



Incident 2 – Chut Pyin village, Rathedaung Township

The Chut Pyin incident occurred on August 27, 2017. After the incident in Chut Pyin, all remaining Chut Pyin Muslim villagers left for Bangladesh. Following are excerpts from findings, based on statements by a local Rakhine ethnic national, who was involved in the Chut Pyin incident, and eight Muslims from the neighboring Chin (Pyaing Taung) village, who witnessed the Chut Pyin incident.

(a) Profile of Chut Pyin village

Chut Pyin village, in Chut Pyin village tract, Rathedaung Township, is located on the west side of the Mayu River. Chut Pyin village tract consists of Chin (Pyaing Taung) Muslim village which has over 300 households, Pi Dauk Myaing (NaTaLa) ethnic village, which has about over 50 households, Pyin Shey Rakhine village, which has 10 households, and Chut Pyin village. Chut Pyin is a village where Muslims and ethnic nationals historically cohabited; before the events of August 2017 there were 32 Rakhine households, 19 Thet households, and around 200 Muslim households. There is only a field separating Chin village and Chut Pyin village; it takes ten to fifteen minutes to walk between the two, or about two minutes on a motorbike.

(b) Statement of a local Rakhine national

Statement 1

In the aftermath of the 2012 disturbances, trust between the Rakhine and Muslims was somewhat affected. The incident resulted in further restrictions on the whole Muslim community. But the relations between my Muslim business partners and me were as normal and did not change until the 2017 disturbances.

As a local tradesman, working hand-in-hand with Muslim businesses, and as a Rakhine national community leader, I wish to relate my eyewitness account of the August 25, 2017, incident.

About a month before the 2017 incident, one important thing occurred. As this was the time when relations between the two communities were deteriorating, due to reports about ARSA's activities, this issue had a tremendous impact on social interactions in the region and on the growing distrust between the communities. The incident was that Than Htay, an ethnic villager from Chut Pyin, Rathedaung Township, went searching for snails together with two of his friends

in the depths of the Mayu mountains and was killed by terrorist fighters, leaving no trace behind. A group of over a hundred villagers, including people from neighboring ethnic villages, searched the jungle thoroughly for Than Htay. At one point Than Htay's shoulder bag was found in the Mayu mountain. They also discovered a terrorist training camp on a nearby hill. But no trace of Than Htay was found. They discovered and seized rice, oil, and large cooking pots used to cook beef at the training camp. He [Than Htay] always used to go around by himself, and never had problems when meeting with Muslims on the way. It could be that he was killed without any trace after he accidentally discovered a terrorist training camp. From that time forward, there was almost a complete breakdown in relations and an increase in tension between the Muslims and the ethnic nationals.

From around May or June 2017, ARSA members had a strong foothold in Chut Pyin village. They were able to persuade villagers to support them and mobilized villagers with diverse approaches. They had already given these villagers military trainings, including courses on how to make improvised explosive devices. Those who did not follow ARSA or accept their membership drives were beaten almost to death and tortured. Some who dared oppose them were treated cruelty, or even beheaded. Muslim acquaintances who were friendly with me pleaded with me to help them raise this issue with the relevant government authorities, saying that the situation could get worse, if the prevailing conditions continued. I went and reported this to relevant security personnel. The security personnel not only ignored my reports, but even told me outright that, "it was good to have Kalar¹ killing Kalar." The authorities did not pay attention or attach any importance to the reports of grave concerns and just disregarded them. Because of their irresponsibility, the issue has now become a crisis.

On the day of the incident, four soldiers were said to have entered the village to inquire about ARSA. According to villagers, the soldiers came to find food. I assume it was for both reasons. According to a military officer I spoke with, when the four soldiers went into the village, they saw Kalars killing a cow, and then cooking and consuming it. The soldiers saw some people among the villagers who they suspected of being ARSA, the soldiers therefore returned to report this to their superiors. A platoon was accordingly sent to the village and demands were made to the village authorities to find and hand over the ARSA members. The village authorities objected to the demands and said they could not hand them [the ARSA members] over. Villagers gathered and were shouting that they could not hand them over. The military officer told me that when these reports came in, he, himself, was near the higher ranking military authorities. The Chief of the Bureau of Special Operation, Regional Military Commander, Tactical Operations Commander, and the Border Guard Police Regimental Commander were all there. He [the military officer] said the Special Military Operations Bureau Chief did not give exact instructions on how to proceed in response to the reports. The Regional Commander said, "In this situation, besides the security of the area, the ethnic nationals would suffer. Let them not suffer. Strike the first

