

Forum: Economic and Social Council

Issue: Addressing the humanitarian crisis of the Rohingya people

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Introduction

The Rohingya refugee crisis is a humanitarian crisis which has shown exponential growth in the last decade. Thousands of people are fleeing, and have been fleeing, from the Rakhine area in seek of refuge and safety since 2015. The issue was first publicized when the refugees mass migrated via boat to neighboring countries. The migration itself received heavy news coverage, and they were thus labeled the 'boat people' by media. Families have been left torn apart and incomplete as children, men and women who had previously drowned continue to wash up on the shores of Myanmar in instances where smugglers abandoned ship or when boats carrying refugees capsized. As the crisis continues, the Rohingya Muslims are subject to heavy physical and emotional scarring from the murder of their families, rape and abuse instigated by the Myanmar militant forces. The Buddhist population see the Myanmar minority as a threat to their peace and society, due to a history of aggressive behavior on the part of the Rohingya, which serves as is their justification for the attacks that they carry out on the Rohingya themselves.

The conflict is essentially between the majority Buddhist and minority Muslim population of Myanmar, with friction between the two rising all the way from post-World War II. Issues began to escalate however, as Rohingya armed rebels began offensive attacks and Myanmar military retaliated, which essentially lead to sectarian violence. Alongside the military, individual violent Buddhist factions had also uprisen, targeting the Rohingya brutally and indiscriminately. The crisis has left 700,000 people displaced and subject to the violence of their own nation. UN officials, such as Andrew Gilmour, assistant secretary-general for human rights, has labeled the situation as a form of 'ethnic cleansing', or in other words, genocide. Human rights violations and other heinous acts are being committed against the people of Rohingya on a daily basis, such as rape, murder and mass burning of entire towns and villages. Due to the mass exodus, refugees tend to escape to neighboring countries such as Bangladesh and India, as they are currently not recognized by the Myanmar government as one of the many minority groups residing within the country. Because of this, they have been denied citizenship and the rights associated

with citizenship, such as healthcare and education, and are currently deemed 'stateless' entities by the country in which they have spent the majority of their lives in. This is what triggered the mass migration of the Rohingya people.

Definition of Key Terms

Rohingya People

The Rohingya people are a group of Muslim individuals who speak an Indo-Aryan language, and reside in the Rakhine state in Myanmar. They are currently being targeted and exterminated by both the people and government of Myanmar, as they see the Rohingya as a threat to their society and wellbeing.

Genocide

Genocide is the planned extremist act of the elimination of a large group of people, primarily for their nationality, ethnicity and religion.

Rakhine (Arakan)

The Rakhine area is a state situated in Myanmar (formerly known as Burma). The Rohingya however, reject the term Rakhine and continue to refer to the area as Arakan.

Exodus

An exodus is a mass migration of people, particularly those who are not native to the country which they are emigrating from. Through the point of view of the Buddhist population, this is an accurate term as they do not view the Rohingya as native to Myanmar.

Stateless

A stateless individual is one who does not bear any nationality, and no country claims him/her.

Sect

A sect is a smaller group of people belong to a larger group, that have adopted a different belief system than that of the majority of the people. In this case, the Muslim Rohingya are a sect of the overall Buddhist population of Myanmar.

Sectarianism

Sectarianism is the discrimination of subdivisions in a larger group of people due to their religious beliefs or ethnicity. The offensives between the Buddhist and Muslim populations are a form of sectarian violence.

Indiscriminate

That which makes no distinction between combatant and non-combatant and destroys all in its path or which it encounters. The Buddhist targeting of the Muslim Rohingya is indiscriminate.

Insurgency

An insurgency is an uprising or revolt, normally against a government, group, or any other organizational body.

Refugee

An individual who migrates to another state/area in search of safety and protection, due to a political or environmental crisis in their own country.

