

# Arakan Rohingya Union (ARU) Formed



JEDDAH, SAUDI ARABIA

A CONVENTION was held at the General Secretariat of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) on 30 and 31 May 2011 attended by Senior Rohingya Leaders representing many Rohingya Associations from various countries around the world and with the participation of the Euro-Burma office in Brussels, to discuss the difficulties faced by the Rohingya people and find ways and means to assist them.

The convention issued a joint statement which included the formation of the Arakan Rohingya Union (ARU) to seek a political solution to the problems faced by the Rohingya people.

## Arkan state

The newly formed Union, which currently composes twenty five organisations, was formed on the agreed principles of an indivisible Arakan State within the territorial integrity of the Union of Myanmar and seeking peaceful co-existence, democracy, human rights and federalism.

The ARU Congress will seek to include representatives of all Rohingya organisations. The convention also agreed upon the establishment of an ARU Council comprising of ten members from different countries to oversee the affairs of the ARU. The Arakan Rohingya Union (ARU), which will endeavor to register itself as a non-profit organisation in the USA, formed a Secretariat to be run by Dr Wakar Uddin who was elected as Director General of the Secretariat for an initial period of 18 months.

## Role of OIC

The participants in the convention, who agreed to establish a Charter, expressed their gratitude and appreciation for the efforts of the OIC Secretary General, Professor Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu and the OIC General Secretariat's Department of Muslim Minorities and Communities for convening this historic convention of Senior Rohingya Leaders in order to bring peace, prosperity and hope for the future of the Rohingya people.

## History of Rohingyas

Arakan, a geographically isolated area in western Myanmar,

a mountain range separating it from central Burma, had been an independent kingdom until 1784. It is named by the present regime as the Rakhine state. Two major ethnic races, the Rohingya (Muslims) and the Rakhine (Buddhists) inhabit Arakan.

The unofficial total population of Arakan is more than 5 million including about 1.5 million Rohingyas. At present both the races stand at almost equal proportions inside Arakan.

Early Muslim settlements in Arakan date back to the 7th century AD. The Arab traders have been in contact with Arakan since the third century and they had introduced Islam to Arakan around 788 CE.

During that time a dynasty, Chandra was ruling the kingdom of Arakan.

## Arrival of Arab merchants

The Arab merchants carried out missionary activities by spreading Islam side by side with their trade. In the process, a large number of people were converted to Islam. Many of the Arab traders married to local women and settled there permanently.

Due to conversion, inter-marriage and migration, the Muslim population grew to large numbers during the subsequent centuries.

## Muslim ruler of Arakan

These Muslims came to be known as Rohingyas, a term derived from the Arabic term Raham (God blessing). Until the 15th century Arakan was ruled by a non-Muslim king, Naramaikhalah, who himself embraced Islam in 1404 and adopted the Muslim name of Solaiman Shah.

After the death of last Muslim king Solaiman Shah 11 Buddhism had arrived in the region from Tibet, Mongolia. By the middle of the 10th century, the Mongolian race Barmans mostly Buddhists had established their power in Burma proper. During the decaying years of Muslim rule in Arakan a Burman king of Ava, Bodaw Phaya invaded Arakan and gained control of Arakan in 1784. Thus came the end of Independent Arakan.

## British invasion

In 1824, the British East India Company invaded Burma and through the Anglo-Burma war

Arakan came under the sway of the British. The whole of Burma including Arakan was brought under the Indian system of Administration.

During the colonial rule the British were not interested in the national integration of diverse communities in Burma.

On the contrary, those divisions were used for prolonging colonial rule with its policy of divide and rule. The Nationalist leader General Aung San convened a conference of all ethnic groups at Pang long in 1947.

## New Constitution

It was agreed that all states would be given regional Autonomy with the provision of seceding after 10 years of Independence. However, the constitution which was adopted after Aung San death declared that the new state called Burma would be unitary in character, with no Autonomy for the provinces.

The constitution caused immediate ethnic insurrection which became worse after 1958, even though, the Prime Minister U Nu had declared Buddhism as the state religion of the country to appease the ethnic groups, as a great majority of them were Buddhists. However their further alienated the Muslims in Arakan who felt more insecure in Independent Burma.

## Anti-Muslim activities

The government dismissed many Muslim officers and replaced them with Buddhists in Arakan.

An all-out effort was made to transmigrate Buddhists from Burma proper to Arakan in order to diminish the Muslim majority.

The state Peace and Development Council (SPDC), supreme body of the regime rejects the existence of a separate ethnic group called Rohingya.

They are not recognised as one of the 135 national races by Myanmar government. As per the rules stated in section 3 of the 1982 citizenship Law, the Rohingyas are not considered to be a National ethnic group and therefore, they are not qualified to obtain full citizenship.

However, the family list only indicates names of family members and date of birth. It may not indicate place of birth, which in-effect prevents people from furnishing conclusive evidence of

(Above) A scene of the OIC's convention on the issues of Muslim Rohingyas refugees in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in the end of May, 2011. (Below) Muslim Rohingya women and a toddler in a refugee camp. Picture: UNHCR, www.asianews.it



birth in Myanmar as required by the 1982 Law.

Thus the theoretical entitlement to citizenship for Rohingyas becomes meaningless in practice.

## Controversial law

In fact, the 1982 act was specially designed effectively to deny the Rohingyas the right to a nationality because the promulgation of this law took place soon after the Rohingyas who fled to Bangladesh during 1978 had been repatriated.

According to a report by Amnesty International this law is certainly discriminatory and is in clear violation of Myanmar's obligation as a state and a member of the UN to protect and respect human rights without distinction, such as race, colour, sex, Language, religion Political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

## Oppressive regime

The military regime has prohibited the Rohingyas, their rights to freedom of movement and selection of their place of residence within the state.

According to the Law, Rohingyas in northern Arakan state must routinely apply for permission before traveling to other villages or towns.

Since 1992, the regime has introduced a regulation that every Muslim in Northern Arakan is required to ask for prior permission of the authority before getting married.

According to UDHR (Article 16):

Men and Women of full age without any limitation due to race, nationality, or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. There are consistent reports of young couples fleeing to Bangladesh because this is the only way for them to get married. Their names have often been removed from their family lists by the authorities.

## Migration to Bangladesh

The poor have gone into serious debt to get permission. When they are unable to reimburse their debt, they have fled to Bangladesh. However, when they are in Bangladesh they are merely branded as economic migrants without realizing their unbearable plights.

In fact, the presence of the UNHCR and UN agencies and NGOs do not provide the necessary safeguard to the refugees. They cannot fulfill the social, economic, political and spiritual needs of the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. The new arrivals that entered into Bangladesh after September 1992 are not recognized as UN refugees and are not accepted in refugee camps.

Nearly 350,000 undocumented Rohingya refugees have entered into Bangladesh. In a report on the plight of Rohingya people to Bangladesh, the International Federation of Human Rights League (FIDH) pointed out that the UNHCR is entrapped in an insane policy, in complete contradiction to its mandate.

OIC Secretariat/ IINA