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# **Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, November 29, 2018**

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**Chair**

**Ms. Anita Vandenbeld**



## Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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• (1305)

[English]

**The Chair (Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.)):** Good afternoon and welcome, everybody.

This is now the second meeting on our study of the current human rights situation of the Rohingya in Myanmar.

I want to welcome our witnesses. From Inter Pares, we have Rebecca Wolsak, program manager; Samantha McGavin, another program manager; and Nikki Richard, the same thing, program manager. From the Burma Human Rights Network, we have Kyaw Win, by teleconference. He is going to be speaking to us from Geneva, Switzerland.

I would like to start with Mr. Win, by teleconference.

You have opening remarks, and you can speak for 10 minutes. Go ahead, Mr. Win.

**Mr. Kyaw Win (Executive Director, Burma Human Rights Network):** Thank you very much, Madam, for giving me a chance to speak here today.

Hi and thank you to everyone in the room.

I would like to first introduce myself. I'm an executive director and the founder of the Burma Human Rights Network. We're based in London and we operate across Burma. We have more than 30 people working inside Burma. They are collecting evidence and investigating the human rights violations across Burma. We mainly focus on minority rights, freedom of religion, especially persecutions of the Rohingya and Muslim minorities in Burma.

As you are aware, the Rohingya issue is not new. Since we've existed in Burma, we've been facing all kinds of discrimination—religious discrimination and persecution.

Let me go straight to the 2007 military operation in the northern Rakhine State. Before the tension started, there were already attempts in some locations that we had been monitoring since last year, since 2017, March and May, these periods. We found so much news from the northern Rakhine State of killings of individuals, masked men coming to the villages in the nighttime and committing murder. Even today, nobody can say clearly who these people are who have committed these heinous crimes.

However, the consequence of this killing is that it has created fear among the people. Also, after that, there was some kind of movement in the media, the tone of the media. They started talking about this issue across Burma.

The tension in the northern Rakhine State had escalated significantly prior to August 25, with the unsolved murder of a Rakhine man, and then what appeared to be a vigilante killing of a Rohingya man by beheading him. Following this, sweeping arrests, curfews, beatings and torture of the Rohingya took place across northern Rakhine State.

The Burmese had brought reinforcement to northern Rakhine State prior to August 25, signalling that they were preparing for a military campaign. This was the start. From June, July, there were so many community-level meetings that happened in Sittwe, and significantly, the monk, Wirathu, known as Burmese bin Laden, travelled to Rakhine State quite a few times, frequently. Within these two to three months, we saw that he travelled two or three times to northern Rakhine State. These are some key indicators signalling that something was going on. We started monitoring more carefully. We found so many activities and things that indicated that this was a preplanned military operation.

The Burmese military was reported to have focused on attacking villages and civilians instead of pursuing ARSA to the mountains and foothills where.... This is exactly what happened on August 25. Before that happening, they brought in some military units, the 33rd and 99th, and those started to take positions in Maungdaw, Buthidaung, Rathedaung and those areas, and the southern Maungdaw Township.

Actually, the night the attack happened, I had been communicating with our team members and I relied on them at that time. The youths, those who were attacking those camps without any weapons.... It was the youth and the desperate people who were attacking those camps—the security force.

But still it is very suspicious. What were the locations they attacked? Still there is no clear evidence. Even the Burmese government couldn't tell us.

The Burmese military was reported to have focused on attacking the villages and civilians instead of pursuing the ARSA. Actually, they attacked those young people and the ARSA is also claiming that they attacked those villages, but something which I cannot be clear about even today is what the role of the real ARSA was because they are villagers. They are also young, desperate people. They are just a little bit confused inside. One of the theories is that the youth has been misled. Another one says they are being misled by the ARSA people.

In order to go to that point, to elaborate more, I would like to say that in 2016 when a military attack happened, the ARSA already had an idea of what the consequences were going to be if they attacked them. At that time, in 2016, when the ARSA attack happened, the military retaliated on the villages and civilians. The Burmese military consistently attacked in that direction. This is very important and very relevant to what is now in an ICC case of forced deportation. We conducted the research and asked questions to the people who faced or experienced military atrocities in northern Rakhine during the military operations.

The military conducted the attack by pushing down towards Bangladesh. They came up from the southwest, southeastern side, and then they pushed the population towards the northern side and drove them into Bangladesh. The Burmese military consistently attacked in the direction that pushed fleeing civilians into Bangladesh in what could only be an attempt to forcibly displace them from the country.

