Summary of situation update for December 2017

Date: 23rd Jan 2018

Rakhine

- The department of Manpower said a group to scrutinize Rohingya refugees was formed with the representatives from three ministries. The Director General of Labor, Immigration and Manpower department U Myint Kyaing said the group includes officials from the Ministry of Foreign and Home Affairs as well as from the Ministry of Labor, Immigration and Manpower. The government said it will do securitization of returnees according to the Burma Citizenship Law of 1982 and those who do not meet criteria under the law would not be allow to come back.

- Local residents of Maungtaw urged the government not allow Rohingya refugees to resettle near the villages of Rakhine people. The call was made in a public gathering of local people held on 7 December. The call was made as the government prepares to repatriate tens of thousands of Rohingya refugees who fled to Bangladesh in recent months. A nine-point statement was issued on 6 December after the meeting which include condemnation of the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC), which said, are supporting Rhingyas. The statement also condemns criticism by the international community on the government and the military for their handling of the crisis.

- The Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement said on 7 December that Rohingya refugees who are to be repatriated from Bangladesh must take Nationality Verification Card (NVC). He said even though repatriation of refugees would be conducted according to the principles for repatriation agreed in 1993 and Burma Citizenship Law of 1982 but refugees will have to take NVC card under the section 5 sub section 2 c of Burma Registration Act of 1949.

- The Director General of Labor, Immigration and Manpower department U Myint Kyaing said Myanmar government has sent forms to Bangladesh the forms that are required to fill up by the returnees to Bangladesh. However, so far no reply received from Bangladesh. A working group for repatriation was formed on 19 December and repatriation would begin on 23 January. The Permanent Secretary said repatriation would only begin only after receiving filled up from Bangladesh. Bangladesh government said on 29 December that it will send the list of 100 000 people to be repatriated.

- The Deputy Minister of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, U Soe Aung, said the International Non-governmental Organizations (INGOs) has no right to interfere in the process of repatriation and resettlement of Rohingya refugees. He made the comment in response to a statement issued on 9 December by 10 INGOs called for Rohingyas to be allow to resettle in their places of origin. The government has to administer. They have no right to interfere.

- The Director General of the State Counsellor Office U Zaw Htay said a statistic issued by the Medicine San Frotntire on the number of deaths was based on unfounded facts. MSF said on 12 December that during one month period between 25 August to 24 September more than 9000 including 730 were killed during terrorist incidents. The Medical Director of MSF Sidney Wong admitted that the survey could not covered the all refugees as well as those left behind in Myanmar. So that is why the stastic was only estimate.

- A member of the National Human Rights Commission U Yu Lwin Aung said Rohingya refugees have fled to Bangladesh as they were facing food shortages. He made the comment on 12 December after talking to Rohingya who were planning to cross into Bangladesh during a trip of the Commission to Buthitaung and Maungtaw. He said due to curfew casual labourer and fishermen were unable to go out for work during morning and night time, that is why people were facing food shortages.

- The Rakhine State Parliament has approved a motion calling for settlement of ethnic Rakhine people living in the state to Maungtaw region, as a part of effort not to lose the state's territory. The motion was presented by U Kyaw Lwin , MP from Kyaukphyu Constituency 1 at the sixth regular meeting held on 24 November and it was approved on 29 November session of the legislature. The National Human Rights Comission said it would recommend establishment of more villages for ethnic people in Buthitaung and Mauntgtaw region

- The Commander-in-Chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, said on 1 December that the military would provide full protection to minority people in Maungtaw region from genocidal attack against them. He said the military and government have handle the

Rakhine issues according to the law, however, due to incitement by some groups international community have not understood actual situation on the ground.

- The Myanmar Ambassador to the United Nations, U Htin Linn, said a resolution by the UN Human Rights Commission hurts the country's sovereign rights. He accused the council of adopting the resolution by using unverified statistics on the incident in Rakhine State. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has called for 27th special meeting of the council on 5 December to discuss on Rohingya issue. A resolution was adopted at the meeting, which said crime against humanity was committed against Rohingya people. He added that pre-determined politicization and partiality seems to be taking roots in the council's work.

