

Committee: Security Council

Issue: The Rohingya Crisis

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Introduction

When one watches a typical 24-hour news cycle, numerous references to the multitude of conflicts in the Middle East, and the subsequent refugee crisis that are caused by them, would be made. Thus, it comes as no surprise that when refugee crises, or crises as a whole, are mentioned, Middle Eastern Countries, such as Iraq and Syria, are the first cases that come to mind.

However, one of the biggest and most catastrophic crises of our times is often ignored. The Rohingya Crisis has only served to inflict further scars on the country of Myanmar, which has been plagued by instability (ranging from political to social) ever since the fall of the military junta in 2011. This multifaceted crisis has a large impact on the entire region of South-Eastern Asia. Firstly, the Rohingya Crisis has become one of the greatest refugee crises of our century as millions of civilians have been displaced. Secondly, the humanitarian crisis that the region faces because of the Rohingya Crisis is of an unprecedented scale, as it can only be matched by the 2004 humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka. Lastly, the systematic killing of the Rohingya people, which is seen by many as a clear ethnic and religious cleansing, as well as the discrimination they have faced by the very government of Myanmar for many years, only seem to escalate.

The Rohingya Crisis is a rather unique one, which may give a reason as to why it is yet to be resolved. Specifically, the persecution of the Rohingya is not a phenomenon that is confined to Myanmar, as it has been practiced by many states in the region for hundreds of years, in many ways similar to the consistent, and often global, discrimination and persecution Jewish populations were facing before the end of the Second World War. The fact that the aforementioned discrimination is instigated, sponsored, and enforced by the government makes the attempts of the United Nations and the international community to mediate the crisis even less fruitful, as those mediators are forced to argue for the rights of a group with the very government that is ruling them.

In general, the Rohingya Crisis is an issue of tremendous relevance and overall importance. The breaches of the human rights of the Rohingya people are as frequent as they are appalling testing the limits of the definition of genocide. Thus, reaching a feasible and peaceful resolution to the issue, that will guarantee the protection of the human rights of the Rohingya people in both the short and long run, is highly necessary.

Definition of Key-Terms

Ethnic Minority

"A group of people of a particular race or nationality living in a country or area where most people are from a different race or nationality." ¹

Religious Minority

A group of people that embraces a religion that is not held by the majority of the population of a country.

In that case, the Rohingya people are classified as both an ethnic and religious minority.

Ethnic Cleansing

"The expulsion, imprisonment, or killing of an ethnic minority by a dominant majority in order to achieve ethnic homogeneity." ²

Genocide

"The deliberate killing of a large group of people, especially those of a particular nation or ethnic group." ³

¹ "Ethnic Minority Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary." *Gender Pay Gap Definition in the Cambridge English Dictionary*, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/ethnic-minority.

² "Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's Most-Trusted Online Dictionary." *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/.

³ "Genocide | Definition of Genocide in English by Oxford Dictionaries." *Oxford Dictionaries | English*, Oxford Dictionaries, en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/genocide.

Exodus

"A mass departure"⁴

The exodus that this study guide will mostly be referring to would be the mass departure of the Rohingya populations following the increase in government brutality after August 2017.

Indigenous Population

"Indigenous populations are communities that live within, or are attached to, geographically distinct traditional habitats or ancestral territories, and who identify themselves as being part of a distinct cultural group, descended from groups present in the area before modern states were created and current borders defined. They generally maintain cultural and social identities, and social, economic, cultural and political institutions, separate from the mainstream or dominant society or culture."⁵

Background Information

The Rohingya People, a story of persecution (Origins to World War II)

Early History and Arrival of Islam

Based on historical artifacts that were lately discovered, it is believed that the Rohingya people were concentrated in the city Arakan, one of the first cities and trade centers of South-East Asia. Due to its strategic position, which was closed to major trade routes like the Silk Road, Arakan became a hotspot of trading, bringing merchants from all over the world together.

Evidence of the existence of Rohingya populations in South-East Asia can be tracked all the way back to the 9th century. They are descendants of Arab merchants that navigated the region at the time, as they put down the roots for the communities that the Rohingya would later come to populate. The Arab merchants

⁴ "Exodus." *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/exodus.

⁵ "Indigenous Populations." *World Health Organization*, World Health Organization, 7 Dec. 2010, www.who.int/topics/health_services_indigenous/en/.

also brought the Muslim faith with them, passing it on to the Rohingya, making them one of the few Muslim populations in the region to this day.

