

group called the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and six other groups claimed responsibility. The attack resulted in wide-scale human rights violations including extrajudicial killings, gang rapes, arsons, and other brutalities. The UN, Amnesty International, the US Department of State, and the government of Malaysia criticized the military crackdown. The regime said that it had the "the right to defend the country by lawful means" against "increasing terrorist activities", and added that a domestic investigation was enough. The regime has often restricted journalists and aid groups from accessing northern Rakhine States.

The Commission findings urged the regime to end the highly militarised crackdown on neighbourhoods where Rohingya live, and to scrap restrictions

the regime. In September 2017, ARSA declared a temporary unilateral ceasefire, but the Myanmar government dismissed the gesture saying "we don't negotiate with terrorists". Myanmar's presidential spokesman announced that Myanmar would establish a new commission to implement some recommendations of the Rakhine Commission. Aung San Suu Kyi was particularly criticized for her inaction and silence and not doing much to prevent military excesses. Later in the month, Aung San Suu Kyi condemned all human rights violations in Rakhine, but never mentioned the Rohingya who have fled to Bangladesh by name. She largely defended her prior position supporting the Myanmar military and its actions. She deflected international criticism by saying most Rohingya villages remained intact, and conflict had not broken out everywhere. With no criticism of the military and denial of any armed clashes or clearance opera-



on movement and citizenship. UN says that the military has very likely committed grave human rights abuses that may amount to war crimes, which the government has denied. The UN supported the findings and urged the government to fulfil its recommendations. The Myanmar government also welcomed the recommendations and pledged to give "full consideration with the view to carrying out the recommendations ... in line with the situation on the ground". Yet, nothing has been done so far.

The UN believes over 1,000 people have been killed since October 2016, contradicting the death toll provided by

tions since September 5, she added that Myanmar was committed to the restoration of peace and stability and rule of law throughout the state, but did not clarify how that will be achieved. Saying that her government was protecting everyone in Rakhine state, she criticised media reports as misinformation that benefitted the terrorists. The government was ready "at any time" to verify the status of those who have fled, Aung San Suu Kyi said, but did not specify what the verification process would be and who would be qualified to return. In some quarters, her speech is believed to be an attempt to pacify global public opinion on this humanitarian issue. The UN Secretary General urged Myanmar authori-



ties to suspend military action and stop the violence insisting that Myanmar's government should uphold the rule of law and recognize the refugees' right to return home. The Security Council also expressed "concern" over reported excessive violence used in Myanmar's security operations and called for de-escalating the situation, re-establishing law and order, protecting civilians and resolving the refugee problem. The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) released a statement in March 2017 stating that it does not associate with any terrorist group and does not commit terror against any civilian regardless of their religious and ethnic origin, but it was obligated to defend, salvage and protect the Rohingya community. The group considers it has the legitimate right under international law to defend themselves in line with the principle of self-defence.

Conclusion

The seeds of a narrow and discriminatory nationalism have blown up into a humanitarian catastrophe of epic proportions. Political solutions need to work towards building an inclusive Myanmar society embracing its ethnic and religious diversity. Though difficult it will be the only response available for addressing the decades-long armed conflict. Reconciling the demands and expectations of the Rakhine Buddhist and Muslim communities will be a major challenge. In such an environment, combating extremism and hate speech as well as ensuring the fundamental rights and freedoms of all are essential.

It is critical for the Myanmar government to address this escalating disaster in a productive and constructive manner. This requires implementing long-term solutions to bring the hundred odd communities together to work for an inclusive, harmonious and reconciled future. Addressing the problems rooted in decades of armed violence and authoritarian rule requires a sustainable humanitarian and developmental response. Cessation of the prevailing climate of impunity will contribute towards political stability and enhance prospects of building a harmonious society.

The grievances of the Rakhine are similar to those of other ethnic minorities around the globe including Sri Lanka: discrimination, deprived citizenship and political expression, economic marginalisation, human rights abuses and linguistic and cultural restrictions. In addition, the Rakhine communities fear they could soon become a minority in their own state, if their region is engulfed with an unstoppable wave of Rohingya. Their concern/paranoia is aggravated by the overpopulation and population density in Bangladesh.

The situation is a complex one and has entangling issues of historical centre-periphery relations with extreme poverty, under-development and an ethnic and religious conflict with Muslims. Though citizenship is necessary, it does not necessarily lead to improving the rights of the Muslim population. Many of Islamic faith are confined to displacement camps with no free movement and they are not allowed to return to their ancestral lands.

To address this situation, discriminatory policies and movement restrictions need to end, and the security and rule of law situation need to be drastically improved. However, there is a pattern visible, of riots breaking up in the Rakhine State hampering repatriation, when Bangladesh arranges to repatriate those living in its refugee camps back to Myanmar. The ongoing violence, and the fear of persecution on return appear to have prevented the vast majority of the Rohingya refugees from returning to their home in Myanmar.

The Myanmar regime's initiative for addressing the situation depends on verifying the citizenship of undocumented Muslims is deeply problematic. Granting naturalised citizenship that does not confer the rights of full citizenship will make people more insecure. The government's and Rakhine community's refusal to use the term "Rohingya" and the Rohingya's rejection of the term "Bengali" have led to an impasse. Without resolving this, a majority of Rohingya will reject such a verification process. However, moderate Rohingya appear to wish to gain citizenship status, even on a compromised use of the term Rohingya. If citizenship is granted, they appear to be willing to take an identity that is neither "Bengali" nor "Rohingya."

Muslim communities, particularly the Rohingya, have over the years been progressively marginalised from social and political life. Keeping them stateless and disenfranchised will destroy their hopes of achieving a fair and reasonable solution to their justifiable grievances. Some of them have already lost all hope. By not allowing a democratic and inclusive solution to their dire situation will force them to seek violence as the only viable option to address their humanitarian issues. Political solutions are critical for the future of Rakhine State and Myanmar. Addressing violence with violence has never resolved and will not resolve political issues. A credible process out of this situation will need to embody creating a new sense of Myanmar national identity that will holistically embrace its huge cultural, ethnic and religious diversity. Lasting generational poverty and underdevelopment of all communities needs to be addressed through fair and equitable development schemes. Otherwise peace and stability of Myanmar will continue to be elusive for a long time into the future.