

SITUATION UPDATE:

# SAC Reinforces Sittwe

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## Current Situation

On 5 August, hundreds of State Administration Council (SAC) troops reportedly [landed](#) in Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine State, arriving by ship to reinforce the SAC's presence there. They are said to have dispersed, after arrival, to SAC positions across Sittwe Township. Locals said that the SAC increased its inspections and detention of port workers and visitors when the troops arrived, and they speculated that the additional troops — one source told local media 300–400 — could be there either to defend the townships from Arakan Army (AA) attacks or to launch their own attacks in the adjacent township of Ponnagyun, which is controlled by the AA and its political wing, the United League of Arakan (ULA).

As well, it was [reported](#) on 7 August that the SAC had been using artillery and drones to destroy villages near the border between Sittwe and Ponnagyun townships, possibly to make it more difficult for the AA to attack from Ponnagyun. Some sources also suggest that the SAC has laid hundreds — or thousands — of landmines outside of Sittwe town to deter attacks. It was also [reported](#) that the SAC had been detaining Rohingya residents of Sittwe on a daily basis, with at least 20 detained during 2–5 August. According to this media source, the detentions are tied to SAC fears that the AA might attack.

### Background

Following the breakdown of two ceasefires struck in 2020 and 2022, the AA launched a statewide offensive in November 2023, and between then and January 2025 overran all SAC positions across Chin State's Paletwa Township and all of Rakhine State except in Sittwe, Kyaukpyu, and Munaung townships. Over the course of 2025, it has whittled away SAC positions in Sittwe and Kyaukpyu townships as well, and it reportedly attacked the SAC's Shwemingan naval base in Sittwe Township in early August, but it has not seriously attempted to capture Sittwe town or the terminus of the Chinese oil and gas pipeline in Kyaukpyu. Nonetheless, the SAC has

continued to intermittently launch artillery from naval ships (and land positions in Sittwe and Kyaukpyu) and conduct airstrikes across the state.