Shifts during the British Colonial Rule

The arrival of the British in the region caused its rapid industrialization. The creation of the East India Company (which did extend to modern day Myanmar) along with the lack of trade restrictions in the British colonies of the region caused rapid migration to economic hotspots like Arakan, as well as the rest of the then-called Burma. More specifically, historians estimate that over a quarter of a million of migrants (mostly of Indian descent) migrated to Myanmar in order to fulfill the needs for cheap labor. This migration also greatly affected the numbers of the Rohingya people of Myanmar, as the Muslim population in the region nearly tripled. It is important to note that, despite the fact that the Rohingya had mainly their roots in Myanmar, a great number of the region's Rohingya population resulted from the British colonial policies in the 19th and 20th century.

Despite the improvement of the economy and decreasing unemployment rates, the British rule in Myanmar was brutal and repressive, while elements of racism and xenophobia already began to emerge. However, the Rohingya were not the 'center' of racism and discrimination at the time. Instead, most of the hatred was directed towards the 'alien' Indian populations that were often envied for being relatively affluent compared to the rest of the population. The newborn 'Burmese Nationalism' only accelerated and the Rohingya were often caught in the middle of the aforementioned persecution and discrimination, despite not being the original target.

The Rohingya during the Second World War

Myanmar, and consequently the Rohingya, found itself in the middle of the Second World War as Japan invaded the British controlled Myanmar in 1942. The power vacuum that was created after the British lost control of the country created mass lawlessness that of course translated to violence among many different ethnic and religious groups.

Tension and violence were especially high between two groups; the Rohingya and the Buddhists. Buddhist nationalists were looking to fight off the Japanese invaders while attempting to get rid of the detested British control over Myanmar, while the Rohingya consistently sided with the British, something that stigmatized them in the eyes of the Buddhist majority. As a result, the Muslim populations of the

region, including the Rohingya, were forced to flee towards British controlled areas, if not to leave Myanmar entirely.

After the end of the war in the region, thousands of Rohingya had crossed Myanmar's borders. In order to facilitate their re-entry into the country, the British put them in an anti-Japanese military unit, called "V force", in Myanmar. Historians do state, however, that many Rohingya abused the power that was given to them, as instead of fulfilling their goal of fighting the Japanese, they often opted to commit atrocities against the Buddhist populations.⁶ The above only served to alienate the Rohingya even more, as they were villainized in the eyes of the Buddhist majority.

Political Representation before the Junta

After Myanmar's independence was granted in 1948, the Rohingya had consistent political participation in the parliament, with at least two members every year. The Rohingya were later formally recognized as an indigenous nationality of Myanmar, allowing them to have even more political rights and representation. Namely, Rohingya got the opportunity to serve in multiple positions within the government, ranging from members of the parliament to ministers. However, this seemingly ideal political landscape was bound to change drastically after the military coup d' état in 1962.

Persecution and Discrimination after the 1962 Coup d' Etat

The rights, both social and political, that the Rohingya came to possess after the end of the war quickly were abolished after the 'Buddhist-centric' military seized control of Myanmar. Persecution and discrimination were a re-occurring phenomenon; however, it was not institutionalized until the 1982 Citizenship Law that identified over 135 ethnic groups, with the Rohingya not being one of them. Consequently, the Rohingya were stripped of their identity, becoming stateless, and losing many of their rights in the process. The Rohingya were not only alienated from the rest of the population politically, but also geographically, as they were physically confined to the ghetto of the Mayu Frontier District.

The first refugee crisis revolving around the Rohingya came in 1978. The Myanmar government launched the "Operation Dragon King", an operation that was

⁶ Chan, Aye. *The Development of a Muslim Enclave in Arakan (Rakhine) State of Burma (Myanmar)*. 2005, pp. 396–420, *The Development of a Muslim Enclave in Arakan (Rakhine) State of Burma (Myanmar)*.

aiming to eradicate the foreign populations in Myanmar in light of an upcoming nation-wide census. Because of the operation, hundreds of thousands of Rohingya were displaced, while their human rights were severely impinged on. The terror imposed on the Rohingya by the government ended after diplomatic pressures were put on Myanmar for over 16 months. It is important to mention that the repatriation process of the Rohingya, which was later facilitated by the UNCHR, was the second largest in the history of Asia.

Opposition from the Rohingya was also frequent, although in most cases kept to isolated incidents of rather small scale. Rebellion in the early years of the Junta mainly utilized violence and guerilla warfare; however, in 1988 a new form of resistance could be observed. Uprisings seen in the late 1980s alienated themselves from the armed struggle that was often criticized for stripping the Rohingya of their moral high ground, in addition to warranting an escalation of violence and discrimination on the part of the government. The new form of resistance primarily revolved around international lobbying by former Rohingya diplomats and government officials, in addition to a consistent opposition to the abolishment of the term Rohingya by the government, which was backed by numerous Rohingya scholars.

