

**Forum:** Human Rights Council

**Issue:** The Rohingya Conflict in Myanmar

**Student Officer:** Tessa ter Avest & Charlotte Roosenberg

**Position:** President chair & Deputy chair

## Introduction

Rohingya people define themselves as descendants of Muslims who came to Myanmar generations ago. The Rohingya are called out by many in Myanmar as illegal immigrants and they suffer from systematic discrimination. There have been placed strict restrictions on Rohingya people's freedom of movement, access to medical assistance, education and other basic services. Militants attacked government forces when in northern Rakhine state on August 25th violence broke out. The Myanmar military responded, resulting in thousands getting killed and fleeing their homes. The UN's top human rights official stated on 11 September that the military's response was clearly disproportionate to the attacks of the rebels and warned that Myanmar's treatment of its Rohingya minority appears to be an example of ethnic cleansing.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Genocide

As defined in Article 2 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948) genocide occurs in any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; [and] forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

### Ethnic cleansing

Ethnic cleansing differs from genocide it being defined as: "the planned deliberate removal from a specific territory, persons of a particular ethnic group, by force or intimidation, in order to render that area ethnically homogenous" by a 1993 UN Commission.

### Rohingya

The Rohingya people are a muslim community in Myanmar their name comes from their mother tongue, a bengal dialect. They have been suffering from discrimination being a minority in the country of Myanmar, since 2016 protests to the situation became more intense and the government took harsh actions causing an immense refugee flood to Bangladesh and neighboring countries. By Myanmar Rohingyas are referred to as 'Bengalis' a

term that implies they are (unwanted) migrants / strangers from Bangladesh despite the fact that Rohingyas have lived in Myanmar for many generations.

## **Citizenship**

If someone obtains citizenship of a set country this means this person has the right to participate and be represented in politics. Citizens receive rights and benefits in their own country as well as certain obligations. It is seen as one of the most powerful instrument of exclusion a government can use. In Myanmar the Rohingya people are excluded from citizenship by the Citizen Act of 1982.

## **General Overview**

### **Violence**

Due to the statelessness of the Rohingya people they can not enjoy special rights and benefits from the Myanmar government since the Act of 1982. Rohingya people have ever since needed special permission to entertain things such as marriage or moving.

An incorrect image has tortured the Rohingya and their reputation since the beginning. They are seen as unwanted immigrants or 'aliens' from the state of Bangladesh or from the british colonies in India further in history. They are said to have cooperated with the british and the Bangladeshis in conflict with the Myanmar, former Burmi, government and are, even now, criticized for this. The Rohingyas are muslims living in a region where the majority is buddhists.

The Myanmar government created an hostile and aggressive image of the Rohingya people by underlining these facts ensuring an incorrect image of the Rohingya minority and shedding a bad light on them. Extremist and ultra-nationalist Buddhists monks have stoked hatred and fear among Myanmar citizens against the Muslim-minority group. This caused communal violence to rise from 2012 onwards leaving Rohingya people locked in their villages due to unsafety in buddhist areas. When the conflict worsened a lot of Rakhine Buddhists acted upon this wrong information, burning villages without any intervention of nearby officers.

Ata Ullah, a Rohingya man started to gather young Rohingya men to join his Arakhan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and fight against the government which withhold them their basic needs and rights. On August 25th

2017 ARSA men and others attacked 30 police stations, one officer died, 17 Rohingya men died of the bullets fired in defense / counteract of the officers. From 25th of august till 25th of september the military of Myanmar reacts to the attacks. Even though the president

stated that this was over on the 5th of september there were reports of gunfire and smoke columns indicating villages were being burned, after this date.

It has also been reported that Buddhist men have burned Rohingya villages while police officers were less than 5 kilometers away. They did not try to stop the men. The outbreak of violence caused many Rohingya people to flee, some risking their lives over sea in order to flee. The Refugees are mostly women and children.

### International community

There has been widespread condemnation of the Myanmar government's actions but talk of sanctions has been more muted. As described above it is not the government officials burning villages but they are not intervening which they should. The government's approach to this issue is heavily criticized by the international community.

