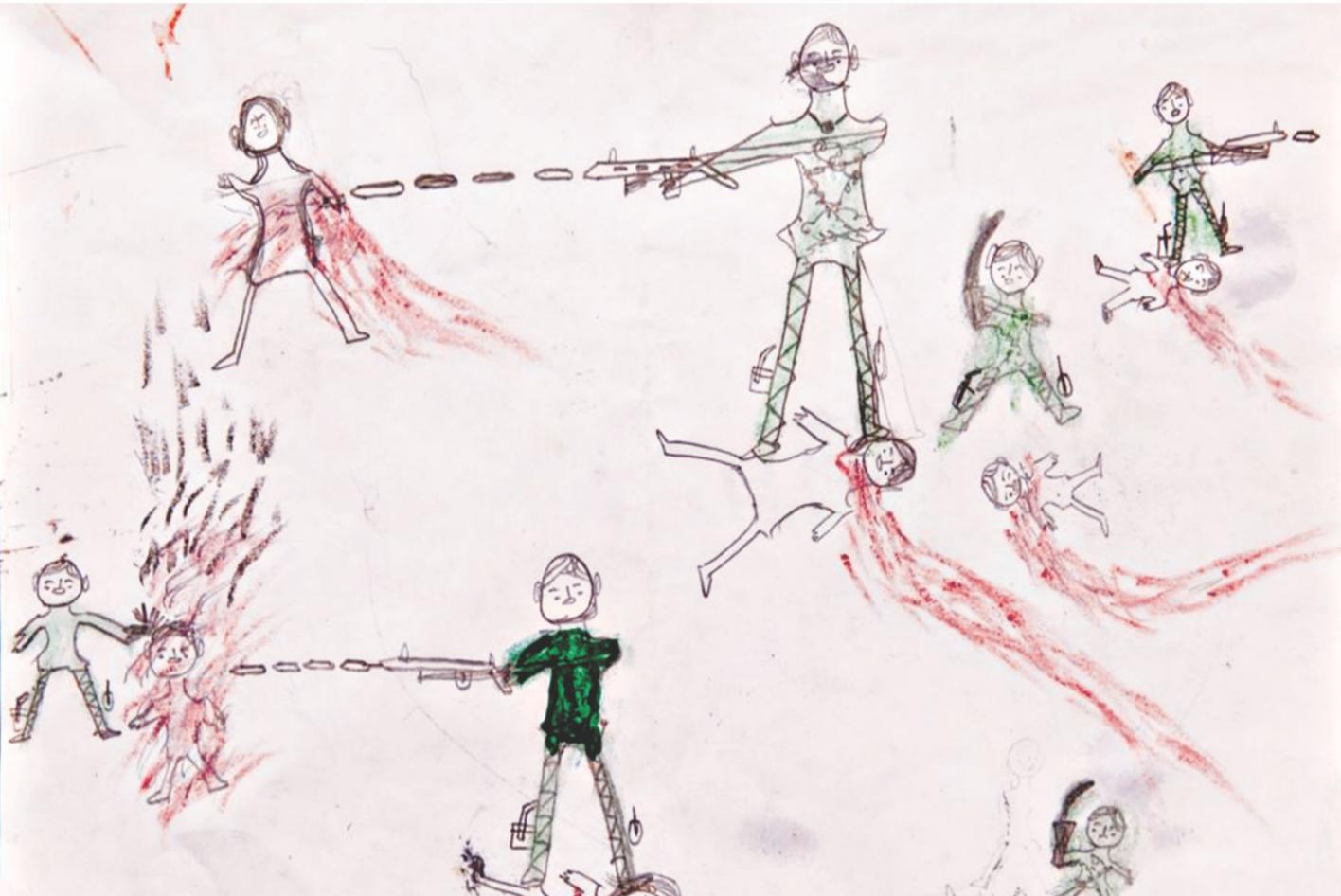


ethnic groups in many instances genuinely do not believe that the Rohingya belong to the modern nation-state of Myanmar. Despite only three percent being Muslims in Myanmar, there is a genuine anxiety that Islamisation will spread. Indonesia is often cited as an example in this context.

