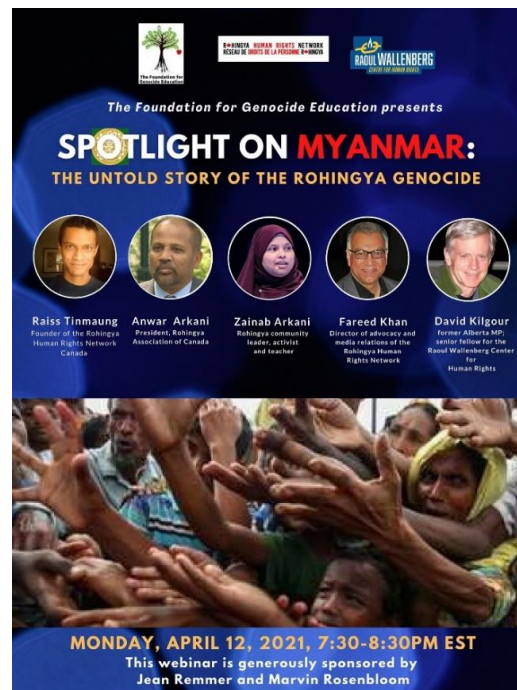


MYANMAR'S 2017 ROHINGYA GENOCIDE AND 2021 COUP FROM A HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE

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Webinar from Montreal (see below), 7.30 EDT, 12 April 2021



Merci mille fois to Montreal's Foundation for Genocide Education for hosting this event. Also to M.C. Heidi Berger, Macha Jauvert-Lesnenko, Raiss Tinmaung, Zainab and Anwar Arkani, and Fareed Khan,

The Feb. 1st coup in Myanmar/Burma has added appalling new layers of human dignity abuses-and I'll speak to them briefly- but let me begin in the summer of 2017, and the intensification of Myanmar military violence against the hapless Rohingya.

Since August, 2017, more than [700,000](#) Rohingya refugees fled to Bangladesh; up to [43,000](#) have been killed; as many as [81,000](#) women and girls have been impregnated by rape; and more than [360](#) Rohingya villages have been fully or partially burned to the ground.

The Rohingya in short have been subjected to almost all the forms of treatment listed in the UN Genocide Convention: 1) killing; 2) serious bodily and mental harm; 3) infliction

of conditions calculated to bring about their physical destruction as a group (tens of thousands of Rohingya have been [confined](#) in “internally displaced persons” camps in Myanmar, where they have been deprived of food, water, and medical care) ; and 4) imposition of measures intended to prevent births (for example, Myanmar’s “Race and Religion Protection Laws” of 2015, which [impose restrictions](#) on Rohingya marriages and births).

Under international law, states are obligated not only to prosecute genocide after it has occurred, but also to prevent genocide in process. According to the International Court of Justice, “a State's obligation to prevent, and the corresponding duty to act, arise at the instant that the State learns of, or should normally have learned of, the existence of a serious risk that genocide will be committed.”

Canada as the first country to recognize officially the violence perpetrated against the Rohingya as genocide should act commensurately by:

- using all political and economic means to pressure Myanmar to comply with international law in its treatment of the Rohingya, including through imposition of sanctions on all military and civilian authorities responsible for the violations;
- re-evaluating all Canadian assistance to and investment in Myanmar, to confirm that individuals and institutions implicated in genocide are not receiving downstream benefits;
- doing our share to ensure that the humanitarian relief effort for Rohingya refugees is fully funded; and
- supporting efforts to hold the Myanmar state and individuals responsible for the genocide accountable.

The first global response to the Rohingya crisis was judicial after The Gambia - acting at the request of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation - filed a genocide case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The Gambia accused Myanmar of violating the U.N. 1948 Genocide Convention, a human rights treaty to which Canada is also a party, along with 151 other countries. Canada and the Netherlands to their credit assisted The Gambia in these efforts.

The ICJ held a 3-day hearing in Dec. 2019; in January, 2020, it ordered the Government of Myanmar to prevent genocidal acts against Rohingya Muslims during the pendency of the case. It later extended the time for Myanmar’s to file to July 23, 2021.