The governmental system in Myanmar is officially a presidential, parliamentary republic, system however the military seems to be the most powerful. This consists mostly of people from the buddhist majority, especially in the Rakhine area. UN officials could monitor this for a certain time. San Suu, the current president, formerly got a nobel peace prize. Discussions arose on whether this should be taken from her, UN decided this wasn't necessary because it was obtained due to her former actions in a different time. This could however set an example and make a statement.

Satellite images show destroyed Rohingya village



Source: Human Rights Watch, Satellite image 21 September 2017

BBC

## Refugee camps

The majority of the people that fled ended up in Bangladesh. Also other neighboring countries have been receiving Rohingya refugees.

### Spread of Rohingya inside and outside Myanmar



According to the Inter Sector Coordination Group report from mid-April 2018 about 70% of the one million refugees are now receiving food aid. Almost 100,000 people have been treated for malnutrition. By mid-January 2018 315,000 children under 15 years of age had received a five-in-one vaccination to try to minimise the risk of disease. Also other large-scale vaccination / healthcare facility programmes have been launched in which 47,639 temporary emergency latrines were built by the Bangladesh military.

Something that has to be taken into account is that not only Rohingya have fled. Also Buddhists have been leaving their homes behind caused by the conflict although specific numbers and knowledge on the earnesty of the motives are absent.



Fig. 1: view of Rohingya tents in Bangladesh, picture made by a drone of Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC).

### **Identity crisis**

Rohingya people used to make 7% of population. The Citizen Act of 1982 excluded those from citizenship which caused millions to become stateless. Rohingyas will stay stateless unless a reform of the Act is realised, seeing Bangladesh and other neighboring countries are not ready to accept them as citizens. This leaves them with an immense identity crisis. It is important jihadi / IS sympathizers will not fill in the gap between those countries and infiltrate with the highly vulnerable Rohingya people.

## Major Parties Involved

### The UN

The Security Council appealed to Myanmar to stop the violence but no sanctions have been imposed. The UN's human rights chief Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini has said an act of genocide against Rohingya Muslims by state forces in Myanmar cannot be ruled out. The UN has investigated the claims of genocide and human rights violations by Myanmar militants such as rape.

### United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)

Has launched money-raising campaigns all over the world supporting refugees in Bangladesh and neighboring countries.

### United States of America

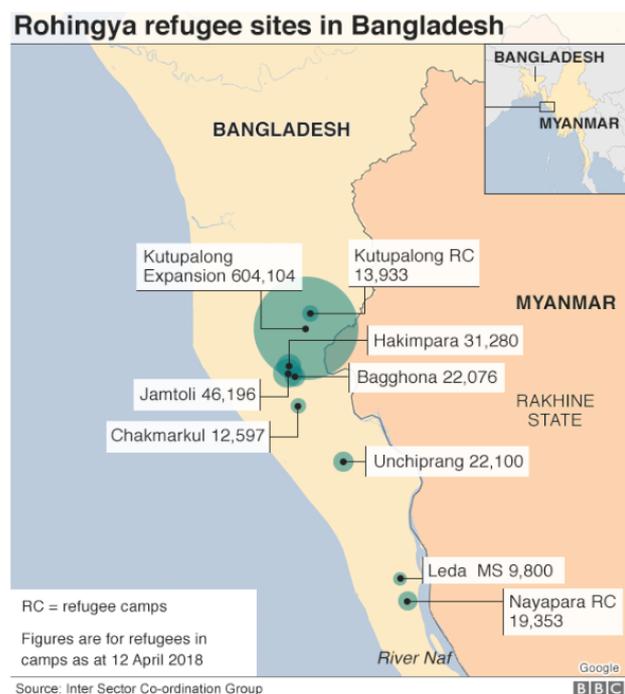
Urged Myanmar's troops to "respect the rule of law, stop the violence and end the displacement of civilians from all communities".

