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Page 1 of 8

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From: Halbmaier, Craig A
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Subject: Burma: USG Delegation Finds Rakhine State Tense, Marked by Inequity

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Subject: Burma: USG Delegation Finds Rakhine State Tense, Marked by Inequity

Summary

1. (C) On September 8 and 9, a nine-member USG delegation visited Sittwe and Maungdaw townships in Rakhine State to investigate the challenges resulting from the aftermath of the June 2012 communal violence. The delegation found a three-sided conflict entangling the Government of Burma (GOB) and Rohingya and Rakhine Buddhist communities, in which enduring legal inequality, restrictions on movement, inequitable population and land policies, as well as perceived inequality in the distribution of international assistance served to exacerbate tensions. Since the conflict erupted in early June, the Rohingya community continues to suffer disproportionately and remains isolated, vulnerable and unable to access education, adequate healthcare or livelihoods. The Rakhine community, despite being better off than the Rohingya, still comprises one of the poorest communities in Burma and has received little GOB help in the past. Local and national GOB leaders along with nearly all Rakhine leaders still publically reject rights for the Rohingya community, casting them as a foreign group – notably, they refer to Rohingya as “Bengali Muslims” – that threatens the security of Burma.

1.4(B)
 1.4(D)
 B1

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Charles Lahiguera, Senior
Reviewer

CLASSIFICATION: CONFIDENTIAL
Page 1 of 8

1.4(B)
1.4(D)
B1USG Delegation Visits Sittwe and Maungdaw September 8-9

3. (SBU) On September 8 and 9, a nine-member USG delegation visited Sittwe and Maungdaw townships in Rakhine State to investigate the challenges resulting from the aftermath of communal violence; this visit constituted the fifth USG visit to Rakhine State since the outbreak of violence in early June (reftels A-D). The delegation travelled to major areas of displacement where the United Nations has outlined a need for humanitarian and recovery assistance in the Rakhine Response Plan issued in late July. Delegation members visited villages and camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs), local businesses, mosques and monasteries. They engaged with international and nongovernmental organizations and a broad spectrum of individuals from both Buddhist and Rohingya communities. The delegation also had extensive consultations with the Union Minister of Border Affairs, who accompanied the delegation throughout the visit, the Chief Minister of Rakhine State, and other local government officials. The delegation was comprised of Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Joseph Yun, Deputy Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Alyssa Ayres, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Dan Baer, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Population, Refugees, and Migration Kelly Clements, U.S. Ambassador to Burma Derek Mitchell, USAID Mission Director Chris Milligan, Defense Attaché Colonel William Dickey, and USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor Brian Heidel.

Rohingya Suffer Disproportionately, Lack Security

4. (SBU) USG officials found broad swathes of both Rohingya and Rakhine Buddhist communities affected, though the Rohingya community, unlike the Rakhine Buddhists, remains isolated, vulnerable and unable to access education, adequate healthcare or livelihoods. Rohingya comprise approximately 64,000 (91%) of the UN-estimated 70,000 IDPs and 700 (93%) of the 750 communal violence-related inmates in local jails. Without access to livelihoods, displaced Rohingya are completely reliant on humanitarian assistance, and without a GOB plan for reintegration, the GOB is on course to institutionalize the segregation and deepen the marginalization of the Rohingya community.

5. (SBU) Lack of security remains the number-one challenge to Rohingya accessing livelihoods and reintegrating into their villages of origin in Rakhine State. Lack of access and security also impacts aid delivery in Maungdaw, as the UN continues to keep Asian staff out of Maungdaw for fear of these staff being mistaken for a Rakhine Buddhist or Rohingya and attacked. Rohingya interlocutors repeatedly told delegation members that

CLASSIFICATION: CONFIDENTIAL

Page 3 of 8

even if allowed to go beyond their locale, lack of security precluded Rohingya from leaving their homes. In Sittwe town, lack of security traps residents of Aung Mingalar Ward, (the sole remaining Rohingya ward after other Rohingya wards were burned down), making it difficult even to cross the street and enter a local mosque. The GOB reports it has deployed hundreds of additional security personnel, mostly military, in Rakhine State, which Rohingya leaders welcome as the personnel are predominately from outside of Rakhine State and less biased than local, predominately Rakhine security forces.

