

Interviews of Rakhine/Arakanese Buddhist victims of the
Bengali Muslim (Rohingya) attacks, killings, and village burnings
in June 2012
VIOLENCE - women speak

How did your husband die?

- Bengalis came to burn down our village. So, we had to run away to Gudaung village. But, my husband stayed at our village to put out the fire.

How did you know your husband was killed?

- People from Gudaung Village went to our village to put out the fire, and they saw him dead along with other dead bodies and houses on fire. When I heard that he was dead, I feel desperately weak as I am pregnant. I can't even imagine my future, as our family is depending on my husband for our daily survival.

What is your attitude towards the Bengalis?

- We want them to move away from us. We dare not live close to them anymore.

San Nu Khin - widow, near Gudaung Village, Ratchadaung Township

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- When we heard that Bengalis were burning down houses, my son accompanied some villagers who went to protect our village. And my husband went after my son to stop him from fighting because our son was so young to be involved in the fight. But, both my husband and my son were killed in the fight.

Were your husband and son at home when the conflict initially started?

- Yeah, they were drinking tea.

How did they leave home?

- When my son joined the villagers to stop the Bengalis from attacking and setting fire to our villages, my husband accompanied him. I think they left home at about 7 AM.

How do you feel about the loss of your family members?

- I feel that the sky has fallen down over me. My son is too young to die. This is an irreplaceable loss in my family.

What is the age of your son?

- He was just 18 years old. He was in 10th grade.

How did Bengalis kill them?

- I was not witness to that. But most people who already saw the bodies told me that their bodies were not in one piece. Their bodies were chopped into pieces. People would not let me see my husband body since I would be shocked and would faint.

What is your perception of Bengalis?

- I do not want to see them on our land anymore.

Yai Thien Phru - Gudaung village, Rathaydaung

Grandma, can you explain what had happened during the riot?

- On June 8, 2012 at 4 pm, Bengali mobs had gathered and were heading to local Arakanese villages. So we informed the regional commander by phone. And also, we phoned the village chairperson and monk and told them that we could be killed, and that we could no longer stay in the village. We requested that the authorities please send some security forces to help us get out. Then, the security forces arrived in the village. If they had arrived just five minutes later, the people from this village may have been killed. Even as the police arrived in the village, the Bengalis didn't retreat. So police fired gunshots in the sky in order to disperse them. At that time, Bengalis dispersed without daring to enter the village but soon they were gathering at the entrance of the village. The police then shot many gunshots into the air to disperse them.

How is the current situation of your village?

- We don't go outside of the village due to security concerns. We manage to work on the paddy farms that are nearby our village. But we are not able to work on the farms that are away from our village due to the fears of hostility, rape and attack by the Bengalis.

What are your difficulties now?

- Now we are relying on rations donated by different donor and relief groups. We have to share the rations received from donations with the village, as the donated rations are limited.

How many houses are there in the village?

- There are over 80 houses in the village. But we had to take shelter at the regional security camp for 11 days due to safety and security concerns.

How did the Bengalis come to your village?

- Actually, our village was surrounded by many Bengalis and their villages. So they came to our village from different directions and locations in groups. Their intention and plans were that they would destroy all the Pagodas, Stupas and burn down monastery and the entire village as well.

So, how many Arakanese villages are around there?

- Our village is the only Arakanese village here.

a Grandmother in Maungdaw Township

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- The house of my mother-in-law was set on fire by 'fire-rings'. A fire-ring is a hand-made weapon which can be thrown from a certain distance to start a fire. Villagers tried to put out the fire. But the Bengalis continuously set fire on the other houses around it. Firefighters efforts to put out the fire were not successful since there were fires being started in every direction. I was watching to see whether or not the fires would spread to my house but I saw that I had no choice but to leave my house and we sadly and broken-heartedly watched my house burn down to ashes. I have lost kitchenware, clothes, and value properties. I have nothing at all, I did not even have the chance to put on my slippers.

Were all family members present when the event happened?

- My elder son and husband were fighting the fires burning the other houses. My younger son, elder daughter and I ran to the monastery.

How do you feel about current crisis?

- I am very sad losing my house and my happy family life. I am sad as we are now fully dependent upon the abbot (senior Buddhist monk). We did not even have a chance to enjoy our newly built house. It is all ruined now. I feel broken-hearted whenever I look at my children and see them in this condition.