### China

Chinese officials have told the international community that they "should support the efforts of Myanmar in safeguarding the stability of its national development"

### Bangladesh

The government of Bangladesh plans to build more shelters in the Cox's Bazaar area but also wants to limit refugees traveling to allocated areas. Though furious with the refugee crisis dumped on it by its neighbour, the country has always taken care to avoid conflict along its long, porous borders. It has supported the refugees but will not accept them permanently and wants a solution to this issue which enables the Rohingya people to return to the land they used to live on. The Bangladeshi prime minister said that Myanmar has to start 'acting accordingly' and should have handled its crisis more patiently.



## Myanmar

urged displaced people to find refuge in temporary camps set up in Rakhine state. In November Bangladesh signed a deal with Myanmar to return hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees, but few details have been released. Myanmar's foreign ministry said it welcomed statements from the UN and other countries "firmly condemning the terrorist attacks" and said troops were being ordered to exercise "all due restraint" as they worked to restore stability. Political system ...

## United Kingdom

has pledged £59m in aid to support those fleeing to Bangladesh. The Prime Minister said the military action in Rakhine had to stop and has suspended training courses for the Myanmar military.

## Arakhan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA)

Arakhan is another name for Rakhine. The organisation has no ties to foreign islamic groups, not al-Queda nor jihadis. Leader Ata Ullah says they're fighting for the Rohingyas, the worlds attention for their situation and to obtain the Rakhine territory which, according to him, is their land. Not all Rohingya support this group however there is great admiration for the first organisation fighting back against Myanmar's military since the 1950's.

## Australia and ASEAN member-states

Can engage with San Suu as most important trade partners to find a resolution. United Nations is after all about cooperation and not only sanctioning and punishments for those who failed to act accordingly in crises.

## Timeline of Events

2012	communal violence, Rohingyas are being subjected to discrimination more often. They need special permission for marriage or moving and can not leave their villages because of the hostility of neighboring Rakhine buddhist communities.
october 2016	First organised Arsa attacks
25 august	'25 august' attacks by Rohingya on 30 police stations with homemade bombs and knives (made of bamboo)
25 august - 25 september	Myanmar's military reacts to the 25 august attacks, hundred of thousand of Rohingyas flee the country to Bangladesh. Militants of Myanmar are accused of rape, burning of villages and other violations of human rights.
5 september 2017	Myanmar's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi claims there have been no conflicts or clearance operations since 5th of september. This later seems untrue.

- 23 october 2017 More than 600,000 Rohingya refugees have arrived in Bangladesh after fleeing violence in Myanmar since August 25.
- 27 august 2018 International Fact-finding Mission on Myanmar tells press before delivery of report that one of the key recommendations of the mission will be to ask the Security Council (SC) Myanmar be referred to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for its actions
- 18 september 2018 International Fact-finding Mission on Myanmar delivers report.

## Previous attempts to solve the issue

There have not yet been many attempts on solving this issue as it has not been clear what actually happened and on what level the state of Myanmar was active and guilty of acquisitions made by refugees in camps in Bangladesh until the 18th of september this year.

Myanmar made a deal with Bangladesh to return refugees to Myanmar, details have not yet been made clear.

No direct, hard sanctions have been implemented. The United Kingdom has suspended military training for the Myanmar militants. Concerns have been stated by many world leaders but not many actions have been undertaken.

Refugees and refugee camps have received support from all over the world through money raising campaigns of organisations such as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

## Possible solutions

What is important to keep in mind is that the Rohingya people, in the refugee camps, are extremely vulnerable and therefore mouldable. They suffer identity crises and insecurities which could make them an easy subject to extremist thoughts. The committee could focus on ensuring the Rohingyas are included in education programs of refugee host countries or, in the ideal situation, of Myanmar. In Myanmar the first step would be adapting the Citizen Act of 1982 and acknowledge the Rohingyas as an ethnic group and citizens of the state.

The United Nations could help Myanmar to defuse inter-communal tensions, condemn incitement to racial hatred and violence and create an environment for safe and dignified repatriation of Rohingya refugees.

Myanmar could also rely on the UN's capacities and experience in tackling other challenges, including democratic consolidation. Seeing the military seems to have a lot of power in the presidential, parliamentary republic.

