



Queensland Rohingya Community Inc

SUBMISSION TO SENATE FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Inquiry: Democracy and human rights in Myanmar

Terms of Reference: The state of democracy and human rights in Myanmar, with specific consideration of the phased elections to be held from December, and the barriers to a return to an inclusive civilian democratic government.

Submission of the Queensland Rohingya Community Inc. (QRC) a not-for-profit organisation, which looks after community welfare and is committed to building a multicultural Australian society by promoting Rohingya Cultures. QRC was originally established in Queensland and now has members located throughout Australia.

1. Introduction

I appreciate the opportunity to provide this submission to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee on behalf of the Queensland Rohingya Community Inc. (QRC) My purpose is to outline the severe and ongoing humanitarian crisis affecting the Rohingya people since at least 1992, the state of human rights in Myanmar and to highlight the critical role that Australia can play in advancing civilian protection, regional stability, and democratic prospects in Myanmar.

For more than three decades, the Rohingya population has been subjected to systemic persecution, targeted violence, displacement, and human rights violations. Despite repeated international condemnations, the situation has deteriorated further since the 2021 military coup. As of 2026, reports continue to document killings, displacement, and widespread exploitation on a near-daily basis.

The violence in Rakhine State — including aerial bombardment and forced displacement — remains one of the primary drivers of mass flight, human trafficking, and the fragmentation of civil society across the region.

2. Historical Continuity of Violence and Human Rights Abuses (1992–2026)

The Rohingya crisis is neither new nor temporary. Since 1992, consistent patterns have been observed:

- Death, torture, and extrajudicial killings of Rohingya civilians
- Forced displacement, often accompanied by village destruction
- Systematic discrimination, including denial of citizenship
- Restricted movement and access to services
- Persecution during military “clearance operations”, particularly in Rakhine State
- Escalating airstrikes since the Tatmadaw seized full control in 2021

These conditions have created one of the world’s largest stateless refugee populations, with more than a million Rohingya now living in extremely precarious conditions in Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, and elsewhere.

Multiple international organisations, including UNHCR, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International, confirm that the pattern of violence has remained largely unchanged for more than 30 years.

A report commissioned by the Queensland Rohingya Community Inc in 2020 by the University of Queensland Pro Bono Centre outlined a litany of human rights abuses against the Rohingya in Myanmar. (See **attached pdf** 'Human Rights Violations against the Rohingya in Myanmar'.)

3. Airstrikes and Civilian Protection

One of the most destructive and escalating threats to Rohingya communities is the use of aerial bombardment. Airstrikes have repeatedly targeted:

- Villages
- Civilians in transit
- Humanitarian corridors
- Areas where displaced Rohingya have sought temporary refuge

These attacks create conditions of chaos and desperation, making movement more dangerous and blocking humanitarian access. Evidence gathered from Rakhine State shows a strong correlation between areas targeted by airstrikes and high-risk zones for trafficking, forced displacement, and organised criminal exploitation.

The **map attached** with this submission visually highlights conflict-affected zones and potential areas that could safely be placed under international protection.

4. Proposal: Establishment of a No-Fly Zone

To prevent further loss of life and stabilise the region, Australia should actively advocate for the introduction of an internationally supervised no-fly zone covering key conflict areas in Rakhine State.

A no-fly zone would:

- Immediately reduce civilian casualties by halting aerial bombardment
- Enable humanitarian organisations to safely access communities
- Limit the Tatmadaw's most destructive operational advantage
- Reduce forced displacement, which is directly linked to trafficking and exploitation (see below)
- Create conditions necessary for political dialogue, conflict de-escalation and homeland safety for people there as well as those returning. As soon as homeland safety is assured people will begin to voluntarily return.

Establishing a no-fly zone is challenging but not unprecedented. Previous humanitarian interventions demonstrate that such measures can be critical in preventing mass atrocities.

Australia is well placed to champion such an initiative within the United Nations system, including through the Security Council, General Assembly mechanisms, and cooperation with ASEAN partners.

If a 'No-fly zone' is not practical then some comparable civilian protection mechanisms is warranted, such as a Strict Global Aviation Fuel Embargo from the international community focused on choking off the supply of aviation fuel to the Myanmar military. Sanctions on suppliers could be effective.

