

Violence in Myanmar's Rakhine state could amount to crimes against humanity – UN special adviser

6 February 2017 – The scale of violence against the Rohingya community in Myanmar's Rakhine state documented in a recent United Nations human rights report is a level of dehumanization and cruelty that is "revolting and unacceptable," the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide said today, underlining the Government's responsibility to ensure that populations are protected.

In a statement, Special Adviser Adama Dieng said the flash report issued last week by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) gave further credibility to allegations that security forces were committing serious human rights violations against civilians in northern Rakhine state from the very beginning of the recent escalation of violence, which was precipitated by attacks on border posts in early October 2016 and the ensuing operations by those forces.

According to the findings contained in the OHCHR report, human rights violations committed by the security forces include mass gang-rape, extra-judicial killings "including of babies and young children, brutal beatings and disappearances.

"If people are being persecuted based on their identity and killed, tortured, raped and forcibly transferred in a widespread or systematic manner, this could amount to crimes against humanity, and in fact be the precursor of other egregious international crimes," said Mr. Dieng.

"This must stop right now!" he declared.

Current panel not a credible option to undertake new investigation

Mr. Dieng also expressed concern that the commission previously appointed by the Government to investigate the allegations and which, despite having unhindered access to the region, found no evidence, or insufficient evidence, of any wrongdoing by Government forces.

"[However,] OHCHR, which was not given access to the area, found an overwhelming number of testimonies and other forms of evidence through interviews with refugees who had fled to a neighbouring country," the Special Adviser added. "The existing Commission is not a credible option to undertake the new investigation."

"I urge that any investigation be conducted by a truly independent and impartial body that includes international observers," he noted, welcoming the Government's commitment to open an immediate probe.

“If the Government wants the international community and regional actors to believe in their willingness to resolve the matter, they must act responsibly and demonstrate their sincerity,” Mr. Dieng said.

“There is no more time to wait. All of this is happening against the background of very deeply rooted and long-standing discriminatory practices and policies against the Rohingya Muslims and a failure to put in place conditions that would support peaceful coexistence among the different communities in Rakhine state,” he concluded.