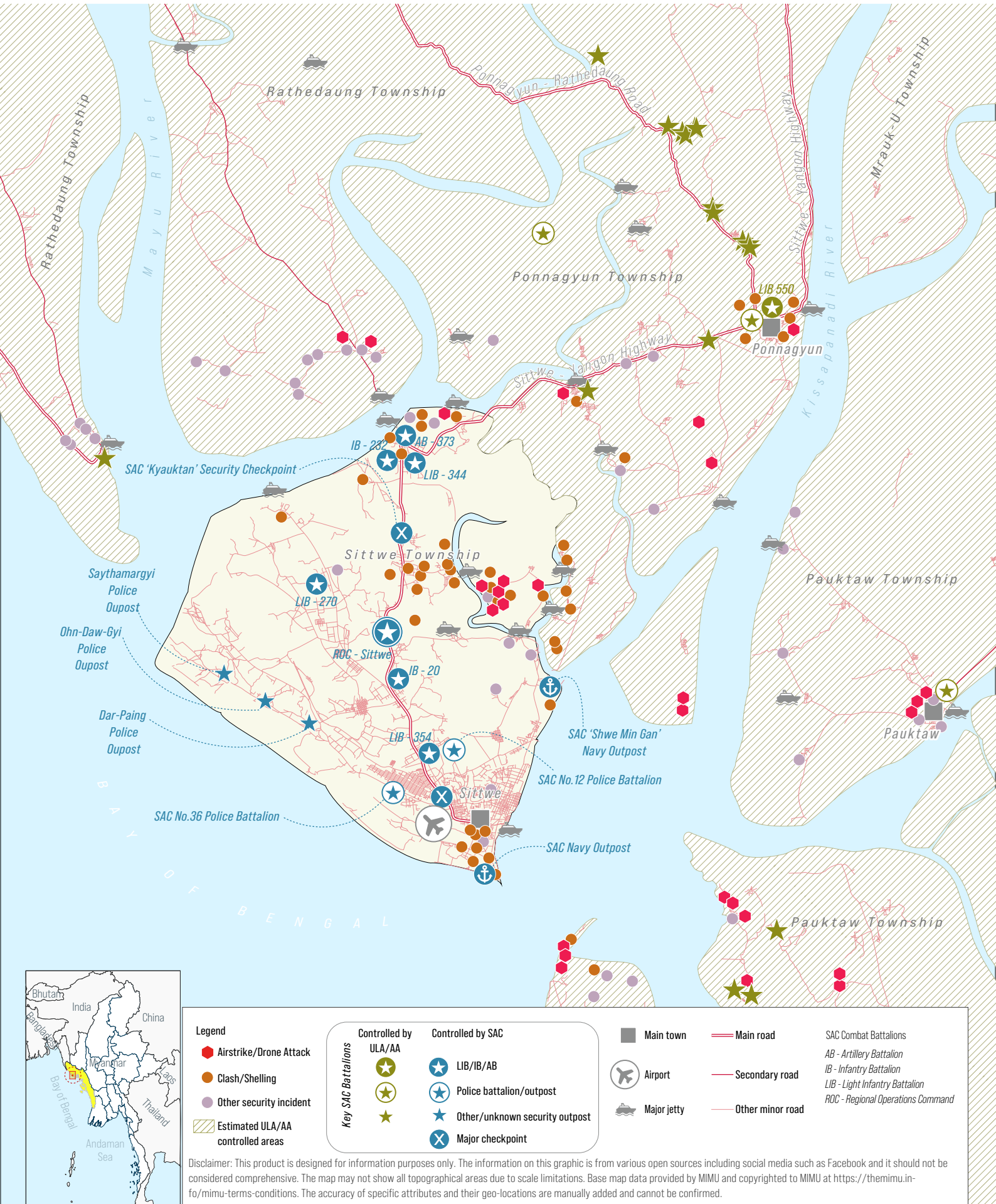
Economic hardship, recent statewide fighting, and continued tensions have made for dire humanitarian conditions in Rakhine State. An estimated [89,200](#) people are internally displaced within the state, and fighting — and allegedly AA abuses — have also pushed a reported [150,000](#) more Rohingya people across the border into Bangladesh. In much of AA-controlled Rakhine State, an SAC blockade on movement from elsewhere in Myanmar has meant that goods are expensive and [out of reach](#) for many households, and multiple factors have led to the decimation of income-generating opportunities. Things are reportedly even [worse](#) in Sittwe, surrounded on three sides by water, where SAC restrictions have prevented the inflow of goods even from elsewhere in Rakhine State and cut off livelihood opportunities; reports suggest that desperation there has led to increased crime and sex work — and in multiple cases to people [taking](#) their own lives (and those of their children). Both the SAC and the AA — in the areas of the state that each controls — have reportedly engaged in forced conscription, including of Rohingya people, who are [often trapped](#) between troops, and conflicting demands, of the SAC and AA.

Meanwhile, at the national level, the SAC has made two noteworthy manoeuvres. First, it announced preparations for national elections, slated for December 2025, including by promulgating several new 'laws' and rebranding itself as the State Security and Peace Council. Second, it made some gains in retaking territory lost since 2023, most notably in urban areas of Mandalay Region and Shan State. While the exact relationship and causality between these two things — and recent developments in Sittwe — remain unclear, all appear to be aimed at increasing the Myanmar military's power, whether through greater territorial control or putative democratic legitimacy.