Background Information

The extent of the escalation of the Rohingya crisis is due to an extensive compilation of events and factors which will all be explained below. The issue can be traced all the way from World War II, up till an event in 2005, the rape and murder of a woman by three Rohingya men, that served as a catalyst to the current level of urgency the crisis has reached.

The amount of events and factors that have contributed to the current day Rohingya crisis are vast and graphic. They have been evaluated shortly and chronologically, and censored to an extent, below.

A Colonialist Legacy

Myanmar was originally under colonial rule of the British after an outbreak of wars in 1824. The policies of Britain encouraged immigrant workers to flood into Myanmar and work in agriculture so as to reduce production costs of the British, as a method of implementing 'cheap labour'. This is when, in the 17th century, the influx of the population of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar rose occurred, with numbers of Muslim population tripling, according to Myanmar's census records. The British then promised the Rohingya a separate state than that of the Buddhists in order for them to practice their religion in peace, as the clash between the Buddhist and Muslim faith caused social differences. This led to the divided population in the second world war, as the Muslims backed the British axis powers and the Buddhists were pro-Japanese.

The Second World War

The violence between the Buddhist and Muslim population of Myanmar extends all the way to World War II. At the time, the minority Muslim population had aligned with British under the premise of an autonomous state. However, the Japanese invasion of South-East Asia was favored by the nationalistic Burmese, and the time period saw much inter-communal violence. This caused extreme violence and a number of offensives between the Buddhist and Muslims. The British defected on their promise of a separate state to the Rohingya, but still remained the colonial rulers. However, in 1948 when Myanmar was finally liberated from the British, the Rohingya Muslims were left defenseless and subject to extreme violence and torture instigated by the Buddhist population of Myanmar.

Upon Japanese invasion of South East Asia, the British were forced to retreat and evacuate Myanmar, thus liberating Myanmar. This is what created a power-vacuum and it is what caused the large-scale violence that erupted in the Rakhine state.

Arakan Massacre

The Arakan massacre, 1942, was a massacre that took place after the Japanese expelled the British. To this day, the Rohingya population still remember his time as '*Karbalae Arakan*' (Doomsday of Arakan). The violence was mainly targeted against groups that had previously benefitted from Britain colonial rule. At first, violence was prevalent on both sides of the scale as the Rohingya and Arakanese engaged in combat creating a polarity of Muslims to the north and Buddhists to the South. The Rohingya were forced to flee to escape the violence and mass murder on their people and land.

Statelessness of the Rohingya

A citizenship law passed in 1982 determined that the Rohingya were not one of the 135 recognized ethnic groups in Myanmar. The government of Myanmar justified this by stating that the Rohingya who migrated from South Asia under the colonial rule of the British did so illegally, thus deeming them and their descendants' illegal immigrants. This, through their point of view, invalidates any claim that the Rohingya might have that the roots of their ancestors go back decades on Myanmar's land. The statelessness of the Rohingya means that they have no passports, ID or any sort of record of self-verification for any country. Therefore, the Rohingya Muslims cannot pursue job opportunities, buy property and gain access to basic healthcare. This is exacerbated by the already poverty-stricken living conditions of the Rakhine area, rendering the standard of living and quality of life of the Rohingya Muslims as significantly low.

The Rape and Murder of Ma Thida Htwe

Although the conflict between the sects of Myanmar dates back decades, the issue began to gain heat again after the rape and murder of a 27-year-old woman, Ma Thida Htwe, in 2012. Three Muslim Rohingya men were taken as suspects and jailed. However, this served to boil over the tensions that had been bubbling for the past years. Public outcry from the Buddhist population was immense. Retaliation against the Muslim population was immediate and aggressive, with discriminatory leaflets being circulated almost immediately and crowds gathering around police stations demanding that the three suspects be handed over. The extent of the discrimination did not stop here, as within the next ten days, a bus carrying civilians was stopped and searched for Muslims, and after ten were identified, they were beaten to death. The list of offenses between the Buddhist and Muslim sects in the modern age essentially stems from the murder of Ma, as it served as a catalyst for the deterioration of the relations between the two.