- U Zaw Htay said on 20 December that the government will cooperate with the UN Special Rapporteur on situation of Human Rights, only if the current envoy Ms Yang Hee Lee is replaced. He accused Ms Lee of bias against the government. He made the comment after Myanmar government imposed visa ban on Ms Lee. She had to cancel her trip to Myanmar planned in January 2018.

- Myanmar Permanent Representative to the United Nations, U Hau Do Suan, said the country has been repeatedly singled out based on the country's human rights situation, which he said was unacceptable. A statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the envoy made the comment at a Security Council meeting on Myanmar held in New York on 12 December. It said the Myanmar ambassador said putting political pressure and coercion on Myanmar by using human rights as an excuse would not yield any good result. U Hau Do Suan warned against making conclusions that Myanmar authorities have committed ethnic cleansing and crime against humanity against Rohingya people. He accused the council of making such conclusions without doing verification in accordance with the law.

- The Director General of the Office of the State Counsellor U Zaw Htay said the government has made full arrangement for security of Rakhine State. The spokesperson said after the International Crisis Group (ICG) issued a report related to Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA).The ICG report said ARSA terrorist group is recruiting fighters who are likely to be used in next round of attack.

- The Office of State Counsellor said on 9 December that an advisory group was established to advice on implementation of recommendations by the Rakhine Advisory Commission. The announcement said the advisory committee was formed with 10 local and international experts. It include five local and five international experts. The foreign experts in the advisory commission are former Thai deputy prime minister and foreign minister Dr.Surakiart Sathirathai, a member of Swedish parliament Mr. Urban Ahlin

- A senior ethnic leader said international attention on the peace process has declined due to the situation in Rakhine State also as the peace process itself has failed to make progress. He told a Peace Forum held on 10 December that even though the process is currently not much relied on the international community, "but as lesser attention from the international community could affect the process in a longer term, we need to finds solution," he said.

- The Buthitaung court has sentenced more than 80 Rohingyas in connection with their role in terrorist attack in Maungtaw region in October. The sentences were passed against 81 people for their roles in 9 October 2016 attack on Nga Khu Ya border security outpost. The sentences were passed on 14 and 15 December and the convicts were given sentences ranging between six to 14 years.

- The Coordinator of the Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development of Rakhine State Dr Aung Tun Thet said permission is being requested for visit of the United Nations and other international organizations to visit Rakhine State as these organization wanted to provide assistance. The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture issued a statement on 21 December that the international organization will not be allow to deliver assistance, but they will have to operate under management of the State Government.

- 24 political parties led by the Union Solidary and Development Party (USDP) has issued a statement criticizing appointment of foreign experts in the Advisory Committee on implementation of the recommendations for Rakhine State. The statement issued on 20 December said the parties opposed to the move as appointment of foreign experts allows interference directly or indirectly in soverign rights of Myanmar.

- Two journalists from *Reuters* news agency covering on the events in Rakhine State were arrested by Myanmar government along with their local contacts. Thet Oo Maung (a.k.a) Ko Wa Lone and Ko Kyaw Soe Oo (a.k.a) Ko Moe Aung were arrested on 12 December around 9 p.m. Their where about were unknown to their families and the news agency. Even though it was widely reported in the social media that the two journalists were arrested under the section 3 of Official Secret Act and they were held at Htaukkyant police station, however, the police refused to confirm the news when contacted by DVB. In connection with the arrest of the two journalists, five people including schoolteachers in Ein Din village in Maungtaw were arrested on 15 and 16 December, local residents said.

- Two Muslim men from a village near Maungtaw were arrested by a group of Rakhine people on 3 January. They were arrested around 11 a.m. villagers of Tharein village with accusation that they illegally came into Myanmar from Bangladesh. The two Muslims were beaten up by villagers before they were handed over to the police.