Thein May - mother, Balikone, Kone Dan Quarter, Sittwe

- Since 2 pm, the situation was not stable. At first, the Bengali Muslim groups of men were coming to the gathering area at our village Buddhist pagoda. Then they started setting fire to our Buddhist monastery. So, all the government servants gathered in one of the teachers' house. The situation became worse and worse. We were all in a dilemma on which way to flee. Mobs of Bengali Muslims suddenly entered the village. People were running back and forth, and in all directions. I was carrying my baby and I fell down the embankment of the village pond and could not get up, and was surrounded by a Bengali mob. When they saw me, some of them said, "*she is our village teacher*". And they also told other Bengalis that were just joining this mob that "*she is our teacher so don't harm me*", and also told them in Bengali language, "*she has a baby*". But, some said that they would kill me, and some didn't want to kill me. Some of my students' parents repeatedly pleaded that I shouldn't be killed, since I am their village teacher, and also, that I had a baby. But, I heard some say that I should be killed and beheaded. I was very worried about my life, and my baby's life, and I pleaded with them not to kill me, that I'm a teacher of this village.

Two young Bengali students of mine arrived, and told the others that I was their teacher, and they picked me and my baby up and quietly told me which way to run to escape from the village. Then I fled, passing a man chopped to death.

Daw Nyo Nyo Warm, teacher, from Sittwe, transferred to Maungdaw

- A Bengali mob came to the Buddhist monastery and set it on fire. There were some shops near the monastery and then they set them on fire. They continued down the street torching more shops. Then, the Bengali mob moved to the dormitory where Rakhine teachers live and tried to burn it down. The dormitory did not burn as much as they expected, so they broke into the dorm and stole the belongings of the residents. They continued attacking the local Rakhine residents in the area. Due to the fires and attacks the Rakhine residents fled their village in great panic and frenzy. As I ran towards the mountain to escape the attacks, I turned back and saw that some Bengalis, mostly teenage and in their twenties, were killing Rakhine people. They first hit Rakhine people with machetes. If they were still alive, they beat them to death with wooden bats and rocks. While they were killing Rakhine people, Sayargyee (School Principal) Shan and his wife approached the Bengalis to request them to stop the attacks. He thought they would listen to him since he has been teaching in the area for about 20 years and they were his students. Sayargyee Shan's wife was hit on her head with a machete by a Bengali. Saya Shan and his wife shouted at each other, "*Run, run, run, run away...*" as they faced a Bengali mob armed with knives, wooden bats, rocks and gasoline bottle bombs. Then, the Bengalis demanded that Saya Shan surrender his sword. He said, "*No, I can't.*" So, he was beaten and murdered. Most of the Bengalis who killed Sayargyee Shan are his own students. After that, Bengalis kept assaulting other local Rakhine residents with their knives, machete, wooden bats and rocks. They burnt all the motorcycles. Rakhine villagers ran to the top of the mountain. As I ran, I heard voices from the Bengali mobs yelling, "*We will come back to kill you all after burning the village down.*"

All the houses and shops in our village were burnt to ashes. Only two houses were left in our village.

A Rakhine female teacher from Kyeintali

Can you describe the difficulties you experienced on the day you fled?

- We fled with our children. We fled the villages as we heard Muslims were burning Arakanese villages. Since I have kids, I was worried about their safety and fled quickly. Both rain and wind turned the calm river deadly for the motor boat; kids were trembling because of terror and harsh weather.

Were the motorboats ready once you made to the pier?

- There was one medium motorboat owned by the village and there were a few other small ones. We fled with all those motorboats, carrying refugees beyond capacity. We were screaming, because the river was heavy due to the wind and rain.

How many trips did the medium motorboat make, to transport all the villagers?

- It took her three days to evacuate all the villages. We were not among the first who fled the village; we were transported by smaller motor boats. I think those motorboats made 20 trips to the village during the evacuation operations. Children were embracing each other in terror while on the motor boat. Due to the severe weather, two people had to steer the motor boat; we thought we would die under the brutality of heavy rain and wind, in the middle of the river, after barely escaping from possible slaughter by Bengalis.

Were there any such incidents before?

- Yes there were. Bengalis burnt down the Nay-Be-Sate village and Yan-Aung-Pyn village. We had to flee. I was 16 years old then. We had to run through forests until we reached Nay-Pu-Khan village.

When you fled at that time, were you with your family, or with other villagers?

- We had to run in haphazard fashion, everyone ran in absolute terror in all directions. Finally we found each other, close to the mouth of the Mayu River. We took refuge in Gudaung village.

How long did you take refuge in Gudaung village?