These attempts of resistance, however, were not particularly successful. The Junta used extreme nationalist actions and the Buddhist faith as tools to provoke further violence against the Rohingya. It was during the Junta that the Rohingya were totally alienated from the country in all aspects of daily life, as both the government and the majority of the population made it clear that they were not wanted in Myanmar. In the 1990s, tensions brought about even further anti-Rohingya riots that were led by Buddhist monks and caused a second major refugee crisis, during which more than a quarter of a million Rohingya were forced to leave Myanmar. This time, less than 25,000 of them were repatriated.

Persecution and Discrimination from the end of the Junta until today

Despite the fall of the military Junta in 2011, the political scene of Myanmar did not shift in a dramatic way. It is important to mention that, according to the constitution that was passed in 2008, the military still had significant control over the government. The military had complete control of several ministries, over a quarter of the seats of the parliament and the prerogative to appointing one of the country's Vice Presidents.

Thus, it comes as no surprise that persecution and discrimination against the Rohingya was not appeased after 2011. The hate towards such religious and ethnic

minorities was now deeply embedded in Myanmar, as riots between different ethnic groups began as early as 2012. In addition, the new government continued to withhold citizenship from the Rohingya, as they were not able to enjoy numerous rights such as the right to vote.

Frustration from the Rohingya became apparent, as they once again resorted to violence and armed resistance. Violence from Rohingya insurgent groups against the Myanmar government, army, and police led to the escalation of a government crackdown against them, slowly but steadily building up to the exodus of many Rohingya. In August of 2017, the conflict reached its peak after an insurgent group, namely the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), killed 12 police officers, the military launched an operation that could only be described as ethnic cleansing, as it used violence, land degradation, and widespread gang rapes as tools to force the Rohingya to flee Myanmar. Their terror campaigns led to a massive exodus as millions of Rohingya have been and continue being displaced from their homes. The international community has repeatedly condemned the actions of the Myanmar government and military, which were characterized as genocide attempts by the Yale Law School⁷. However, reaching resolution is extremely difficult because the Myanmar government has repeatedly denied allegations made by the international community, as it keeps insisting that it is simply fighting terrorist groups.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Myanmar

The state of Myanmar is obviously highly involved in the issue at hand. Pressure put on the government by the international community, although not on a large scale, has had an impact on the economy of the nation, which was not in the best state to begin with. As mentioned previously, though, the main issue is the fact that the government has repeatedly refused to formally recognize the Rohingya as an ethnic minority, which would likely put a halt to most of the violence and discrimination against them. The unwillingness of the government to do so is probably an indicator of the fact that Rohingya discrimination likely has very deep roots in Myanmar that will be very difficult to get rid of.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

⁷ "Clinic Study Finds Evidence of Genocide in Myanmar." *Yale Law School*, 29 Aug. 2018, law.yale.edu/yls-today/news/clinic-study-finds-evidence-genocide-myanmar.

The UNCHR has been involved in the Rohingya issue, and Myanmar as a whole, even since the start of the state sanctioned prosecution during the Junta. The UNCHR has been involved in the largely successful repatriation processed in the region· however, such successes are becoming very scarce due to the continuous raise of tension in the region. The establishment of numerous refugee camps in the borders of Myanmar and Bangladesh, as well as the securing of hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of aid have been achieved by the UNCHR· however, they are unlikely to have a real impact if violence and discrimination against the Rohingya do not cease.

Bangladesh

Relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar have been historically good, since the two neighbors have had strong diplomatic and economic ties that can be traced all the way back to the days that the Junta took the power. However, the relations of the two states have only worsened in recent years, as Bangladesh has become a hotspot of the Rohingya exodus as hundreds of thousands of refugees currently reside in camps within Bangladesh.

United States of America (USA)

The United States have historically been very involved in the Myanmar region. From the times of the Cold War, Myanmar was a hotspot of CIA-sponsored covert operations that aimed to prevent the spread of Communism in Eastern Asia. The USA continues its involvement in the region, being especially concerned with the Rohingya Crisis. More specifically, the USA has publicly condemned the way the Myanmar government has handled the crisis, going as far as imposing sanctions (which now have been revoked).

People's Republic of China

China has also been very involved in Myanmar state affairs, especially since the Rohingya Crisis erupted. The proximity of the two states has raised concerns in China over a potential spread of the Rohingya refugee crisis· however, the two states do remain in “good terms”. China commended the Myanmar government’s handling of the Rohingya Crisis so far, stating that Myanmar’s efforts are “safeguarding the stability of its national development”⁸.

