



Incident 9 – Myo Thugyi village, Maungdaw Township, incident

The Myo Thugyi village incident occurred on three successive days, from August 25 to August 27, 2017. Following are excerpts from statements given by a total of 32 eyewitnesses -- 2 Rakhine ethnic nationals, 1 Hindu, and 29 Muslims -- during the incident in Myo Thugyi village:

(a) Facts regarding Myo Thugyi village

The village of Myo Thugyi, located on the Maungdaw-Buthidaung/Ahngumaw Road two miles south of Maungdaw Town, is largely inhabited by Muslims. Officially designated as a village-tract in the nearest vicinity of Maungdaw Town, it consists of six villages – namely, Kankya (north), Kankya (south), Myo Thugyi (Razabhi), Thaungpaing Nya, Vesali (NaTaLa), and Ywahaung. For convenience sake, all the six villages are referred to as Myo Thugyi in general, which is therefore a fairly big and densely populated village. In the post 2017 uprising, Myo Thugyi was designated as a ward under the Maungdaw Town municipality area. Myo Thugyi ward is located at the north-south junction at the entry point of Maungdaw Town and used to be a ward of paramount economic importance. According to official statistics, the ward of Myo Thugyi consisted of 1240 houses, with a population of 8925, most of whom are Muslims.

(b) Statements of two Rakhine ethnic nationalities

A Rakhine ethnic national stated, I started to settle here in Maungdaw Town in 2010, and have seen the incidents that happened ever since. I think the incidents of 2012, 2016, and 2017 in Maungdaw were linked to each other. To start with, the houses of Rakhine people in No. 2 Street of Bohmu village were first set on fire in the 2012 incident, and the conflict intensified due to lack of control by the Na Sa Ka[a border and immigration control command, set up with a combined force of military intelligence, police, and immigration and customs officers, widely known by its Burmese acronym Na Sa Ka], who were then in charge of the Maungdaw region. No Muslim village or houses were burned or destroyed in the 2012 incident, and stability was later gradually restored, with some improvement of mutual trust between the two opposing communities.

But the incidents of 2016 created a certain degree of tension, which escalated and reached its peak in the 2017 incidents. Before the latest incident, we received from our Muslim friends forewarnings of some possible serious occurrences on unforeseen

dates. Then, amidst rumors of possible raids by terrorists, some local people fled in search of safer places. At around 10 p.m. on August 24, 2017, came the shocking news of some Muslims gathering somewhere in Kondan, Alai Than Kyaw, and aiming to attack the police stations, and very soon, from around 11 p.m., gunshots were heard quite simultaneously from seven police outposts in the vicinity of Maungdaw Town. Mine explosions were heard at almost 15 minute intervals from around midnight. From my house, which was located near the hospital in the Bohmu village, adjacent to the Muslim ward of Myoma Kanyin Dan, I sensed the cracking of window panes and heard the gunshots and loud shouts of the Muslim mobs during the raids on the outposts the whole night, until about 5a.m.

When morning broke, we saw the vehicle police outpost, neighboring the former district administrator's house, totally destroyed by dynamites set by terrorists, and the policemen clearing a Muslim house opposite to the police outpost. We could still hear gunshots coming from Myo Thugyi village near the entrance into Maungdaw Town, although silence had prevailed in the town itself. Strictly prohibited by the officials from going beyond the entrance of Maungdaw Town outside into Myo Thugyi, we just kept watching at a distance of at least 1000 yards.

On the afternoon of August 25, a lot of soldiers were seen coming in military trucks into the town, deploying at places downtown and outside, and moving on patrol. At 7 p.m., another still bigger battle broke out, emitting the banging noises of gunshots far and near around Maungdaw Town. I learned over the phone from my friends that the battle was occurring between the military and the terrorists. The next morning on August 26, we saw thousands of Muslims walking with bags in the direction of Du Nyaungbin Gyi/Alai Than Kyaw from Myo Thugyi. I guess they must have been fleeing due to the clearance of the locality by the troops, but I didn't see soldiers hurting any Muslim civilian. Obviously, they could leave the place alive just because the military did not harm them.

