83</sup> That whole night, bands of young and middle-aged men armed with weapons roamed the Muslim quarter.<sup>84</sup> Myint was shaking he was so afraid.<sup>85</sup>

While it was still dark, Soe heard men yelling. One man screamed, "Kill all the Kalars! If you have courage, come outside."<sup>86</sup> Myint heard a car or mini-bus stop on the main road and a group of men get out. One of them shouted, "A Kalar ran into Wat Hlan Taw. Follow him!" Then he saw people with flashlights come toward him and the others. They were about 20 meters away. [Myint drew a detailed map of the area.] Myint also heard someone yell, "Wake up, people of Oat Kyin. Kalars are in Wat Hlan Taw. Show your courage and kill them all!" [Oat Kyin is the Buddhist quarter next to Wat Hlan Taw.]<sup>87</sup>

## 12 Composite Narrative of Mingalar Zayyone Massacre

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### Flushed out of the grass with spotlights, students flee

Soon after the Buddhists began ringing the 4 a.m. prayer bell,<sup>88</sup> Thiri heard a growing crowd congregating on the embankment bordering Meiktila Lake.<sup>89</sup> According to Htay, the group spotted a Muslim man driving on the main road on top the embankment. Htay heard the crowd yell, "Catch him and beat him!" As the car turned around and the headlights shone down the embankment and lit up the grassy area below, men up on the road shouted, "There are Kalars in the weeds!"<sup>90</sup> A man yelled, "There's a Kalar, get him!"<sup>91</sup> Nine-year-old Sein heard the mob cry out, "Find and kill the Kalars!"<sup>92</sup>

According to Thiri, the mob discovered at least one student in the grass, who had been slow to follow the rest of the group because he was on his cell phone talking with his mother. A few moments later they heard the group of men descend upon the student with sticks. Thiri said they listened in horror as the group of men beat the screaming student.<sup>93</sup> Htay reported that two students who remained in the grass were killed.<sup>94</sup>

While it was still dark, the group of 150 students, teachers, and others from the neighborhood who had been hiding all night in Wat Hlan Taw began to run back toward the school, away from the main road.<sup>95</sup> The entire group ran to get out of the grass and sought refuge in a nearby residential compound.<sup>96</sup> Myint saw some in his group break down the bamboo fence of the western wall of the compound, where there were four buildings.<sup>97</sup> While the students were running from the bushes to the neighbor's house, the armed men saw them and followed them to the house where others were hiding.<sup>98</sup>



General view of the destruction in Mingalar Zayyone quarter, including burnt out homes, the mosque, and the school.

Photo: Hein Aung

### Seeking refuge in a residential compound, women and children are attacked

The men escorted the women and the younger children, including Myint, to the one brick house on the property.<sup>99</sup> Once inside the house, Sein's mother told him to sit on the floor next to his sisters.<sup>100</sup> "Many were crying, especially the younger children, and all of us were terrified," Thiri said.<sup>101</sup> About 150 Muslims eventually hid in the compound (120 students, seven teachers, five females, and about 20 others from the quarter).<sup>102</sup> People hid in four buildings on the property, according to Phyu, who hid with his friends in the shed (an empty chicken coop) within the walled compound.<sup>103</sup>

According to one of the older students, a gang came down from the main road to the compound and surrounded it.<sup>104</sup> Some students started to pray, chanting *Allah Akbar*.<sup>105</sup> Hearing this, the mob outside the compound started

chanting nationalist songs.<sup>106</sup> Maung heard loud voices outside and men saying they were going to break down the gate of the compound. [Several of the witnesses drew maps of the area depicting four buildings situated within a walled compound.]<sup>107</sup>

Just before dawn, the wooden fence behind the shed was set on fire.<sup>108</sup> Maung's small group then ran next door to another building in the compound and found a large group of more than 100 students and others hiding inside. At around 6 a.m., the mob started throwing rocks, red bricks, and flaming sticks of wood at the compound where they were hiding.<sup>109</sup> Myint described the "fire sticks" as pieces of wood wrapped in cloth soaked in gasoline and then ignited.<sup>110</sup> From inside one of the houses, Sein could hear the mob throwing things at the house.<sup>111</sup> Through one of the

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windows, Aung saw around 20 men whom he did not recognize begin to attack the house.<sup>112</sup>

As time passed, more and more of the mob came down the embankment and encircled the compound, continuing to pelt the courtyard and buildings with stones, rocks, bricks, and sticks.<sup>113</sup> When the Buddhists began attacking the house in which Maung was hiding, he and five other students ran out and hid in the shed.<sup>114</sup> About 10 minutes later, Phyu saw a group of armed men approach the shed where they were hiding.<sup>115</sup>

Two younger children were hit in the head and face with rocks while sitting in one of the houses.<sup>116</sup> Some of the Muslims started throwing objects back at the mob over the compound wall,<sup>117</sup> and the men in the compound armed themselves with anything they could find on the ground in preparation for more attacks.<sup>118</sup> Some of the houses around them were burning at this point—and many of the older students in the group were working to put out fires.<sup>119</sup>