¹ A derogatory term used for Muslims.

blow.” The other commanders did not know how to act on this command, so they kept looking at his face. The Regional Commander then said, “What you need to do, do it decisively.” Soon after that, gunshots were heard. It seems that the military viewed the majority of the Muslims in Chut Pyin village as supporters of ARSA and thought that, if their members were not identified and annihilated, this group would be a danger to regional security and the ethnic nationals with whom the Muslims cohabited.

I was not in Chut Pyin village while the shooting was happening, as I was on my way back to the village. I could hear the sounds of gunfire, though. I arrived only after the shooting was over. When I arrived at Chut Pyin village, I saw many Muslim villagers were dead. They said not only small arms, but also launchers were used in the shootings. I also saw houses in the village on fire. There were soldiers and many villagers from ethnic villages present, but no one tried to stop the fires from burning and spreading. I do not know exactly how many dead bodies I saw. But, at a guess, there could have been over a hundred.

Muslims from Chut Pyin village, with whom I was acquainted, called and told me that the military started shooting before the villagers could do anything. Some Muslim friends told me that ARSA supporters had planned to attack the military, even if the military had not started shooting. It seems that the military had received news of this in advance.

According to a military officer with whom I am acquainted, there had already been instances where a mob would attack and kill police force members with their sticks and knives. He said that generally, when a mob approached the military to attack it, the military would verbally order it to stop. If the mob did not obey the order and kept approaching, the military would shoot in the air, as a warning. If the mob still ignored it and kept approaching, the military would shoot directly into the mob, and when someone from the mob used a gun to shoot, the military would retaliate with launcher attacks. In this incident the military and police responded to the threat of an attack by striking first. In the incidents that occurred in villages such as Chein Kharli, Alai Than Kyaw, Gu Dar Pyin, and Chut Pyin, the military retaliated against the attacks by Muslims.

I want to state that I don’t view these kinds of military actions as justified. To put it in a nutshell, these situations occurred because there was not effective implementation of the rule of law.

Among the incidents that occurred [in August 2017], the Chut Pyin incident caused a large number of casualties. Among all the killings, ARSA’s killing of Hindus was the most brutal and cruel. I would designate the incident in Chut Pyin as the second-most brutal.

One soldier said that they did not act like this just to drive out all the Bengalis, but that they had to take a firm action because the whole village of Chut Pyin had turned into ARSA members.

There were so many corpses in Chut Pyin village that when they were burnt, not all could be burnt down to ashes; some were buried, and some dead bodies were pulled apart by wild animals; I saw the dismembered bodies myself. Some of the corpses that were buried resurfaced after the rains. Although local nationals told the military to systematically destroy the remaining dead bodies, it took a long time for them to take the complaint seriously and act on it. Finally, these corpses were covered with earth by using a bulldozer. I would estimate that there were over a hundred dead bodies.

I view this incident as a deplorable crime. The military's objective was not to ethnically cleanse the Muslims, but to completely annihilate ARSA supporters. But this tough retaliation was excessive; more than that was called for, I believe.

I did not see the military stealing things from villagers or robbing them. But I saw them taking away their goats, fowls and food items. Some of the ethnic nationals entered houses owned by Muslims and took things in the presence of the soldiers. The soldiers did not interfere or prevent them from doing so. I also saw some of the villagers taking away cows, owned by Muslims, and reselling them for 10,000 Kyats each.

The majority of the houses in Chut Pyin village were burnt down because of the launcher attacks. In some villages, the fires were due to some ethnic nationals torching the houses. In these cases, the military did not prevent the ethnic nationals from burning the villages. I personally saw that the nationals set houses in Zay Di Pyin village on fire. I heard that, in some villages, the military prevented the setting of fires, but I did not see this myself.

The ethnic nationals did not do anything to force the Muslims to leave for Bangladesh. They just felt that having ARSA-supporting Muslim villages near the villages of nationals was critically dangerous for them [the ethnic nationals]. They therefore wanted Muslims to leave their village and not to return and resettle near their village again.

