

## **Notes on the decision by the Brighton and Hove City Council to revoke the “Freedom of the City” award made to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in 2011**

Derek Tonkin - 28 October 2023

The Brighton and Hove City Council convened a Special Meeting on 19 October 2023 to approve a Report by the Executive Director for Governance, People and Resources, Elizabeth Culvert, which recommended: “That Council revokes the Freedom of the City of Brighton & Hove awarded to Aung San Suu Kyi.” The recommendation was approved unanimously by all Councillors present.

The Report is [available online](#) and appears as Agenda Item 7. Elements of Section 3 of the Report headed “Context/Background Information” are seriously flawed, and the purpose of this analysis is to refute many of the allegations made against Daw Aung San Suu Kyi (to whom I shall refer as “Daw Suu”) in the Report. There are numerous errors of fact as well as bias and misinformation in the Report.

[A webcast of the proceedings](#) is also available online. The meeting lasted only 18 minutes. The debate was led by Councillor Bella Sankey, the Labour leader of the Council, who claimed that Daw Suu “presided over <sup>1</sup> the ethnic cleansing and genocide of the Muslim Rohingya community. Not only did she acquiesce in the military actions of the junta, she appeared at the International Court of Justice in The Hague to defend the persecution of the Muslim minority .....It’s not right to continue to honour and celebrate a person who was an enabler to racial and religious discrimination and ethnic cleansing. The Council cannot and should not be seen to associate itself with such an individual.”

[A press report of the decision](#) appeared in the Brighton and Hove News on the same day.

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<sup>1</sup> “preside over - to be in charge of (a place or situation)” - New Oxford Dictionary of English. See Footnote 2: by no stretch of the imagination was Daw Suu ever in control of military policy and operations in Rakhine State. Indeed she had virtually no influence over the situation.

My methodology is to analyse Section 3 of the Report sub-paragraph by sub-paragraph in order to highlight the nature of my concerns. This analysis should in no way be taken as a deliberate criticism of the Executive Director. The presentation she makes could no doubt be justified by reference to respectable sources.

An excellent analysis of the situation in Rakhine State in January 2018 was a detailed and perceptive BBC news report on 25 January 2018 which has several valuable links.<sup>2</sup> I agree with much that was said in the BBC report. However, it predates her important speeches of 21 August 2018 in Singapore<sup>3</sup> and of 11 December 2019 before the International Court of Justice in The Hague<sup>4</sup> on which I comment later in this analysis. The BBC article also makes no mention of the Repatriation Agreement with Bangladesh on 23 November 2017 which I likewise discuss later.

*3.1 At a special meeting convened in 2011 full Council conferred the title of freewoman of the city on Aung San Suu Kyi, the previous president of Burma in recognition of her contribution in fighting totalitarianism and advocating for human rights and individual liberty in her country of Burma. She was a student at Sussex University.*

Daw Suu was at no time President of either Burma or Myanmar. [Article 59\(f\) of the 2008 Constitution](#) debars any person who has close relatives who are foreign nationals from being elected to the Presidency. Daw Suu has two sons, Alexander and Kim, who were born in the UK and have British citizenship. Her husband the late Michal Aris was a noted scholar of Tibetan history and culture, and Professor at Oxford University. It should also be noted that the UK

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-42824778> - "Ms Suu Kyi makes most of the important decisions, but the military retains control of three vital ministries - home affairs, defence and border affairs. That means it also controls the police. The military is the real power in northern Rakhine State, along the border with Bangladesh. So Ms Suu Kyi has very little control over events there. Speaking out in support of the Rohingya would almost certainly prompt an angry reaction from Buddhist nationalists and military officials. Not to mention the general public who have very little sympathy for the Rohingya. This goes some way to explaining why she has rarely spoken out in their favour."

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.networkmyanmar.org/ESW/Files/ASSK-Speech-2.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.networkmyanmar.org/ESW/Files/ASSK-Speech-3.pdf>

Government no longer uses the designation “Burma” **in its formal pronouncements**, though for clarification “(Burma)” sometimes appears in parentheses. “Myanmar” is now the correct designation, used in the United Nations.

Daw Suu was not a student at Sussex University, but at St Hugh’s College, Oxford and later at the School of Oriental and African Studies of London University.