## **Buddhist monks and police march Muslims out of the compound**

Through a window inside one of the houses, Myint could see police standing on the raised embankment and watching as the mob attacked the compound.<sup>120</sup> Member of Parliament and National League for Democracy party member Win Htein told PHR investigators that he had walked from his home in Meiktila that morning to Mingalar Zayyone quarter. He said the main road along the embankment was filled with many hundreds of people, including police.<sup>121</sup>

Between 8 and 9 a.m., an estimated 15 to 20 police in blue uniforms with black and blue helmets, carrying rifles

and anti-riot shields, arrived in several military trucks that they parked on the main road along the embankment.<sup>122</sup> They then walked about 200 meters to the compound and encircled it.<sup>123</sup> The apparent commander had three stars on his epaulets.<sup>124</sup>

From inside one of the houses, Aung heard police yell for the occupants to come out.<sup>125</sup> Htay said the police came to the gate of the compound to tell them that two students had been killed and to request that some of the teachers should go outside into the grass to claim the bodies. Htay said everyone was too afraid to go outside.<sup>126</sup>

A Buddhist monk came to the compound gate, talked to the police, and then yelled to the group, “Put down your weapons.” A Muslim woman in the group went to the gate and said, “There are women here. We are not associated with the incident at the gold shop. We are asking for your forgiveness; please don’t set fire to this compound.”<sup>127</sup> The monk then asked, “Do you want to get out? If you want to get out, then you must listen to what I say. So put down your weapons.”<sup>128</sup> Htay heard the monk say to the police, “I can take all the students out.”<sup>129</sup>

The police told everyone to keep their heads down and they would be protected from the mob that had assembled.<sup>130</sup> Those who had armed themselves with various objects laid them down. Aung believed that the police were there to protect them from the mob, so he and the other students, teachers, and some residents of his quarter began to line up two-by-two and marched out of the compound with their hands clasped behind their heads.<sup>131</sup> Aung was in the middle of the line.<sup>132</sup> Thiri, her ill husband, and their five children were in the front of the

line.<sup>133</sup> Myint’s father told him to go to the front as well. This was the last time Myint saw his father.<sup>134</sup>

## **Police lead Muslims through the mob**

As soon as they left the compound, Myint saw the mob begin to club some of the students. As he is small, he said other students around him protected him. Some students were hit with red bricks and beaten with motorcycle chains and exhaust pipes.<sup>135</sup> Myint saw men with long swords and slingshots attack the unarmed group.<sup>136</sup> Aung also saw men stone and club the unarmed civilians as they were marched toward Oat Kyune quarter—about 150 meters from the school and beside the pond.<sup>137</sup>

Thiri reported that the police did not intervene to control the groups of men who were destroying the neighborhood.<sup>138</sup> Phyu said the police watched and did nothing to prevent or stop the Buddhists from stoning and hitting the students and others as they marched out of the compound.<sup>139</sup> Myint also reported that the police, who were holding rifles, did not intervene and forced the group to keep marching with their hands above their heads.<sup>140</sup> They followed a small path toward the embankment where several large military transport trucks were parked.<sup>141</sup>

Several witnesses reported hearing gunshots. Phyu said the shooting started when someone in the mob threw a rock at his group, but hit one of the policemen instead. The police officer (who wore two stars on his shoulder) in turn fired his rifle several times in the air.<sup>142</sup> Thiri saw the police then shoot once into the mob, grazing one of the attackers in the thigh. Some of the attackers yelled at the policeman, “Don’t shoot us, shoot the Muslims!”<sup>143</sup>

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Thiri said she was carrying her baby, her husband was leaning on one arm (he was having trouble breathing), and her younger son was clasping her other arm. Her younger daughter was a little ahead of them in the crowd, while her older daughter walked by her side. She and others fell into “newly dug pits” along the path. The holes were “about waist deep.” She fell into one with her baby and had a hard time getting up as other people were stepping on them. She tried to stand up but fell a second time. Then a student pulled her up out of the hole.<sup>144</sup> Sein was walking beside his mother. While on the narrow path, he tripped and fell because he was trying to avoid “holes in the ground.” Lwin encountered the same pits dug into the dirt path.<sup>145</sup> Both students said a lot of broken glass covered the dirt path.<sup>146</sup>

Lwin said the police only pretended to protect the Muslims but led them straight into a group of armed Buddhists instead.<sup>147</sup> The police told them they were going to the main road, which was next to the Buddhist quarter along the embankment.<sup>148</sup> They forced the group of more than 150 Muslims to continue marching along the path for about 15 minutes until they reached the edge of the Buddhist quarter called Oat Kyune.<sup>149</sup> Htay heard people shouting, “Don’t let any of the Kalars come into our quarter.”<sup>150</sup> A local authority from the quarter shouted, “*Tanari!*”—a derogatory term meaning “keep out,” often used in reference to dogs—and said that if they came into the Buddhist quarter, “We will kill you.”<sup>151</sup>

### **File of marchers is abused, beaten, and humiliated**

When they reached the edge of Mingalar Zayyone Muslim quarter, Aung saw hundreds of people, including about 10 Buddhist monks in

saffron robes, who did not allow them to pass.<sup>152</sup> A man standing near one of the monks shouted, “We will kill them all!”<sup>153</sup> That monk replied with a laugh, “Don’t kill them in your quarter, otherwise the Kalar ghosts will come here.”<sup>154</sup> Thiri heard the monk say, “Let them walk to the main road—and we can kill them there.”<sup>155</sup>

