

## **Text of Email to the British Prime Minister from U Khin Maung Saw**

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The Rt. Hon. Theresa May, MP  
Prime Minister  
Government of the United Kingdom  
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Your Excellency,

I am Khin Maung Saw, a retired lecturer in the Department of Burma Studies, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany. I used to work also as a 'Scholar in Residence' at Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, U.S..A. Currently, I am elected as a patron and an advisor of the World Arakanese Organisation (WAO), Europe Branch.

As a historian, let me approach the current affairs of the Northern Rakhine State of Myanmar from the historical point of view.

### **I. Are the Rohingyas an ethnic group of Myanmar (Burma)?**

There are eight major ethnic groups in Myanmar (Burma) such as Bama (Burman or Burmese), Chin, Kachin, Karen, Kayah (Karenni), Mon, Rakhine (Arakanese) and other small native ethnic groups, all together 135. The name 'Rohingya' is not the name of an ethnic group in Burma, instead it is an invented name.

Since some parts of Burma, particularly Arakan, was a British Colony from 1826 to 1947, the British authorities then made very proper administrative records. Please check in the British Archives whether the name 'Rohingyas' was ever mentioned there or not. The name 'Rohingya' was neither recorded in Burmese History nor in Indian History written by British, Portuguese, Dutch and native historians. All British Colonial Archives had proven that there was no such an ethnic group called 'Rohingya', neither in British Burma nor in the British Indian Empire.

In 1971 the Independence War in East Pakistan broke out. It started on 26th March 1971 and ended on 16th December in the same year. At that time, according to BBC news, there were about one and a half million to two million East Pakistani war refugees in Arakan Division of Burma. In the meantime, there were more than ten million war refugees on Indian soil. In 1975 the Bangladeshi ambassador in Burma, K.N. Kaiser, admitted to the

then British ambassador to Burma, Mr. T.J. O'Brien that there were still about five hundred thousand illegal Bangladeshi immigrants inside Burma. That report can be seen in the National Archives in London, Folio 35 on File FCO 15/2041.

Another factor is the population explosion in Bangladesh. When the nation of Bangladesh was established in 1971, its population was only 65 million but now it reached 170 million. Because of this population explosion, there is no longer enough space in their motherland and Bengali Muslims from Bangladesh are immigrating illegally into two of her neighbours, namely India and Myanmar (Burma), by crossing the porous border either secretly or due to the corruption of border authorities. The communal riots with blood bath in the Indian State of Assam is an evidence.

Since these 'Rohingya' people confess polygamy do not use birth control methods and contraceptives their population growth is much higher than other ethnic groups. In this way, they became 95% of the population in Maungdaw District. That means, they are the majorities and NOT minorities. Because of their men waves Rakhaings (Arakanese) unfortunately became a minority in their native soil, Northern Arakan.

These Chittagonian Bengali Muslims have created the term "Rohingya" which has a meaning "the natives of Arakan" in Bengali language Chittagaung dialect (Rohan = Arakan and "Gya" or "Ja" means "Native"). That's why the real Arakanese (Rakhaings) as well as the whole populace cannot accept that term.

The majority of the so-called Rohingyas cannot speak Burmese. They speak only their mother tongue which is Bengali Chittagong Dialect. They cannot communicate with any natives of Myanmar (Burma) because of language barrier, however, when they are in Bangladesh they do not have any communication difficulty. When they are in a third country they normally asked for a Bengali interpreter. It will be very obvious if some people who claim to be British but cannot speak English instead ask for a Polish interpreter!

In his work, Derek Tonkin, a former British Ambassador, wrote in "The 'Rohingya' Identity: The British Experience in Arakan 1826 – 1948": *"But supporters of Rakhine Muslims overseas should at the same time acknowledge that the particular designation 'Rohingya' had no serious historical validity prior to independence in 1948"*.

In the interview with the Irrawaddy Magazine on July 9<sup>th</sup> 2012 Dr. Jacques Leider, an Arakan expert, answered very clearly:

**Q:** *Are the Rohingya an ethnic group of Burma?*

**A:** *My answer is that Rohingya is not an ethnic concept. Okay, they can stand up and say we are an ethnic group inside Myanmar. But I think that is not the best way. When you argue we are Muslims and we have been living in Rakhine for several generations, nobody can deny it. For me, Rohingya is the term, which is an old word that has been claimed as above all as a political label after the independence of Myanmar. For the moment, I do not see that all the people there readily submit to one and a single label. When I was in Bangladesh, people pointed out Muslims to me who originally lived in Rakhine. They have now moved to*

*Bangladesh and when you ask them, "Are you Rohingya coming from Rakhine?" they say, "No, we are Muslims who lived in Rakhine, we do not take for us the label Rohingya."*

Let me emphasize some more points:

It is the nature of peoples living at the borders.