1.4(B)
1.4(D)
B1

Rakhine Prospects More Positive, Though Still Poverty-stricken

8. (SBU) Approximately 6,000 Rakhine Buddhists remain displaced in Rakhine State. Although the Rakhine have greater access to livelihoods and aid than the Rohingya, the Rakhine community is also relatively poor compared to the rest of Burma. While the GOB stalls on building adequate shelter for the Rohingya, and has argued that their communities cannot be rebuilt in their prior locations for security reasons, the GOB is facilitating, either by funding or granting access to international organizations, the reconstruction of Rakhine communities, especially in and around Maungdaw. (Note: the GOB built 40 of these settlements in Maungdaw in the 1990s using work-release prisoners from Sittwe Prison.)

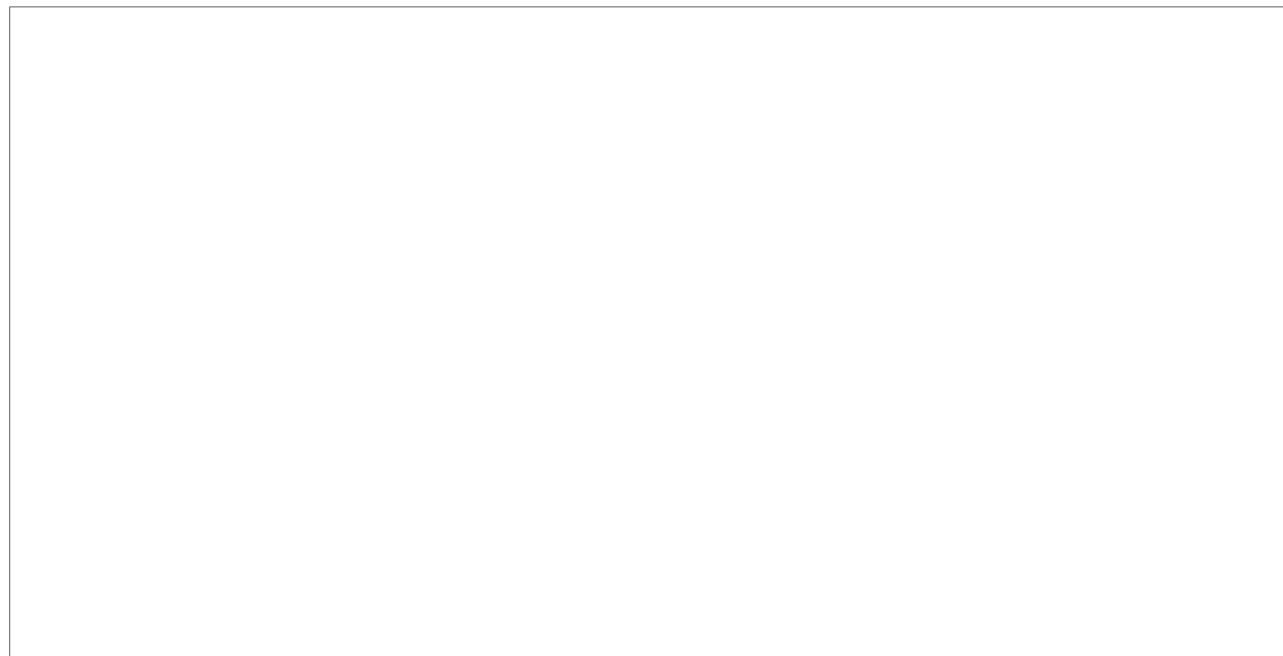
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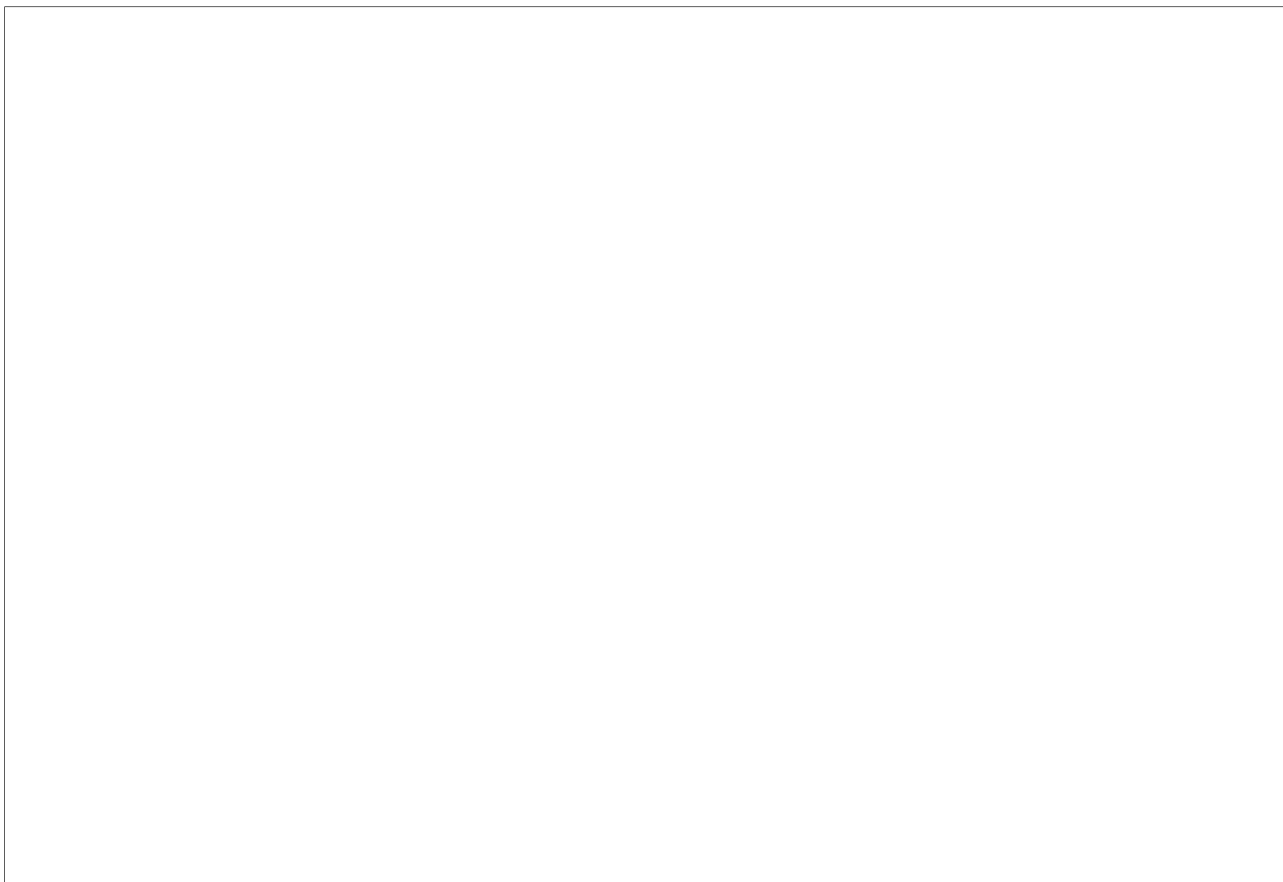
Page 3 of 8