- The government and private medias reported that Muslims were involved in killing of a Myo ethnic national. News reports say Muslims have committed murder without proper evidence.

- About 300 people have lost their shelters in a fire at Kyin Ni Pyin IDP camp in Pauktaw Township on the morning of 7 December. Three hostels in the camp where 120 people from 32 families were living were destroyed. In addition, six houses where 20 people were living were also destroyed in the fire.

- 15 Muslims who tried to travel to other parts of Myanmar were arrested in three separate incidents during December 2017. They were charged under the section 62 (2) of the 1949 Registration Act.

- Rakhine State immigration Department more than 5000 people have issued Natinoalities Verification Card after last August terrorsit attack. The NVC cards were issued as substitute to the temporary identity cards also known as white cards were cancelled on 31 May 2005. Even though the number of people who surrender white cards are more than 400 000 but those who issue NVC card is only 9000.

Kachin

- Due to a series of military operations in Shan and Kachin states launched by Myanmar army on Christmas Eve, score of Christians were killed and injured. In an offensive by military, where predominately Christians live, dozens of people were forced to flee and two people were injured. On 24 December, Myanmar army fired with heavy artilleries on Wui Chaing, which is situated near the headquarters of the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO). In the attack, a student and a teacher were severely injured. The village has camps for Kachin displaced people. On Christmas day, the military attacked a KIO controlled area in Tanaing Township by using fighter jets. In an attack by Myanmar military on an area near Maine Yu village in Muse Township on 23 December one person was killed and three injured. The area came, which is on Lashio-Muse highway under attack by heavy artillery by the Tatmadaw.

Mandalay

- A group of Muslim who are serving life in prison for their alleged involvement in establishment of Islamic Army were given additional prison terms ranging from 7 to 15 years. The new sentences under Counter Terrorism Law were passed by the Mandalaydistrict court on 28 December. Their lawyer U Than Than Oo said his clients

were sentenced without having strong evidence against them in all charges they have faced.

- Six monks who were involved in protest in Mandalay to bring down the government were given 18 months jail sentence on 27 December. The Chan Myae Thazi Township court passed sentence after they were found guilty under criminal deformation section 505 (b) two monks who also involved in the protest are still evading arrest. They were declared as fugitive by the court. A series of protests to put pressure on the NLD government to quit were organized in Yangon, Mandalay regions and Shan State.

***Miekhtila* (Mandalay)**

- Complaint was against in Set Pyit Taung village in Muslim gather for prayer in a private home in the village. The mosque in the village was destroyed during religious riot in Meiktila in 2013. The villagers are concerned that a prominent ultra nationalist monk U Wirathu wrote on his Facebook page accused the authorities of failing to take action against the mosque for breaching an undertaking.

- Muslims who lost their homes in Meiktila riot has been requesting the authorities to allow to return to their places of origin. Even though 48 apartments are vacant they were not given to the original landowners, a fisherman family who has been homeless from more than four years have request for home through Bullet journal.

Naypyi Taw

- Four people who were jailed for flying drone in Hluttaw in Nay Pyi Taw were released on 5 December after plaintiff has withdrawn the case. A Malaysian Mok Choy Lin and a Singaporean Lau Hon Meng who work for TRT news agency along with Myanmar journalist Aung Naing Soe and driver were given two months jail under section 10 of the Aircraft Act. They also faced under the section 8 of the export/import act and the two foreigners had also face charge under section 13(1) of Immigration Act. However, the charges against them were dropped on 28 December after it was convinced that their action did not undermine the state security and for the goodwill of the two countries.

Shan

- A group of ultra-nationalists used eviction of tenants in shops built on mosque owned land in Lashio to incite religious riot. The mosque evicted the tenant with court order on 14 December. The land is owned by a Muslim and it is linked to mosque in nearby Tangyang Township. Buddhist tenant of the shops who did not want to move used social media

Facebook to incite religious violence. Ko Aung Than, a Muslim resident of Lashio said after the Facebook post a group of 12 ultra nationalist monks came to Lashio mosque and threatened Muslims that they would repeat the event like 2013, when the mosque was partially burned down by Buddhist mobs. The township court has issued eviction order after dispute between tenants and landlord in which 7 families living in the 5 rooms shops. The shops situated on No 174 Bo Gyoke Road in no 3 ward area 7.