5. Human Trafficking and the Exploitation of Women and Children

The rapidly deteriorating security environment in Rakhine and in refugee camps across Bangladesh and Southeast Asia has created a fertile environment for traffickers and transnational criminal networks.

Recent reporting (see links below) indicates:

- Human trafficking in Rohingya camps is “rife”, with women and girls the primary targets (SBS News, 2025).
- Many are lured with false promises of work or marriage, only to be forced into prostitution, forced labour, or illegal marriages (Al Jazeera, 2019).
- Hundreds of victims were identified in 2024 alone, according to the Anti-Trafficking Working Group (2025).
- UNHCR’s 2023–24 movement data confirms that dangerous migration routes are increasingly controlled by criminal syndicates, preying on refugees attempting to escape violence.
- HRW (2023) documents widespread kidnapping, rape, forced marriage, and gang activity within and around refugee populations.
- News outlets in 2025 report active trafficking operations in Bangladesh and India, involving women, children, and entire families.

If there was a no-fly zone it would directly reduce trafficking risks by reducing the chaos and displacement exploited by traffickers. When families are not forced to flee bombardments, they are less vulnerable to smugglers and criminal networks.

By restoring minimal security and humanitarian access, a no-fly zone could significantly disrupt trafficking pathways and protect women and children who are currently at extreme risk.

6. The ‘democratic election’ process

With regard to the ‘election’ and the Rohingya we refer to an opinion piece in the Journal *Rohingya Khobor* of 17 January 2026 ‘*Election Without a People: Myanmar’s Vote and the Rohingya’s Permanent Exile*’ (<https://rohingyakhobor.com/an-election-without-a-people-myanmars-vote-and-the-rohingyas-permanent-exile/>)

In summary it says that for stateless Rohingya, Myanmar’s election reinforces their exclusion. Voting presumes citizenship, and they are denied both. The election, held amid war and repression, risks being used internationally to legitimize the junta and reduce pressure for justice or their safe return. It is a political performance that perpetuates the structure of their exclusion, not a step toward inclusion or resolution.

Specific paragraphs from the *Rohingya Khobor* article raise deep issues that give cause for countries to reflect on their responses to the election. We ask the Committee to consider these carefully:

..... The Jakarta Post reported that stateless Rohingya in exile viewed the election through the lens of permanent denial. ... Voting presumes citizenship. It presumes belonging to a political community. Statelessness places a person outside that community. For Rohingya refugees living in camps in Bangladesh, or displaced elsewhere, the election becomes a political event that happens in a country that refuses to recognize them as part of its electorate, its citizenry, or its national story....

... If international actors treat elections as progress, they may reduce pressure on the junta. They may adjust asylum decisions, humanitarian aid postures, or sanctions regimes. Reuters reported that the United States terminated temporary legal status for Myanmar citizens and that the decision was linked, at least in part, to arguments that conditions were changing.

‘.... Bangladesh, which hosts a vast Rohingya refugee population and repeatedly describes the crisis as a burden requiring international action.... If regional and global

actors interpret the election as a step toward normalization, pressure to prioritize Rohingya justice or citizenship restoration may diminish....

There is a temptation in international discourse to treat elections as thresholds: before elections, a country is authoritarian; after elections, it is on the road to democracy. The materials we have on Myanmar's vote challenge that simplification. Voting can be staged, managed, and constrained. Participation can be coerced. Competition can be removed. And the international system can still be pressured to respond as if something meaningful occurred.

That is why language like "sham" becomes important. It is not merely an insult; it is a description of a process designed to perform legitimacy while maintaining control. It is a warning against confusing procedure with democracy. And it is a reminder that democracy is not only ballots. It is institutions, rights, and equal membership in the political community...

... If international actors are serious about stability, they cannot treat elections as an endpoint. They must treat them as a moment that requires sharper scrutiny, not softer pressure. They must ask not only whether votes were cast, but who was allowed to compete, who was imprisoned, which territories were excluded, and which communities remain outside citizenship. The Rohingya question is ... a test of whether Myanmar's future can be built on inclusion rather than exclusion.