*3.2 Between 2016 and 2021 she was the State Counsellor of Myanmar<sup>5</sup> (equivalent to a prime minister) and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Unfortunately this was a time when gross violations of human rights and what many describe as genocide was conducted against the Rohingya community in Burma. Aung San Suu Kyi did not take any steps or advocate the protection of the minority Muslim Rohingya community and some say she supported the actions of the military in carrying out the atrocities. These human rights violations continue.*

No determination of genocide against the Rohingya Muslim Community<sup>6</sup> has yet been made by any competent international or national court of law. **UN Guidance on use of the term** is relevant and crystal clear:

“The legal definition of genocide is precise and includes an element that is often hard to prove, the element of ‘intent’. The determination as to whether a situation constitutes genocide is thus factually and legally complex and should only be made following a careful and detailed examination of the facts against relevant legislation. This examination has been carried out for the purpose of establishing State responsibility or individual criminal responsibility for the crime of genocide. This must be done by a competent international or national court of law with the jurisdiction to try such cases, after an investigation meeting appropriate due process standards. According to Article IX of the Genocide

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<sup>5</sup> Daw Suu’s Senior Adviser Ko Ni is credited with crafting the title of “State Counsellor” for which the military “never forgave her”. <https://tinyurl.com/v9anm9bw> . Ko Ni was a Muslim lawyer, assassinated by military agents on 29 January 2017 at Yangon International Airport.

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.networkmyanmar.org/Rohang.html> for an historical view of this designation, which was at no time used or even known during the British administration of Arakan (Rakhine) 1826-1948 and was devised by Muslim ideologues in the early 1960s.

Convention, disputes related to its interpretation, application and fulfilment, including State responsibility, should be addressed to the ICJ. With regards to individual criminal responsibility, Article VI determines that persons charged with genocide shall be tried by a competent court of the State in the territory of which the act was committed or by a competent international penal tribunal whose jurisdiction is accepted by the State Parties.”

The policy of the UK Government on the determination of genocide for the present remains identical to that of the United Nations. As Minister of State [Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon told the House of Lords](#) <sup>7</sup> on 28 October 2022 during the Second Reading of [the Genocide Determination Bill](#):

“The Government’s long-standing policy is that any determination that a genocide has been or is being committed should be undertaken by a competent court, such as the ICC or the ICJ. Under this policy, the Government have formally acknowledged the Holocaust.”

Internationally, only [the United States Government has made a formal determination](#) of genocide and this was not against the State of Myanmar but against the Myanmar military. The designation was a political act. Daw Suu was specifically excluded from the determination which has no legal consequences. The grounds of the determination have been challenged.<sup>8</sup>

In short, the determination of genocide is a complex issue and in my view the term should only be used by local government in the UK with the same care consistently shown by central government, and never without good reason and justification.

The statement that Daw Suu “did not take any steps or advocate the protection of the minority Muslim Rohingya community” is contradicted by her pivotal role in numerous undertakings. I give four examples:

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<sup>7</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tariq\\_Ahmad,\\_Baron\\_Ahmad\\_of\\_Wimbledon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tariq_Ahmad,_Baron_Ahmad_of_Wimbledon) and the Ahmadiyya Muslims. Lord Ahmad has visited Myanmar on a number of occasions in recent years and has had discussions with Daw Suu.

<sup>8</sup> See for example my TOAEP Policy Brief at <https://www.toaep.org/pbs-pdf/130-tonkin/>

- (a) In the wake of attacks in October 2016 by the militant Islamic group [Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army \(ARSA\)](#) on border guard posts, Daw Suu invited former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to lead an Advisory Commission on Rakhine State. Their final report “Towards a Peaceful, Fair and Prosperous Future for the People of Rakhine”<sup>9</sup> contained some 88 recommendations of which [Daw Suu announced on 21 August 2018 in Singapore](#) that 81 had already been implemented.<sup>10</sup> In this final report Kofi Annan paid tribute to the role played by Daw Suu: “I would like especially to express my deep appreciation to the State Counsellor, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, for her leadership in setting up the Commission and her readiness to meet and consult with me whenever needed”. The International Crisis Group described the ARSA attacks [in their 15 December 2016 Report](#)<sup>11</sup> in stark terms: “The current violence is qualitatively different from anything in recent decades, seriously threatens the prospects of stability and development in the state and has serious implications for Myanmar as a whole.”
- (b) Daw Suu played an active role in the negotiation of the Repatriation Agreement signed with Bangladesh on 23 November 2017<sup>12</sup>, the “Physical Arrangement for Repatriation” signed on 16 January 2018<sup>13</sup> and the Tripartite Memorandum of Understanding reached on 6 June 2018 between Myanmar, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.<sup>14</sup> Although attempts to arrange a pilot repatriation have not so far been realised, the essential treaty arrangements and physical infrastructure remain intact. Delay in repatriation is due both to the dissatisfaction of the refugees themselves about their status and conditions in Rakhine as well as to the unusually complex situation which has arisen because of the control which the insurgent Arakan Army exercises over much of the territory in Rakhine, expertly analysed<sup>15</sup> by Jacques P Leider of the [Ecole française d’Extrême-Orient](#) in a TOAEP briefing dated 22 May 2023.

