

**Thumbnail Image:**



Sep 20, 2017 by [Nafay Choudhury](#)

## **No Protocol to Revoke Suu Kyi's Nobel Prize? What Baloney.** <sup>[1]</sup>

The Rohingya may be at the brink of facing genocide. As each day passes, new headlines in the press highlight their tragic situation, but with little solace to their dire condition. Since the Myanmar military began their ruthless incursion into Rakhine State three weeks ago, nearly 400,000 Rohingya Muslims have fled to neighboring Bangladesh to escape kidnapping, torture, rape, army raids or being burnt to death.

Twelve year-old Jashim walked for 13 days before reaching Bangladesh after the military ransacked his village, shooting indiscriminately and burning houses. "I'm very upset about my village because it's not there any more. We did not bring anything, so it is all lost." Thirty-three-year-old Mohammad had to carry his 80-year-old paralyzed mother during the 10-day trek. "We crossed three rivers by boat while the rest we did on foot. Sometimes, we would come across the military who would start shooting at us, and sometimes we would sleep in the

forest where there were lots of wild animals.”

Despite widespread international outcry, the pro-democracy Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi has remained deafeningly silent while the military continues its onslaught of the Rohingya. The government that she now heads displays outright disinterest in the plight of the Rohingya. Worse yet, her title of Nobel Laureate serves to legitimize her continued (in)actions, while Rakhine State goes up in flames.

In recent days, more than 420,000 individuals across the world have signed an online petition petitioning the Norwegian Nobel Committee 2016 to revoke Suu Kyi’s Nobel Peace Prize. “When a laureate cannot maintain peace, then for the sake of peace itself the prize needs to be returned or confiscated by the Nobel Peace Prize Committee,” the petition states. This petition comes at the heels of fellow Nobel Laureates Malala Yousafzai, Desmond Tutu and Shirin Ebadi expressing their deep dismay over the failure of the Myanmar leader to address in any serious manner the Rohingya’s plight.

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However, on Friday, September 8, the Norwegian Nobel Institute released a statement making clear that it would not consider revoking Suu Kyi’s Nobel Prize. “[A]s a matter of principle the Norwegian Nobel Committee never comment upon what the Peace Prize Laureates may say and do after they have been awarded the prize.” In an interview, the head of the committee added, “Neither Alfred Nobel’s will nor the statutes of the Nobel Foundation provide for the possibility that a Nobel Prize [...] can be revoked.” The message is plain and clear. No protocol exists and the committee intends to distance itself from monitoring any subsequent behavior of recipients. This response by the committee is—to be frank—simply baloney.

No single accolade garners so much attention and widespread respect as the Nobel Prize. It “has become something of a global recognition,” writes Professor Hamid Dabashi. The prize confers upon the recipient an incredible status of moral rectitude and authority. Nobel Peace Prize recipients are forever etched into the annals of history as exemplars of “people who have given their utmost to international brotherhood and sisterhood.”

Far more than simply recognizing achievements, the Nobel Peace Prize empowers its recipients in whatever action they pursue moving forward, for better or for worse. And the committee is well aware of this fact. Their attempt to inspire Barack Obama to bring about global change was a total flop. But the move powerfully captures the moral authority that the committee had hoped to confer upon Obama to reach a particular end.

In the case of Aung San Suu Kyi, her assent to political power as well as her ongoing disregard for the human rights and dignity of the Rohingya people remain deeply entangled with the immense moral authority afforded by the Nobel Peace Prize. Critics may argue that her strong character would have allowed her to reach her political aspirations regardless of

the award, and sure, this may be true. But the prize certainly did not hurt her case. However, what is most worrisome is that the prize now effectively shields her from serious criticism and accountability as she pursues her political ambitions (let us be honest that supporting the Rohingya within Myanmar remains a politically unpopular position). Thus, when the UN announces that actions by the Myanmar Army amount to nothing less than ethnic cleansing, Suu Kyi can cloak herself in the protective surety of her prize as it quite literally gives her claim to the highest apex in human rights.

Unlike any other award, the Nobel Peace Prize has a direct impact on real world events. By conferring the award, the Norwegian Nobel Committee licenses Suu Kyi with unparalleled moral authority. For the committee to say it cannot fetter that authority—even when the prize serves to shield her from the criticisms of inaction regarding egregious acts of human suffering happening directly under her watch—because it lacks the protocol is irresponsible at best and complicit at worst. Underlying any protocols—and indeed, the prize itself—is the understanding that the prize be a force for good in the world and a means to alleviate human suffering.

Let us not forget this as each Rohingya man, woman and child wonders ominously about their future.

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