- (1) There are Karens & Shans in Burma. These peoples are also in Thailand.
- (2) There are Kachins & Shans in Burma. These peoples can be found also in China.
- (3) Nagas & Chins can be found in Burma. There are Nagas & Chins also in India.
- (4) Rakhaings & Saks inhabit in Burma. These peoples live also in Bangladesh and in India.

**However, is it not very strange or ridiculous that the so-called 'Rohingyas' exists only in Burma but not in Bangladesh and in India?**

**Hence, the term 'Rohingya' is NOT the name of an ethnic group in Myanmar, instead it is a political term invented for a political movement!**

It is a wrong statement that the "Rohingya" — have been in Arakan State for generations. There were some Muslims who have been in Arakan for generations but they never named themselves "Rohingyas". They are Kaman, Myedu and the descendants of Bengali slaves who were recorded by the British authorities as Chittagonian Bengalis and grouped them as non-indigenous ethnic group.

## **II. 'Rohingyas' for Myanmar Citizenship**

Almost all natives of Myanmar will have no objection if these so-called "Rohingyas" want to become Myanmar citizens, as long as they can fulfil the requirements. The problem is: Till now almost all 'Rohingyas' can speak only their mother tongue which is the Bengali Chittagong Dialect and many of them are illiterates. Apart from that, they are very stubborn and they refused to learn Myanmar (Burmese) instead they demand that their 'Rohingya' language must be accepted as one of the languages spoken in Myanmar (Burma). Furthermore, they can neither salute the Flag of the Union of Myanmar nor sing the Myanmar National Anthem because the Koran instructs a Muslim has to worship only Allah!! That's why most of them cannot get Myanmar citizenship.

These so-called 'Rohingya' people have to learn how to speak, read and write Myanmar (Burmese) language which is the official language as well as the communication language of one ethnic group to another in the Union of Myanmar. If they do not pass the basic test on the Myanmar language and some general knowledge about Myanmar, how can they be citizens of Myanmar? This kind of test is required in almost all countries on the earth for their naturalized citizens.

In any case, one should not forget the fact that every sovereign nation has their own immigration and naturalization laws which the others should respect. Even "the most democratic country on the earth", the United States of America" do not grant citizenship automatically to many offsprings of the Mexicans who were born inside the U.S.A. because their parents came illegally to the U.S.A. and lived there as illegal immigrants.

The similar problem is also for the People of the Subcontinent, Sri Lanka and the West Indies who reside in The United Kingdom, "the Mother of Democracy". These people came to UK using the right of a citizen of a "British Commonwealth" country. However, they were not granted British citizenship easily. Many of them demonstrated in the U.K. with the slogan "We are here because you were there!"

So do many Turks in Germany. Some of them came to Germany as 'Guest Workers' invited by the then West-German Government in the 1950's. Some of them live there more than 40 years and their children were born in Germany, however, these children won't be granted German citizenship automatically, unless or otherwise they apply for that and go through some legal procedures.

Hence, I would like to suggest sincerely to the 'Rohingyas' that they should be honest and they should stop demanding for the undeserved right of an ethnic minority status, instead they should ask only for citizenship. Furthermore, they should try to pass the citizenship test, which is needed for aliens in all countries. If they don't want to be called Bengali and want to have a different identity they should suggest another name rather than the unacceptable name 'Rohingya'.

### **III. Population Growth of the Refugee Camps inside Bangladesh and their claims of military abuse:**

On one hand Myanmar armed forces are accused for stationing at the border, blocking the "Rohingya Exodus", searching for 'Rohingyas' to kill, rape and torture. On the other hand, the number of Refugees who arrived at the Bangladeshi side increased from zero to six hundred thousand within ten days. If there were numbers of Myanmar police and soldiers stationing at the border and killing them, how could six hundred thousand people cross the border easily? We could even see in BBC TV and other media how easily and safely these 'refugees' could cross the border and communicate easily with the natives of Bangladesh through their mother tongue!! Is that not ridiculous and in contradiction to their claims?

There were some accusations of military abuse or killing of villagers by the soldiers and policemen, however, the plaintiffs could not state clearly where, when and how it happened, how many people were killed and where the mass graveyard could be and so forth. Otherwise, only God will know whether their stories were true or they were framing Myanmar armed forces and made them scapegoats! Recently, Myanmar authorities found out a graveyard of ten people and the armed forces personnel in that area were charged by Myanmar military.

In conclusion, I emphasize that the "Rohingya" problem is not a conflict between Buddhists and Muslims in Myanmar as some media reported. Burmese Muslims", "Arakan Muslims" (Kaman and Myedu ethnic groups) and the so-called "Rohingyas" are NOT the same. "Burmese Muslims" and "Arakan Muslims", all together about 4% of the population of Burma, are living peacefully side by side with Buddhists (90%), Christians(4%), Hindus(0.5%) and the Nature Worshippers.

Your Excellency, in the light of my historical pleading I hope and wish that you can see this problem more thoroughly and can judge properly.

Respectfully

**Khin Maung Saw**

Cc.

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