Sadly, even human rights organisations and women's rights organisations in Myanmar have not publicly defended the Rohingya. Karen Women's Organisation is a notable exception.

The forced migration of Rohingyas that generated the recent crisis beginning from 1942 is well documented. What is less known, at least in Bangladesh is that from the 1920s, the word "kala" was widely used to describe Indian Muslims, Indian Hindus and Burmese Muslims. There were anti-Muslim riots led primarily by the ethnic Bamar in 1926 and 1938. In 1930 there were serious anti-Indian riots. The "Burma for Burmese" campaign in the late thirties is deeply embedded in the discourse of Myanmarification of



UNICEF/BROWN (COURTESY PHOTO)

## Statelessness and disenfranchisement

There are eight major national ethnic groups that could be broken down into another 135 ethnic groups. Myanmar, through its 1982 Citizenship Law, recognises the Kaman and Bamar Muslims in its Muslim populations. Its population also includes Chinese Muslims and Indian Muslims. However, the largest Muslim population living in the Rakhine State, the Rohingyas are not recognised in the list—this has effectively rendered them stateless.

the state that I noted earlier.

We are also familiar with some of the key exclusionary policies and strategies that started with the military coup, after which freedom of movement was restricted in 1962; the promulgation of the Emergency Immigration Act designed to prevent people entering from India, China and Bangladesh in 1974; the census programme Operation Nagamin, to check identification cards and take action against illegal aliens in 1977; and finally the 1982 Citizenship Law, following the 1978 exodus, when many Rohingyas returned or attempted to return to Myanmar.



PHOTO: RASHED SUMON

In Myanmar's first openly contested election in 25 years in November 2015, Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy won a landslide victory. But the 2008 Constitution also reserves 25 percent of seats in the Parliament for members of the military, which primarily controls security policies and practices of Myanmar. The electoral politics prior to general elections and restrictions imposed on political rights contributed to further disenfranchisement of the Rohingyas. Temporary identity cards of an estimated 700,000 Rohingyas and other minority groups, which they needed to vote, were revoked in May 2015 (see OHCHR report on Rohingya, June 28, 2016). The new Parliament has no Muslim members.

U Ko Ni—Aung San Suu Kyi's advisor, a well-known lawyer and one of the most prominent Muslims in Myanmar—was assassinated in January 2017, marking the beginning of the end that we are now witnessing in 2017. U Ko Ni was widely believed to be the one who advised forming the position of State Counselor for Aung San Suu Kyi as she was barred from the presidency under Article 59(f) of the 2008 Constitution primarily drafted by the military. In recent years, U Ko Ni had publicly pushed for constitutional reforms and advocated for a drastic reduction of the military's political powers. A former military officer was suspected of the killing. Aung San Suu Kyi was not only

remarkably silent for a while after the assassination but she didn't even attend his funeral. It is worth noting that Aung San Suu Kyi has been criticised for her silence in responding to the plight of Kachins when the Tatmadaw launched ground and airstrikes in Kachin State. Following a 17-year ceasefire in Kachin and northern Shan states, armed conflicts emerged when the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) turned down government proposals to ethnic armed groups and economic development projects such as the Myitsone hydropower dam generated "new" grievances. Thousands of Kachin refugees were turned away by China.

## Implications for children

While the forced displacement of the Rohingya has been a constant factor even before Bangladesh became an independent country in 1971, in order to understand the most recent surge, it is worthwhile to go back to 2012. Following allegations of the rape and murder of Thida Htwe, a Rakhine women, a Rakhine mob lynched 10 Rohingya men in June 2012. The international community needed to pay attention to the deafening silences projected by the government in Myanmar and counter the strategy of self-censorship that was employed to strategically and innovatively deliver humanitarian assistance to affected people. These strategies, by 2017, had backfired.