

August 5, 2024

Dear Elaine Pearson,

Thank you for sharing your report. We, the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army (ULA/AA), categorically condemn any form of threats or attacks against civilian populations. We do not condone or engage in unlawful attacks or arson attacks against civilians. Such actions are contrary to our policies and military doctrines. It is important to note that such acts are typically carried out by other groups, including the Myanmar military and certain terrorist and militant organizations such as ARSA, RSO, and ARA. We possess substantial evidence, including video footage and photographs, to support this. And, there are many video and photo footages even in the public media sources.

We are concerned about the findings of your report and the significant omissions regarding the actions of these other groups. Before addressing your specific questions, we would like to offer some comments on the report.

(A) First, we would like to address a concern regarding your report. It appears that the findings may be influenced by confirmation bias, as the conclusion drawn from the relatively small sample size of 20 ethnic Rohingya and Rakhine victims may not be sufficient to substantiate the accusations of arson attacks. If your organization wishes to conduct interviews with civilian witnesses, we are willing to assist in arranging these interviews.

(B) Second, while your report cites witness interviews, satellite images, and thermal anomaly data as sources, it is crucial to note that satellite images and thermal anomalies primarily identify hotspots and damage, rather than the perpetrators of such attacks. Additionally, distinguishing between civilians and combatants in urban warfare scenarios presents significant challenges. We have concerns regarding the data collection methods and sampling selections used in your report.

In response to the questions you raised, we would like to address them as follows:

- (1) *What measures does the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army have in place to prevent abuses by its forces, including oversight and accountability systems?*

[REDACTED]

Answer: The ULA/AA has established a Code of Conduct (COC) for all members, including both combatants and civilian personnel. Our rules are derived from the Hague and Geneva Conventions and are emphasized through training, integrated into our rules of engagement, and applied in combat situations. Should there be any instances of misconduct by our forces, we have dedicated military and civilian judicial mechanisms to address and resolve these issues.

(2) Before conducting military operations against villages and wards in Buthidaung in April-May 2024, what steps did the Arakan Army take to minimize harm to the civilian population in the area?

Answer: In every military operation, we meticulously plan for operational implementation, evacuation, and civilian protection. Our procedures and guidelines involve our commanders collaborating with local leaders in the operation areas to devise strategies for evacuating civilian populations and minimizing collateral damage.

(3) What was the intended military objective of the May 17-18 attacks on Buthidaung town?

Answer: In every military operation currently underway across the country, our objective is to dismantle the SAC's military forces and terrorist organizations that pose a threat to regional peace, stability, and civilian populations.

(4) Please explain how the warnings provided to residents of Buthidaung town to evacuate by 10 a.m. on May 18 were in compliance with the international humanitarian law requirement of effective advance warnings.

Answer: In every military operation, we meticulously plan for operational implementation, evacuation, and civilian protection. Our procedures and guidelines involve our commanders collaborating with local leaders in the operation areas to devise strategies for evacuating civilian populations and minimizing collateral damage.

(5) Has the Arakan Army investigated possible laws-of-war violations in its April-May attacks in Buthidaung? If so, what were the findings? Have any members of the Arakan

Army faced disciplinary measures for abuses committed during the operations?

Answer: We do not condone or engage in unlawful attacks or arson attacks against civilians. Such actions are contrary to our policies and military doctrines. It is important to note that such acts are typically carried out by other groups, including the Myanmar military and certain terrorist and militant organizations such as ARSA, RSO, and ARA. We possess substantial evidence, including video footage and photographs, to support this. And, there are many video and photo footages even in the public media sources.

(6) **What steps is the Arakan Army taking to provide food and medical care for civilians under their control, especially those displaced by the fighting. What steps is the Arakan Army taking to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to civilian populations?**

Answer: We have established the Humanitarian and Development Coordination Office (HDCO), which primarily works with aid organizations and international entities to provide essential services such as food, medical care, and other basic needs to civilians. We have been delivering humanitarian aid since the beginning and continue to do so for the civilian population.

However, these efforts are typically not shared online or in any other form. HDCO/ULA adheres to agreements with the UN, INGOs, and local NGOs to avoid disseminating aid delivery information both online and offline. This is done to protect humanitarian workers and their organizations from threats posed by the SAC and to ensure the uninterrupted flow of aid to beneficiaries, regardless of race or religion, that the SAC is attempting to obstruct. HDCO continues to collaborate and coordinate with any organizations that aim to assist the entire population of Arakan State.

Nevertheless, more humanitarian aid is needed for all vulnerable populations in Rakhine. The aid assistance should be a need-based delivery.

(7) **What measures does the United League of Arakan take to maintain control over Arakan Army operations?**

Answer: We have a Code of Conduct for military operations (COE) and strategic planning in place, as well as an oversight mechanism managed by our civilian wings.

- [REDACTED]
- (8) Is the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army willing to grant access to independent human rights groups to conduct impartial investigations into the April-May military operations in Buthidaung?

Answer: As a legitimate entity, the ULA/AA respects the norms, principles, and guidelines of human rights. We are committed to cooperating with independent organizations that seek justice for all civilians, not just specific groups or individuals. Additionally, we have formal mechanisms in place to facilitate such cooperation, considering safety and security concerns of each and everyone.

- (9) Have any members of the Arakan Army been investigated or faced disciplinary measures for alleged abuses since fighting resumed in November 2023? If so, please provide details of these initiatives and the outcomes.

Answer: Every military and political organization, including the ULA/AA, adheres to strict confidentiality practices regarding internal investigations and disciplinary measures. We regularly disclose information that serves the public interest. Currently, our military records related to such matters are classified, but we intend to release this information in due course.

- (10) Has the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army taken any measures to counter anti-Rohingya incitement or hate speech in areas under its control, including online?

Answer: The United League of Arakan/Arakan Army (ULA/AA) is fundamentally opposed to discrimination and hate speech based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or political views. We consistently publish our stance against such incitement and hate speech, affirming our commitment to opposing discrimination and promoting respect for all races and religions. Simultaneously, we recognize that there is a significant amount of hate speech circulating against the Rakhine people and other minority groups from Arakan on social media platforms, including X (formerly known as Twitter) and Facebook. These troubling contents are being propagated by groups such as ARSA, RSO, ARA, and their supporters. Additionally, we have observed that some diaspora activists are exploiting human rights rhetoric as a weapon against the ULA/AA. These activists are engaging in the dissemination of hateful messages that target race, religion, and political views, further fueling division and animosity, and it undermines the act of social cohesion that the ULA/AA is striving for.



Sincerely,

Headquarter,
United League of Arakan/ Arakan Army

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