Several villages had meetings where authorities from the local government or the military told them to stay in place, and they were attacked and killed the following day. This includes Tula Toli. In this case, the authorities misled those villagers in order to trap them and conduct mass killings.

Following the military campaign, Rohingya civilians continued to flee due to the aid restrictions, the travel restrictions and food shortages. These are like killing without a gun. Official policy continued to force Rohingya to flee the country, but the media paid less attention because it was not conducted by a military operation. It is silently continuing until today.

Discussions on the repatriation of the Rohingya were occurring as the Rohingyas were still fleeing the country due to the unlivable conditions. The international community did not address this as they spoke on behalf of the Rohingya in regard to their return. Whenever we talk about their return, we need to know that these are genocide survivors, traumatized people. They have experienced such a heinous experience. They had to go. It is not possible for them to just return without any protection, without any assurance of security.

Numerous reports have been relayed to BHRN, our organization, and our teams on the ground of Rohingya who stayed in northern Rakhine State being accused of belonging to ARSA, without evidence. They are accused by the authorities that remain in northern Rakhine State, and often in extortion schemes, scamming. They release the accused after they have paid bribes to the police or throw the military some cash. This is one way to get money from those people.

Rohingya living in remote or rural areas outside the Buthidaung have reported that they are receiving little or no aid. Rohingya living in northern Rakhine State continue to complain of inadequate access to life-sustaining medicine for serious illness or diseases such as hepatitis. There are a few people...and the symptoms are now spreading among many people.

Seven Rohingya were also reported fleeing to Bangladesh to get medicine for serious health issues and they were later arrested when they attempted to return home. Rohingya living on the same border near Bangladesh complain about the lack of access to any aid, as Burma has discouraged them from—

• (1310)

**The Chair:** Mr. Win, could you conclude? It's already been 10 minutes.

• (1315)

**Mr. Kyaw Win:** Sure.

I would like to quickly say that a heinous crime has been committed in northern Rakhine state, in villages such as Tula Toli and Chut Pyin, and mass killing has continued.

The problem is that the genocide is not finished yet. They are killing without guns, without any military operation. It's still continuing by restricting humanitarian aid, and also on the other hand, allowing the 120,000 to remain in refugee camps. The situation is not getting any better.

In that case, the international community [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] proceed with accountability and put more pressure and economic sanctions on Burma.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for your testimony.

We will now go to Rebecca Wolsak for 10 minutes.

**Ms. Rebecca Wolsak (Program Manager, Inter Pares):** Thank you and good afternoon.

Inter Pares is a Canadian social justice organization. We began working with people from Burma in 1991. We have significant support from Global Affairs Canada for our Burma program.

My colleagues Nikki Richard and Samantha McGavin are here with me today, and all three of us have recently returned from Burma. We would be happy to answer your questions.

I'd like to start by reading from a report that documents the experiences of one family, a family of five. Burma's army was forcing their village to move, and the family had stopped for a rest when the soldiers came across them.

The troops tied up the father, suspended him to the beam of the hut with a rope and made a fire under him, roasting him over it. They then gang raped the teenage girl and eventually killed her. A few days later, her father died after suffering much from the pain of torture. Her mother suffered much from the agony of watching her husband being tortured and her daughter being raped and killed, and finally became mentally unbalanced.

I believe you've heard many similar horror stories over the past year. It is hard to hear them. The report that I just read from is called "License to Rape", and it was published 16 years ago. It documents 173 incidents of rape and other forms of sexual violence, involving 625 girls and women, committed by Burma's army in Shan State between 1996 and 2001.

I was reminded of this report recently by a Rohingya woman that we work with. She described reading this report with a mixture of horror and solidarity. "It was like reading about us," she said.

Burma is a very diverse country, with just 60% of the people identifying as Burman and 40% identifying as "ethnic". Burma's army has been on a nation-building project since the first coup in 1962, with a vision—one nation with one ethnicity and one religion.

I believe that you have heard from many people about the current situation of the Rohingya, so today we'd like to focus on two things: one, making very clear that what is happening to the Rohingya is part a nationwide and decades-old pattern; and two, offering some concrete action that Canada can take.