Around 3 p.m., two empty military trucks, with only the driver and a sergeant in it, came saying that they were in need of volunteers for locality clearance in Myo Thugyi. Thrilled and agitated over the Muslim attackers at the time, many local inhabitants including Hindus from Maungdaw Town, were ready to render their voluntary service to the military. As you know, Myo Thugyi is just two miles from Maungdaw Town center and situated on the main traffic road coming into the town. Having a curious nature at heart, I was also among those who came to Myo Thugyi in the military trucks. But I was left behind in our truck when a sergeant beckoned our group and took them away into the village. Soon after the departure of the volunteers, from the truck, I saw clouds of smoke rolling up from the northern side of the Myo Thugyi village. Houses were already on fire when the volunteering city-dwellers returned to the trucks, some of them saying, 'It will serve as a lesson for the Muslims. What can they now do to us?', and others bringing bicycles or motorcycles and electronic materials that belonged to the Muslims, and still others bringing chickens, goats, and cattle. I didn't see any dead bodies, but I knew that the burning of the Myo Thugyi village lasted until the late afternoon of August 27, when the entire village went into ashes. I was not aware of the troop's involvement in the arson. According to the Hindu volunteers in the truck, I learned that the

soldiers did not burn the village nor stopped the volunteers burning it. I had no idea of rape cases in that incident. There were also some other civilians who came to the scene for clearing of locality in Myo Thugyi.

Starting from August 27, downtown Maungdaw remained like a battlefield. The Muslim houses and shops were robbed by some outsider ethnic nationalities, who had come out of nowhere, as well as some local ethnic nationalities, and Hindus. Although many people said that they were looking for food, I looked around the town on my motorbike only to see that all the Muslim shops, not only food stores, had been robbed. Regrettably, there was no official who would stop those lawless, unscrupulous destructionists. The police were only in their outposts, and did not come out at all.

On the same afternoon of August 27, the Muslim houses from Ward 5 of Maungdaw Town were on fire. The entire ward then burnt to ashes. Before the burnings, Rakhines and Muslims had lived across the main street from each other. When the burnings started, the Muslims had already fled out of the ward. There was no possibility of these Muslims destroying their homes, as some accusations indicated. From what I could see from the upper floor of my house, I believe that the burnings were most probably caused by those local Rakhines, and must say that the blame for these blatant crimes should partly go to the neglectful officials who failed to stop them.

There were three significant points I noticed in Maungdaw just before the incident of August 25, 2017. Firstly, there were precautions of the imminent attacks we were given by our Muslim friends. Secondly, there was an important Islamic festival, which name I can't recall, to be held on August 28, in which each and every Muslim was expected to traditionally participate in new, beautiful dresses, like in the previous years. The main market of Maungdaw which had been normally brisk with Muslims, eager for that festival, seemed very dry and remarkably deserted that year. Thirdly, not many Muslims were seen in town or around, and several Muslims staying at home were giving their close Rakhine friends some warnings regarding moving about.

When it came to the turmoil, many Muslim city-dwellers did not like ARSA though they did not express their opinions in public. Our Muslim friends often confided their worries to us that they had to take care not to be targets in the eyes of active Muslim fighters and their supportive hardliners, since they could not rely on the government, lacking in providing effective protection and adequate actions, even when complaints have been filed. Traditionally, Muslim inhabitants in Maungdaw Town have coexisted peacefully and closely with the local Rakhines, in spite of their different religious faiths. However, many of those living in the remote areas on the border line tend to hold radical and fundamental views, in which must have lain the roots of the incidents.

Another Rakhine witness, who was formerly the administrator of Myo Thugyi village, and who currently lives in Vesali (NaTaLa) stated, on Thursday afternoon when that incident happened, the outbreak of fire started from the home where ammunitions

were secretly kept by the house owner who had fled into Bangladesh. When I got that information, I asked the villagers of Myo Thugyi to evacuate to a safer place. On the following day, Friday, August 25, when I saw the smoke coming out of the Myo Thugyi village, I reported it to the heads of hundred households and ten households. It was learnt that the Muslim men had set fire to their own houses and detonated a dynamite near the district court at 3 Mile, and that there was no military or police in the village of Myo Thugyi at the time of the incident.

(c) Statement of a Hindu

During the 2017 incident, one Friday morning, the date of which I do not remember, I went to open my shop in U Daung village and encountered more than a hundred masked Muslim men dressed in black, carrying swords, sticks and more than a foot-long guns. As they were burning down my shop, I dared not live in U Daung village and went to Maungdaw Town together with 12 Hindus on whatever car was available. Some Rakhines were also on the car. We left U Daung village around 8 a.m. and the Rakhines alighted at 4 Mile, before reaching Maungdaw. At 3 Mile, the driver said this was the end of the trip and we got off. It was 10 a.m. when we arrived at 3 Mile.