Many men carrying bamboo sticks, knives, swords, slingshots, chains, and motorcycle exhaust pipes then started to attack the group.<sup>156</sup> Right in front of her, Thiri saw one man start to beat an older woman with a bamboo stick. One of the students ran to protect her, and another man took a horizontal swing at the boy with a long knife, first slicing into his neck. The second blow came down vertically on top of the boy’s skull, at the frontal bone, and passed through the jaw. Thiri said the boy’s entire face was sliced off and he fell to the ground.<sup>157</sup>

She then witnessed two students in front of her being beaten by a group of men with bamboo sticks and exhaust pipes. One fell to the ground and didn’t move; the other boy fell to the ground on his back, and when he moved, a man used the end of a wooden plank to stab him in the face several times.

“Only the people in the middle of the line of people did well,” Thiri said.<sup>158</sup> Htay, who was in the middle of the escorted group, said students in the back were severely injured and killed. He also said that the attacking gang of men targeted the leaders and the wealthy in the Muslim community—dragging them away and killing them. He said about six people he knew from the neighborhood were killed, as well as a number of students.<sup>159</sup>

Htay himself was beaten “many, many times.”<sup>160</sup> He fell down, and was set upon by men with sticks, swords, and chains. He was able to get up once, but was struck down again. At that point, Htay lost consciousness.<sup>161</sup>

When Htay regained consciousness a few minutes later, he observed that the gang who had been beating him had moved away and begun to beat another student lying face down on the ground. When that student lifted his head, one of the men lifted his sword and brought it down on the back of the student’s neck, essentially decapitating him.

Thiri’s 16-year-old daughter, Hla, said Buddhists were handing Muslims pieces of pork and forcing them to eat.<sup>162</sup> Lwin said some of the Buddhists were harassing the Muslims, taunting them by saying, “Here! You must eat this pork!” Others were laughing, saying, “Hey, don’t feed them too much of it. They’ll come to like it, and we’ll have to feed them more of it!”<sup>163</sup> Thiri said she heard some of the police laughing.<sup>164</sup>

Other Buddhists in the crowd showed kindness. Hla was ahead of her mother, younger brother, and father. She was next to her neighbor who was holding her baby. One of the Buddhists in the crowd blocking the path recognized her neighbor and said, “I don’t want to hit you and the baby. Come with me.” Hla said the man pulled the woman off the path and beckoned for Hla and her brother to follow.<sup>165</sup> He took them into his house at the edge of Wat Hlan Taw, where Hla said there were already about 15 other Muslim women and girls hiding.<sup>166</sup> The house owner grabbed a head shawl and dressed her brother in it so he might be spared as a girl if they were all discovered.<sup>167</sup>



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## Police and monks force Muslims to violate their dietary laws and pray as Buddhists

A Buddhist monk told a group of students, teachers, and other Muslims to squat on the ground with their hands above their heads.<sup>168</sup> He said, "If you don't want to die, you must sit and worship us." [Myint and Phyu demonstrated the squat position they were forced to adopt, with the soles of their feet on the ground, knees bent, and hands clasped together above the forehead.]<sup>169</sup> The monk then said, "You are under our control, and we can do what we want with you. So pray like a Buddhist." And they did.<sup>170</sup>

Another young eyewitness, Yon, said that they were forced to pray, circled by men armed with knives. A policeman complained that they were not praying like a Buddhist but were all cheating and praying to Allah; he ordered them all to turn to the east and pray like Buddha, and they were given more pork to eat.<sup>171</sup>

After the prayers, the police instructed the entire group of Muslims to go up to the main road.<sup>172</sup> Some found the embankment too steep, so they sat back down while others continued climbing up to the main road. As they were making their way up, Yon was separated from her father.<sup>173</sup> Some policemen with riot shields stationed themselves around the seated group, as if to protect them.<sup>174</sup> Both Lwin and Htay said, however, that when someone charged them, the police stepped aside and let the person attack.<sup>175</sup>

## Crowd of onlookers encourages armed men to attack Muslims

The crowd of onlookers along the embankment and on the main road numbered many hundreds, according to three witnesses.<sup>176</sup> Large, armed men ran down the bank toward the group

of Muslims and began attacking them with swords, clubs, wooden batons, and metal pipes.<sup>177</sup> Other Buddhists joined—even some of the monks beat them, Aung said.<sup>178</sup> A 39-year-old witness estimated the mob comprised about 100 armed men, including some 10 to 20 Buddhist monks in saffron robes.<sup>179</sup> The rest of the crowd watched from above.<sup>180</sup> Member of Parliament Win Htein, who was witness to the events, said that some of these Buddhists were clapping, cheering, and encouraging the men to attack and kill.<sup>181</sup> Htay heard the crowd on the road encouraging the attackers too, chanting, "Kill the Kalars! Kill the Kalars!"<sup>182</sup>

Maung saw "blood the color of the monks' [saffron] robes." He thought they would be safe because monks were there, but instead he saw his friends being killed.

