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Children at Kyein Ni Pyin IDP camp, Rakhine State

Rakhine State: A strange calm has settled on the northern townships of Myanmar's Rakhine State. Hints of the terrible violence that swept through the area in August 2017 can still be seen in the razed villages and the blackened palm tree stumps. But there is little trace of the 700,000 Rohingya Muslims who fled late last year, most of whom are now living in Bangladesh.

Although the visible scars may be slowly fading, the invisible ones are not. The trauma of what happened a year ago is still felt by all communities. Economic activity is down and Muslims continue to face travel and other restrictions, severely limiting their access to services and livelihoods.

Rakhine is one of the most economically and socially deprived regions of Myanmar, and the lack of development is felt across all ethnic groups. According to the UN, more than 690,000 people in Rakhine State require humanitarian assistance, the majority of them – some 595,000 – being stateless Muslims (i.e. Rohingya). More than 360,000 children from all communities in Rakhine are deemed to require humanitarian assistance.

Security and bureaucratic obstacles mean that delivering help to those in need is hugely challenging. But in recent months, travel restrictions have sufficiently eased for UNICEF staff to get a clearer idea of the situation confronting children.

A UNICEF mission to Maungdaw in July 2018 reported that 210 out of 222 schools were open, but with sharply reduced

student attendance. One primary school which had 150 students last year now has just 50 still attending. Elsewhere, the UNICEF team noted that some classrooms lacked desks and other furniture, and saw a need for investment in teaching staff and school infrastructure.

Other concerns noted by the mission focused on food insecurity (with the risk of malnutrition among young children), as well as a high school-dropout rate and a range of child protection issues.

Between January and June 2018, more than 900 individual cases of child protection violations were reported across


Six years on, people in the camps are starting to lose hope that their lives will ever return to normal.

Rakhine, including cases of children who were unaccompanied or separated; children who experienced sexual and physical violence; and children who had come into conflict with the law after trying to leave Myanmar without authorisation.

The picture is little more reassuring in the camps for internally-displaced people (IDPs) in central Rakhine, where more than 125,000 Rohingya people have been confined since an earlier bout of inter-communal violence in 2012.