There were five children, four women and three men in our group of 12 people. On arrival at 3 Mile, we saw a group of soldiers, about 30 of them, firing a launcher towards Myo Thugyi village. We ran in fear into an under construction district court building. It was a two-story building and as there was no one at the ground floor, we went up to the next floor. Around 11 a.m., four Muslims, dressed in black, entered the building. They were dressed in the same way as Muslims we saw in U Daung village, and they were carrying foot-long guns.

They asked what race we were, and when I replied we were Hindus, they shot at me and my five family members. I was hit in the stomach and wounded, while the rest were killed. Muslims thought we were dead and took away the gold and other belongings. The five killed were one man, two boys, and two girls. My husband, my child, my younger brother and sister died from gunshot wounds. As six others were hiding, they were not shot. My relatives sent me to Buthidaung hospital and that's why I'm still surviving. I was treated in the hospital for eight days and was transferred to Sittwe hospital where I was treated for two more months.

(d) Statements of 29 Muslims

One witness stated, only in the morning was I aware of the 2016 incident of the attack against the border guard police headquarters, since the headquarters is quite far from our village. Between 11 a.m. and noon, I saw shopkeepers from the market returning home early, due perhaps to their fear of the battle. Two days later, Rakhine State Chief Minister U Nyi Pu, accompanied by officials from the state, and Rakhine state ministers for immigration, for education and for information, came to Maungdaw and convened a meeting with the elders of the town in the backyard hall of the township administrator's office. I also attended the meeting and heard the chief minister say, 'We know that only a handful of men were involved in the attacks

against the headquarters – not all the people cannot be held responsible. But we must take action against those who committed the raid. Let me hear your opinion.’ He also added, ‘We can’t think of a reason to readily accept the work of any terrorists nor the fighting of ARSA. We denounce them.’

Another meeting was called for again two or three days after the return of these officials. Thura U San Lwin and Major-General Maung Maung Soe attended the meeting, and the former spoke more on the matter. They discussed most of the matter very positively, saying, ‘Let bygones be bygones. But we must find ways together not to let this kind of thing happen again.’ We were also on the same consensus. Thura U San Lwin continued, ‘If you know who the perpetrators were and where they hid their weapons, you are requested to give us the information you know. If you can, listen for the news about the place of the weapons. Just report to the officials any news you got, and you have no reason to fear the consequences. We will take care of the rest.’ However, we ourselves had no idea of the weapons. Three or four days later, again in the same year, Wapeik village, which is not very far from the headquarters, was burnt down. It was followed by the relocation of the villagers to other safer places, the fleeing of some into Bangladesh, and the arrest of some suspects.

Though I am not convinced, we had been receiving rumors since 2017 that terrorists will come for attacks and that the other side will wage attacks. The incident first broke out in Myo Thugyi and spread to Razabhi soon. In the incident, shootings were exchanged between the two sides. There could be some who were working in connection with ARSA, because shooting was started in the village before the other side did so. After the incident that happened at night in Myo Thugyi, another incident of shootings occurred in Nwayon Taung village the next morning.

We heard the cries of some twenty people between midnight and 1 a.m. on August 25, 2017. As is the wont of Moslem men, we shout and invoke Allah first of all whatever we do. Now, we heard such cries, and it was followed several minutes later by the noises of attacks and stones flung. No gunshot was heard, however. When my wife wondered whether the incident could escalate to a level of intensity in 2012, I had to comfort her that there was scant chance of this going as bad as then. We heard more and more noises as of stones falling on the gates but did not have an idea of who were flinging these stones. A while later, we went to open the door of the guard outpost. At around 2 a.m., with the disappearance of cries for Allah, gunshots were heard from every direction. This continued until the breaking of the day. In the morning we found that the stones had broken the window-panes of the school and damaged the police-station, in which there was no policeman seen. At around 8:30 a.m., a car, seemingly a police-car from Maungdaw police station, arrived and took photos around. When they returned, they even said words of farewell to me. In the following days, markets and houses were all shut, and a loudhailer speaker went around announcing that the town was now under martial law and that a township level military operation was to be launched on August 28. We felt quite relieved to know that there was a military troop deployed in the street between our village and the Rakhine village. There was also another military troop deployed in the yards of the western mosque. The military assured us of the

situation, suggesting that we not leave the houses during the martial law period, and that they would crack down on the perpetrators only. But two days later, we saw a new military troop taking its place.