One monk instructed the mob to go up the embankment toward the main road to wait for the Muslim group there.<sup>183</sup> Thiri, with a baby still in her arms and her feeble husband, older daughter, and younger son at her side, started up the embankment to the main road. Suddenly, two men appeared in front of her. "We are only allowing women to the main road." One of the men shoved his hand in her husband's face, knocking him backward off his feet. The other man tried to pull her baby son from her arms. A third man yanked her 13-year-old son away from her, saying to Lwin, "You're a boy, you can't

go with her."<sup>184</sup> A policeman standing nearby grabbed Lwin's arm and pulled him away from the attacker, saying, "Let him go!" and shoved him back toward his mother. Lwin said, "I know that policeman saved my life."<sup>185</sup> Thiri and the other women, now in a group, went up to the main road, several of them leaving their husbands behind.<sup>186</sup> When the women reached the main road, they were again instructed to "sit down, pull down your scarf, and don't look back."<sup>187</sup>

## Police stand by as armed gangs massacre unarmed Muslims

One of the local leaders told the seated group not to move, according to two witnesses.<sup>188</sup> One of the older students, Htay, said that his classmate, [name withheld], moved slightly to reposition his legs and was suddenly attacked by two men. One had a sword and used it to slice open a long gash in the young man's quadriceps muscle. Another attacker poured gasoline into the bleeding wound and lit him on fire. Htay said the group on the ground, only about 30 meters away, watched his classmate burn to death by the water well. They were all terrified but were trying not to move, fearing they might be killed as well.<sup>189</sup> In perhaps the same event, another student saw one man stab a boy who was on fire. Maung saw "blood the color of the monks' [saffron] robes." He thought they would be safe because monks were there, but instead he saw his friends being killed.<sup>190</sup>

According to two witnesses, four men beat with hard bamboo another young student in the grove of trees below the embankment. A young female, Hla, said that while the boy was still shaking and twitching on the ground, someone poured gasoline on him out of a plastic container and set him on fire.<sup>191</sup> Aung also witnessed this event. He saw someone pour clear liquid from

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a one-gallon jug on his 10-year-old classmate and then use a lighter to set the boy on fire. Aung watched in terror some 10 meters away while the young boy fell to the ground burning and screaming in agony.<sup>192</sup>

Thiri's husband was stabbed with a knife twice in the abdomen, according to one of the older students present.<sup>193</sup> The mob then dragged his body and four others to form a pile. While "the bodies were still shaking and moving" two women collected dried leaves under the trees and threw them on top of the men, poured gasoline on them, and lit a fire, according to two witnesses.<sup>194</sup> Thiri smelled burning flesh, and grabbed the leg of a policeman who was standing near her. She said, "There's a fire! Please, please put it out!" The policeman replied, "Don't look back; if you do, we can set fire to you, too."<sup>195</sup>

**Yon heard a monk say, "If you want to kill the plant, you need to cut the root. If you come back, we will kill you all."**

Nineteen-year-old Phyu saw 17 of his friends and fellow students stabbed and killed. [During the interview, Phyu listed their names, including five of his closest friends, and approximate ages. He began to cry.] He saw other lifeless bodies on the ground, but could not identify them because he did not see their faces.<sup>196</sup>

Aung also reported witnessing five men with clubs and swords attack his 20-year-old classmate. One of the men stabbed the young man three times in the stomach after he had fallen to the ground. According to Aung, the police and monks watched and did nothing to prevent or stop these killings.<sup>197</sup>

While Myint's group sat on the grassy field, the monks and police told the others to march up the embankment toward the trucks parked on the main road. It was then that Myint saw a man club his friend, Abubakar, a fellow student about his age. Abubakar fell to the ground. Myint next saw Abubakar burning alive. Another man told Myint to keep his eyes down, saying: "If you dare look up, we will beat you to death." Crying and shaking with fear, Myint remained squatting looking down at the ground for about 30 minutes while he heard others being beaten. Finally Myint's group was told to stand up and march to the trucks.<sup>198</sup>

After about 10 minutes of sitting in terror, Htay said his group was told to slowly crawl up the embankment, keep their heads down, and not look at the killing going on around them. If they ran, they would be killed. Htay said that he did keep his head down and that as he climbed through the grove he was climbing past body parts—arms, hands, legs, and feet—that had been hacked off.<sup>199</sup>

When Yon and her family made it to the road, she said they were told to sit down again. As she turned to reposition herself, this witness reported seeing a man behind her near the grove holding up the decapitated head of a Muslim by the hair. The facial muscles were still twitching. Then she heard a monk say, "If you want to kill the plant, you need to cut the root. If you come back, we will kill you all."<sup>200</sup>

Sein's group was told to move to the main road. At that point, as they tried to go forward, large mobs in front of them and behind them blocked their path so they couldn't escape. He said the attackers were beating people with bamboo sticks, and killing them with knives and swords. They were cutting people's throats and doing "many bad things." [Sein's eyes opened wide. He looked afraid, teared up, and the interview was stopped.]<sup>201</sup>

### **Piles of charred corpses lie strewn across the field**

MP Win Htein was present and stood among the crowd on the main road along the embankment. According to this member of Parliament, the police commissioner and district commissioner were also present. Win Htein reported that some 200 police were present, and none intervened to prevent or stop the killings. He saw seven young teenagers who were dead, lying in the grassy area below.<sup>202</sup> Thant saw "many black" [charred] bodies on the ground.<sup>203</sup> Maung saw seven bodies on the ground after the group was finally told to get up and go to the military trucks nearby.<sup>204</sup> As Myint walked looking down with his arms above his head, he saw three lifeless bodies at his feet. The mob continued to attack them as they mounted the trucks.<sup>205</sup> According to Win Htein, the bodies lay on the ground for two days. Finally, municipal workers were instructed to pick up the bodies and take them to the crematorium. They were not identified nor were their families notified.<sup>206</sup>

