

UNHCR seeks 'true' community reconciliation in Rakhine State

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By **May Sandy**
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THE head of UN Refugee Agency has dismissed President U Thein Sein's suggestion that stateless Rohingya be sent to refugee camps or a third country.

UN high commissioner for refugees Mr Antonio Guterres met President U Thein Sein in Nay Pyi Taw on July 12 to discuss the crisis in Rakhine state. According to the president's official website, U Thein Sein told Mr Guterres that the solution to communal violence in Rakhine State was to send the Rohingya – known in Myanmar as Bengalis – to either UNHCR refugee camps or a third country.

But Mr Guterres said at a press conference in Yangon on July 12 that these proposals were impossible as the Rohingya inside Myanmar would not be recognised as refugees under the 1951 convention.

"The resettlement program is organised by UNHCR for refugees, for people fleeing from one country into another in very specific circumstances so this obviously is not related to the situation," he said.

According to UNHCR statistics, approximately 800,000 Rohingya or Bengalis without citizenship live in Myanmar.

President U Thein Sein told Mr Guterres that Bengalis came to Myanmar as migrant workers during the British colonial period and their children are considered Myanmar citizens. However, after independence illegal migrants known as Rohingya had entered Myanmar and threatened the country's stability.

Mr Guterres said he was trying to explore other possible ways to resolve the crisis.

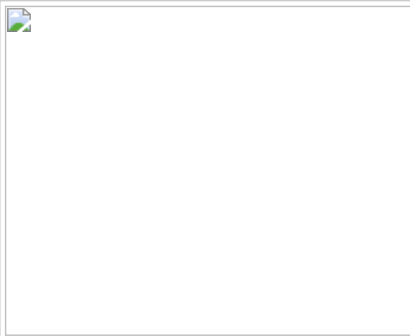
"We have discussed different actions in applying [the] nationality law and in attributing nationality to the people who are entitled to have nationality according to [the] nationality law and a certain number of other measures and it is in this context that I believe the cooperation between the UNHCR and Myanmar will be very positive," he said.

"For the government of Myanmar, this population is designated as the Muslim community or the Bengali Muslim community of north Rakhine State. The government of Myanmar doesn't use the word Rohingya, which is a word that is used by others ... internationally it is a common word. But I think it is important to say that that is not the designation that the government of Myanmar uses for the population."

Mr Guterres also said that his organisation was committed to assisting all victims of the violence in Rakhine State last month regardless of their religion or ethnicity.

"We are committed to enhance our capacity of humanitarian assistance and support to all the victims of which will be undertaken, in what we hope, in the process of true reconciliation," he said.

"We hope that our efforts might also give a humble contribution to hopefully what will be a true reconciliation between communities. And we strongly hope that after these events, it will be slowly possible to establish in north Rakhine State a situation where the rule of law will prevail in a human rights-minded way and the communities will be able to respect each other and look positively into the future."



UN high commissioner for refugees Mr Antonio Guterres speaks at a press conference in Yangon on July 12.
Pic: Boothee

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