Rohingya Insurgency

After the Rohingya's continued persecution, an insurgency within the Rohingya Muslims arose, known as the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). To the Rohingya, ARSA was an opportunity to fight for their rights and religious freedom. But from the point of view of the Buddhists, ARSA was a terrorist organization that threatened the peace and collective security of Myanmar. ARSA members, reported to be a mere 500 after inflated numbers circulated reports to increase the seeming threat of ARSA, were hunted indiscriminately. Entire villages, including Tula Toli, have been burned to the ground by Myanmar government officials and individual Buddhist groups and organizations, with the justification provided that they needed to root out ARSA members. Many onlookers dispute this claim, condemning Myanmar for acts of genocide and ethnic cleansing and using the search of ARSA members as an excuse.

Notable recent massacres

In Myanmar's quest for the eradication of the Rohingya Muslim sect, they have been widely known to commit mass murder and violent offenses against the minority group. Summarized below are some of the most infamous massacres that occurred. The way in which these massacres occur, as stated above, a 'text-book example of ethnic cleansing' carried out by the people of Myanmar on Rohingya Muslims.

Tula Toli massacre

The Tula Toli massacre saw the obliteration of an entire village. In the night, on the 30th of August 2017, an independent Buddhist nationalist group came and set fire to homes and stores. Eyewitnesses testify that over 500 women and children were killed, however deaths

for men were not accurately estimated. Satellite images show the village of Tula Toli to be burnt to the ground, where neighboring villages remain undamaged.

Gu Dar Pyin massacre

The Gu Dar Pyin massacre occurred on the 27th of August 2017, just three days before the Tula Toli massacre. It was carried out in a similar fashion to the Tula Toli massacre, except focus was more on executing the people rather than burning down the villages. Most victims of violence were placed in mass graves. The death toll has been clocked between 75-400 men, women and children, with eye-witness accounts being wildly inaccurate and varying reports.

Aung San Suu Kyi

Aung San Suu Kyi is the current state counsellor (parallel to the role of Prime Minister) of Myanmar. Her actions have come under spotlight for defending the actions of her state against the Rohingya Muslims and providing no clear support system or repatriation deals to the displaced people. She also continually denies the involvement of the military of Myanmar in massacres committed against the Rohingya People. However, to the Myanmar's people Aung San is deemed a hero, as her efforts toward the issue are seen to be in the best interest of the nation, safeguarding against the threat of terrorism.

Economic status of the Rohingya

An accurate HDI measure has not been carried out as it is part of the census, and since the Rohingya are not considered Myanmar citizens, they do not have an accurate HDI measure. However, majority have not had access to education or secondary/tertiary jobs, as reported by AlJazeera. Therefore, many do not make enough money to support their families. Additionally, due to discrimination between sects in Myanmar, it proves difficult to carry out day-to-day tasks for the Rohingya, which therefore impedes on quality of life. Children do not have access to education due to both discrimination and insufficient documentation, which leads to future job prospects being diminished or bleak. The Rohingya are also denied access to healthcare in Myanmar, and therefore many of them are carriers of infectious diseases and/or major/minor health problems. Majority have also never been vaccinated. It is because of these combination of factors that the consequent rehabilitation of the Rohingya also proves difficult, as described below.