The police told the seated group to climb up the embankment where three trucks were parked on the main road.<sup>207</sup> The policemen loaded some students onto the first truck, and the women and girls were put in the second truck.<sup>208</sup> A monk yelled to the police while they were loading, "Take

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A man takes pictures of burnt bodies in Meiktila, Burma on March 22, 2013.  
Photo: STR/AFP/Getty Images

them to Yin Taw Village [a Muslim enclave], where they belong!”<sup>209</sup> When Aung got to the trucks, two of the three were already filled. His group climbed onto the third truck and he estimates they rode for about 15 minutes until they arrived at Meiktila’s No. 2 police station at around noon on March 21.<sup>210</sup>

### **Police detain survivors at No. 2 police station in Meiktila**

When the students, teachers, and other residents of Mingalar Zayyone quarter arrived at the police station, more than 80 students and teachers were separated from the others and put in one packed room inside the station.<sup>211</sup>

Htay lay on the floor and slept “for a long time.” When he woke up he had a very bad headache and was dizzy. Then he noticed that his hands were extremely painful and he couldn’t move them. One of his friends told him he had blood all over his back. He then realized he had been cut in several places. He had wounds on his left thumb and forearm and right hand, and

several superficial—although heavily bleeding—wounds on his back.<sup>212</sup> Htay could not pinpoint the moment he was injured, although he recalled passing out soon after the armed men started beating him.

Thiri said that during the first two hours at the police station, the police “gave us a lot of sermons. They said they sympathized with us and that they had tried to save our lives. And they said they were sorry for what happened.” Some of the police said, “We are afraid of the monks too, and the monks hate us for saving your lives.”<sup>213</sup>

Aung said some of the police called the Muslim detainees “terrorists.” They were given a small amount of rice and water each day. Maung said he received only three biscuits and water.<sup>214</sup> Aung also said that a military officer wearing three stars came to the police station and told his group to keep calm.<sup>215</sup>

Htun made a list of all the students in the jail. From one of the police officers, Htun bought a notebook for 200 kyat (about 25 cents) and then wrote down the names (both Burmese and Arabic), ages, fathers’ names, and addresses of 88 students. [During the interview, Htun drew a detailed map of the police station.]<sup>216</sup> Phyu remembered giving Htun all of this information, which he wrote down on paper.<sup>217</sup> Later that afternoon, Myint could see through the cracks in the wall a mob of armed men outside the police station. Buddhist monks were among them.<sup>218</sup>

### **Muslim survivors are reunited with their families**

At 10 a.m. Saturday, March 23, most of the detained students and several teachers were loaded into three buses and driven with police escort to Tapatswe village about 90 minutes away near Mandalay where they were reunited with their families. They arrived around 11:30 a.m. and were taken to a mosque where they were fed. Township authorities and religious leaders wrote down the names of students before they left with their families who had come to pick them up.<sup>219</sup> [During the interview, Phyu began to cry at this point and said how much he missed his friends who were killed.]<sup>220</sup>

Myint remained in the police station with his older cousin, his aunt, and her three young children.<sup>221</sup> They remained because they were not part of the group of students being transferred.<sup>222</sup> On March 24 the group of six was picked up by Htun’s relatives who had come to drop off food for the detainees. He and his female relatives were then able to leave the police station with their relatives.<sup>223</sup>

## PHR used other forms of documentation to corroborate the events described in the eyewitness interviews:

- 1 Visual verification of actual locations of reported human rights violations
- 2 Review of photographic, video, and satellite evidence
- 3 Physical evaluation of one survivor
- 4 Psychological distress among survivors
- 5 Comparison of the community's list of the missing (presumed) dead, with eyewitness accounts
- 6 Corroboration of data with concurrent events reported in several media accounts

### 1. Visual verification of actual locations of reported human rights violations

The PHR team twice visited the scene of the massacre in the Mingalar Zayyone quarter in Meiktila. The PHR team visited and photographed all 13 mosques in the city, of which 12 were damaged or destroyed. The team also visited the three principal madrassas within Meiktila and documented the destruction, as well as determined the location of five temporary camps for displaced persons in and around the city. The team also photographed the extensive damage to Muslim businesses and homes throughout Meiktila. Photographs were taken with a Nikon Coolpix AW100, a Sony DSC-WX80, and an iPhone 5. Two of the cameras, the Nikon Coolpix and iPhone, are capable of recording GPS coordinates on each image. The team logged all images into a photographic database, recording the image number, description, time, date, and GPS location of the site.

### 2. Review of photographic, video, and satellite evidence

The PHR team also reviewed over 450 photos and 37 videos taken on March 23 by Hein Aung, a professional Burmese journalist and photographer, two days after the massacre. Hein Aung also accompanied PHR investigators on both of the trips into Meiktila to photograph the physical destruction. He indicated where he had taken specific photographs on March 23.