- Almost one year. When we returned to our village at the time of the rice harvest, the Bengalis returned with terror. We fled again, leaving my mother-in-law's house and my grandpa's house. The Bengalis burned the village to ashes.

So, how many times have you fled from your village?

- Twice. This is the second time. However, this time is more severe. In addition, we are hearing all kinds of threats and terror from the Bengalis.

What is your opinion of the Bengalis?

- Since they are bringing terror to our native people - burning our villages and killing our people - we see them as an evil enemy. We have just heard that 3 men in Myin-Phuu village have been slaughtered by the Bengalis.

Ma Than Ye - widowed mother of 4 children, Nat Chaung village, Rathaydaung

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- We fled in fear of attack from the Bengalis, when we heard that hostile Bengali mobs were coming towards our village. We passed through jungles and mountains. When we arrived near the village of Doedan, the Bengalis came out to attack and chop us with swords and machetes. So we were split into smaller groups. Unfortunately one of our groups arrived in the Bengali village of Praidang, and the Bengalis pointed their swords at the necks of our villagers. Then, we pleaded with the Bengalis to not to kill us.

Hla Sein Nu - farmers wife, Kyauksadine Village, near to the Mayu Mountain Range

- Our Mawrawaddy Village was burned down by the Bengali Muslims. Initially our village had security police who told us that “*nothing would happen to us, we didn’t need to worry about our security and we didn’t need to run away.*” Then on June 8, Bengali Muslims came into our village shouting loudly. The villagers gathered together near the police station. When the Bengalis came towards us, and shouted aggressively at us, we fled and climbed to the top of the nearby mountain - elders, children and all people of our village. We were all exhausted, as we had to climb to the top of the mountain very fast. We didn’t have time to bring any clothes or belongings, as we had to flee quickly to escape from the Bengalis’ attack and the threat to our lives. Worse we didn’t even bring any swords or spears to protect ourselves. And we also didn’t bring any torchlight to use at night, since we had to flee so quickly. Then, our village was set on fire by the Bengali Muslims while we were fleeing for our safety.

How many people were involved in setting fire to your village?

- Actually there were many Bengali Muslims - maybe thousands. Some of them shouted from the mosque loudspeaker, telling the mobs where the Arakanese people were gathering.

How many houses in your village were burned down?

- 109 houses were burned down.

Daw Hla Sein - mother, Mawrawaddy Village

- We are afraid of Bengalis. They burned down houses and killed us in mass. Everyone had to run in panic and disorder. I could not run well, so some men helped me. Only because some security personnel arrived in time and fired a few shots in the sky, did the Bengalis hesitate a little, and that gave us the opportunity to escape their slaughter.

Hmwe Tha - 86 year-old grandmother, Nay-Bi-Sate Village, Ratchadaung Township

- The difficulties we have are really because of fear and distrust of Bengali Muslims. So we dare not even go to the forests to collect firewood. Bengalis attacked our village at night three times, so we had to flee three times to escape their attack. When we came back to our village we had to flee again. We can’t stay safely, because of the Bengalis.

Chait Naing Warm - Maungdaw Township

- We always have to stay alert because of the callousness and vicious nature of the Bengalis. It is very important to inform the new generation about the Bengalis. The Bengalis don’t know what tolerance is and they don’t have any hesitation to harm and kill, even those who try to help them. They are very cruel, inferior and they have the attitude of superiority and intolerance. I especially would like to warn the new generation that they should not live with the Bengalis together any more, for their own safety.

Maung Lone Phru - 81 year-old grandmother, Pauk Phru Prung village, Rathaydaung Township

- We are afraid to go into the forests to get firewood to sell - its part of our livelihood, and that makes it very difficult to get food for ourselves now. We are frightened of the Bengalis because there are only about 1,000 Arakanese people around here (Maungdaw). But there are more than 100,000 Bengali people around here, and our village is surrounded by many Bengali villages. So, we are very worried about our safety because the Bengalis could violently attack us anytime. Any of our village people could be killed when the Bengalis try to burn our village, and drive us out.

Aunty - from Maungdaw Township

- We want to report to the government that we don't want to live near the Bengali villages any longer. We also want to tell the concerned authorities that we can deal with developing our lives and livelihood, only when some army troops are installed near the Bengali Muslim villages.

Daw Hla Sein - mother, Mawrawaddy Village

- I'm a native of Thandway Township. My parents are mixed. My father is Bengali (Muslim) and my mother is Burmese (was Buddhist, had to convert to Islam), so I am Muslim.

Could you explain your experience of the violence in Maungdaw on June 8, 2012?