I have personally seen police and soldiers beating up Muslims. I have noticed that there are three reasons for those beatings.

1. When security forces meet with Muslims and tell them to 'Yat' [Stop, in Burmese], and they don't, they were stopped and beaten up. I learnt from one Muslim friend that they did not stop because they didn't understand the word 'Yat' which the security forces use. I have seen similar incidents in Zay Di Pyin, Chein Kharli, and Chin villages.
2. When police and soldiers enter Muslim houses to carry out inspection, some households would start up a fight and end up getting beaten up.
3. Some Muslims were beaten up without any reason, just because the security forces couldn't stand the sight of Muslims, and deliberately looked for an issue with them.

Of these three reasons, the first two are more common. I accompanied the military when they were doing clearance operations in three villages near us. Some of the Muslims would not cooperate and would do silly things. I have seen four of them get beaten up as a result of such behavior. Those who did what they were told were not beaten up. In Tha Pyay Taw village, I saw beatings for no reason, but just because the security forces crossed eyes with the Muslims. It is not that every Muslim that they encountered was beaten up by the police or soldiers. Three soldiers called and beat up three or four grown-up Muslim men. One reason was that the soldiers couldn't stand the look of the Muslims and another reason was that they wanted to instill fear in them. I have seen that by beating three or four grown-ups, they make the others who see the incident afraid, so that they do not dare oppose them.

In all villages that I personally accompanied the military to, I did not see or hear of any instances of rape. I went to most of the villages where the incidents occurred. I did not hear about any rape cases in Zay Di Pyin, Tha Pyay Taw, Chut Pyin, or Chin villages, to which I accompanied the authorities. If there were, they would surely have been reported. They were not reported, because there weren't any rape cases. Anyway, when lightning attacks were occurring, it would be impossible for rape to take place. Also, in the majority of other villages, everyone had fled even before the military troops arrived. Muslim businessmen who were my business partners, always call me to lend them a hand, wherever they are, even if they are in Bangladesh. Now they tell me that they don't have anything left, as everything they owned had been burnt down and lost. When I asked them whether there were any rape cases or whether they had witnessed any, they replied that they had heard of cases in some other places, but that there were no cases in the places where they used to live. I myself saw beatings, the taking away of food items, and shootings in Chut Pyin village, but did not witness any rape.

To summarize the whole incident, I would reiterate that these grievous events occurred because the government was not able to systematically implement the rule of law.

(c) Statements of eight Muslims from Chin village

Statement 2

Chin village is a Muslim village with about 350 households. It is only a field's distance away from Chut Pyin village. They are only about a furlong apart. There's nothing to obstruct the view between the two villages, and since they are not far from one another, one can clearly see everything happening in one village from the other. Walking from Chin village to Chut Pyin takes between ten and fifteen minutes. It would take less than three minutes to go with a motorbike. Walking to Zay Di Pyin from Chin village would take about 30 minutes. There is a creek in between. Rakhine are the majority in Zay Di Pyin, which has only about 100 Muslim households. There are about 40 Rakhine households, 20 Thet ethnic households, and over 200 Muslim households in Chut Pyin village. In the past,

there were no issues, whatsoever, between the Muslims and the ethnic nationals. They lived interdependently and peacefully with each other.

To recount the initial stage of the Chut Pyin crisis that occurred in August 2017, a total of three persons, one Rakhine and two Thet from Chut Pyin village climbed up the Mayu hills in search of snails. One of the three, Than Htay, got lost, and only the remaining two returned to the village. The following day, Rakhine from neighboring areas gathered to look for him [Than Htay] in the Mayu mountain range, without success. They looked for him on the second day, again, and still didn't find him. When they came back, they accused the Muslims from Ah Htet [Upper] Nan Yar and Chut Pyin villages, "Your people committed this crime," and started causing problems for them. The Muslims replied that they didn't know anything about it, that they were not involved in it, and that they [the Rakhine] should not create problems. The next day, three Muslims from Ni Lin Paw village, who had been working as farm laborers for a Rakhine national from Zay Di Pyin, were murdered by Rakhine locals during the night, while they were in their farm hut. Their dead bodies were thrown in the nearby creek. Their bodies were only retrieved three days later. I personally saw the two corpses, which were tied together with their heads missing. This problem occurred about one month before the Chut Pyin incident [the interviewee could not remember the exact date]. From that time onwards, interactions between the ethnic nationals and Muslims broke down almost completely.