PHR investigators also interviewed Jason Szep, a Reuters journalist who was at the scene of the massacre on March 24. He wrote: “[O]n the hill where Muslim bodies were burned, this reporter found the remains of a mix of adults and children: pieces of human skull, vertebrae and other bones, and a singed child’s backpack. Nearby, municipal trucks dumped bodies in a field next to a crematorium in Meiktila’s outskirts. They were burned with old

tires.” Reuters and other news media published images of these burning corpses.

In addition, PHR investigators reviewed some 30 videos taken by unidentified individuals at a number of the alleged incidents that marked the violence over the period March 20-21. Comparison of landmarks in the PHR investigators’ photographs to landmarks in the videos suggests, though cannot confirm, that these videos record the events described to PHR investigators by eyewitnesses and documented in this report. One video in particular shows several piles of burning bodies in the area where the eyewitnesses reported that many of the killings had taken place.

The PHR team also reviewed Human Rights Watch (HRW) satellite images of the city of Meiktila, recorded on the morning of March 26, 2013, and compared them with images taken on December 13, 2012. HRW identified an estimated total of 828 destroyed and 35 severely damaged buildings within the city, likely caused by arson attacks reported to have occurred.<sup>224</sup>

In an effort to authenticate photographs and videos reportedly taken at the site and time of the killings, PHR investigators twice traveled to Meiktila to visually inspect, photograph, and log GPS coordinates of the alleged crime scene. Through comparison analysis of landmarks and other distinctive objects in the vicinity captured in PHR photographs and videos, PHR investigators conclude that these photographs and videos are highly likely to be authentic and thus constitute strong evidence of the killings that the witnesses have recounted in this report. In addition, logged GPS coordinates and visual inspection of the crime scene corroborate destruction that HRW satellite images captured.

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### 3. Physical evaluation of the healed wounds of one survivor

On April 27, a PHR physician interviewed and examined Htay, an adult student at the Mingalar Zayyone school. As reported above, he was attacked by several men—he could not estimate the number because they descended upon him so quickly—armed with sticks, chains and swords. He was knocked down, got up once, but then was struck down again. At that point, Htay lost consciousness for what he guesses were just a few minutes. Upon regaining consciousness, he tried to quickly catch up with his group. He did not notice his injuries until he arrived at the police station. While at the police station, he suffered from a severe headache, experienced dizziness, and was bleeding from wounds on both his hands, his left forearm, and his back. He has suffered no subsequent symptoms except for insomnia and nightmares. He received one stitch at the police station for the laceration on his left hand. He specifically gave consent for the PHR investigator to examine and photograph his healed wounds.

Htay was anxious, although in control of his emotions, during the exam. Inspection revealed several well-healed lacerations: (1) a 5-cm laceration running from the thenar eminence around the base of the thumb onto the dorsal aspect of the hand; (2) a 2-cm straight laceration on the left forearm; (3) three small lacerations on the back of the right hand, forming a slight arc measuring about 5 cm total; and (4) four lacerations at various angles on his back. Two lacerations measured approximately 10 cm, one measured approximately 16 cm and one measured 20 cm. All six lacerations are highly consistent with his testimony of being struck with a weapon such as a sword or knife.

### 4. Psychological distress among survivors

All eight students whom PHR investigators interviewed reported some psychological distress. Sixteen-year-old Maung has nightmares nearly every night. He dreams of his friends whom he saw killed and wakes up crying.<sup>225</sup> Twelve-year-old Myint also has nightmares each night and said that a doctor gave him medication so he could sleep.<sup>226</sup>

One of the teenage students, Lwin, said that the smell of the burning bodies was overwhelming, and that he now has olfactory flashbacks and trouble sleeping. One of the recurring nightmares he has is reliving the scene of roving dogs eating the flesh of the dead bodies in the grove. He also has nightmares in which he sees the conflagration of the school, and people from his neighborhood fleeing the scene and screaming. He cries “almost every day” and feels very fearful about the future.<sup>227</sup>

### 5. Comparison of community’s list of the missing with eyewitness accounts

PHR investigators were given a list of names of students and teachers of Mingalar Zayyone madrasa, or residents of the Mingalar Zayyone quarter, who were still unaccounted for and presumed dead. Muslim community leaders compiled the list after consulting with families. The list included the names of 33 students, four teachers, and 38 residents of the quarter. PHR asked each of the 14 eyewitnesses whether they had personally witnessed the death of someone they knew, and if so, requested the person’s name. Based on their responses, of the 75 names on the community list, PHR was able to account for 20 of these people.

### 6. Corroboration of data with concurrent events reported in the media

As of early May 2013, PHR’s analysis of independent media coverage yielded reports of anti-Muslim unrest in an estimated 26-28 townships in Burma during and after the March 20-23 violence in Meiktila.<sup>228</sup> Property damage was reported in approximately 19-20 of these townships. Another eight townships reportedly experienced new or increased anti-Muslim propaganda or vandalism during this period, reportedly causing Muslim residents to pre-emptively flee from at least one of these townships.<sup>229</sup> The majority of documented violence in Meiktila took place during March 20-23. While estimates vary, the Meiktila violence seems to have sparked more than 160 incidents in as many as 15 townships, towns, or villages.