In terms of the larger context, I could have read to you from one of many similar reports documenting the systematic use of rape as a weapon of war by Burma's army. These are reports written by women of many different ethnicities. There are also reports on mega-development projects and the accompanying militarization and human rights abuses, reports on serious restrictions on the freedom of religion and freedom of the press, and reports on the forced relocation of people. The list goes on.

If we only focus on the Rohingya, we fail to see the patterns of militarized power, ethnic assimilation and centralized territorial control. We also run the risk of undermining our own good intentions. Burma's government and religious leaders have been promoting anti-Rohingya and anti-Muslim sentiment for decades. One of our partners has recently mapped the reach of Ma Ba Tha. This is the group that mobilizes people, promoting Buddhist supremacy and anti-Muslim sentiment. This movement is in every part of the country and has built a propaganda machine of staggering proportions.

When international actors like the Canadian government focus their resources on the Rohingya, they risk undermining their own credibility in the country, further inflaming resentment against the Rohingya and not addressing the root causes of the problem. The treatment of the Rohingya has been extreme, but we also know that there is credible evidence of crimes against humanity in many other parts of the country. Canada must take a comprehensive approach to the Rohingya crisis.

We have some suggestions for action that Canada can take.

• (1320)

Canada is on the board of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and is also a major donor. The UNHCR needs to stop participating in the repatriation process in Bangladesh. UNHCR staff have been critical of the process and rightfully noted that the conditions for safe, voluntary and dignified return are not yet there. However, they have also agreed to assess the voluntary nature of potential returnees. This very process has caused intense anxiety. People have committed suicide and fled the camps in fear. Rohingya

are calling for UN peacekeeping troops to protect them in Burma, but this requires UN Security Council approval and the agreement of the host country. We know that neither of these things will happen, but we wanted you to hear this request from the Rohingya as it illustrates both the intensity of their fear and their desire to return home. Rohingya need to see a guarantee of citizenship and respect for their rights, including freedom of movement, before beginning a process of return.

UNHCR has also decided that Chin State is now safe, despite well-documented human rights violations, particularly related to freedom of religion and ongoing conflict. The UNHCR has begun to revoke refugee protection for Chin refugees and this, too, must stop.

In terms of international accountability, we applaud Canada's support for a referral of Burma to the International Criminal Court. It is unclear if that is only focused on the Arakan state. We believe Canada should champion a referral to the ICC that explicitly looks at crimes committed in multiple states. We would also like to see Canada bring a case against Burma to the International Court of Justice for its breach of the Genocide convention.

We would like to see a full review of our relationship with Burma, similar to what the United Kingdom recently completed. The Global Affairs web page, "Canada and Myanmar relations", includes a number of issues that warrant review. For example, Burma's peace process is in a shambles. The recent U.K. review noted, "We think it highly likely that the process is just window-dressing for the Burmese Army". Global Affairs notes that Canada strongly supports the national peace process. Canada should review the appropriateness of investing in this process.

Canada has some individual sanctions in place and an arms embargo. While we are not sanctions experts, we believe that broader sanctions should be considered. The head of Burma's military should be added to the short list of individuals facing Canada's sanctions. The list should be expanded to include all other military and government officials implicated in crimes against humanity in Burma.

Natural resource development projects in Burma come hand in hand with the rights abuses and militarization. Many of our partners have called for a moratorium against these projects. Canada should explore how to support these calls. One way to do this would be to impose sanctions in this sector.

Global Affairs encourages trade with Burma on their website, noting that in 2015 Canada reinstated a general preferential tariff and least-developed-country tariff status for Burma. This should be reviewed.

The existing arms embargo does not appear to prohibit the training of Burma's military. Perhaps most alarming, under the heading of "Security cooperation", Global Affairs notes that Burma receives capacity-building support for counterterrorism efforts and law enforcement. Aung San Suu Kyi's government and military officials have often referred to ethnic organizations as terrorists. For instance, the 2017 attack against Rohingya was framed as a counterterrorism effort. We do not mean to leap to conclusions about Canada's support, but we do think that this warrants consideration within a full review.

Thank you.

• (1325)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We will now start the questions, and we will start with Mr. Sweet for seven minutes.

**Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC):** Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you to the witnesses.

Mr. Win, you mentioned that the genocide still continues. I recall the actions that were taken during the Bosnian crisis when the genocide was happening there. In your estimation from being on the ground there, what is your opinion about why there's resistance among the international community to have a protective operation there like what happened to protect the people of Bosnia?