- On Friday, June 8, we went to the school where we teach. We came back to the dorm at about 11:30 am on that day. On the way to the dorm, an Arakanese lady told us that the Bengali Muslims were gathering and you should take great care and caution for your security. It was true, there were a lot of Bengali Muslims gathering in the cemetery, while we continued walking to our dorm. So we packed our belongings as soon as we arrived at our dorm. Moreover, we shared the news of gathering Bengalis with other teachers in the village and warned them to be aware and cautious". When we were done packing, we fled and gathered together along with the villagers at the school principal's home. After two hours, the Bengali Muslims had finished their gathering and were ready to attack the Arakanese. The Bengalis started setting fire to the Arakan houses. So, we teachers along with the villagers fled to the mountains. The Bengalis chased after us. There were so many Bengalis. When we managed to get high on the mountain, we saw our school principal lying far below. His body had been badly beaten and chopped with machetes by the Bengalis. At 5 pm a senior teacher, Htwan Marm Hlaing and the troops of the NaSaKa (Border Security Force) arrived in the village. We were told to return to the village. At that time, all the houses in the village were burned down. So we had to temporarily stay at a clinic that was not burned down. The next morning, we were brought back to Maungdaw by the army.

OK. If so you're a follower of Islam, what would you like to say about the current violence?

- What I want to say is that the current violence was started by the Bengalis and they burnt down and destroyed Arakanese houses, buildings and Buddhist monasteries. They are wild and cruel, and they are targeting and killing innocent people, and torturing them. It is so disgusting and inhumane. I'm not sure that they can be tamed. They can't expel their evil forces. I am not sure if they could ever expel them. We can't teach them how to be kind and compassionate to each other.

What is your opinion of the Bengali Muslims and the current unrest?

- I think that they are so terrible. I have never seen or experienced such a horrible event in my life. I was so shocked. These people are more then terrible. I would like to say that I will keep my teaching position, and I will try to keep doing good things for our country.

Aye Su Thi - teacher, Zawmatet Village, Maungdaw Township

Do you have family in your village?

- All my family members are at U-Daung village. Once we had to flee when Bengali Muslims came and slaughtered many of us.

Where did you live before?

- Myin-Chaung Village. It is in the southern part of Maungdaw Township.

How old were you when you first experienced Bengali Muslims attacking Rakhine Buddhist people?

- I was 14 years old.

Did you flee the village at that time?

- It was so severe at that time. They massacred our villagers with all the weapons they had, such as knives and swords. This time, they just burned our houses to force us to leave the village.

How many villagers died in your village during that time?

- During that time I would say I was somewhat lucky to know, ahead of time, that the Bengalis were organizing to kill us and burn our village. Some who did not flee the village in time were slaughtered; the headman of the village was chopped as if he was a fish. We ran up to the mountains. We had stay in the Hta-bin-tote mountain range with food shortages and everything. We survived in the mountains and forest, suffering extreme conditions for about 3 months.

What did you eat while on the mountains?

- We brought some rice and a pot; we did not manage to bring anything more than that.

Were you able to bring some of your property and belongings when you fled the village?

- No, we lost everything: houses, cattle, and farmland.

What kinds of difficulties did you face when you fled the village?

- Some villagers escaped, but many were killed by Bengalis.

As far as we know, Myin-Chaung village was once a Rakhine village. Are there any Arakanese inhabitants in the village now?

- Yes it was once an Arakanese village, but there are no Arakanese living there now. It's entirely Bengali now. Moreover, there are many villages such as Shauk-Kaing, and Myin-Chaung, etc were once all native Arakanese villages. Also Tat Htoe Pyin, Ah-lae-Tha-Kyaw and etc, were also used to be Arakanese villages too. They destroyed the villages and monasteries and even slaughtered the monks there.

After the first conflict, how long did it take you to return village?

- It took us 20 years. Once the government launched relocation program, we returned to the village on a Russian Ship from Ah-pauk-wa village, Kyauk-Taw Township. When we came on the ship, we had ticket to Buthidaung. We requested to leave us at Thi-taung village because we are afraid of Bengalis at Buthidaung. Officers on the ship rejected and transported us to Buthidaung. He said that we would settle down in any places in the township when we got there. But it didn't work what he said.

Can you please share your opinion on Bengalis?

- In my opinion, Bengalis are very rude, cruel, and evil and they don't know what gratitude and compassion are. They even kill their benefactors and teachers. They are like very aggressive and terrifying animals.

Hmwe Tha - 86 year-old grandmother, Nay-Bi-Sate village, Rathaydaung