

Forum: Human Rights Committee 2

Issue: Reviewing the Human Rights situation in Myanmar

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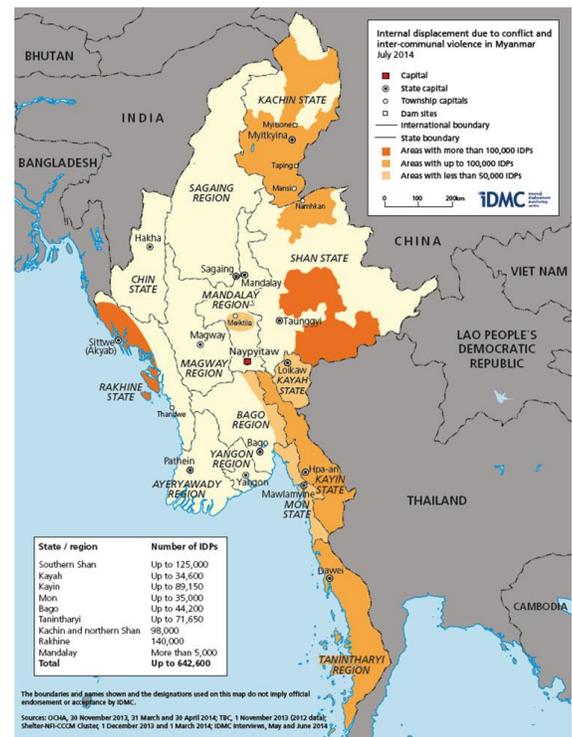
Position: Deputy President

Introduction

During the Second World War, Burma, which is now referred to as Myanmar, was being ruled by the British. However, when the Japanese invaded, the Buddhists chose to support them while the Rohingyas stayed loyal to the British. Despite the British winning the war, the minority Rohingyas were portrayed as the enemies. Even after the war, when Myanmar gained independence, the Rohingyas were blamed for the economic turmoil of the country.

Since the start of this internal conflict about 379,000 Rohingyas have fled to Bangladesh, a neighbouring country, as most villages have been burned. The Rohingya are the Muslim minority group in a Buddhist majority Rakhine state. The country of Myanmar has subjected the Rohingyas to torture specifically because of their religious affiliations. The torture is focused in Rakhine although it is also happening in Myanmar. This discrimination requires immediate attention as not only are they being denied citizenship, but they're also being murdered and are then choosing to leave their belongings in hopes of starting another life. This ethnic cleansing raises numerous questions surrounding human rights.

The Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has told Myanmar to allow their citizens back, however this has been ignored. The leader of the military, Gen Min Aung Hlaing, said that the country "could not accept and recognise the term 'Rohingya' by hiding the truth". This was said to support the government's claim that the Rohingya are actually from Bangladesh while the Buddhists are originally from Myanmar; the claim is that on March 1942, "Rohingya", a made up name, was used to cover up their true origins. However, there is evidence to support their Burmese origin.



Definition of Key Terms

Internally Displaced

Internally displaced people are those who are forced to leave behind their belongings and flee their houses. They are not referred to as refugees as they remain within the countries borders. There are lots of internally displaced people who are unable to enter bordering countries because the military has blocked the routes.

Rohingya People

The “Rohingya People” are classified by the UN as the most “persecuted minority” and the majority of these people are Muslim. The Rohingya people are denied citizenship and fair human rights such as the right to move freely. The Myanmar government says that the Rohingya people originate from India and Bangladesh when the British empire merged India with Myanmar although many historians have proved their Burmese (now called Myanmar) origin.

Safe Passage

Safe passage is when people who are in grave danger (Rohingya People) are escorted out of a dangerous place(Myanmar). Myanmar is refusing to allow the safe passage of the Rohingya people.

Ethnic Cleansing

Ethnic cleansing is when the minority group are forced out often through killing. This is done by the more dominant group usually in order to rid the country of any impurities. All ethnic cleansing examples remove any evidence that the minority group had a culture in order to portray them as an imposter. They also will attempt to remove physical evidence by burning homes, killing families, and stealing belongings.

Background Information

Historical Context

Buddhists are the majority group in Myanmar and this has led to numerous conflicts between the religious groups. This all results from the 1982 “Myanmar Nationality Law” which has a list of 135 different ethnic groups that are eligible for citizenship. However, “Rohingya Muslim” is not included on this list. The

law also states that the ancestors could have lived in Myanmar before 1823 for the descendants to be eligible, however, they have refused to accept the Rohingya's origin. Additionally, if the parents have the citizenship and the child was born in Myanmar than the child are eligible. Dual citizenship in Myanmar is not allowed meaning a person can only have the Myanmar passport for the person to gain its benefits.