Key Security Incidents

Sittwe and Neighbouring Townships, Rakhine State

1 JAN - 31 JULY, 2025.



## Impact

Increased militarisation around Sittwe Township is likely to impact civilians in multiple ways, including in the following:

- An increased SAC presence is likely to result in a greater number of SAC checkpoints, alongside more restrictions, extortion, and detention of civilians suspected of supporting the AA in Sittwe.
- The laying of landmines, purposeful destruction of villages, and erecting of other security measures are likely to increase physical harm to civilians.
- The potential displacement (and forced relocation) of civilians from wider Sittwe Township, an apparent counter-insurgency practice the SAC has previously applied, into Sittwe town is likely to put further stress on displaced people and material resources in the town, and would also lead to new Housing, Land and Property (HLP) concerns on the household and community levels, with long-term implications.
- A larger SAC presence may make it still more difficult for local responders to conduct humanitarian response activities, by increasing scrutiny of their operations and wider restrictions.
- Forced conscription, and particularly of Rohingya people, may result not only in the immediate protection concerns related to conscription, but the secondary impacts including a loss of income for households when the primary breadwinner is no longer able to work.

## Forecast

There remains the possibility that the reinforcement of troops into Sittwe will not result in any escalation in fighting, and that the status quo will continue — along with its high cost to civilians. Recent events suggest that tensions will remain high in Sittwe and neighbouring Ponnagyun (and potentially other) townships, with civilians bearing the brunt of continued violence and restrictions. However, the SAC's reported troop reinforcements, detention of civilians (possibly for conscription), and destructive measures to fortify its positions also suggest the possibility of two scenarios in the near future: an SAC offensive, launched from Sittwe, aimed at nearby parts of Rakhine State; and an AA offensive, launched from Ponnagyun, on Sittwe town.

### SCENARIO 1: SAC ATTACKS AA-HELD AREAS

In this scenario, the SAC uses its resources in Sittwe — including the new reinforcements and potentially naval vessels — to launch attacks on AA-held areas of Rakhine State, likely supported by air power. This would most likely begin in Ponnagyun Township, where the SAC can send troops overland (while giving them cover with air, drone, and artillery strikes). However, SAC attacks would not necessarily be limited to Ponnagyun; both Pauktaw and Rathedaung are only separated from Sittwe by waterways, meaning that the SAC could use its naval fleet (and airstrikes) to launch attacks there, forcing the AA to react on multiple fronts. Other parts of the state are accessible by river as well, but by heading further inland on these waterways the SAC increases the risks to its ships of attacks by AA troops on both banks.

The impact of this scenario would be a resurgence in violence in parts of Rakhine State that have been relatively calm — albeit with sporadic airstrikes — over the past year, elevating protection and other humanitarian concerns. This would likely send civilians in these areas fleeing — in most cases further east into AA-controlled areas, but in the case of Ponnagyun potentially also into SAC-controlled Sittwe. People fleeing into Sittwe may see this as a means to escape Rakhine State entirely (by flying to Yangon) or may simply perceive SAC-held Sittwe as safer from fighting and airstrikes. However, amid poor economic and humanitarian conditions and the threat of SAC abuses in Sittwe, as well as greater barriers to crossing AA-SAC frontlines, it will likely both seem safer and be easier for many people to move deeper into AA-held areas. Considering that both the SAC and the AA are engaged in conscription of fighting-age males,

displacement may look different for different demographics who will face particular protection concerns. SAC attacks could also further impede humanitarian operations, including by pushing the AA to re-tighten restrictions on Starlink internet usage, movement, or humanitarian permissions.

This scenario is premised on the idea that the SAC is not willing to accept the loss of territory in Rakhine State and — despite making little progress in recouping territory here in recent months — seeks to build on its recent gains elsewhere in Myanmar, potentially before its planned elections in December. While SAC gains in Rakhine State would no doubt be challenging, this may be precisely the aim of the newly-arrived reinforcements.

## SCENARIO 2: AA ATTACKS SITTWE TOWN

In this scenario, the AA finally launches attacks deeper into Sittwe Township and ultimately on Sittwe town, seeking to remove the SAC from the state capital. It sends troops overland from Ponnagyun, advancing along the main road toward the town, and potentially also approaches the township by water from neighbouring Pauktaw and Rathedaung townships. In response, the SAC fires heavy artillery, primarily from navy vessels positioned around the township, and launches air-strikes. To secure its positions and deter AA attacks, the SAC likely uses civilians in the town as human shields and deploys rapidly conscripted Rohingya recruits to engage AA forces.

