

Rohingya violence: Aung San Suu Kyi to lead team to fight genocide charges

21/11/2019 20:38 by admin

The announcement was posted on the Facebook page of the office of the state counsellor, a position Suu Kyi holds along with that of foreign minister. Myanmar's government releases much public information on Facebook.

Myanmar has strongly denied carrying out organized human rights abuses. (File)

Yangoon: Myanmar's government announced Wednesday that its leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, will head a legal team it will send to the International Court of Justice in the Netherlands to contest a case of genocide filed against it by Gambia on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The announcement was posted on the Facebook page of the office of the state counsellor, a position Suu Kyi holds along with that of foreign minister. Myanmar's government releases much public information on Facebook.

The country's military has been accused of carrying out mass rapes, killings and the torching of homes during a counterinsurgency campaign launched in western Myanmar in August 2017 after rebel attacks. The violence sent more than 700,000 members of the Muslim Rohingya minority fleeing to neighboring Bangladesh. Myanmar's population is overwhelmingly Buddhist.

When filing the case, Gambia's justice minister and attorney general, Abubacarr Marie Tambadou, told The Associated Press he wanted to "send a clear message to Myanmar and to the rest of the international community that the world must not stand by and do nothing in the face of terrible atrocities that are occurring around us. It is a shame for our generation that we do nothing while genocide is unfolding right before our own eyes."

The head of a UN fact-finding mission on Myanmar warned last month that "there is a serious risk of genocide recurring," and the mission also said in its final report in September that Myanmar should be held responsible in international legal forums for alleged genocide against the Rohingya.

Myanmar has strongly denied carrying out organized human rights abuses.

The brief announcement Wednesday night on the effort "to defend Myanmar's national interest" did not specify that Gambia's application to the ICJ involved genocide, but said it was "with regard to the displaced persons from the Rakhine state, the area from which the Rohingya fled."

It said Myanmar has retained prominent international lawyers to contest the case, and that Suu Kyi will lead the team in her capacity as foreign minister.

The announcement did not mention a date for the mission to the court, but the court said on Monday that it would hold public hearings on Dec. 10-12.

On Friday, Myanmar's government rejected the International Criminal Court's decision to allow prosecutors to open an investigation into crimes committed against the Rohingya Muslim minority.

Government spokesman Zaw Htay said Myanmar stood by its position that the Netherlands-based court has no jurisdiction over its actions because Myanmar was not a party to the agreement establishing the court.

The court's position is that because Myanmar's alleged atrocities sent more than 700,000 Rohingya fleeing to Bangladesh for safety, it does have jurisdiction since Bangladesh is a party to the court and the case may involve forced deportation.

The International Court of Justice settles disputes between nations, while the International Criminal Court seeks to convict individuals responsible for crimes. Member states of the United Nations are automatically parties to the court, though they must also consent to its jurisdiction.

Both courts are based in The Hague.

- AP