Internal Conflicts

The internal conflict in Myanmar is the ongoing conflict between the Rakhine Buddhists and the Rohingya Muslims. These conflicts began after Myanmar's independence in 1948. The conflict instigated by the unjust treatment of the Rohingya people solely because of their ethnicity is continuing until today. Also, because they are not recognized, the crimes against them are rarely even acknowledged. This has led to the 2012 Rakhine state riots in which 150,000 people were displaced with 88 casualties. Conflicts like these occur sporadically and has now become undeniably severe as about 500,000 people are displaced. With internal conflicts occurring more frequently, there has also been increased cases of rape which can cripple societies and families.

Citizenship

Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan released a detailed report in which he said, "the biggest obstacle to peace in Rakhine is the issue of citizenship". This illustrates the importance of being a citizen for the Rohingya people as that would alleviate their financial situation, provide them with security, and provide them with their basic right as they have origins dating back many centuries. The "Rohingya People" are stateless as they do not have any citizenship. They also don't have enough identification to apply for citizenship anywhere else or qualify for any benefits. In some villages, they were given registration cards which was made to be distinct from an actual citizenship. However, government officials took them all and refused to return them when asked. By allowing this conflict to continue, there will be profound impacts on the economy as well as the communities. With there being only one school in every 25 villages, and 15.8% of children being malnourished, people resort to the black market. This cripples the economy and the society as its citizens no longer have any opportunities open for them.

Police Involvement

Similar to Rwanda which was also a clear example of ethnic cleansing, the police blatantly ignored the violent crimes perpetrated against the Rohingya people. The police even joined the coordinated attacks in some instances. On October 23rd, the Yan Thei village (densely populated) was attacked leading to the deaths of 70 people in a single day. Also there are cases where videos of police systematically beating up the Rohingya people have been uploaded. However, despite these videos, there has been no action taken by the government to acknowledge the crimes. This only indicates that the police are acting inhumanely on-

camera, what if there was no camera. How would they act if they are already beating up women and children on camera? Former secretary general to the UN Kofi Annan has also urged the leader of Myanmar to condemn the actions and allow foreign intervention to prevent the abuse of power by the military. However, similar to almost every other request, they have refused.

Government's Response

The government's official response to the situation has been to deny any wrongdoing on their behalf. This is done by disputing the fact that the Rohingya are even Burmese and that they don't deserve a citizenship. In addition to that, the government claims to be attacking militant groups responsible for attacking the police. They also claim that Rohingya people are burning their own villages, a claim which confuses almost everyone. The final response has been to claim that the international aid workers who were allowed into the country have surrounded a village and murdered the security forces protecting it. However, this is extremely unlikely considering the fact that most international aid workers are worried for their life and not interested in fighting. With Aung San Suu Kyi being a Nobel Peace Prize winner, it became possible for the country to achieve success and growth. The government has not condemned the actions of the military mainly because they hold 25% of the seats of the parliament and they could overtake her if she publicly accused them (significant political power). Therefore, this Nobel Peace Prize winner has remained silent and ignored the UN meetings which she has been invited to attend, and also refuse to allow any international aid from entering the country.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Bangladesh

Bangladesh has taken in the most Rohingya refugees out of any country. It has also negotiated deals to return the refugees back to Myanmar as it can't cope with the influx of people. It has a goal to become a middle income country by 2021 and with these poor refugees coming in, the chances of that goal turning into a reality are fading. A 1993 agreement between Bangladesh and Myanmar for the return of the refugees states that when refugees are returned they must be treated humanely. However, in past experiences refugees kept returning and fleeing indicating that they weren't given their rights. On October 1, 2017 Bangladesh and Myanmar have finalized this updated agreement and the leader of Myanmar even said, "refugees from this country will be accepted without any problem".

Australia

The Refugee Council of Australia has urged the government to implement a resettlement program similar to what it did for the Syrian and Iraqi refugees. There have been protests to intervene, and these

protests are occurring in huge numbers unseen in any country around the world. Therefore there is internal pressure for the government to help prevent this ethnic cleansing. However, Australia is acting against most countries and has implemented a \$300,000 military co-operation program. The Australian Department of Defense issued a statement amidst this public outrage that Australia is supporting an ethnic cleansing; They claim to be partnering with Myanmar to "promote professionalism and adherence to international laws"

Canada

Canada also condemns the actions of the Myanmar government and has urged the government numerous times to stop the violence. He also advised that the other countries implement the recommendations of the UN's former secretary general. On October 20, 2017 the Canadian ambassador to Myanmar has a meeting regarding the Rakhine state. As the leader of the state of Myanmar is also a Canadian citizen, to apply pressure they are threatening to take away her honorary citizenship. Canada has also been donating tens of millions of dollars since Myanmar made the shift to democracy (government claims to have freedom of speech).