Such an offensive would be extremely harmful for all people in Sittwe town and would carry particularly devastating impacts for Rohingya people. The SAC's forced relocation of villagers to the town, and the dangers facing people who try to escape, mean that the town remains relatively densely populated, despite the movement of many residents to Yangon or elsewhere since 2023. Meanwhile, the SAC has reportedly prohibited town residents from building bunkers and bomb shelters and detained people trying to do so. Given the challenges of escape by waterway, and the roadblocks to escaping overland, these people will likely remain confined in the town when fighting occurs, and will be unable to leave until/unless the AA is able to establish an overland corridor (without SAC presence) for them to do so. For all civilians in the township, there is likely to be significant exposure to gunfire, explosives, and

other hazards of fighting, and escape is likely to remain extremely challenging until fighting ceases. Fighting is also likely to make the procurement of food and other essentials even more challenging, as even informal import channels are cut off.

For Rohingya people in the densely populated camps located in the western part of the township, there are serious concerns about the dangers of shelling, air-strikes, and ground fighting (as seen in Maungdaw Township). While people in these camps have reportedly been able to build bunkers, any presence of AA troops in the area would likely mean shelling, gunfire, and positioning of troops by both sides. If the SAC deploys Rohingya conscripts, as it did in fighting in northern Rakhine State in late 2024, this will both put these people in harm's way with deadly consequences and, in the longer term, severely impact relations between Rakhine and Rohingya communities and increase the threat of reprisals against Rohingya people by the AA and potentially Rakhine communities.

While this scenario would have enormous consequences and is important to consider, ultimately it is relatively unlikely. Despite the AA having expressed the desire to fully remove the SAC from Rakhine State, there has been no concerted attempt to capture Sittwe town and there is little reason to think that this will change now. For the AA, such an attack may be more trouble than it is worth at the moment; it would have catastrophic consequences for civilians and infrastructure in the most densely-populated part of the state, it could do further damage to the AA's reputation (particularly regarding the tens of thousands of Rohingya people living there), and it would be far more challenging, militarily, than any other place the AA has attacked. The SAC has ample troops there, including the new reinforcements, has spent years installing defensive infrastructure, and can surround the township on three sides with naval vessels. While the AA might be more inclined to launch an offensive on the capital before the SAC's planned elections in December, there is no clear indication that the SAC reinforcement was a response to elevated risk of — or intelligence concerning — such an offensive. As noted above, the reported reinforcements into Sittwe do not necessarily signal any immediate escalation in fighting, and the result may be limited to current hostilities continuing and increased protection concerns for communities in Sittwe.



## Response Implications

The reported increase in SAC presence and SAC securitisation measures can be expected to further constrict space for local and international responders. This is particularly relevant in Sittwe Township, where a greater presence will allow the SAC to use more resources scrutinising people's activities, and where securitisation measures will likely make movement and procurement more difficult. However, humanitarian space may be constricted in other parts of the state as well, especially if the AA takes measures to prevent intelligence from leaking to the SAC — such as making it harder for people to use the internet. To the extent that the AA perceives areas under its control to be threatened to a greater extent, it may also apply greater levels of scrutiny to humanitarian responders there, disrupting implementation to some extent. As conditions are subject to rapid change, it is crucial that response agencies allow for flexibility, both in their own operations and for local partners.

Market conditions can be expected to degrade further, in Sittwe and elsewhere. Though there appears to be very little movement of goods or cash between Sittwe Township and AA-controlled Rakhine State, increased SAC resources in Sittwe Township could mean the elimination of even the most informal movement channels. As well, in the case of fighting in Sittwe town, this would likely undermine the functioning of markets there. If there is increased fighting elsewhere in Rakhine State, this could disrupt supply channels within AA-held areas, meaning that, for example, goods from Bangladesh, India, or smuggled from central Myanmar may not be able to reach as many parts of the state.

