

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PRESS RELEASE

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### Myanmar: Army landmines along border with Bangladesh pose deadly threat to fleeing Rohingya

Myanmar's security forces planted internationally banned antipersonnel landmines along its border with Bangladesh which have seriously injured at least three civilians, including two children, and reportedly killed one man in the past week, Amnesty International confirmed today.

Based on interviews with eyewitnesses and analysis by its own weapons experts, Amnesty International has documented what seems to be targeted use of landmines along a narrow stretch forming part of the north-western border of Rakhine State, where the United Nations estimates 270,000 people have fled a major military operation in the past fortnight.

"This is another low in what is already a horrific situation in Rakhine State. The Myanmar military's callous use of inherently indiscriminate and deadly weapons at highly trafficked paths around the border is putting the lives of ordinary people at enormous risk," said Tirana Hassan, Amnesty International's Crisis Response Director, who is currently near the Bangladesh-Myanmar border.

"The Myanmar Army is one of only a handful of state forces worldwide, along with North Korea and Syria, to still openly use antipersonnel landmines. Authorities must immediately end this abhorrent practice against people who are already fleeing persecution."

Some of the mines have been found near Taung Pyo Let Wal (also known as Tumbro) in Myanmar's Rakhine State on the edge of the border with Bangladesh. Many have fled the area to a makeshift refugee camp inside Bangladesh, but make frequent trips back across the border to bring supplies or to help others to cross.

In one incident, on 3 September, a woman in her 50s crossed the border from Bangladesh into Taung Pyo Let Wal and stepped on a landmine on the way back. She is being treated in a Bangladeshi hospital after her leg was blown off from the knee down.

One of her relatives, Kalma, 20, told Amnesty International: "My mother-in-law went to our village [from the camp] to fetch water to take a shower. A few minutes later I heard a big explosion and I heard someone had stepped on a mine. It was only later I realized it was my mother-in-law."

Several eyewitnesses said they had seen Myanmar security forces, including military personnel and Border Guard Police, plant mines close to the Myanmar-Bangladesh border.

Amnesty International verified the authenticity of graphic mobile phone images showing the woman's shredded legs immediately after the blast. Medical experts concluded from the nature of the injury that it was caused by an explosive device that was powerful, directed upwards and located on the ground, all of which is consistent with a landmine.

Other villagers showed photos of at least one other landmine close to the same location, which Amnesty International has also verified to be genuine.

Four other suspected mine blasts have also taken place this week by a busy crossroad near another village further inside Myanmar in the border area. They seriously injured two boys aged between 10 and 13 and reportedly killed one man, according to witnesses and local people.

One Rohingya man who is in hiding near the crossroads, who said he and others had had found at least six other mines planted in the same area. He and other men had put their own lives at risk to dig up two of the mines to protect other villagers.

At least one of the mines used appears to be the PMN-1 antipersonnel landmine, which is designed to maim and does so indiscriminately, based on analysis of images by Amnesty International weapons experts.

In a report in June this year, Amnesty International documented how both the Myanmar Army and ethnic armed groups in Kachin and Shan State planted antipersonnel landmines or improvised explosive devices that killed and maimed people, including children.

### **International military support**

The Australian governments is providing training to the Myanmar Army, while Russia and Israel are among countries supplying it with weapons. While the EU maintains an arms embargo on Myanmar, there have been recent moves by some Member States to provide other forms of support including training.

The USA is also exploring expanding military co-operation with the Myanmar army through trainings and workshops.

“Governments around the world who continue to train or sell arms to Myanmar’s military are propping up a force that is carrying out a vicious campaign of violence against Rohingya that amounts to crimes against humanity. This must stop and any other states who are thinking about similar engagement should change course immediately,” said Tirana Hassan.

Earlier this week, the spokesperson for Myanmar’s State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, dismissed media reports that the army was planting landmines: “Who can surely say those mines were not laid by the terrorists?”

A few days later the Bangladeshi Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque confirmed to Reuters news agency that Dhaka had launched a formal complaint with Myanmar for planting landmines along the countries’ shared border.

“The Myanmar authorities should stop issuing blanket denials. All the evidence suggests that its own security forces are planting landmines that are not only unlawful, but that are already maiming ordinary people,” said Tirana Hassan.

“What is unfolding in front of our eyes can be described as ethnic cleansing, with the Rohingya targeted for their ethnicity and religion. In legal terms, these are crimes against humanity that include murder and deportation or forcible transfer of population.

Myanmar’s government must immediately end the campaign and the shocking abuses against Rohingya. It must also allow unfettered access for humanitarian groups, including specialized demining teams, into Rakhine State.”

### **Public Document**

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