The next phase of the ICJ proceedings will unfold over the coming years. Canada, in keeping with its proactive policy, needs to send an important signal of universal solidarity with the Rohingyas. It is also an opportunity for Canada to advance our feminist foreign policy.

This case is not just of interest to the Muslim world. Genocide is a matter of concern to the entire international community. A coalition of Muslim and Western states has an important symbolic value. It would also help gather worldwide support to ensure

compliance with any measures of reparation that might be ordered in the ICJ's final judgement.

In closing, I should add my understanding about several related points: The Myanmar military recognizes 135 distinct ethnic groups living in the 7 ethnic minority states and the Nagas. It does not/will not "recognize" the Rohingya who were living in the northern area of Rakhine state. It denies them citizenship, and they can't own land, vote, travel or marry. They have suffered well-documented abuse and forced labour at the hand of the military. They've fled to Thailand and Bangladesh, but have often been forced back over the border. Some have been sent out to sea. As of August 24, 2020, there were about 600,000 Rohingya remaining in Rakhine State and facing severe repression and violence, with no freedom of movement or other basic rights.

Myanmar: Post-Coup of Feb. 1

The Rohingya Genocide, motivated presumably by paranoid xenophobia in the army from the generals down, and the weak international response to hold accountable all persons involved in it, was no doubt a *causa causans* for the latest military coup of Feb 1 this year and the subsequent ongoing nightmare. The courageous coup protesters killed by the army now include more than 650 civilians, including 43 children (source: BBC-see link below).

Canada's *Globe and Mail* (Nathan Vanderklippe) reported over the weekend on current conditions in Myanmar:

- The military has "now killed more than 600 people-90 per cent of them by gunshot, mostly to the head-in an effort to stamp out broad opposition to the coup. Almost 3000 have been arrested..."
- The senior UN representative in Myanmar, Canadian Andrew Kirkwood, estimates that "roughly half" of the 54 million population is now "impoverished", up from about a quarter a year ago before the devastating impact of the coup and onset of COVID-19.
- Ports, rail and trucking have largely gone on strike in widespread citizen fury over the return to military rule. Kirkwood thinks "hundreds of thousands have gone back to their rural homes...after military strikes in southeastern Karen state, thousands have fled to Thailand."
- The UN special envoy on Myanmar Christine Burgener warned the UN Security Council last week that Myanmar "is on the verge of spiralling into a failed state."

The current *Economist* (Apr 3-9) focuses on Buddhism because almost 90% of the Burmese population in Myanmar (about 65% of the total population) are Buddhist. Buddhism in its different forms is a peaceful religion in most places where it is practised today. The Dalai Lama is one of the most universally-admired leaders in the world in large measure because of his decades as the best-known Buddhist leader calling for peace, harmony and unity among all peoples and faith communities.

Myanmar rulers have long sought the support of the sangha, the Buddhist monkhood. The recent coup instigator, Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, is wooing the sangha; their role in the protests is not nearly as prominent to date as in 2007. Fortunately, the Mahana, a group appointed by the government to oversee the monkhood, reportedly drew up a statement calling for an end to violence to quash coup protests saying it would cease to function for the time being. Some monks have since refused to accept both alms and covid-19 vaccines from soldiers. Sadly, some monks share the paranoid xenophobia of the generals.

Conclusion

It would strongly appear that Beijing and Moscow will continue to use their permanent vetoes to block the UN Security Council from doing anything useful. Beijing has allegedly asked the military to "tone down" their actions to avoid further negative publicity. ASEAN parliamentarians are active in seeking to put pressure on the junta, but as a group won't act other than to issue the usual diplomatic statements.

It is futile to engage in so-called "constructive engagement" with an illegal military government that is murdering its own people. One problem for ASEAN is that lucrative business connections could be jeopardised; many of the generals have bank accounts in Singapore. In short, the rules-respecting international community as a whole needs to initiate numerous effective measures very quickly.

Thank you.

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