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<sup>9</sup> [https://www.kofiannanfoundation.org/app/uploads/2017/08/FinalReport\\_Eng.pdf](https://www.kofiannanfoundation.org/app/uploads/2017/08/FinalReport_Eng.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> The 7 recommendations not implemented relate to those on citizenship.

<sup>11</sup> “Myanmar: a new Muslim Insurgency in Rakhine State” Report No. 283/Asia issued by the International Crisis Group on 15 December 2016 -

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/RelatedRecords/CR2019\\_06132.PDF](https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/RelatedRecords/CR2019_06132.PDF)

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.networkmyanmar.org/ESW/Files/CR2019\\_06133.PDF](https://www.networkmyanmar.org/ESW/Files/CR2019_06133.PDF)

<sup>14</sup> <https://networkmyanmar.org/ESW/Files/The-MOU-between-Myanmar-UNDP-and-UNHCR.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.toaep.org/pbs-pdf/144-leider/>

- (c) Daw Suu established on 14 December 2017 with the Office of the President an [Advisory Board to the Committee for Implementation of Kofi Annan's Recommendations on Rakhine State](#) under the chairmanship of former Thai Foreign Minister Dr Surakiart Sathirathai. The Board [submitted its final report](#) on 16 August 2018. [The Board](#) did not however have a smooth passage, a result [of the resignation of former US diplomat and New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson](#). One of the Board's recommendations was to establish (see (d) which follows) an International Commission of Enquiry. [Lord Darzi of Denham](#), the British-Armenian surgeon, academic and politician, was a Member of the Board.
- (d) In the wake of the new attacks by ARSA on 25 August 2017 against military posts in Rakhine State, Daw Suu established with the Office of the President an International Commission of Enquiry (ICOE) into human right violations in Rakhine State. Their final report <sup>16</sup> made 22 recommendations which President Win Myint <sup>17</sup> accepted. [A Press Release by the Office of the President](#) on 21 January 2020 noted that: "The President has expressed sympathy for all victims and assured them of his commitment to accountability, justice and to professionalism of Myanmar's security forces." Daw Suu herself wrote an article in [the UK Financial Times on 23 January 2020](#) in which she noted:

"I stated at the ICJ <sup>18</sup> that there would be domestic investigations and prosecutions if the ICOE report presented further evidence of violations in Rakhine. The ICOE has done that, concluding that war crimes were committed during the internal armed conflict with the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army by members of Myanmar's security forces and civilians. The report details killing of civilians, disproportionate use of force, looting of property, and destruction of abandoned homes of Muslims. The ICOE found no evidence of genocide..... Justice can help us overcome distrust and fear, prejudice and hate, and end longstanding

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<sup>16</sup> [https://www.networkmyanmar.org/ESW/Files/Executive\\_Summary\\_of\\_ICOEs\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](https://www.networkmyanmar.org/ESW/Files/Executive_Summary_of_ICOEs_Final_Report.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> President Win Myint was detained by the junta along with Daw Suu when the military staged their coup on 1 February 2021.

<sup>18</sup> See Daw Suu's address to the International Court of Justice on 11 December 2019. The text is at <https://www.networkmyanmar.org/ESW/Files/ASSK-Speech-3.pdf>

cycles of intercommunal violence. This has always been my goal. This is what we are working to achieve. International justice should not itself fall victim to the extreme polarisation which characterises discussions on the situation in Rakhine.”

