



ROHINGYAS

the world's least wanted



Ngapali Beach is the most famous beach in Myanmar and a popular tourist destination. Hilton even built a hotel in this paradise. But 7 km from there, in Thandwe, the Rohingya people live in hell.



Built centuries ago, Thandwe is a town and major seaport in Rakhine State. The Sunni mosque is in the center of the town.

In 2012, brutal clashes broke out between Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims leaving more than 200 dead in Myanmar.

The police found sticks inside the mosque and said they were weapons. Consequently, many Rohingya were jailed.

Some say that in the morning, during the muezzin's first call to prayer, the Buddhist monks cover the call with music played over loudspeakers. Acts like these symbolize the growing tension between the communities. The government has convinced the monks to not drown out Friday's call to prayer as it is the most important to the Muslims.



The religious tension is linked to a movement known as 969, Myanmar's homegrown religious extremist group led by Buddhist monks. They claim to be the defenders of the Buddhist faith and the Burmese race against Islam. They call for a boycott on all businesses ruined by muslim people, including Rohingyas. Many people in the countryside are uneducated and easily influenced by this propaganda.



At 5PM, Thandwe looks to be a ghost town. All the shops are closed and people are cloistered inside their homes. Some houses have been maliciously burnt down, so the tensions still run high.



If you ask the Buddhists in the Thandwe market about the Rohingya, most of them will say, “Muslims are no good” and run their finger across their neck to simulate beheading... Upon learning that I was French, many shouted “Charlie!” for Charlie Hebdo.



In the Rohingya village of Poutt Taw, located a few kilometers from Thandwe, 42 houses were burned by Buddhist extremists a few months ago.



“The Buddhist extremists arrived on foot, by boats, and by cars. They had weapons and stones. We had to go away. We ran to the hill where we hid for a few days. We were afraid of being killed.”



“Not all the Buddhists are extremists and want to see our demise. I still have Buddhist friends but it’s harder to see them as tension is high in our communities.”



“Extremists Buddhists came and destroyed my house. My whole life’s work. The government, under pressure from the international community, finally gave us some money to rebuild. With the money I received though, I could only build a wooden house, not a solid brick one like I had before owned.”



This woman decided to keep the burned pillars in hopes of showing the international press, but I was the first photographer to come since the events took place. I was not supposed to visit any Rohingya village as the government does its best to keep foreign eyes away.



This woman is rebuilding her roof which was burnt by the mob. She is building the new one from palm leaves since she can't afford a metal roof.



In order to clog the wells, the extremists threw in all kinds of things like chairs and furniture.

They even poured diesel in to make sure the people could no longer use the water.



A small village mosque used to sit on this site. Now that the Buddhists have destroyed it, the locals do not dare build another since they don't want to provoke the wrath of the radical Buddhists.



“We still don’t understand why they attacked us. They started to cut the pillars of our houses, then burned them when they realized it would take too long to cut with axes”.



The children also lost everything in the fires, even their school furniture. They are too afraid to go back to school. Some mothers report their children having recurring nightmares.



Some people are too poor to rebuild their houses with new wood, so they use scorched wood. One house has already collapsed and wounded some children.



“We don’t even want revenge after what we suffered. We don’t know anything about this feeling. It’s not a Muslim feeling. You know, we are a little ‘Buddhist’ in the way we think, too!” she said, with a smile.



“We have lost everything so now we want to speak and tell the world what happened to us. We fear nothing from the government repression since it can’t get much worse. The government views us as foreign immigrants, not citizens.” The UN has described the Rohingya as one of the most persecuted minorities in the world.



These two photographs feature the same girl. Above she is in the traditional Burmese attire. To the right, she is praying as a Muslim.

“The Rohingya have nothing to do with Islamic State and the terrorists. We are peaceful people who just want to live from our work.”



Many Rohingya do not understand why Aung San Suu Kyi, who won the Peace Nobel prize, does not say anything about their situation.



In Rangon, you can find madrasas (Koranic schools) in the Muslim quarter. They have been forbidden in the Rohingya community.



A law from 1982 denied the Rohingya people of their Burmese citizenship, thereby removing their freedom of movement, and access to education. It also allows the arbitrary confiscation of their property and lands.



Myanmar's Buddhists worry since muslims, including Rohingyas, have larger families, they will one day be in the majority. In the Rakhine state, they have limited the number of children to two per family.



The explosion of violence in June 2012 between the Rohingya Muslim minority and the Rakhine Buddhist majority left at least 140,000 IDPs. According to the UN, many suffer from severe malnutrition in overcrowded camps.



Rohingya have become among the world's least wanted, failing to be welcomed in Thailand, Bangladesh, Malaysia or Australia. Singapore even refused entry to Rohingya who sailed for days on a ship to arrive. Last month, dozens of children were among 98 Rohingya trafficking victims discovered in trucks in southern Thailand. One was dead. They meet their end just like the Eritreans in Lampedusa.

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