Rehabilitation of the Rohingya

Rehabilitation of the Rohingya muslims proves difficult as they often migrate into countries without proper documentation or other means. This creates a lengthy and difficult processing time period for the host countries to fully adopt the Rohingya. Additionally, seeing as the Rohingya did not have access to healthcare rights in Myanmar, they come unvaccinated. This serves as a health and safety threat to the

population of the host countries, which leads to host countries rejecting the Rohingya in the best interest of their own population. Children also often come orphaned, resulting in immense difficulty for rehabilitation of the child, as child services in the host country have no previous track record, vaccination record, medical or educational record of the child and with the added factor that the child may have trauma from previous events relating to the Rohingya genocide, adoption for the child is a major obstacle. Apart from orphans, many refugees are generally physically and emotionally incapacitated upon arrival due to the ongoing violence from which they have escaped. Host countries often do not have the means to treat this such as psychologist clinics or healthcare supplies/clinics. Thus, rehabilitation proves difficult for the Rohingya. There are currently 830,000 refugees in Cox Bazaar alone, and only 34% of the funds needed to rehabilitate the Rohingya has been raised. The funds to fully rehabilitate the Rohingya amounts to \$434 million USD, which is currently being raised by the Joint response program, launched by OCHA.

Conditions in Refugee camps

Rohingya Muslims, upon migration tend to create and reside in refugee camps in neighboring countries, seeing as they have no other place to stay and are new people in a completely foreign country. However, Refugee camps have been condemned for their inhumane living conditions which often pose health and sanitation risks. Additionally, the risk of sex-trafficking is also prevalent in Cox Bazaar, Bangladesh where a large refugee camp is currently based. Refugee camps are also prone to environmental hazards due to their poor structural resilience, where Bangladesh for example, is prone to flooding and refugee camps are often destroyed, leaving thousands of lives at risk. Refugee camps in Bangladesh are only one example of a camp that is at a myriad of risks, but many camps around the world are at risk of the same issues.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA)

The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) is an insurgent group formed to retaliate against Myanmar's policy towards the Rohingya people. Rohingya men have been secretly recruited in the organization to fight for the rights of the Rohingya and promote freedom of religion. However, the actions of ARSA are generally blurred, and they have been accused by Myanmar state officials of human rights violations and alleged acts of terrorism, and although there is evidence to support some of these claims, many do not have substantial evidence to back claims of terrorist motives. Myanmar has obliterated entire villages and towns in search for ARSA members.

Human Rights Watch

The Human Rights Watch organization (HRW) is an organization comprised of a varied range of people from all walks of life. The group continues to do accurate fact finding and observation of the situation at hand and collaborate with local groups and entities to put a stop to the Rohingya crisis. They also accept donations towards the repatriation and rehabilitation of the refugee population. As opposed to direct involvement though, they mainly work on the logistical side of the approach to the Rohingya crisis. By providing their finds to entities involved directly in their repatriation and to the public, they make it easier for such entities to know what to expect upon arrival and estimate the true extent of the crisis. Therefore, the HRW has proved instrumental in the repatriation of the Rohingya.

Relief International

Relief international has deployed emergency humanitarian aid teams to Bangladesh, in areas where people have begun to make makeshift homes and temporary settlements. They are involved in the direct repatriation of the Rohingya, and mainly rely on emergency response volunteers to carry out schemes. They establish safe areas for women and children in areas such as Cox Bazaar, seeing sex trafficking is a risk posed in any area where they are left vulnerable. They also implement sanitation services, to avoid an outbreak of disease as the risk of health and hygiene related issues is increased due to the overcrowding of people. Relief international also relies on donations from people all over the world.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has implemented various programs to help the Rohingya refugees in refugee camps. They have sent rescue teams to install roads and facilities, along with ensuring that refugees have access to clean water and sanitary conditions to avoid the risk and spread of water-borne diseases such as cholera which are often prevalent in overcrowded and poorly infrastructured areas, as states above. Finally, the UNHCR has also deployed teams for refugees that are suffering the effects of flash floods in Bangladesh and is continuously working to rehabilitate the displaced Rohingya.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs (UNOCHA, A.K.A OCHA) has worked diligently to combat the growing refugee crisis. OCHA has commandeered a joint response program, launched on March 16th 2018, to gather funds for all the different aspects of the crisis. However, less than half of the needed funds have been met, as of 24th October. Nevertheless, the joint response program has raised \$679 million USD as of October which will go towards providing relief and assistance to the 1.3 million people who have been displaced or affected by the crisis. The Joint Response program covers all aspects of the crisis, such as but not limited to, child protection, logistics, food security and education.