*3.3 In January 2020, the International Court of Justice decided that there was a real and imminent risk of irreparable prejudice to the rights of the Rohingya. The court also took the view that the Burmese government's efforts to remedy the situation "do not appear sufficient" to protect the Rohingya. Therefore, the court ordered the Burmese government to take "all measures within its power" to protect the Rohingya from genocidal actions. The court also instructed the Burmese government to preserve evidence and report back to the court at timely intervals about the situation.*

The Report is in my view at serious fault in not making it clear that this **decision by the Court concerned only “provisional measures”** to be taken by Myanmar in view of the critical situation of the Rohingya and in no way reflected any interim or definitive decision by the Court on the merits of the case. Article 85 of the Court Order specifically provided that:

85. The Court further reaffirms that the decision given in the present proceedings in no way prejudices the question of the jurisdiction of the Court to deal with the merits of the case or any questions relating to the admissibility of the Application or to the merits themselves. It leaves unaffected the right of the Governments of The Gambia and Myanmar to submit arguments and evidence in respect of those questions.

ICJ Vice-President Judge Hue of China noted in a separate opinion:

“1. I voted in favour of the operative paragraph of the Order, however, with reservations to some of the reasoning. Given the importance of the issues involved, even at the present stage of the proceedings, I feel obliged to put on record my separate opinion.

2. First of all, I have serious reservations with regard to the plausibility of the present case under the Genocide Convention. ....”

The Order in no way determined, even provisionally, that the State of Myanmar was guilty of genocide against the Rohingya. Indeed, this sub-paragraph has no relevance to the allegations made against Daw Suu and the failure to mention the specific context of the Order may well have misled the City Council.<sup>19</sup>

*3.4 Many Cities, including Oxford, The City of London Corporation, Edinburgh and Dublin have revoked the Freedom of the City awarded to Aung San Suu Kyi. Amnesty International withdrew her human rights award. These are only some of the examples of awards she lost.*

No comment.

*3.5 In 2018 Brighton and Hove City Council considered a joint motion from the Labour & Co-operative and Green Groups which stated: "This council resolves, in the light of continuing lack of protection of the human rights of the Rohingya people in Myanmar, many of whom are now refugees in Bangladesh, to remove at the earliest opportunity the Freedom of the City granted to Aung San Suu Kyi in 2011."*

No comment.

*3.6 A two thirds majority was required to pass the resolution to remove the Freedom of City by full Council and this threshold was not reached. The award therefore remains in place. It is some 5 years since the matter was considered and there has been no improvement in the human rights situation in Burma as it affects the Rohingya people. To continue to allow the honorary freedom of the city awarded in 2011 to remain in place risks the Council being associated, albeit indirectly, with indifference to the suffering of the Rohingya people and is inconsistent with the Councils values and anti-racist strategy. It is therefore proposed that the conferring of the Freedom of the City be reconsidered with a*

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<sup>19</sup> The term "genocide" used in Arakan can be traced back to the immediate post-independence years. See "[Constitutional Demands of the Arakani Muslims](#)" of June 1951 made a decade before their leaders started to use the designation "Rohingya". See Paragraph 13 of [Peter Murray's report on Arakan 1942-43](#) for talk of "jihad" (holy war) to capture Akyab (Sittwe), the capital of Arakan, for Islam.

*recommendation to revoke it. Accordingly, a further Special Meeting has been convened to consider the proposal again to remove the Freedom of the City from Aung San Suu Kyi. If passed, the freedom of the city will be revoked with immediate effect.*

Comment: While the Report claims that there has been no improvement in the human rights situation as it affects the Rohingya people over the last five years, it should be noted that Daw Suu was detained on 1 February 2021, over two and a half years ago, and can hardly be blamed for any lack of improvement in the dire situation in Rakhine State during the last 30 months or more. As regards the concern that the Council might have “being associated, albeit indirectly, with indifference to the suffering of the Rohingya people”, I have already given examples of her practical expressions of concern in the establishment of the Kofi Annan Commission in 2016, the repatriation agreements agreed with Bangladesh, UNHCR and UNDP, the Advisory Board related to Kofi Annan’s recommendations in 2017, the International Commission of Enquiry in the same year. In addition, might I draw attention to passages which emphasize her undoubted compassion with the Rohingya community:

(a) Her address in Nay Pyi Taw on 19 September 2017 <sup>20</sup> in which she stated:

“We feel deeply for the suffering of all the people who have been caught up in the conflict. Those who have had to flee their homes are many - not just Muslims and Rakhines, but also small minority groups, such as the Daing-net, Mro, Thet, Mramagyi and Hindus of whose presence most of the world is totally unaware.”

(b) Her address in Singapore on 21 August 2018 <sup>21</sup> in which she stated:

“We share deep sympathy and concern for all displaced persons, especially women and children. There are around four million Myanmar +migrant workers and displaced persons at present in Thailand.

