

Edinburgh calls for peace in Myanmar

The Lord Provost of Edinburgh is to write to the state leader of Burma calling for a peaceful resolution to the Rohingya crisis.

At a meeting of the Full Council on Thursday elected members agreed unanimously to the Lord Provost's request to publicly condemn the crisis and express the people of Edinburgh's demands for the violence to end.



Lord Provost of the City of Edinburgh The Rt
Hon Frank Ross

Writing exclusively for the Edinburgh Reporter, the Lord Provost said: "Attacks in Myanmar's Rakhine state, by the Myanmar armed forces under the command of Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, have forced hundreds of thousands of Burmese Muslims to flee from their towns and villages. Many have found refuge in Bangladesh, but most are living in temporary shelters without adequate access to food and water, having left their homes, jobs, and communities behind. The horrific images we have seen and stories we have heard of the terror, fear, and violence these innocent families are enduring are truly heart-breaking.



Sunset on the Ayeyerwady

"Burma is a country with longstanding connections with Scotland, where many Scots served in the Second World War, and I want the people of Burma to know that Edinburgh stands with the victims of this crisis. That is why I raised a Motion at a meeting of the Full Council this week and why I will be writing to Myanmar's State Councillor, echoing the calls for

ceasefire from Amnesty International and the many aid agencies who are helping tirelessly on the ground.

“Many people in Scotland do not realise that the leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is no stranger to the City of Edinburgh or to this Council. In 2005, while she was under house arrest, the City of Edinburgh Council awarded her ‘in absentia’ in the presence of her son and the Director of Amnesty International with the highest Honour we can give – the Freedom of the City. A magnolia tree was planted in her honour in Princes Street Gardens and a street party rally was held in Parliament Square by Amnesty International, the Burma Educational Scholarship Trust, and the Scottish Refugee Council.

“For while Aung Sang Suu Kyi is widely criticised internationally for her current handling of what has now become a humanitarian aid crisis, she was presented with the Freedom of the City 12 years ago for her long history of fighting for Burmese equalities. In making this award, the Council took an active decision to raise public awareness about the continuing human rights abuses in Burma. To revoke it would be to turn our back on our original aims.

“We instead ask Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, as a recipient of the Freedom of the City of Edinburgh, to use her influence and moral courage to intervene to stop the violence, to allow UN and international scrutiny and mediation to commence immediately, and to ensure a safe, democratic, and peaceful solution for the people of the region.”

Amnesty International’s Scotland Programme Director, Kate Nevens, told us: “Aung San Suu Kyi has repeatedly denied the true extent of the horrors being suffered by people across Myanmar’s Rakhine State, despite overwhelming evidence that security forces are engaged in a campaign of ethnic cleansing.



Street scene from Pathein

“Rohingya eyewitnesses inside Rakhine State, and refugees in Bangladesh, told our researchers on the ground in the region about the security forces’ systematic approach to ethnic cleansing: Soldiers, police, and vigilante groups sometimes encircle a village and fire into the air before entering, but often just storm in and start firing in all directions, with people fleeing in panic. As surviving villagers desperately try to leave the area, security forces torch houses using petrol or shoulder-fired rocket launchers.

“These indiscriminate attacks, have forced more than 530,000 Rohingya to flee northern Rakhine State and seek asylum in Bangladesh, where they squat in rice fields or live in appalling conditions in makeshift camps. We will continue to call on the Myanmar government to end the violent attacks and other human rights violations against the Rohingya.”

Many organisations are supporting those in need on the ground. If you would like to show your support, please add your voice to Amnesty International’s growing list of calls for an end to violence

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/stop-violence-against-rohingya-myanmar>

or you may donate to support Amnesty’s work to protect human rights in Burma and around the world <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/campaign/myanmar-rohingya-crisis-appeal-action-takers-part1>.



Two children in Bagan wearing thanaka on their faces

Photos from Myanmar courtesy of Mary Durkacz.