- The spokesperson for the Shan National League for Democracy (SNLD) U Sai Latt said the Tatmadaw has obstructed the national level dialogue in Shan State. The meeting of Shan people was planned to compile discussion points at the forthcoming Panglong Conference. He said even though the public meetings were planned in major cities in Shan State during 14 to 17 December, however, due to objection by military the dialogue were unable to hold in Panglong, Kyaukme, Tachileik, Kyine Tong and Taunggyi.

Sagaing

- A pre-Christmas mass in Kan Thar Yar village on 9 December was banned by the village authorities. The mass was banned as authorities feared for religious violence. The mass was planned to be held at the home of U Kyaw Myint and Daw Aye Khaing, however, it was cancelled after the villagers protestors with the explanation that it could trigger religious riot. U Kyaw Myint was asked to sing an undertaking not to organize the event. Similarly, local residents in Nyaung U criticized authorities for allowing Kayin New Year and pre-Christmas music event planned in the town on 10 December.

Bago

- A martial arts training organise by the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) was held in Bago during 26 to 30 December. The martial arts class was conducted jointly with lectures on nationalism. A former MP Daw Khin Waing Kyi gave lecture on national politics and subject on parliament. An advocate Daw Htay Kywe gave lecture on practical usage of law, on crimes and punishments as well as on the main criminal cases taking place in the society.

Yangon

- A meeting of Civil Society Organization (CSOs) held in Yangon was told that human rights violations by using religion as pretext is on the rise in Myanmar. The forum held at the Summit Park View held on 19 and 20 December was organized by the Human Rights Defenders Forum. after religious riot in Rakhine, Mandalay, Meiktila recently one

Christmas prayers event in Sagaing was banned. We can say these are example of human rights violation using religion, said HRDF official.

- The Buddha Dhamma Charitable Foundation (formerly known as Ma Ba Tha) has criticized a resolution by the United Nations General Assembly calling for granting citizenship to the Rohingya after they were repatriated from Bangladesh. A statement issued by the foundation on 29 December said the resolution by the world body adopted five days earlier was against Myanmar's sovereign rights and also the country's constitution. The statement said the UN adopted the resolution at the encouragement of the Organization of Islamic Organization (OIC) without understanding the actual situation on the ground. It said Bengali terrorists were living in Myanmar illegally and they were not citizens of Myanmar.

- The defense lawyer in U Ko Ni murder trial has asked the court to take action against one of the prosecution witness in the trial for allegedly committing perjury. A complaint against Ye Htut Hlaing was filed with persecution office. The court has ordered on 24 November to hear the complaint against the witness as a separate case. Ye Htut Hlaing has driven the main suspect in the case Aung Win Khaing to Nay Pyi Taw. The main suspect is still evading arrest.

- 24 political parties led by the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) has issued a statement on 20 December condemning a resolution by the UN Human Rights Council. The statement said the parties reject the resolution adopted by the UN rights body as its country specific resolution include pressure and to hurt the country's image.

Note

Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN) has been gathering information through our dedicated staff on the ground regarding human rights violation in Burma and sharing it extensively with partners, international governments, the United Nations, rights organisations, media and NGOs. This information covers violations of freedom of religion, violations of minority rights, hate speech and violations of freedom of speech. The information shared in this document is summarised for the convenience of the audience. BHRN is happy to share more in depth information upon request.

Background on the Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN)

Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN) is based in London, operate across Burma and works for human rights, minority rights and religious freedom in Burma. BHRN has played a crucial role advocating for human rights and religious freedom with politicians and world leaders.

Media Enquiries

Please contact:
Kyaw Win
Executive Director of the Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN)
E: kyawwin78@bhrn.org.uk
T: +44 (0) 740 345 2378