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ARNO Briefing Paper

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Briefing Paper: Arakan Rohingya National Organization

The Arakan Rohingya National Organization, or ARNO, is a political organization based in London which advocates for the rights of the Rohingya people of Myanmar. The ARNO was founded in 1998, and later became the leading member of the Arakan Rohingya Union (ARU) association of Rohingya groups. It works closely with international NGOs like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, and also holds close ties with the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office. It is currently led by Chairman Nurul Islam, a Rohingya lawyer whose citizenship within Myanmar has since been revoked.

The Arakan Rohingya National Organization has aligned itself with Rakhine nationalist groups in the past, but does not explicitly call for the independence of Rakhine state; instead, it focuses exclusively on promoting the rights and interests of ethnic Rohingya within Myanmar. It does not seek to do so through mobilizing members of the group on the ground or through military means—indeed, ARNO strictly renounces violence in all forms, and does not officially communicate with any violent groups—but rather by pressuring the international community into action through public campaigns.

ARNO's five primary goals are:

1. To end the ongoing genocide against the Rohingya peoples and enable the Rohingya refugees currently in Bangladesh to return to their homes safely;
2. To end the settler colonialist policies currently being practiced in Rakhine state which replace Rohingya villages with Buddhist settlements;

3. To achieve political autonomy for the Rohingya people in Rakhine, preferably as part of a greater federal state in Myanmar;
4. To preserve the cultural and religious heritage of the Rohingya people and prevent their extinction as a culture;
5. To economically empower the Rohingya people and bring development to Rakhine state.

ARNO has, since its establishment, been the primary voice for the Rohingya people on the world stage. It has fought in the court of global opinion in their favor for decades; however, when the current crisis began, its efforts intensified significantly. The current crisis should not be viewed as an isolated event, ARNO believes, but rather as the culmination of a long history of persecution and oppression by the central government of Myanmar. Because of this history, ARNO believes that any solutions for this crisis that are brought to the table that seek to truly end the violence for good must address those crimes, and redress the grievances of the Rohingya people to prevent them from recurring ever again.

In the Committee on Governance and Security, ARNO has several of these deep-rooted solutions to bring to the table. First and foremost, however, there is a more immediate action that ARNO believes that the international community should take: to invoke the Responsibility to Protect in Rakhine state. This should not necessarily be followed by military intervention, but should at the least involve heavy diplomatic pressure to cease the actions of the Tatmadaw, up to and including sanctions on individuals and groups, the freezing of extra-national assets, and even declaring Myanmar in violation of the United Nations Charter. Deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping mission is also an option that should not be overlooked.

However, this security is worth little if it simply pushes back the next pogrom fifteen or twenty years down the line. Something must be done to protect the Rohingya people more permanently, and part of that something is changing the fundamental government structures in which they exist. Therefore, Myanmar's constitution should be modified to create a truly federal state in which all ethnic groups have autonomy and equal rights as citizens, including the Rohingya.

With regards to the Committee on Human Rights, Law and Reconciliation, ARNO has a similar double-pronged approach to solutions: some to address the immediate issues, and some to address the long-term. First and foremost, the international community must come together and resolve that it will declare Myanmar in violation of the United Nations Charter if it does not immediately abide by the strictures placed upon it by the recent ruling of the International Court of Justice. Second—and also immediately—humanitarian aid groups must be allowed access to the Rohingya in Rakhine state.

On a more long-term basis, ARNO believes that Buddhist chauvinism from the majority in Myanmar must cease, and Muslims must be respected as equal citizens. This can be aided by marginalizing (or at least ceasing funding to) radical voices like Wirantu. A truth commission would probably not be out of line either, but is not an immediate priority: instead, aiding in preservation of the cultural traditions and heritage of the Rohingya people should come before all else.

Finally, with regards to the Committee on Development and Repatriation, ARNO obviously believes that the Rohingya people should be immediately permitted to return to their homes in Rakhine state and have their full citizenship restored. Where those homes have been

demolished to make way for new Buddhist settlements, the state should provide new ones—they were able to afford to demolish the old, so they should be able to afford to build the new.

When it comes to development, the only demand that ARNO has is that the Rohingya people not be left behind if and when greater economic prosperity comes to Rakhine state, whether through greater international investment, peaceful domestic development, humanitarian aid, or some combination of all three. An excellent way to ensure this would be to disconnect the Tatmadaw from its economic investments.