Bangladesh

Due to the violence in their own country, the Rohingya Muslims evacuate to the nearest neighboring countries to take refuge. In this case, India and Bangladesh. The Rohingya refugee population in Bangladesh has now reached over 1.1 million. They also plan to rehabilitate the 32,000/232,000 refugees which are currently residing in refugee camps on Myanmar's border. Bangladesh has difficulty managing the huge refugee influx and often relies on aid from other countries for support.

India

Rohingya Muslims have been evacuating Myanmar to neighboring countries in search of refuge. India however, has denied entry of refugees, seeing them as a threat to national security. Regardless, Rohingya refugees have been illegally immigrating into the country, and many have taken shelter in the area of Jammu and Kashmir, a disputed territory on the border of India and Pakistan. India has also pledged aid to the cause, naming it Operation 'Insaniyat'. The operation was launched to donate food and supplies to help Bangladesh manage the growing refugee population. In Sept 14, 2017, aid for 35,000 refugees was brought by plane to Chittagong, Bangladesh.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1057	Myanmar is first unified and established in Bagan.
1430	Rakhine Kingdom, with the capital in Mrauk U, was founded on the border of Muslim and Buddhist Asia. It became one of the most prosperous cities in Asia.
1785	Rakhine Kingdom came under Burmese control.
1824-1948	Myanmar was under British Colonial rule. Cheap labor was needed for cultivation, and so policies encouraged Muslim migrant workers to move to Myanmar and work in agriculture.
1941-1945	World War II: Myanmar was engaged in violence as Muslims supported the British but Buddhists supported the Japanese. The era saw much inter-communal violence.
1942	Arakan Massacre occurs. (see section: Background Information > Second World War > Arakan Massacre)

1948	After independence from British colonial rule was achieved, Muslim revolts erupted. They wanted equal rights and a separate, autonomous state.
1962	Military orchestrated a coup, and military rule thus began. The Muslim Rohingya immediately became increasingly persecuted.
1978-1991	Harsh government campaigns and policies pushed Rohingya Muslims into Bangladesh.
1982	Implementation of a new citizenship law in which it states that the Rohingya Muslims are not a recognized minority group and will not be granted citizenship, seeing as they are illegal immigrants from the British colonial period.
May 28th, 2012	Ma Thida Htwe is raped and killed, an event that served as a catalyst to rising tensions in the state. (see section: Background Information > The Rape and Murder of Ma Thida Htwe)
June 2012	Violence and sectarianism escalates. 150,000 Rohingya Muslims displaced, 200 dead.
2012-2015	Religious violence persists, and Rohingya crisis gains mass news coverage and spotlight. International responses pour in, demanding justice for the Rohingya.
2014	Myanmar carries out its first state census from which the Rohingya Muslims are excluded.
November 2015	Myanmar's first democratic election takes place, in which the Rohingya are not given rights to vote. Aung San Suu Kyi wins the role of de-facto leader. (see section: Background Information > Aung San Suu Kyi)
October 9th, 2016	ARSA (see section: Background Information > Rohingya Insurgency, Major countries and organizations involved > Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA)) claims responsibility for the attack on border control police, in which 9 officers were killed. This triggers crackdown of Myanmar's military on Rohingya Muslims. This in turn results in an exodus, and 87,000 Rohingya are forced to flee to Bangladesh.
August 25th, 2017	Myanmar state media confirms that several security officers were killed by ARSA, and Myanmar claims 'clearance operations' underway to root out ARSA members.