As a result of this issue, there were ongoing problems between the police and the villagers from southern villages, such as Ah Htet Nan Yar, Out [Lower] Nan Yar, Than Du, Ah Du, Be Lar Mi, Ni Lin Paw, and Pyaing Taung.² The police detained some people in relation to the disappearance of an ethnic national from Chut Pyin village, who [went missing while he] was searching for snails. A crowd tried to defend [the detainees] and forcefully snatch back those who were arrested. As a result the tension between the police and Muslim villagers began to grow. This situation resulted in Muslims fleeing from their villages, even before August 25. They were already leaving in July.

Amidst loss of trust, suspicion, and tension between the Rakhine and the Muslims, on July 29, 2017, the area where the Muslims lived in Zay Di Pyin was fenced in and blocked by Rakhine from Zay Di Pyin. The Muslims reported the situation to the government authorities, who responded that they would solve the problem, but did not take any action.

Problems erupted on August 25, 2017. At about 1:15 p.m. on that day, Muslim houses in Zay Di Pyin were torched by the Rakhine. At that time, there were both police and military in Zay Di Pyin. There were also military and Border Guard Police in Chut Pyin village. We heard that, in Zay Di Pyin, the Rakhine executed a Muslim family who were not able to run away. I did not personally see who committed the crime. Muslim victims of the fire in Zay Di Pyin fled to Chin village.

² This Pyaing Taung is in Ah Htet Nan Yar village tract and should not be confused with Chin (Pyaing Taung) in Chut Pyin village tract.

I heard about what was happening through my Muslim relatives who called me from that village. At that time, the military was stationed at the school in Chut Pyin village.

After Zay Di Pyin was burnt down, at about 2 p.m. on August 27, 2017, the military surrounded Chut Pyin from the eastern, western, and northern sides, leaving only the southern side open, and started shooting. There was a lot of gunfire. As my house was at the southern end of Chin village, I could see everything plainly from my house. Soldiers opened fire, using launchers and guns. As Chut Pyin villagers came running out, the soldiers shot on sight. As the soldiers were firing their long-range launchers from Chut Pyin, some of the shells exploded near Chin village, causing Chin villagers to become afraid, abandon their homes and run out of the village. A woman from Chin village was wounded in her thigh. The injured woman fled to Bangladesh with her husband.

Those villagers who fled from Chut Pyin were followed and arrested by the military and the police. The women were released, while the men were kept in detention and later executed. Men who impersonated women, while fleeing, were also arrested and killed. Chin village and Chut Pyin village are only about one furlong distant. In between is Chut Pyin Rakhine village. At that time, the battalion commander from Battalion 33 was in Chut Pyin village. I had to attend the morning meetings which he called as I was the Chin village In-Charge³ at that time. Beginning in the morning of the next day, August 28, soldiers were seen collecting the remains of the dead in Chut Pyin village and burning them. Corpses were also scattered in the fields. That was the day of the Muslim Qurbani Eid. I was watching from Chin village embankment and was able to see everything. There were 387 casualties in Chut Pyin village. Originally, there were over 1,200 Muslims in Chut Pyin village, but over 800 of them had already fled. Some are known to have arrived wounded in Bangladesh. As well as the soldiers, Border Guard Police were involved in the incident. On August 28, some soldiers called me and told me to hand over a child who remained alive. I then tried to find that child's relatives and sent the child back to them.

Statement 3

What I know is that the main reason for the shooting and torching of Chut Pyin village was the belief that al-Yaqin fighters,⁴ who were revolting against the government, had taken refuge in Chut Pyin. The military was shooting until about 4:30 p.m. We thought that next they would attack Chin village, and so we fled to the coconut palm grove. When we called the Colonel, he said that they would not do anything to those who did not commit any crime, so we returned to the village at sunset. As they had told us, the military did not do anything to Chin village.

³ In villages without a village Administrator, a Head of Ten Households or Head of Hundred Households is appointed as village In-Charge with responsibility for the administration of the village.

⁴ Harakah al-Yaqin is a former name for ARSA.

Statement 4

I called my friends in Chut Pyin and got the information that there were 358 killed in their village.

