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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

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

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

[24 August 2012]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Dismal human rights situation of Rohingya in Myanmar

Despite all the applause for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's recent trip to Europe and the reforms of the incumbent president of Myanmar, U Thein Sein, the situation of the systematically persecuted Muslim minority of the Rohingya remains grave.

In the recent outbreaks of violence in May/June 2012, following the rape-murder of the Buddhist woman Thidar Htwe on May 28th 2012, at least 62 persons have been killed, leaving 32,000 people displaced and around 100,000 have tried to flee the violent conflict between the Buddhist Rakhine and the Muslim Rohingya. There are numerous claims and reports of Rohingya being killed, tortured and raped, and their property looted by the security forces and the Buddhist citizens that has resulted in around 600 deaths, which could not be verified due to the absence of an independent media. However, this tragedy is not an isolated case but just the tip of the iceberg that constitutes a much deeper problem: the ongoing, decade-old persecution and discrimination of the Rohingya and the deeply rooted racism in the Burmese society.

Based on the "Citizenship Act" from 1982, enacted by the military dictatorship, the Rohingya are deprived of their citizenship. They are hence considered „stateless“ and do not have any rights. The restrictions imposed by the government include: freedom of movement, freedom to marry and to have children, access to medical services, education and employment including serving in the military or the police. They are subjected to forced labour (with an estimated amount of 40% child labour) on their very own land that is often confiscated by the government for infrastructure projects as well as Buddhist buildings. Arbitrary detention, rape, torture and extra-judicial killings openly committed by security forces are common and the Rohingya live in perpetual fear.

Officials usually refer to the Rohingya as „Bengalis“, claiming that they are illegal migrants from neighbouring Bangladesh despite of Rohingya living in the region for at least several centuries. They use racist language as well. Myanmar's former Consul-General to Hong Kong and now ambassador to the United Nations, U Ye Myint Aung, described the Rohingya as „ugly as ogres“. The opposition party, National League for Democracy (NLD) is not speaking out on behalf of the Rohingya either. Leading figures of the NLD and other oppositional forces use discriminatory slurs as well and have adopted the official rhetoric of „illegal migrants“. With the newly acquired freedom of expression, many Burmese citizens express their hatred and racism publicly on the internet through social networks and in the newspapers. Prominent members of society such as actors or musicians openly discriminate Rohingya and demand them to be exiled or even killed. This racism is the result of the decade-long military rulership that enforced and perpetuated the deeply rooted mistrust.

Due to this systematic persecution, many Rohingya have fled to other countries. Bangladesh is hosting at least 300,000 Rohingya, mostly under inhumane conditions. Thailand hosts 111,000 Rohingya, Malaysia between 50,000 and 70,000, Saudi Arabia between 120,000 and 500,000. They are exposed to detention and violence in their host countries as well. In case of deportation, they end up serving long prison sentences for violating migration laws.

Wherever the Rohingya are, where they go and what they do, they always suffer as they are never welcome. Historically, the Rohingya have never cause a conflict in the country and have lived peacefully in Myanmar. As measured against the persecution they are facing today, they still adapt to peaceful ways of living.

Society for Threatened People calls on the Human Rights Council to urge the Government of Myanmar as well as the National League for Democracy, the leading opposition party of Myanmar to:

- End the discrimination of the Rohingya immediately and restore their civil and political rights together with their citizenship;
 - Publicly oppose the racism spread by officials and Burmese citizens alike;
 - Integrate ways for a peaceful co-existence between the Buddhist majority and the Rohingya and to accept them as one of the country's ethnic groups;
 - Allow Rohingya free access to medical care, education and employment and grant them the right to work in officialdom, the police and the military.
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