⁸ Osborne, Samuel. “China Backs Burma's Efforts to 'Safeguard Stability' amid Global Outcry over Rohingya Muslim Crisis.” *The Independent*, Independent Digital News and Media,

Timeline of Events

1824	British colonizers take control of Myanmar· population rapidly increases.
1942	Japanese invasion of Myanmar.
1948	End of British rule· Myanmar is granted its independence.
1948	Muslim rebellion in Myanmar asking for equal rights and democratic participation.
1962	Coup d' État takes place· Myanmar is taken under the control of the military.
1978	First Rohingya Refugee Crisis.
1982	Citizenship Law is passed· the Rohingya are not recognized as an ethnic minority.
1988	Pro-democracy uprising takes place.
1991-1992	Second Rohingya Refugee Crisis.
2010	Minority human rights activist Aung San Suu Kyi released from prison.
2012	Rakhine State riots· religious violence causes the displacement of 150,000 people.
2014	First census in 30 years is conducted· the Rohingya are excluded.
2015	First democratic elections since the Junta took place· the Rohingya are not allowed to vote.
2016	Members of ARSA attack border outposts throughout the country, triggering a violent response from the military as well as the start of the exodus.
2017	12 police officers are killed by ARSA· state sponsored ethnic cleansing operations begin· as a result, hundreds of thousands of Rohingya flee the country.
2017	Myanmar government condemns Human Rights Violations and denies that any atrocities were made by the military.

12 Sept. 2017, www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/china-burma-rohingya-muslim-crisis-safeguard-stability-support-east-asia-massacre-army-a7941916.html.

Relevant UN Treaties, Resolutions and Events

Report of Special Rapporteur regarding the state of Human Rights in Myanmar

[A/72/382](#), 8th September 2018

Draft Resolution on Myanmar, vetoed by China and Russia

[S/2007/14](#), 12th January 2008

Resolution regarding Human Rights in Myanmar, passed by GA 3

[A/C.3/72/L.48](#), 31st October 2017

Security Council Press Statement after visit in Myanmar and Bangladesh

[SC/13331](#), 9th May 2018

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Overall, the attempts to solve the issue at hand have been plentiful but of a rather small scale. Isolated attempts of the UNCHR to control the situation are evident; however, they are not enough to put an end to the multifaceted crisis that revolved around the Rohingya population.

It is important to mention that the actions that the United Nations (UN) has formally adopted are rather scarce. More specifically, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has been unable to pass a resolution on the situation in Myanmar which shows how divided the international community is in terms of choosing the best course of actions in its attempts to resolve the Rohingya Crisis. The UNSC, however, has condemned the handling of the Crisis by the Myanmar government on multiple occasions, calling for the repeated violence to cease.

Lastly, harsh sanctions were imposed (instigated by the United States) on Myanmar in 2003, ultimately being removed after the fall of the Junta in 2016. However, these sanctions did not do much in alleviating the crisis, as they nearly crippled the economy of the region. As a result, the Rohingya became targets of

discrimination and violence, as they were quickly made the scapegoats for the whole affair.

Possible Solutions

As mentioned previously on numerous occasions, the Rohingya Crisis is extremely multifaceted. Consequently, possible solutions to the crisis range from providing humanitarian assistance to raising awareness. It is important to understand that simply resolving the refugee crisis, for instance, would only be a temporarily solution since discrimination and violence against the Rohingya and other minority groups would not stop. Thus, achieving stability within the state of Myanmar while promoting tolerance for both present and future generations is most likely the best course of action in terms of achieving a feasible solution that will be bound to last in the long run.

It is important to understand that the solutions outlined in this study guide may contradict each other because they are not supposed to fit one, single stance. Thus, not every single solution mentioned here would apply to all delegates. Some suggested possible solutions are outlined below:

- Increasing the flow of humanitarian assistance not only within Myanmar, but also in neighboring countries that take a huge influx of Rohingya refugees, such as Bangladesh. Doing so would not only serve to help resolve the humanitarian crisis regarding the Rohingya but would also improve the relations of Myanmar with its neighbors, allowing for further economic and political stability to be achieved within the region.
- Potentially sanctioning the Myanmar government if state-sponsored discrimination continues to take place. Although this is a very radical solution, and would indeed hurt Myanmar's economic stability, it would put the necessary political and economic pressure on Myanmar that could potentially cease violence and discrimination against the Rohingya.
- Urging states with large Rohingya refugee populations to grant citizenship to them. Although a bit utopic, this solution does hit the core of the crisis as the statelessness of the Rohingya people has not allowed them to enjoy basic rights for years.
- Raising awareness within the Myanmar population regarding religious and ethnic tolerance. This solution would likely change the culture of Myanmar in the end and would largely benefit the Rohingya people along with numerous

others religious and ethnic minorities in Myanmar, as they would no longer be discriminated against.

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