Statement 5

Over 200 Muslims were killed in Chut Pyin. My relatives were among them. Women were known to have been released, while men were detained and executed by the military and the Rakhine. I learnt about this from a relative who had fled to Ah Htet Nan Yar.

Statement 6

At about 1:30 p.m. on August 27, 2017, the Border Guard Police and the military executed at least 200 Chut Pyin villagers. They set fire to over 250, nearly 300, houses in Chut Pyin village. Rakhine nationals were also involved. Chut Pyin village and Chin village, where I live, are only about one furlong apart. The military was at that time at the school in the Rakhine village, in the middle of the two villages. My elder brother who is a village elder, and I, a Head of Ten Households, were in contact with the Colonel from the military (I forgot his name). He told us to remain calm.

Statement 7

Starting from the day after the Chut Pyin incident, dead bodies were collected, dowsed with gasoline and set on fire. The military, police, and the Rakhine collaborated in the Chut Pyin incident. During that time, the Chut Pyin village tract administrator was Aung Thein Mya. He was the uncle of the person who was lost in the jungle. I presume, he was hurt about what happened to his nephew, and so did this against us, the Muslims. For this reason, he misinformed the military, using various approaches to convince them that there were terrorists in Chut Pyin. In reality, there was no such thing as ARSA or terrorists. We know what the situation in our village is. Chut Pyin Muslim villagers said that Aung Thein Mya was the person who brought in the military authorities. No Chut Pyin villagers remain in this area, anymore. In spite of my telling them not to leave, they left, saying that they would not stay as they felt unsafe. I think, the Rakhine, who were eyewitnesses to the Chut Pyin incident, would not recount what happened. Except for the military opening fire and killing people, the military did not do anything else. As Chut Pyin village was razed by fire, there was nothing left. The cattle that were outside could have been taken away by anyone. Things and houses were destroyed in our Chin village. The Rakhine tore them apart and took them away.

The military was not involved in what happened at Zay Di Pyin. It was besieged by the Rakhine. But during the Chut Pyin village incident the military and Border Guard Police besieged the area, opened fire, and committed arson.

During the incident, the military and the Border Guard Police were not seen or heard to be committing rape, torture, or looting. But there were instances where

they detained and interrogated some of those who were suspected of being ARSA members. Some were given prison sentences.

Statement 8

There is no ARSA or terrorist at all in our villages, including Chut Pyin. There were no clashes in Chut Pyin. All Chut Pyin villagers ran away. I do not know about loss of lives, though. They fled directly to Bangladesh. We saw Chut Pyin village being torched, and we were all very terrified. Women, especially, were completely horrified. Because the soldiers did not allow us to use the main road, we had to flee along jungle paths to the Nyaung Chaung area.

At that time, my wife was pregnant and her due date was about three more days. So to avoid the situation, we fled to outside the village for the night, but came back to the village the next day and stayed in our house. Two days later, my wife gave birth. On September 9, our family once again left Chin village. At that time, all Muslim houses in neighboring Muslim villages – Ah Htet Nan Yar, Out Nan Yar, Ni Lin Paw, Be Lar Mi, Than Du, Zay Di Pyin, and Chut Pyin – had been set on fire, with villagers fleeing to the other country through Kyauk Pan Du, crossing over the Mayu mountain.

Only our Chin village remained. The military did not do anything when they came since our village did not create any problems. At that time, Tha Pyay Taw, Thin Ga Net, and Tar Zaw villages still remained. At about 9 a.m. on September 9, they came to Tha Pyay Taw and set fire to the village. Then Thin Ga Net was also set on fire. After this, Chin villagers, got worried and started thinking, “all of them are burning, we are the only remaining village among Rakhine villages, we cannot just stay on without leaving,” and so villagers began to leave. Because the military and the police did not allow people to use the main road, they had to leave via the forest paths. They started leaving on September 9 and sought shelter at Du Oe Thei Ma village near Buthidaung.

Statement 9

The military surrounded Chut Pyin village on all four sides and opened fire. Then they carried out the arson. While they were burning Chut Pyin village to the ground, Padauk Myaing (NaTaLa) villagers and Border Guard Police took away my 92 cows.