Quotes above from: <https://rohingyakhobor.com/an-election-without-a-people-myanmars-vote-and-the-rohingyas-permanent-exile/> sourced 29 January 2026)

7. The Case for Australian Leadership

As a respected regional democracy with a record of constructive engagement in Southeast Asia, Australia is well positioned to advocate for strong international action.

a. Diplomatic Leadership

- Advance proposals for a no-fly zone or comparable civilian protection mechanisms.
- Encourage ASEAN to adopt stronger, enforceable positions on humanitarian access.
- Support efforts through UN agencies to monitor and enforce humanitarian protections.
- Support the case brought by The Gambia in the International Court of Justice, which claims that genocide is being committed against the Rohingya people. The case has only just finished proceedings on 29 January 2026 and is awaiting judgment of the court (see transcripts and details on the ICJ website <https://www.icj-cij.org/case/178>). We note, for your information that in 1948, when Myanmar gained independence from the British, the Rohingya people (who supported the British against Japan in WW2) were promised an autonomous state, but were rebuffed by the new leadership. The persecution of the Rohingya people continued from then (see **attached** 'Myanmar: Rakhine State' speech to House of Representatives by Member for Lilley, Wayne Swan on 5 February 2018)
- Australia could play an important role in protecting the Rohingya and other ethnic groups similar to how it did in East Timor, including supporting the establishment of, and joining, a Peace-keeping force.

b. Accountability and Targeted Sanctions

- Strengthen Magnitsky-style sanctions on individuals and entities involved in airstrikes, trafficking, or systematic abuses.
- Support international justice mechanisms, including ICC and ICJ proceedings.

c. Humanitarian Assistance

- Increase funding for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Indonesia.
- Prioritise Rohingya refugees at highest risk (particularly women and children) in Australia's humanitarian intake.

d. Support for Civil Society and Democratic Movements

- Take a lead internationally with strong, deeply considered language and actions to not reward authoritarian sham democratic election process and to highlight the position of Rohingya within this context as outlined in Section 6.
- Provide long-term capacity-building and political backing to Myanmar's pro-democracy actors and community organisations.
- Support independent media, civil society, women's networks, and ethnic organisations working toward accountability and stability.

7. Conclusion

The Rohingya crisis remains one of the most urgent, protracted, and devastating human rights issues in the region. Despite decades of international concern, little meaningful change has occurred on the ground. Civilians continue to face daily violence, starvation, displacement, and trafficking.

Australia can, and should, take a stronger leadership role — particularly by advocating for measures that directly protect civilians, restrict the military's capacity for mass violence, and disrupt criminal exploitation networks.

A no-fly zone, or comparable civilian protection mechanisms, coupled with enhanced humanitarian access and diplomatic pressure and leadership mentioned above, would represent a meaningful step toward reducing suffering and creating conditions for meaningful dialogue and democratic transition in Myanmar.

Australia's voice, credibility, and regional influence can save lives and help prevent further atrocities. We urge the Committee to adopt the recommendations outlined in this submission.

Noor Zaman
President, Queensland Rohingya Community Inc.



Background: Mr Noor Zaman

Noor Zaman is President of Queensland Rohingya Community Inc., He is a well-known community leader, has established strong relationships with state and federal elected officials and continues to advocate for the plight of Rohingya who remain in Myanmar and in refugee camps in Bangladesh. Noor fled Myanmar in 1991 escaping ethnic cleansing and persecution, as a child and spent many years living in refugee camps in Bangladesh. Around 2004 Noor left the camp due to the poor conditions and spent five years living in Chittagong, Bangladesh's second-largest city. Noor maintained contact with friends and family in the refugee camps, as well as UNHCR Officers appointed to the camps. When third party countries began resettling Rohingya people from refugee camps in Bangladesh around 2005, the UNHCR Officer at the time collaborated with Noor to communicate the process with people in the camp to establish trust. In 2009, Noor was one of the first Rohingya humanitarian entrants to be resettled in Australia. Today, Noor has a place to call home, Brisbane, Australia.

Appendix: References

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