Further displacement — and in particular the potential forced relocation of villagers from areas of Sittwe Township — is likely to raise needs overall, and shelter and WASH needs in particular. In confined Sittwe town, there are few and diminishing shelter options for people displaced from elsewhere in the township, and the situation would be worsened if fighting in Ponnagyun Township led people from there to join the displaced population in Sittwe. Elsewhere in Rakhine State, displaced people may have more options, but they are likely to face barriers to building new shelters because of minimal resources available — theirs and the ULA/AA's. WASH needs are likely to be high for similar reasons, and the monsoon season rains will make both more challenging.

Protection is a particular concern. This is not only because increased tensions may lead to violence in civilian-populated areas. The SAC's forced recruitment threatens people (particularly young men) in Sittwe Township, and AA forced recruitment presents similar concerns elsewhere in the state. In SAC-held areas, Rohingya people are likely at particular risk for conscription, as the SAC has shown a tendency towards mistrust of the ethnic Rakhine community, who are therefore at greater risk of detention and imprisonment on suspicion of affiliation with the AA. Where people flee into Sittwe they may be viewed with suspicion by the SAC and subjected to scrutiny, detention, and abuse; where people (especially non-Rakhine ethnic) flee out of Sittwe they may receive similar treatment from the AA. Increased concerns about SAC airstrikes (or other types of attacks) could also lead the AA to again restrict — or eliminate — civilian use of Starlink internet services, undermining access to information and the ability to report concerns outward.

## Key Recommendations

In light of the poor (and worsening) conditions in Rakhine State, reported increase in securitisation and tensions around Sittwe Township, and possibility of armed violence in Sittwe, international responders should:

- Increase support — through local partners or in direct implementation — for displaced people and other communities in need;
- Update internal analysis on key stakeholders best placed to navigate response activities, including non-traditional and private sector partners;
- Maintain clear lines of communication with the ULA/AA's Humanitarian and Development Coordination Office (HDCO) to ensure that assistance is effective, transparent, and equitable in AA-held areas;
- Be prepared to address rising displacement, including with temporary shelters and WASH infrastructure;

- Support protection programming, especially for populations with higher vulnerability;
- Coordinate with legal partners to backstop whatever protection there may be for HLP rights among newly-displaced communities (e.g. protection of existing documentation, production of affidavits proving land ownership where possible);
- Pre-position aid materials in AA-held areas less likely to see immediate fighting, in order to benefit people fleeing from Sittwe, Ponnagyun, or elsewhere;
- Allow project activities and budgets to be rapidly adjusted to address emergency needs and adapt to extreme market fluctuations; and
- Ensure that response activities do not discriminate between affected people from different communities, so as not to unintentionally intensify any growing intercommunal tension.

In addition, if the SAC increases attacks on AA-held areas of Rakhine State, international responders should:

- Advocate to stakeholders in Bangladesh and northeast India to allow free flow of trade, in order to meet growing demands (and needs) in AA-held areas;

- Prepare for a potential increase in the displacement of people into Sittwe township, most likely from among the ethnic Rakhine majority in Ponnagyun Township, who may seek shelter and food support from existing displacement sites in Sittwe township; and
- Build and maintain strong relationships and lines of communication with the HDCO and partners inside AA-held Rakhine State to respond to increased humanitarian needs as a result of the escalation.

Finally, if the AA launches an offensive on Sittwe town, international responders should:

- Assess the feasibility of getting funds to local partners in the township who can assist people in need, whether through the provision of materials, services such as healthcare, or otherwise;
- Position relief materials and service points in nearby parts of Ponnagyun Township (and potentially Rathedaung Township, if people are able to escape by waterway) to assist people who are able to escape from Sittwe; and
- Advocate to the ULA/AA — potentially in partnership with key international and local stakeholders who have leverage — to ensure that its military activity, and evacuation and response measures, do not discriminate against Rohingya or other minority populations.