One day, we saw smoke coming out of the Muslim village behind the township administrator's office. First, it was just smoke to be seen, but it grew more and more into a conflagration. The military asked us who started the fire, and they said they had not ordered such a thing. We then heard the sirens of a fire-engine, which could have gone to extinguish the fire. Another outbreak of fire happened near the Hindu village on the following day. It was said that this fire was started from a Muslim house adjacent to the Hindu village. The fire of the previous day could have been an accidental one, but this fire aroused our suspicion. While running to the village on the other side with what they could take along with them, most people just shouted, 'Fire is being set on here. Get out and run.' As for me, I was just at home for six days, surrounded safely by the military troops. But I had no other villagers than my family – my wife and children. For the four days I fasted, satisfying myself with water only. We didn't know where to go or what to do. There was no soul to be seen in the village as all had run away in fear. I didn't see any reason or excuse on my own part to leave our place. But due to shortage of ration and the phone call from my brother who suggested we move out of the village, I finally decided to go to a friend's with some important documents and property on me. Until that time, our section in the village had not experienced any burnings because we lived just across the street from the other section, which already had about 400 houses burnt. The next day I came back to find that the whole village had been left abandoned and there was no pet, nor police, nor any soul except the military troops in the mosque. My house remained intact inside and outside. However, at about 5 p.m. on the following day, about 11 houses including mine were set on fire at the same time. Who did it? I have no idea.

Depressed and worried about the future of my seven children, we then left the village in spite of the comforting words of the soldiers. There was no policeman, and the troops could not help the situation nor guarantee our safety when the matter worsened. Before the outbreaks of fire, I did not see any military activity except when they fired warning shots into the sky; nor did I see any rape case committed by the soldiers. During the martial law time, there was only a woman who was shot dead by the police the following day after the fire outbreak. She was wearing a hijab on her return to the place where she had hidden her property in the ground the previous day. I believe she was just one of the many naïve villagers in the area who did not understand the extent of martial law and military operations.

When the incident occurred, Harbi and Italia villages were the first villages our villagers sought refuge in, as their relatives lived there. They marched to those villages on foot. One noteworthy thing. At the single-story building in the backyard of the school, I saw some Hindu men preparing for an act of arson with a bottle wrapped in a fuel soaked cloth. Then, they lurked in hiding places when the police launched warning shots into the sky, but they very soon resumed their attempts to set fires. I saw them with my own eyes. As there were lots of people on suspicion of such arsons, I am not sure who made these things. Many people believed that they

were from Hindu groups, and I am strongly convinced that the soldiers and the police were well beyond suspicion.

During the incident under discussion, only 165 houses were left intact of the total 400 houses in the outbreaks of fires. At first we were told by the township administrator of resettlement plans in the remaining 165 houses since the original places were no longer usable for relocating the victims. But we are no longer hearing of these plans. We are now looking forward to the government's resettlement plans for us. We would like to live in our original places, and we understand that during military operations we might have to be relocated, as this sort of thing has been occurring across the world. We hope to be resettled in our original places.

Another witness stated, a couple of months before the 2017 incident, a Muslim villager from Myo Thugyi who befriended the ward administrator was executed. In a household of about 10 people, there can be at least someone who is secretly working with ARSA. ARSA members can also be among civilians living normally as a household member. Before the outbreak of the incident, we passed our days normally, but it suddenly changed one morning. My brother used to be an administrator responsible for a hundred households. During his tenure, we were under the threats of ARSA swords as well as the orders from the security forces. Before the incident, he went to refrain some villagers and strangers, totaling about 10, only to be labeled as a government's stooge and threatened not to hinder them. The 2017 incident happened just a month after this threat.

Another witness, while narrating his reason for leaving his house, said, that late Saturday afternoon, I ran across the paddy-fields together with my mother and my sister in the direction of Nyaungchaung village. We were not forced to nor prevented from doing so. At that time in Myo Thugyi village, there were some soldiers in camouflaged and some in green apparels. They saw us leaving the village for Nyaungchaung but did not stop us. Men were quicker in moving, and women remained a month or so longer, waiting for money from their husbands, so they could flee into the neighboring country. During our flight, we saw a fire near our house, but we didn't see anybody setting the fire.

Another witness said, our family left the village at 8 a.m. on Friday, August 25, and arrived in Nyaungchaung past midnight. We didn't see anybody on the way, and via Nyaungchaung, continued to Pantaw Pyin village, and ultimately to Shwezar village. We heard of the killings of some villagers, whose names I do not remember now. The entire village ran away out of fright, leaving only some of them behind.