A Humanitarian Coordinator could improve the coordination in the response to the flow of refugees, this person could be situated in Bangladesh or elsewhere.

The government of Bangladesh could remove the bureaucratic impediments preventing operational organisations and donors from engaging in longer-term responses (visas, work permits, access to camps).

There should be a stronger coordination between organisations, and attention for Rohingya people's voices and perspectives, in refugee sites where a transition has to take place from the existing programming (such as food distribution) to a longer-term programming.

Moneywise member states and NGO's should recognise this as a enduring crisis which will require resources and action for a long time. They should be willing to commit to longer-term, flexible, multi-year funding and start investing in local development and infrastructure.

Member states can make a huge statement to the Rohingya and the rest of the world by taking San Suu's nobel prize implicitly stating they do not agree with the human rights violations. Countries that have earlier been mild about the actions of the government can still show disagreement. This could be a discussion for the committee however it should not be a priority.

## Useful documents

Apart from this report delegates can use trustworthy and reliable news sites (of their home country) or links in the biography to get an introduction / overview of the issue. Also following links are useful and of importance to the subject.

Myanmar's Refugee Problem among World's Worst Humanitarian, Human Rights Crises, Secretary-General Says in Briefing to Security Council:

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13469.doc.htm>

International Fact-finding Mission on Myanmar report which was released to the Human Rights Council (HRC) on 18 september 2018:

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=23575&LangID=E>

Sexual Violence in Conflict:

<https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/press-release/framework-of-cooperation-signed-between-the-united-nations-and-the-government-of-bangladesh-will-enhance-efforts-to-address-conflict-related-sexual-violence-against-displaced-rohingya-population/>

International Conference on the Rohingya Refugee Crisis:

<http://www.actionaid.org/bangladesh/stories/international-conference-rohingya-refugee-crisis-towards-sustainable-solutions>

Another Research Report on the issue: <https://fn.se/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Model-UN-Myanmar-2018.pdf>

## Bibliography

Latest Rohingya news <https://www.aljazeera.com/topics/subjects/rohingya.html>

Myanmar Rohingya: what you need to know about the crisis. April 24, 2018

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41566561>

Rohingya crisis: Are Suu Kyi's Rohingya claims correct? <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41312931>

Rohingya crisis: finding out the truth about Arsa militants

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41521268>

Rohingya crisis: seeing through the official story in Myanmar

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41222210>

Myanmar: What sparked latest violence in Rakhine? <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41082689>

McPherson, P.E., June 27, 2018. Exclusive: Myanmar rejects citizenship reform at private Rohingya talks <https://in.reuters.com/article/myanmar-rohingya-meeting/exclusive-myanmar-rejects-citizenship-reform-at-private-rohingya-talks-idINKBN1JN0D5>

The Guardian: Who are the Rohingya and what is happening in Myanmar?

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/sep/06/who-are-the-rohingya-and-what-is-happening-in-myanmar>

Aung San Suu Kyi won't be stripped of Nobel peace prize despite Rohingya crisis

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/30/aung-san-suu-kyi-wont-be-stripped-of-nobel-peace-prize-despite-rohingya-crisis>

Myanmar military leaders must face genocide charges – UN report

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/08/1017802>

Myanmar: UN Fact-Finding Mission releases its full account of massive violations by military in Rakhine, Kachin and Shan States

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=23575&LangID=E>

People Fleeing Myanmar, DEC <https://www.dec.org.uk/appeal/people-fleeing-myanmar>

Citizenship <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/international-migration/glossary/citizenship/>

Migration, displacement and education

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0026/002662/266274E.pdf>

Rohingya crisis explained: Why the minority Muslim group is fleeing Myanmar, Dangerfield, K. september 13th, 2017. <https://globalnews.ca/news/3740246/rohingya-crisis-in-myanmar/>

Myanmar's Refugee Problem among World's Worst Humanitarian, Human Rights Crises, Secretary-General Says in Briefing to Security Council, UN SC, august 28, 2018.

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13469.doc.htm>

Myanmar crisis: Bangladesh PM in Rohingya plea, 12 september 2017.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41238180>