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.networkmyanmar.org/ESW/Files/ASSK-Speech-1.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.networkmyanmar.org/ESW/Files/ASSK-Speech-2.pdf>

“Similarly, we hope to work with Bangladesh to effect the voluntary, safe and dignified return of displaced persons from northern Rakhine. We have reached out to Bangladesh by sending Ministerial delegations to Dhaka and last week, the Bangladeshi Foreign Minister was invited to Myanmar to see at first hand preparations we have made for the resettlement of returnees. During his visit, both sides agreed, inter alia, to deliver on commitments made, to speed up implementation of bilateral agreements on repatriation, and to set up a hotline between the two countries at the ministerial level.

“We also recognise the crucial role of the United Nations in addressing an issue of this nature. We facilitated the visits of the Permanent Representatives of the UN Security Council members together with representatives of neighbouring countries and the ASEAN Chair, Singapore. We welcome the appointment of Ambassador Christine Burgener as Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General. She has already opened her Office in Nay Pyi Taw. We believe that our engagement with Ambassador Burgener will be positive and fruitful.

“The danger of terrorist activities, which was the initial cause of events leading to the humanitarian crisis in Rakhine, remains real and present today. Unless this security challenge is addressed, the risk of inter-communal violence will remain. It is a threat that could have 10 grave consequences not just for Myanmar but also for other countries in our region and beyond. Terrorism should not be condoned in any form for any reason.”

(c) Her address in The Hague on 11 December 2019 <sup>22</sup> before the International Court of Justice in which she stated:

“The situation in Rakhine is complex and not easy to fathom. But one thing surely touches all of us equally: the sufferings of the many innocent people whose lives were torn apart as a consequence of the armed conflicts of 2016 and 2017, in particular, those who have had to flee their homes and are now living in camps in Cox’s Bazar.....

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.networkmyanmar.org/ESW/Files/ASSK-Speech-3.pdf>

“Recent cases in the news headlines illustrate that even when military justice works, there can be reversals. This can also happen in Myanmar. As part of the overall efforts of the Myanmar Government to provide justice, a court-martial found that 10 Muslim men had been summarily executed in Inn Din village, one of the 12 locations of serious incidents referred to earlier. It sentenced four officers and three soldiers each to ten years in prison with hard labour. After serving a part of their sentences, they were given a military pardon. Many of us in Myanmar were unhappy with this pardon.”<sup>23</sup>

“As I have already stated, if war crimes have been committed by members of Myanmar’s Defence Services, they will be prosecuted through our military justice system, in accordance with Myanmar’s Constitution. It is a matter for the competent criminal justice authorities to assess whether, for example, there has been inadequate distinction between civilians and ARSA fighters, disproportionate use of force, violations of human rights, failure to prevent plundering or property destruction, or acts of forcible displacement of civilians. Such conduct, if proven, could be relevant under international humanitarian law or human rights conventions, but not under the 1948 Genocide Convention for reasons Professor William Schabas will elaborate in a moment.

“We are, however, dealing with an internal armed conflict, started by coordinated and comprehensive attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, to which Myanmar’s Defence Services responded. Tragically, this armed conflict led to the exodus of several hundred thousand Muslims from the three northernmost townships of Rakhine into Bangladesh – just as the armed conflict in Croatia with which the Court had to deal led to the massive exodus of, first, ethnic Croats and later, ethnic Serbs.”

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<sup>23</sup> This criticism of the Myanmar military was about as far as Daw Suu dared to go without risking strong reaction from the military authorities.

## Conclusions

My decision to defend Daw Suu against allegations, and not only by the Brighton and Hove City Council, that she was indifferent to the sufferings of the Rohingya, acquiesced in military action against them, remained silent and did little or nothing to support the community does not reflect any close association of mine with her, although I have had discussions with her on two occasions. It is simply that, on the basis of my analysis of the public record of what she has actually said and done, there is no serious evidence to confirm such allegations, but abundant evidence that she worked as hard as she knew how to resolve the precarious situation in Rakhine State, to reconcile the Buddhist and Muslim communities and to maintain a working relationship with the military, essential for her political survival.<sup>24</sup>

There is no hint in anything she has ever said or done which is suggestive of racism, which was also a concern of the City Council.<sup>25</sup>

I am very doubtful that prominent British personalities who have met her, including The King when Prince of Wales, David Cameron and Boris Johnson, in any way countenance these allegations made against her.