Out of Zay Di Pyin, Chut Pyin, Thin Ga Net, Out Nanyar, Than Du, Ni Lin Paw, Pyaing Taung, Ahtet Nanyar, Thein Taung, Pan Kaing, Tha Pyay Taw, Tarsaw, and Hpetleik villages, Chin, Thin Ga Net, and Tarsaw were not set on fire. I heard Thab Pyay Taw was torched by the Rakhine. Except for Chut Pyin village, the military was not among those who carried out the arson. The Rakhine started the fires in other villages. No rape cases were heard of in any village.

Only Chin village was left unburnt. After the military had left, the Rakhine, came to burn Chin village carrying guns and knives. I think the Rakhine only wanted to take our possessions. When Rakhine in civilian clothes turned up, we could hear the sounds of gunfire. I’m not sure whether the guns were issued by the

government. We made a run for it after hearing the sounds of shooting. I left Chin village on September 9. While we were fleeing, the Colonel called us, asking, why we left, whether it was because we didn't trust his words, and said that he guaranteed that nothing would happen to us. We told him that we left out of fear, because the Rakhine were coming.

The Rakhine plundered my possessions, worth hundreds of millions of kyats. When I called and asked the administrator from the Rakhine village, he said that I did not have any possessions left.

Forty-three families from Zay Di Pyin, Chin, Thin Ga Net, Tarsaw, and Tha Pyay Taw villages went to Du Oe Thei Ma village, Buthidaung Township. They left only on September 9. They remained in Zay Di Pyin for that long, because they were acquainted with a military captain who told them that they could stay.

We heard that Tha Pyay Taw Muslim village was also set on fire on September 8. I did not see who carried out the arson. I do not know whether the military and the police went there or not. When houses were seen burning in Chut Pyin village, Chin villagers dared not stay in their village anymore, since the two villages are close together. They started leaving their village, saying they would come and burn Chin village too. It was not that the whole village left at the same time. They left on their own, each individual family making their own arrangement and going where their feet led them. As the military did not allow them to use the main road, they went along the forest paths. When we left, the Rakhine followed us to plunder our belongings. Two women were left behind when we fled. We heard that both of them died in the end. Besides being old, they were not mentally well. Fleeing along jungle paths, one had to cross streams without bridges, making it impossible for elderly people to follow the others, so they were left behind. We do not know whether the two died due to starvation or whether they were murdered.

During the incident, the military did not commit rape nor any sexual advances. There were instances where the soldiers beat up people who went back to their villages in search of their buffalo and cows, when their villages were set on fire. But they were not executed.

There was no shooting in Chin village. The military did not torch the village. People decided to leave after seeing the Chut Pyin incident, out of fear that it would spread to their village. There was no damage or destruction by the military in Chin village.

On August 27, the second day after people from Zay Di Pyin fled to Chin village, Chut Pyin village was seen burning. All the cattle were scattered, and the owners were beaten up while in search of their livestock. This is what I heard, but I did not witness it. On September 8, I heard that Tha Pyay Taw village was razed to the ground. I do not know whether the military and the police were in that village or not. After seeing and hearing fires raging in nearby villages, I was afraid to stay in Chin village, I came out crossing over fields and streams. Later, Rakhine

nationals raided the houses left vacant in the village, and took away the goods inside the houses.

Two sick elderly women were left behind in Chin village. We heard these two were fed by the ethnic nationals during that period. Both have since passed away due to their sicknesses. I did not hear that women were raped. Villagers were said to have been beaten up by soldiers. Among my relatives, there was no one beaten up in that way.

I was not allowed to continue my studies. The 2012 turmoil occurred when I was attending Grade 10 in Buthidaung. Later a high school was established in Zay Di Pyin village. As I needed a school leaving certificate from Buthidaung to continue my class in Zay Di Pyin, I went to Buthidaung to ask for it, but without any success. Therefore, I passed my Grade 9, and am still at Grade 10.

Between 2013 and 2017, no teachers were appointed to schools in our village. There was also no health care services in Zay Di Pyin. I could not travel to Rathedaung Town. Muslims have been restricted in their freedom of movement since the days of NaSaKa border security force⁵. Muslims are also rarely employed. If they are, the rate of pay for their labor is much less than that for others.

⁵ NaSaKa, the border area immigration control headquarters, were largely responsible for controlling the Muslim population in northern Rakhine until they were disbanded in 2013.