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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[29 August 2016]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Situation of the Rohingya in Myanmar

In early May 2016 the government of Myanmar under Aung San Suu Kyi banned the term “Rohingya”. The government stated that the term will be avoided because it would be an emotionally charged term. Instead, the Rohingya are now to be referred to as “people who believe in Islam”. This is not only absurd, but also highly dangerous. Ethnic identity is being mixed up with religious beliefs. This gives the wrong impression that all Muslims in Myanmar belong to the Rohingya and are thus not recognized as citizens. This is poison for the coexistence between Muslims and Buddhists in Myanmar. There are also other Muslim minorities in Myanmar. The Kaman, for example, are an officially recognized ethnic group that has been living in the country for generations. In contrast, the authorities refuse to recognize most of the Rohingya as citizens because they are unable to present proof that their families have been living in the country since the mid-19th century.

A few days later the new ambassador of the United States to Myanmar said that his country will keep using the term “Rohingya” for the persecuted Muslim minority. Only the European Union followed the call of Aung San Suu Kyi to avoid the term to describe persecuted Muslims in Myanmar.

In June 2016 an Anti-Muslim riot started in Pegu Division's Thuye Thamein village in Waw Township. A mob demolished a mosque, a Muslim cemetery and a house and storeroom belonging to a Muslim family. After that 200-250 Muslim village people fled from their home. Another Buddhist mob of over 200 Buddhists stormed in the end of June a village, attacked a Muslim man, pillaged his house and destroyed a mosque. These Buddhists believed that the local Muslims built a Muslim school, but the Muslims said it is only a depot.

In July 2016 a mob burned down a Muslim Prayer Hall in Hpakant Township. 30 Muslim families had to flee since the outbreak of the riot. Before they burned down the Prayer Hall the local Buddhist nationalists issued an ultimatum to demolish the illegal extension to the Muslim Prayer Hall. Under the new government the Rohingya are still living in miserable conditions. There are still 125,000 Rohingya refugees living in camps – with a lack of supplies, cut off from the outside world, and under inhumane conditions. The internally displaced persons and the Rohingya have to cope with severely limited freedom of movement and systematic violations of their personal rights (regarding their right to marriage, when searching for jobs, etc.).

In early August 2016, the Government planned to demolish illegal Buddhist temples and Islamic mosques. They announced that they will destroy all religious buildings which were built without permission. That affects over 200 religious buildings and will hurt people of all religions. Also on August 6, 2016, Muslim residents of Rangoon's Thingangyun Township travelled allegedly without government approval. They failed to return their “white cards” (temporary citizenship) last year. Immigration authorities have charged them.

The latest news is that Rohingya children are not allowed to learn principles of the Islamic religion. The Rohingya teachers were forced to sign a written pledge not to teach from the Holy Quran or anything related to the Islamic religion. Teachers are threatened with a 10-year imprisonment if they violated this decision.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the UN Human Rights Council:

- To demand an end to the ostracism and the persecution of the Rohingya and end the apartheid-like discrimination against the minority. Denials of massive human rights violations and refusals to acknowledge the identity of ethnic or religious minorities often are the roots for future conflicts,
- To call on the European Union to keep using the term “Rohingya” for this persecuted Muslim minority,
- To reinstate the citizenship of the Rohingya in order for them to be able to enjoy the same rights as their fellow countrymen,