Daw Suu is admittedly something of an enigma and I am no apologist for her. She can be autocratic, stubborn, at times ill-informed, fails to delegate and is ill-at-ease when facing hostile questioning. Her low point in recent years was when she told an international audience in Myanmar on 19 September 2017<sup>26</sup>:

“We are concerned to hear that numbers of Muslims are fleeing across the border to Bangladesh. We want to find out why this exodus is happening. We would like to talk to those who have fled as well as those who have stayed.”

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<sup>24</sup> The American Buddhist scholar Alan Clements and his British colleague Fergus Harlow recently published an extensive anthology of interviews with Daw Suu. “The Voice of Hope: Aung San Suu Kyi” World Dharma Publications 2023 (ISBN 978-1953508-31-7). This volume is invaluable for an understanding of Daw Suu’s philosophy of reconciliation.

<sup>25</sup> Daw Suu had a close relationship at Oxford University with a Muslim Pakistani student who later became a distinguished Pakistani Ambassador:

[https://www.networkmyanmar.org/ESW/Files/Tariq\\_Osman\\_Hyder.pdf](https://www.networkmyanmar.org/ESW/Files/Tariq_Osman_Hyder.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.networkmyanmar.org/ESW/Files/ASSK-Speech-1.pdf>

I doubt that there was anyone in the audience who could not have told her that Rohingya were fleeing by their thousands to Bangladesh because of the brutal counter-insurgency operations of the military after the 17 August 2017 attacks by ARSA. So was this perhaps more a *cri de coeur* for international understanding of the immense difficulties she faced in dealing with the military who were and are a law unto themselves in Myanmar? Some in the West, mainly the media and human rights groups, were pitiless in their condemnation of her. They wanted to hear criticism from her of the military, even though that would have precipitated a coup against her <sup>27</sup>. While they wanted confrontation, Daw Suu strove for reconciliation between the Buddhist and Muslim communities and a better relationship with the military. Human rights groups demanded that she use her moral authority and speak out against the appalling treatment inflicted on the Rohingya. Yet she knew that to speak out would mean almost certain political suicide which she was not prepared to risk.

The historical complexity of the situation in Rakhine State has been well documented and is well understood by Daw Suu. I would in particular refer you to four [briefing papers on Myanmar published online](#) by the Torkel Opsahl Academic EPublisher (TOAEP):

- [“Rohingya: The Foundational Years”](#) by Jacques P Leider
- [“A Critical Assessment of the Burma Exhibition at the US Holocaust Museum”](#) by Derek Tonkin
- [“Territorial dispossession in Northern Arakan 1942-43”](#) by Jacques P Leider
- [“Migration to Arakan from Bengal during British Rule 1826-1948”](#) by Derek Tonkin

as well as the Network Myanmar memorandum [“The UN Fact-Finding Mission’s Mischievous Use of Historical Sources”](#) by Derek Tonkin <sup>28</sup>

I have no expectation at all that the Brighton and Hove City Council will wish to reverse their revocation of Daw Suu’s “Freedom of the City”. Indeed, during the debate Councillors advanced cogent reasons why the award should not have

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<sup>27</sup> The coup eventually came on 1 February 2021.

<sup>28</sup> There is a wealth of historical information about the Rohingya on my website [www.networkmyanmar.org](http://www.networkmyanmar.org) which I fund and edit by myself.

been made in the first place, as well as outlining revised criteria for such awards in the future and a possible future recipient.

I feel it important however to put on record my deep regret that allegations made concerning Daw Suu's supposed indifference to the suffering of the Rohingya, perceived acquiescence in counter-insurgency operations against ARSA who derived considerable support from the local Rohingya population, and even racism are not supported by what she actually said and did. They reflect rather comment by human rights organisations and Islamic activists outraged that she did not respond to their criticisms in the confrontational way that they would like and were urging on her.

I recognise that the views expressed by Brighton and Hove City Councillors are widely shared by many in this country, but that is because, in my humble opinion, they do not know the facts.

The decision of the City Council was in my view unfair and unkind. Revoking their award to this elderly lady, whose arbitrary detention was condemned last year by the UN Security Council <sup>29</sup>, showed a lack of humanity, for Councillors were made aware by me personally before their meeting that she has been held in prison incommunicado since 1 February 2021.

*Derek Tonkin is a former British Ambassador to Vietnam (1980-82) and to Thailand (1986-89).*

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<sup>29</sup> [UNSC Resolution 2669 of 21 December 2022](#)