**Mr. Kyaw Win:** If I may, with the genocide that continues, especially if I talk about the Rohingya, there are less than 500,000 remaining in Rakhine State now, but there are some 120,000 remaining in Sittwe Township, and they are in the IDP camp around Sittwe.

A few days ago, on the 25th, there was one boat arrested by the Burmese navy in southern Burma. They were fleeing to Malaysia by boat, and there were 93 people, 60 adults and 33 children. They are now going to be sent back to Sittwe again and they are going to have an NVC, a nationality verification card. The card itself says that the holder of the card is not a citizen of Burma, which means they have now become foreigners. This is their process. The Burmese government is trapping the Rohingya people, eliminating those named Rohingya and then making them into foreigners. Gradually, these people are concentrated in the one location. If you look at the repatriation, they're talking about putting them into a camp like a concentration camp, and nobody knows how long they are going to live there.

The future is totally blurred, and for those who are now in Rakhine State, they have the same situation as before. There are travel restrictions. They cannot marry, and as well they have to apply for it, which takes two years. There is also a two-child policy and there are still restrictions on movement and medicines and health care, education. Everything from the oppression is still there and this is also forcing these people to flee from Burma, to flee all these atrocities. This genocide is not only mass killing, but they are also gradually shrinking their population. That's the way we describe it.

On the other hand, this genocide, as we call it, of the Rohingya people, what we are facing, is not only with the Rohingya alone now. Now it is moving and unfolding in other parts of Burma with other Muslims as well. If I may say, there is one Muslim community group

in Thailand now. They are from Burma. Now they have been become stateless, only because of the citizenship policy of Burma. We launched a report on June 26 from Thailand. There are thousands of families now in Thailand, Bangkok.

The position—

**Mr. David Sweet:** Mr. Win, I just have a limited amount of time. I want to give Ms. Wolsak an opportunity around the question about why the international community hasn't intervened in a more aggressive manner.

Do you have any...?

**Ms. Samantha McGavin (Program Manager, Inter Pares):** We can speculate about the geopolitical interests at play. Certainly, it's deemed unlikely that the United Nations Security Council would authorize a peacekeeping mission because of the objections of China and Russia. We know that they tried to block even the head of the fact-finding mission on Myanmar from merely presenting their findings, and they had to go to a vote over the objections of those two countries.

Certainly there are a lot of natural resources at play in the northern Arakan state and a lot of countries that have some vested interests in seeing that. It's yet another interest, not that we think that this should be part of Canada's calculus, but it's another reason that Canada is very well placed because of the lack of geopolitical interest in that area in terms of trade. Obviously it's also a country that has shown commitment to human rights, so we think that it creates a unique opportunity.

• (1330)

**Mr. David Sweet:** Okay, I want to merge a couple of ideas.

Mr. Win was saying that the genocide is now spreading. I think four or five years ago we were already studying Arakan state and the Christians who were there, so it's been spreading for a long time. Of the 135 ethnic groups that are in Burma, are any discriminated against and persecuted to the degree of the Rohingya?

**Ms. Rebecca Wolsak:** I can jump in just to say that I am very uncomfortable with comparing the atrocities that every ethnic group is experiencing. If I had to say, and I have said in the past, Rohingya is an extreme example.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Primarily, one of the big differences—this is my understanding from the years of looking at this—is that they are primarily a people who never militarized to defend themselves. They always tried to take the peaceful route, so they continue to be easy targets for the Burmese government and of course those other players that the Burmese government manipulates to persecute them.

In regard to initiatives that Canada can do, you mentioned reviewing our approach. What else did you mean when you said "a comprehensive approach"? Was it about how all of the different groups are actually affected by the Burmese military, or was there more to it than that?

**Ms. Rebecca Wolsak:** It's mostly about the fact that we're seeing the patterns of behaviour—the oppression against Rohingya—throughout the country, and we have been seeing it for decades. We need to be looking at the whole picture, and looking at the basic project of the government and military of creating a nation. Burma has never really been a nation.

If we only look at the Rohingya, we're not looking at the bigger picture of the conflict, or the fact that various other ethnic groups are also trying to seek rights for self-determination.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I'm sorry, but that is your time. We can revisit this in other questions.

We'll go now to Mr. Fragiskatos for seven minutes.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to everyone for appearing today. Thank you very much for the difficult, but vitally important work that you're carrying out.