According to statements given by 28 witnesses, those who left their places abandoned their village on their own will, without any coercion or prohibition to do so from the military or the government.

Another witness, giving an account of the lootings he happened to see, stated, I saw some Rakhines and Hindus looting cooking oil and rice bags in the Ywahaung market at the entrance of Myo Thugyi village. There were a total of about 50 people in

number, two Hindu faces of whom were familiar to me. In the vicinity, there were some soldiers with red scarves around their necks. They did not bother to stop the looters nor encourage them. Some civilians were carrying such things as wardrobes in cars. I also left the village with my belongings at around 4 p.m. The soldiers were seen only in the streets, but not in house compounds. There were about 12 soldiers and 20 border guard police. The next morning, the border guard police, Rakhines and Hindus were back in the village. They had piled up their household property in front of the houses, and then about 30 cars came into the village to carry the property away. After this, the empty houses were set on fire by throwing bottles of petrol into the houses. For the record, I took photos of what I saw, but I deleted them later because the village officer said the border guard police might come and investigate us.

Another witness stated, for quite a long time on the night of the incident, we heard gunshots. I saw some soldiers in the street the following Saturday morning. After hearing some gunshots, I ran out of the house only to be seen by the soldiers and was shot several times. One bullet hit my forearm, but I escaped by running across the paddy-fields. There was no one to follow me. Back at PantawPyin village, I underwent medical treatment, so my hand has totally recovered now.

Another witness to the incident stated, soldiers came walking while firing gunshots from the direction of 3 Mile village. In the paddy fields, I saw a man in early twenties lying dead of a bullet-shot. I saw a soldier, wearing a red scarf, firing at him, while the man was looking from up a tree. More than half a year before the incident, a convoy of about 100 soldiers came into the village and shot around 7 villagers dead. But only the dead bodies were seen. No one bore witness to the actual shooting.

Another witness stated, from the direction of Nyaungchaung and Italia villages, some people came with several batons and swords in their hands. Then, coming from the direction of 3 Mile, the troops fired warning shots into the sky, and went back towards 3 Mile after a while. Very soon, I found many Muslims already gathered there with handy weapons – I don't know where they might have come from. At 10 a.m. on August 27, the fighting started between the two sides. I was at home at that time. The moment I heard the gunshots, I ran away from home. I didn't have any idea of the reason of shootings. Altogether four – a child, a woman and two men – were killed by the shootings, which were aimed directly at the village.

One male neighbor near my house was among those who were shot dead, and I happened to see his funeral. On Saturday, the soldiers came by aircraft to set the village on fire, so I left the place that day. On Friday afternoon, I had seen some soldiers and policemen walking in the street or driving their cars around. A unit or a troop consisted of about 20 members. There were also 30 soldiers on the truck. Some gunshots were fired in the direction of the village on Friday. This continued to occur throughout Saturday as well. I saw six men shot dead under my eyes – there could be as many as 12 killings during their shootings. Dead bodies were not retrieved.

Another witness, in his narration regarding the arsons, said, at around 6 p.m., looking from Nyaungchaung village, I saw a fire burning in the direction of Myo Thugyi village, but I did not know the details of the fire. I saw some soldiers, who could have started the fire.

A further witness stated, my house was located on the verge of paddy fields just behind the main street of the village. I saw four men in military green uniforms setting fire by using petrol. I saw them from a distance of between 20 and 30 feet. While they were busy setting fire towards the eastern part of the village, I went into the house and took my bags of clothes and belongings. In the outbreaks of fire in Myo Thugyi village, a decrepit old lady was left behind by her family members only to be killed in fire. At the time of my departure from the village, I didn't see anybody around who was setting fire.

An additional witness stated, on Friday, the old village of Myo Thugyi was on fire. The troops were shooting in the direction of the village. The soldiers, border guard police and Rakhine people took their part in groups in setting fire to the village section wise. Some six civilians were seen with petrol bottles in their hands, while I was at Razapyin village near Ywahaung. Nothing peculiar was seen in Myo Thugyi on Saturday and Sunday, the 26th and 27th. On Monday, August 28, there was an outbreak of fire in Myo Thugyi, which I happened to see from a distance. There were news of deaths in the incident, but I did not have a chance to see any.

All the 29 Muslim witnesses stated that there were no gang rape or related cases in Myo Thugyi, as far as they were concerned.