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1.4(B)
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1.4(B)
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13. (C) The Rakhine Nationalities Development Party (RNDP) leaders

[Redacted] The RNDP chairman publically stated that Rohingya are foreigners and not a legitimate ethnic group of Burma and "we [the Rakhine people] will not lose one inch of Rakhine land [to the Rohingya]." Rakhine leaders continually cited their fundamental fear of being overrun demographically by "Bengali Muslims" who "flood across a porous border and are having too many children."

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Some Points of Hope Remain for Positive Outcomes

14. (SBU) Political and religious leaders in discreet side conversations stated there are scenarios under which the Rohingya IDPs could be reintegrated into Rakhine State, but stressed the need for major changes on behalf of the local and national government to help resolve the crisis. Conversations with Rakhine leaders often began with invectives against the Rohingya community, but often ended with requests for greater self determination, freedom from "Burman colonizers" and economic development for all residents in Rakhine State. Interlocutors stated that if the economic pie were larger and if economic development of the Rohingya community brought down birth rates, there could be a possibility of reintegration between the Rakhine and Rohingya communities. A senior leader of the Rakhine Nationalities Development Party stated, "they [the Rohingya] are poor, but so are we [the Rakhine community]... the Government represses [the Rohingya], but the Government also represses us [the Rakhine]. The Government needs to give papers and permission to the Muslims so that they can travel to other states and divisions so that the burden is not only on Rakhine State."

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