I wanted to put a question first to Inter Pares. In April 2016, the Government of Canada committed up to \$18.5 million to your organization to deliver programming—I'm reading from it right here—that would foster inclusive democratic development in Myanmar until 2020. The project is expected to reach 320,000 people within Myanmar and 110,000 refugees outside of Myanmar.

Considering the current situation, are you still able to carry out this work?

**Ms. Rebecca Wolsak:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** What is the situation for your organization? Clearly you're doing really vital, crucial work on the ground. I'm very happy that the government committed funding to your organization. Considering the context that we all know in Myanmar and the surrounding area, I would imagine it's extremely difficult, but you're saying it's not impossible.

**Ms. Rebecca Wolsak:** It's not impossible for us and the work we do. We work with local community organizations that are accustomed to working in extremely difficult situations. We've been building on that work for many years.

At one point in developing the project that you're referring to, we looked at scenarios. We looked at what would happen if there was complete peace, or contested peace or outright war, and how our program would need to adapt. We explored all of that. We saw the relevance of the work being maintained throughout all of those contexts. We ensured that there was adaptability and flexibility within the program.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** For purposes of the record, Madam Chair, that work is focused—correct me if I'm wrong—on improving democratic governance practices, improving decentralized governance and services in areas where ethnic minorities are the majority, and enhancing the participation of marginalized and conflict-impacted communities in local development.

On that point—again, to Inter Pares—I know that one of the key focuses of your organization is inter-ethnic relations, and how conflict can really contribute in very negative ways to inter-ethnic relations. With everything that has taken place in recent years and everything that is taking place now, how worried are you about the future of Myanmar and about relations, in particular, between the Buddhist majority and all the other various ethnic and religious minority groups—not just the Rohingya but also the ethnic Karen and so on and so forth? I don't mean to be so callous to say “so on

and so forth”, but there are many ethnic groups on the ground. It's a very diverse society.

Going forward, is the situation only bound to become worse between ethnic groups?

● (1335)

**Ms. Samantha McGavin:** I think we've seen incredible gains over the last 15 to 20 years in terms of inter-ethnic solidarity and coalition building, where many people from different backgrounds have come together on different themes, topics and campaigns, and that continues. I think the largest impact—and Kyaw Win can speak to this as well—is the incredible impact of the anti-Muslim sentiment that's been fomented over the decades.

We do see that many organizations are overcoming this, despite this poisoned environment. Organizations from other ethnic groups are speaking out in solidarity for the Rohingya and with Rohingya organizations. Certainly it is a very long road to travel in terms of looking at intercommunal harmony, particularly around Muslim issues, given the extent of the propaganda against them.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** I will ask one last quick question if I can.

Obviously the situation in Myanmar is beyond difficult. I'm reading the report here kindly prepared by our great analysts, which says, on the matter of repatriation, that returning Rohingya do not have villages to which they can return and Rohingya crops and cattle have been looted.

Witnesses we've heard from previously have expressed fears that returning Rohingya would be sent to “concentration camps” not unlike the camps that house the approximately 127,000 Rohingya who have been internally displaced since 2012.

With all of that in mind—and I put this to whoever from Inter Pares wants to take it and to Mr. Win—should we as an international community not focus instead on supporting Bangladesh, supporting the effort to bring some measure of dignity to refugees on the ground in Bangladesh?

There was an opinion piece published in the old Manchester Guardian newspaper some weeks ago saying exactly this, and I've raised it in committee before.

I'd love to hear your view. In fact, maybe I'll go to Mr. Win first and then hear from Inter Pares.

**Mr. Kyaw Win:** From our perspective, from our view, it is extremely important to continually support the Bangladesh government and the people on the ground, because they are facing enormous difficulties to receive any proper humanitarian aid and to continue to receive humanitarian aid on the ground because a huge population has come to a very tiny place. There are a lot of issues: social issues, hygiene problems, health care issues, education. There are several things. They are suffering. These people are traumatized people. They have a lot of issues internally as well.

All efforts by the international community as much as possible should be to support the Bangladesh government and also to make sure that aid reaches the people as well.

Also, there is another very important thing I would like to highlight here as well. I'm in Geneva right now. We are advocating about the funding for the IIIM, the new mechanism. It is also very important to support this new mechanism to receive a budget, as it should, because a failure of accountability is going to risk millions of people's lives in Burma.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but that's the end of the time.

Now we will be going to Ms. Hardcastle for seven minutes.