27th August, 2017	Gyu Pyar Din massacre occurs. (see section: Background Information > Notable recent massacres > Gyu Pyar Din Massacre)
30th August, 2017	Tula Toli massacre occurs. (see section: Background Information > Notable recent massacres > Tula Toli massacre)
19th Sept, 2017	Aung San Suu Kyi fails to address atrocities committed by Myanmar's military, and military continues to deny involvement in massacres. Hence, Aung San is widely criticized.
23rd October, 2017 - Present	Over 600,000 and counting refugees have escaped to Bangladesh and continue to flee to neighboring countries.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- The situation of the human rights of the Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar, 03/10/2018, **(A/HRC/RES/39/2)**
- The situation of human rights in Myanmar, 02/04/2015, **(A/HRC/RES/28/23)**

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Efforts have been previously made by organizations geared towards humanitarian causes, such as those listed above, the UNHCR and Relief International. They have organized relief teams to places in urgent need of attention, such as Cox Bazaar in Bangladesh. Their current efforts are focused on providing latrines and access to clean water. Additionally, they are aiding refugees in building roads and resilient homes to withstand harsh conditions and natural disasters, i.e flash floods.

There has also been a significant effort to raise awareness about the human rights crisis in Myanmar by organizations such as the Human Rights Watch. This is in order to increase donations and volunteers to alleviate the stress on host countries of Rohingya refugees such as Bangladesh and Malaysia.

International responses have also poured in from onlooking countries such as Canada, who called into question the motives of state officials such as Aung San Suu Kyi for the human rights encroachments in her country and the continuous denial of Myanmar's military. However, many countries are apprehensive of getting directly involved as the uninvited involvement of one country in another's affairs often leads to an escalation of events and by extension, the risk of war.

Possible Solutions

Although various organizations are running to aid the issue of the Rohingya, the amount of influx into countries such as Malaysia, India and Bangladesh is unprecedented, and resources must be made abundant for host countries by donations and increased awareness. Only a small percentage of the Rohingya have received adequate aid to rehabilitate their lives and countries with excess resources must make an effort toward solving the crisis at hand, such as pledging aid and rescue teams.

The issue of conditions in refugee camps must also be addressed, such as providing free vaccinations and blueprints for resilient infrastructure, along with supplies and professional help to aid the refugees in building resilient infrastructure. Emergency clinics and counseling centers must also be erected in order for the Rohingya to receive both physical and psychological aid, as majority are still suffering from trauma from their continued persecution and human rights violations by the Myanmar military and government.

Countries are generally skeptical about allowing Rohingya refugees to rehabilitate within their own land due to security threats, mainly terrorism. However, seeing as the crisis has reached an urgent level, countries should adopt new approaches to the situation to find a sustainable and permanent solution for the displaced refugees. Countries could look to open their borders for the masses of orphaned children who need homes as it is unlikely they will have violent and terrorist motives. New methods should also be implemented, however, to allow for the rehabilitation of adults and families in new countries as although the threat of terrorism is understandable, the extent of the humanitarian crisis is reaching a critical state.

Dialogue between involved parties must also be improved, as this is a fundamental aspect of ensuring that the Rohingya and the Myanmar state entities engage in peaceful talks and efforts geared towards scaling down the violence that has emerged between the two states. This can be either done through UN meeting in which neutral bodied mediators could prove instrumental in carrying out fruitful talks, or through the use of other neutral-bodied associations.

The ethics of Myanmar's government, ARSA, and other involved parties should be called into question, which can be done by launching neutral-bodied UN agencies to search for signs of foul play on the part of all involved parties. The UN can then sanction guilty parties based on findings. UN member states with abundant resources should do everything in their power to ensure the matter isn't put to rest until the crisis has been alleviated and the Rohingya refugees are brought justice, as genocide in a modern world is, in reality, a world on the path to a dystopia.

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Appendix

Appendix 1

Further information on the crisis, extent, effect and needed response of the Rohingya Refugee Crisis.

<https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/JRP%20for%20Rohingya%20Humanitarian%20Crisis%202018.PDF>