World Food Bank

The World Food Bank focuses mainly on sending aid to Bangladesh or even the Rakhine State where most people are stranded and in need of medical assistance, food, and water. With the issue becoming more serious, more NGOs are becoming involved and there are gradually more donations. These human rights movements are raising awareness about the issue throughout the globe and have drawn people's attention to the severity of this issue. The World Food Bank is one of the major contributors to helping the human rights issue in the area, through direct action and raising awareness.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
8th century	Proof of Rohingya people living in modern day Myanmar. This is through official documents from the past in which the government acknowledges the minority groups present in Myanmar (Rohingya people are stated). Additionally there are documents showing the Rohingya people in places of power during the British colonization. Finally, there are pictures of Rohingya people with Buddhists leading the country in the 1960s.

1824 to 1942	England colonized Burma and added it to India. Workers in construction projects would travel between Burma and India
1942	Japan defeated the British and the Rohingya were accused of benefiting under the British rule. Tensions began to arise between religious groups.
1945	Rohingya fighters helped Britain overthrow Japan and were not given their part of the deal for doing so.
1962	General Ne Win and his party took power and made it one of their priorities to deal with the Rohingya people
1977	200,000 Rohingya people fled because the government implemented nationwide screening. People claimed they were abused for being a muslim Rohingya. They were forced to return back to Myanmar.
1982	The Myanmar Nationality Law was created
1991 to 1997	250,000 people fled once again after mass murders and abuse. They were eventually returned under a repatriation agreement. The government admitted to attempting to bring order to the Rakhine state.
2012	Rioting killed more than 100 people. 150,00 are internally displaced as a result of this riot.
2016	Rohingya militant groups killed 9 soldier and the army responded. 25,000 people fled after the army began widespread murder once again.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Fifteenth Session, Agenda Item 109, 9 February 1996 (A/RES/50/152)
- Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar, 23 December 2015 (A/RES/70/233)
- Situation of human rights in Myanmar, 11 March 1996, (A/RES/50/194)
- Situation of human rights in Myanmar, 69th plenary meeting, 23 December 2005,(A/RES/60/233)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

The main solution which will completely solve the issue is to return the Rohingya people to Myanmar and provide them with basic fundamental human rights. However, this will never be agreed upon and therefore, different solutions to the crisis were developed. Some previous attempts to solve the issue have been to impose sanctions on Myanmar. This has been for the sole purpose of improving humanitarian conditions in Myanmar. However, the sanctions imposed by the US were removed for political reasons. In addition to these sanctions, the government of Myanmar has not stopped the violence. Aung San, who was an active member of the revolution against the British and is considered the father of modern day Myanmar, refused to address the issue as the UN attempted to solve the issue at an assembly. This makes it clear that the government of Myanmar is not willing to negotiate, which is at the cost of the basic human rights of hundreds of thousands of people. In addition to that, the former UN secretary general attempted to deploy UN peacekeepers to mediate the crisis. However, the government refused to allow any form of aid into the country.

In addition to this, the UN has attempted to remove military control in the government and make it a full democratic society. This would allow the leader to act on her own free will without the pressure of losing her position. The UN also attempted to expose any government officials and incriminate any officials with a clear involvement in the war. This would allow the government to have no officials supporting of the war while also showing the citizens that there will be drastic changes for the better.

Possible Solutions

One of the most important solutions is to ensure that safe passage is provided for the Rohingya people. This is because the military on the route to Bangladesh effectively murders anyone who passes. However, if the countries of the UN all impose sanctions and pressure on Myanmar to allow for safe passage, then the amount of deaths will significantly decrease. During this official protection, food, water, and medical supplies must be provided in order to deal with the other issues that arise from fleeing. Working with the World Food Bank and various other NGOs, these supplies can be donated and given to them as they leave to start a new life.

Another possible way in which the issue can be dealt with is by educating the citizens of Myanmar of the Rohingya people's origins as well as providing them citizenship in other neighbouring countries. By having educational tv or radio shows in which the Rohingya people's origins is explained in an interesting way, the Buddhist citizens will start to inquire about the morality of the government. This could then lead to

protests as they will no longer agree with the actions of the government. These protests are another way to pressure the government to end the violence.

The final possible solution to quell any doubt of the Rohingya people's origin is to obtain official photos and statistics. The number of villages burned varies based on the source, leading many people to be confused of the actual situation. Therefore, if official members can be deployed to obtain an accurate number of displaced people, villages burned, mass graves, and photos, then the world will be more likely to respond. This could also then show the world the truth of what is going on as there are so many different statistics being presented that people are confused. With official statistics and proof, people around the world will have tangible evidence and be compelled to donate. The world after that cannot ignore the issue. Additionally, with this evidence it could be put on radio, T.V., and social media throughout the world to also cause a global reaction. Similar to the previous solution, various age groups must be targeted differently with younger adults targeted through documentaries and social media posts while the older generation can be influenced through more simple approaches. This could include newspapers or advertising on websites that are popular among the older age group. For example, in the US human rights groups are placing their ads on golf websites as 78% of the users are above 50. By placing relevant and specific information with proof, people will respond to this call to action.

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