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to ask each of you, actually, about Mr. Win's comments, which I'd like you to maybe go back to and revisit in the context of some of the other things you've talked about.

Just due to time, I'm not going to repeat everything, but I am going to talk about the issue of failing to see patterns, the issue of not having intervened, and long-standing issues and reports with graphic evidence. Mr. Win said that something that was problematic was the tone of the media.

I don't know if that's something that can be influential in a different or modified or renewed response, a resolve response from the international community.

Maybe I could hear you talk a little bit about how you see it.

Maybe we'll start with you, Ms. Wolsak, and I'll go to Mr. Win in a minute. I'll let the panellist in person here comment on that first.

Thank you.

• (1340)

**Ms. Samantha McGavin:** Certainly there is an inwardness that's been encouraged, I think, by the government towards international media, and a scepticism and framing of things as fake news. We have several partners who are independent media organizations who are sharing ethnic perspectives and reporting in ethnic areas but as much as they may have a certain reach, it doesn't include the whole country.

It is something that needs to be considered in terms of being able to reach people to try to counter what is a very powerful machine in terms of trying to poison the well.

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle:** Nikki or Rebecca, do you have anything to add?

What about media in the outlying countries such as China?

**Ms. Rebecca Wolsak:** I'm sorry, I don't really know about the media in China.

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle:** Okay.

Mr. Win, perhaps we can go to you and you can talk a little bit more about the tone of the media and how that has been a problem in this whole saga.

**Mr. Kyaw Win:** I would divide it into three parts: one media in Burma, the media in the international community, and then the media in China, you may say.

The first media, in Burma, is one of the key tools that is propagating anti-Muslim hate speech. These media are owned by the

cronies and the military and a general. They are one of the very big issues creating more problems for the Rohingya people and other Muslim minorities and other minorities.

In the international community, I think the media is one of the important phenomena to more clearly convey the message of what is happening on the ground. One of the problems with the media is that they always focus on the hot topics. They are very focused on their audience and what the audience would like to hear.

That worries us because while the normal issue of oppression remains, there are still killings going on and people are still fleeing. People are still facing so much oppression. This does not become newsworthy but it is a very dangerous thing. We are already seeing that now. During the military operation, the media on a daily basis—every second, every minute, every hour of the day—reported about the Rohingya issue.

There are not many Rohingya news issues in the news any more, but the problem continues on the ground. People are still facing so many problems, even though there are no military operations.

What I am worried about is that in order to bring political momentum, create more pressure, and gain agreement and support from the international community, the media play a very important role. We need the media to continue to focus on the issues that are very important, which does not mean a military operation yet but still there are important issues we must keep highlighting until the solutions come.

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle:** We did have an emergency debate on this issue. We did revoke Aung San Suu Kyi's Canadian citizenship.

I guess some would argue that those things, without the concrete action you were talking about, are superficial. In terms of the media, however, and the argument that Mr. Win is making, they do help substantiate a reason to put something in a headline again and continue it, especially in western media.

What are some of the concrete steps you think we should be taking as an independent country, and then as part of an international community, as part of a larger movement, that hopefully would catch on more than what's already been done?

• (1345)

**Mr. Kyaw Win:** I think media in Canada has been doing amazing work and we are really grateful for it.

If I may say, of course media has independence. They have their own rules and regulations, and their own understanding and they go for it.

If I may suggest, this is the momentum that the media picks up—certain issues, certain things, certain hot topics—and we cannot clearly say what it is at a particular time. For example, when some information is launched in the media, and the UN or the Canadian Parliament or the Canadian government is stating something, or there are things that are going to happen on the ground, these are the kinds of moments in which we can highlight those issues and we can continue those issues.



For example, in March, there will be UN human rights sessions in Geneva where they are going to talk about the issues in Burma. All those things need to continuously come up in the media.

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle:** Inter Pares, you have 30 seconds.

**Ms. Rebecca Wolsak:** I don't know if this is the right moment to add this, but it's somewhat related to what you're saying. I just want to note that there has been a reluctance among the diplomatic community and among the donor community, particularly in Rangoon but also internationally, to talk about Rohingya out of fear of closing the door. They want to keep the door open. They want to keep a conversation going.

I just want to emphasize that there is a huge cost to that.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

I want to thank our witnesses, and I thank the members for their questions.

We will be suspending for one minute so that we can go in camera to do committee business.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

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