

Rohingya crisis: Myanmar's Aung Suu Kyi to skip UN General Assembly meet

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Bangkok: With Myanmar drawing condemnation for violence that has driven at least 370,000 Rohingya to flee the country, the government said Wednesday its leader Aung San Suu Kyi would skip this week's U.N. General Assembly.

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Suu Kyi was missing the assembly, which opened Tuesday and runs through September 25, in order to address domestic security issues, according to presidential office spokesman Zaw Htay. Suu Kyi is not Myanmar's president - her official titles are state counselor and foreign minister - but she effectively serves as leader of the Southeast Asian nation.

Zaw Htay said that, with President Htin Kyaw hospitalized, the second vice president would attend the U.N. meeting.

"The first reason (Suu Kyi cannot attend) is because of the Rakhine terrorist attacks," Zaw Htay said. "The state counselor is focusing to calm the situation in Rakhine state. There are circumstances. The second reason is, there are people inciting riots in some areas. We are trying to take care of the security issue in many other places. The third is that we are hearing that there will be terrorist attacks and we are trying to address this issue."

The crisis erupted on Aug. 25, when an insurgent Rohingya group attacked on police outposts in Myanmar's Rakhine state. That prompted Myanmar's military to launch "clearance operations" against the rebels, setting off a wave of violence that have left hundreds dead and thousands of homes burned - mostly Rohingya in both cases.

The government blames Rohingya for the attacks, but journalists who visited the region found evidence that raises doubts about its claims that Rohingya set fire to their own homes.

Many of the Rohingya who flooded into refugee camps in Bangladesh told of Myanmar soldiers shooting indiscriminately, burning their homes and warning them to leave or die. Others said they were attacked by Buddhist mobs.

Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate who lived under house arrest for many years under a military junta that ultimately gave way to an elected government, has faced a torrent of international criticism and pressure since the crisis erupted.

On Tuesday, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called the killing of Muslims a political disaster and called Suu Kyi a "brutal woman." U.N. human rights chief Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini said the Rohingya were victims of what "seems a textbook example of ethnic cleansing."

Bangladesh has been overwhelmed with the massive influx of Rohingya, many of whom arrived hungry and traumatized after walking for days through jungles or being packed into rickety wooden boats.

Before Aug. 25, Bangladesh had already been housing some 500,000 Rohingya refugees who fled earlier flashes of violence including anti-Muslim riots in 2012.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has pledged to help the new arrivals, but demanded that Myanmar "take their

nationals back.â€•

With two pre-existing camps packed beyond capacity, the government said it would provide 2,000 acres (810 hectares) for a new camp in the border district of Coxâ€™s Bazar. Many of the new arrivals were staying in schools, or were huddling under tarps in makeshift settlements along roads and in open fields.

Basic resources were scarce, including food, clean water and medical aid.

Dozens of foreign diplomats and aid agency officials were set to meet Rohingya refugees Wednesday near the Kutupalong refugee camp, according to Kazi Abdur Rahman, additional deputy commissioner in Coxâ€™s Bazar district.

â€œA humanitarian crisis is going on here,â€• he said. The diplomats â€œwill visit camps, talk to them, see their condition. We need to work together during such a serious crisis.â€•

Two human rights groups have accused the U.N. Security Council of ignoring the crisis.

â€œThis is an international peace and security crisisâ€• and there is no excuse for the Security Council â€œsitting on its hands,â€• Louis Charbonneau of Human Rights Watch said Tuesday alongside representatives from Amnesty International at the U.N. headquarters

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the worldâ€™s largest Muslim body, urged Myanmar to allow in U.N. monitors so they can investigate what it alleged was systematic brutality against the Rohingya. The U.N. Human Rights Council approved an investigative mission earlier this year, but Myanmar in June refused to allow it to enter. An envoyâ€™s visit in July was met with protests.

The ethnic Rohingya Muslim minority has faced decades of discrimination persecution in Buddhist-majority Myanmar, where they are denied citizenship despite centuries-old roots in the country.

On Tuesday, the presidentâ€™s office said Myanmarâ€™s government had established a new committee to address security and economic development in Rohingya areas. It said the 15-member committee would work on implementing recommendations made last month by a commission led by former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

- AP