The 14 eyewitness accounts presented in this report, corroborated by other documentation, provide compelling evidence that police officers were complicit in violent crimes against civilians. Such acts on the part of law enforcement officers blatantly violate even the most rudimentary provisions of Burma's own penal code<sup>230</sup> as well as international norms. The UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, for example, stipulates that police officers must protect people from crime,<sup>231</sup> and this service to the community is intended to include rendering assistance to those who are in need of immediate aid. The standards require law enforcement officials to protect the rights of all people.<sup>232</sup>

The eyewitness reports detailed in this report demonstrate that the majority of police officers present during the violence in Meiktila fell far short of this professional standard, not only by failing to protect vulnerable children and others at risk but by failing to apprehend the perpetrators. The crimes in Meiktila indicate a failure of leadership within the Burmese police force that must be addressed through effective accountability mechanisms and security-sector reform.

The testimonies of those interviewed by PHR demand a concerted and effective response from both the Government of Burma and the international community. The serious crimes documented in this report require immediate action: an independent investigation of the violence and accountability for all perpetrators in compliance with fair and internationally recognized legal standards.

The crimes in Meiktila occurred in a general national context marked by a lack of accountability for perpetrators of human rights violations. The Government of Burma must respond effectively not only to this incident but to the long history of systematic human rights violations on the part of Burmese authorities. The people of Burma face the important long-term task of building a society based on tolerance and understanding, and reckoning with past violence is a key element of this social reconciliation. The Government of Burma has an important role to play in this process, and must institutionalize the protection of minority groups across the country and establish and maintain effective accountability mechanisms in order to move the country out of a culture of violence.

## **To the Government of Burma:**

Senior officials, pro-democracy advocates, and religious leaders should publicly and repeatedly condemn all ethnic and religious violence and intimidation, and should demonstrate by their words and actions that such discrimination and hateful rhetoric will not be tolerated. The Government of Burma should also:

- Immediately allow unfettered access by human rights investigators, journalists, and humanitarian aid workers to Meiktila, areas of Rakhine State, and other places where acts of anti-Muslim violence have occurred.
- Institutionalize protections for ethnic and religious minority groups by: (1) completely revising Burma's citizenship law so that it reflects international norms; (2) reforming the structure of the military and police to establish accountability mechanisms; (3) bringing an end to ethnic discrimination in all sectors; and (4) encouraging full civil participation by minority groups.
- Provide mental health counseling and other appropriate health care for those affected by the violence, with a special focus on the particular needs of children.
- Collaborate with international humanitarian agencies, including the International Committee of the Red Cross and UNICEF, to trace missing children and reunite families separated by the violence.
- Promote the protection of children by adhering to the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, promulgated by the Child Protection Working Group.

## **To the international community:**

- Immediately establish an international, independent investigation of the massacre in Meiktila as well as other sites of anti-Muslim violence. Members of the United Nations Human Rights Council should direct the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to conduct this necessary investigation. The Government of Burma should cooperate with any investigation and assist in implementing any recommendations from the investigators.
- Tie economic aid to and investment in Burma to the Burmese government's allowing unfettered access to areas of violence to human rights investigators, journalists, and humanitarian aid workers and to the government's progress in investigating and prosecuting perpetrators of the violence. Until the Burmese government has established full accountability for security forces and has undertaken significant steps toward structural reforms as outlined above, no security assistance should be provided.

22 Map: PHR-Verified Destruction of Mosques and Islamic Schools in the City of Meiktila, Burma March 20-23, 2013





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97. Interview with key informant no. 09, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013).
98. Interview with key informant no. 04, in Mandalay Division, Burma (24 Apr. 2013); Interview with key informant no. 17, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013).
99. Interview with key informant no. 09, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013).
100. Interview with key informant no. 21, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013).
101. Interview with key informant no. 17, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013).
102. Interview with key informant no. 04, in Mandalay Division, Burma (24 Apr. 2013); Interview with key informant no. 17, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013).
103. Interview with key informant no. 13, in Mandalay Division, Burma (27 Apr. 2013).
104. Interview with key informant no. 24, in Mandalay Division, Burma (27 Apr. 2013).
105. Interview with key informant no. 04, in Mandalay Division, Burma (24 Apr. 2013); Interview with key informant no. 09, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013); Interview with key informant no. 17, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013); Interview with key informant no. 13, in Mandalay Division, Burma (27 Apr. 2013); Interview with key informant no. 21, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013).
106. Interview with key informant no. 09, in Mandalay Division, v (25 Apr. 2013); Interview with key informant no. 21, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013).
107. Interview with key informant no. 02, in Mandalay Division, Burma (28 Mar. 2013); Interview with key informant no. 17, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013).
108. Interview with key informant no. 02, in Mandalay Division, Burma (28 Mar. 2013).



