ABSTRACT: In February 2017, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) released a damning report of human rights abuses perpetrated against the Rohingya. The report was based on interviews with Rohingya fleeing from Myanmar since 9 October 2016, with research continuing up to January 2017. Many recounted personal experiences of violence and physical, life-threatening harm. The report received some attention among humanitarian agencies (many of which have been banned from accessing Rakhine state) but was largely ignored by the international press. Headlines that week focused on the Trump administration's attempts to defend its travel ban. This poem contains fragments and modifications of the report. It is not an attempt to supplant the voices of those at the heart of the report, but—by stripping down its language—an attempt to make (and mend) our ways of reading (and hearing) their stories.

KEYWORDS: displacement, eyewitness, OHCHR, poetry, Rohingya, violence


To move\(^1\) between, and often within

1. Go in a specified direction
or manner, change position; Alter
the space, or shape of; Change one's place
of residence or work; (Of a player)
change the position of a piece in a board game;

townships, procedures to secure\(^2\) travel

Depart. 2. (Of a door) Make hard to open,
fasten, or lock; Protect against threats,
make safe; Succeed in obtaining, especially
with difficulty; Fix (something)
so that it cannot be moved or lost.
are onerous and time-consuming.

3. A moment or definite portion of time allotted; The appropriate or expected time, in particular of childbirth or death; The indefinite continued progress of existence; A prison sentence;

Failure to comply with requirements

An instance or occasion. 4. To act in accordance with a wish or command; Meet specified standards; Late 16th Century from Latin compleere, fill up, fulfil (the original sense was “accomplish,”

can result in arrest and prosecution.

Hence “oblige” or “obey”). 5. Seize by legal authority; Detain; Stop or check (a process, a disease); A sudden cessation of movement; To attract attention (as in, “the stillness of the place arrested her”).

Several victims mentioned

Death

, the destruction of property and the displacement of 140,000 people due to shooting at close range
due to stabbing by knife
due to beating by the security forces
by five army officers in front of our eyes
of the foetus
due to random firing
and her two sisters killed
[...] Maybe
they held each other tight, that could be why they seemed to be hugging in there, my brother said.

Families may have had members killed,

Your pen wavers on the stroke, severs beaten, raped, and / or taken away
“and” from “or.” After calamity, a small to an unknown location, while at the same time chance, a breath – such sweet distance, in their homes were burned and looted. For most this language of yours. You tell me
interviewees, separation
it is a good and merciful tongue.
from their families is a major concern.
In our own it never rains, but pours.

My Father
stood up, which is when a grenade came listen: here the things I
was killed at the same time as I was shot remember. the armed
who was also living with me men were wearing green uniforms,
a prayer leader some with plain patterned pants, and some with
was slaughtered with a knife a kind of camouflage pattern, like
was called out from all of us women and children leaves. They
totally burned, together with three others were the same color
paid the army up to 1 million kyat for my release as helicopters.

Have crossed the border pictured below

My country sells its islands whole. to many
My country lets its cities grow. Families
My country takes care of your soul. Moving
This led
My country holds its secrets close. from village
My country builds above the sea. to village
My country makes your emperor’s clothes. and
My country lets your country be. Ultimately

My country has its own to feed. leaving
My country is your country’s womb. the country
My country knows it has no need. for safety.

THEOPHILUS KWEK is a writer and researcher based in Singapore. He has published four volumes of poetry, most recently The First Five Storms, which won the New Poets’ Prize in 2016. His poems, translations, and essays have appeared in The Guardian, Times Literary Supplement, Irish Examiner, Mekong Review, and The London Magazine. He presently serves as Co-Editor of Oxford Poetry and The Kindling.