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191. Interview with key informant no. 18, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013).
192. Interview with key informant no. 04, in Mandalay Division, Burma (24 Apr. 2013).
193. Interview with key informant no. 17, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013).
194. Interview with key informant no. 17, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013); Interview with key informant no. 20, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013).
195. Interview with key informant no. 17, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013).
196. Interview with key informant no. 13, in Mandalay Division, Burma (27 Apr. 2013).
197. Interview with key informant no. 04, in Mandalay Division, Burma (24 Apr. 2013).
198. Interview with key informant no. 09, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013).
199. Interview with key informant no. 24, in Mandalay Division, Burma (27 Apr. 2013).
200. Interview with key informant no. 19, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013).
201. Interview with key informant no. 21, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013).
202. Interview with key informant no. 25, in Yangon Division, Burma (29 Apr. 2013).
203. Interview with key informant no. 01, in Mandalay Division, Burma (26 Mar. 2013).
204. Interview with key informant no. 02, in Mandalay Division, Burma (28 Mar. 2013).
205. Interview with key informant no. 09, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013).
206. Interview with key informant no. 25, in Yangon Division, Burma (29 Apr. 2013).
207. Interview with key informant no. 04, in Mandalay Division, Burma (24 Apr. 2013); Interview with key informant no. 13, in Mandalay Division, Burma (27 Apr. 2013); Interview with key informant no. 24, in Mandalay Division, Burma (27 Apr. 2013).
208. Interview with key informant no. 17, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013); Interview with key informant no. 24, in Mandalay Division, Burma (27 Apr. 2013).
209. Interview with key informant no. 17, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013).
210. Interview with key informant no. 04, in Mandalay Division, Burma (24 Apr. 2013); Interview with key informant no. 09, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013).
211. Interview with key informant no. 04, in Mandalay Division, Burma (24 Apr. 2013); Interview with key informant no. 24, in Mandalay Division, Burma (27 Apr. 2013).
212. Interview with key informant no. 24, in Mandalay Division, Burma (27 Apr. 2013).
213. Interview with key informant no. 17, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013).
214. Interview with key informant no. 02, in Mandalay Division, Burma (28 Mar. 2013).
215. Interview with key informant no. 04, in Mandalay Division, Burma (24 Apr. 2013).
216. Interview with key informant no. 10, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013); Interview with key informant no. 13, in Mandalay Division, Burma (27 Apr. 2013).
217. Interview with key informant no. 13, in Mandalay Division, Burma (27 Apr. 2013).
218. Interview with key informant no. 09, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013).
219. Interview with key informant no. 02, in Mandalay Division, Burma (28 Mar. 2013); Interview with key informant no. 04, in Mandalay Division, Burma (24 Apr. 2013); Interview with key informant no. 10, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013); Interview with key informant no. 13, in Mandalay Division, Burma (27 Apr. 2013).
220. Interview with key informant no. 13, in Mandalay Division, Burma (27 Apr. 2013).
221. Interview with key informant no. 09, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013).
222. Interview with key informant no. 09, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013); Interview with key informant no. 10, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013).
223. Interview with key informant no. 10, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013).
224. Human Rights Watch, *Burma: Satellite Images Detail Destruction in Meiktila*, 1 Apr. 2013, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/04/01/burma-satellite-images-detail-destruction-meiktila>.
225. Interview with key informant no. 02, in Mandalay Division, Burma (28 Mar. 2013).
226. Interview with key informant no. 09, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013).
227. Interview with key informant no. 20, in Mandalay Division, Burma (25 Apr. 2013).
228. PHR reviewed accounts of alleged anti-Muslim unrest during and following the Meikhtila riots in over 100 articles, press releases, statements, situation updates, blog posts and reports.
229. Burmese Muslim Association, records of incidents of violence in Meikhtila and other areas from 20 to 28 Mar. 2013, on file with PHR. Association website <http://www.b-m-a.org/>.
230. Burma's penal code includes provisions that address abetment of crimes. The Penal Code [Union of Burma], 1860, Ch. V. available at [http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs6/MYANMAR\\_PENAL\\_CODE-corr.1.pdf](http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs6/MYANMAR_PENAL_CODE-corr.1.pdf). The Code also addresses acts of omission in a general manner. *Id.* Ch. II, art. 32. Note, however, that Burmese authorities have used the substance and application of national laws in a political manner to target political activists and humanitarian aid workers. See Burma Lawyers' Council, List of the Most Problematic Provisions in the 2008 constitution and Burmese laws (2012), available at <http://www.burmapartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Top-Laws-and-Constitutional-Provisions-to-Be-Repealed-or-Amended.pdf>; Nyein Nyein and Khin Oo Thar, *UN Calls on Govt to Release Aid Workers Still in Detention*, Irrawaddy, 20 Aug. 2012, <http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/11914>.
231. The Code of Conduct reads "Law enforcement officials shall at all times fulfill the duty imposed upon them by law, by serving the community and by protecting all persons against illegal acts, consistent with the high degree of responsibility required by their profession." UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials art. 1(a), U.N. Doc. A/34/46 (17 Dec. 1979).
232. "In the performance of their duty, law enforcement officials shall respect and protect human dignity and maintain and uphold the human rights of all persons." UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials art. 2, U.N. Doc. A/34/46 (17 Dec. 1979).



Residents look at the charred remains of burnt bodies in Meiktila, Burma on March 23, 2013.  
Photo: Soe Than WIN/AFP/Getty Images



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[physiciansforhumanrights.org](http://physiciansforhumanrights.org)

2 Arrow Street  
Suite 301  
Cambridge, Massachusetts  
02138

617.301.4200 Tel  
617.301.4250 Fax

1156 15th Street NW  
Suite 1001  
Washington, DC  
20005 USA

202.728.5335 Tel  
202.728.3053 Fax