



# SECURITY COUNCIL

## QUESTION OF THE ROHINGYA CRISIS

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### Introduction of Topic

The Rohingya Muslims are one of the most persecuted peoples today: about 687,000 of them have fled persecution in Myanmar since August 2017. In fact, the UN described the military action in Myanmar, which has caused the exodus of the Rohingya, as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing". Numerous country leaders of the world have appealed to Myanmar to stop the violence against the Rohingya, but the military claims that it is only fighting terrorists and denies attacking civilians.

The Rohingya have been persecuted for a very long time; they have been physically assaulted, financially weakened, and granted limited or no access to health services, education, and employment. Even Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh face unsafe living conditions. More action needs to be taken in order to ensure the safe return of the Rohingya refugees and the protection of rights of the Rohingya.

### Definition of Key Terms

#### Rohingya

The Rohingya people are a stateless ethnic group who have lived in Rakhine State (a state in Myanmar located at the Western coast adjacent to the Bay of Bengal) for centuries. This ethnic group represents the largest percentage of Muslims (about 4%) in Myanmar, where 88% of the population is Buddhist. Before the 2016-17 persecution of Rohingya by Myanmar military forces, more than a million Rohingya lived in Rakhine State. Since then, about 687,000 have fled to neighboring countries, especially Bangladesh.

#### Burma

Burma is the former name of the Southeast Asian country currently named Myanmar. For centuries, Burma was the official English name of the country. In 1989, the country's official English name changed from the "Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma" to the "Union of Myanmar".

## **Military Junta**

A military junta, or a military dictatorship, is a form of government where a military force has complete control over political authority after taking power by force. Myanmar became a military dictatorship under the Burma Socialist Programme Party following a coup d'état in 1962. This military junta, which lasted till 2011, ruled as a single party system under a general. The Rohingya lost all the rights that they enjoyed prior the coup, and more than 250,000 Rohingya Muslims were pushed out across the border into Bangladesh between 1978 and 1991 due to heavy-handed government policies.

## **International Criminal Court (ICC)**

According to the ICC, the tribunal "investigates and, where warranted, tries individuals charged with the gravest crimes of concern to the international community: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and the crime of aggression".

## **Background Information**

The Rohingya people have faced persecution for decades, and the conflict between the Rohingya Muslims and the Buddhist community in Myanmar has been going on for a very long time. As soon as Rakhine State came under Burmese control in 1785, the differences in religion, language, and political support have ultimately caused the conflict we know today as the Rohingya Crisis.

### **Military rule: 1962-2011**

#### ***Formation of the military junta***

On 2 March 1962, a military junta was formed: the military, which was led by General Ne Win, took control of Burma through a coup d'état, and the Burmese government was under direct control by the military until 2011. At this time, most aspects of society, be it business, media, or production, were nationalized under the Burmese Socialist Party.

#### ***Persecution of Rohingya under military rule***

The Rohingya suffered after the military gained control in 1962. Oppressive government campaigns forced more than 250,000 Rohingya Muslims to leave Myanmar and seek refuge in Bangladesh. The military authorities viewed the minority group as a threat to nationalist identity.

The army killed, tortured, and raped the Rohingya, calling them foreigners. They stopped social and political organizations that were affiliated with the Rohingya. The Rohingya suffered forced labor, arbitrary detention and physical assaults as a result of the heavy-handed campaigns of the military.

In 1982, a new citizenship law was passed wherein the government identified 135 national ethnic groups. The Rohingya weren't one of them, which effectively rendered them stateless.

### **The current crisis: 2016-Present**

#### ***Persecution of the Rohingya before the crisis***

Even after the end of the military junta, the Rohingya continued to be persecuted. In June 2012, the 2012 Rakhine State riots took place. A series of religious conflicts erupted between Rakhine Buddhists and Muslims, in which more than 200 Rohingya died and about 150,000 were rendered homeless. Between 2012 and 2015, more than 112,000 Rohingya fled to Malaysia.

#### ***ARSA attacks and military response***

On October 9, 2016, about 300 Rohingya men attacked border posts in Rakhine State, killing nine police officers. The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) claimed responsibility for the border post attack, which sparked an intense crackdown by the Myanmar military. That caused many Rohingya people to flee to Bangladesh. The military then declared ARSA a terrorist organization and responded with what they call "clearance operations".

As a part of the clearance operations, the military burned down villages and attacked civilians, although the Myanmar government denied the claim.

On September 19, 2017, Aung San Suu Kyi, State Counsellor of Myanmar, condemned the human rights violations. Suu Kyi has been accused of ignoring the atrocities committed by the Myanmar military, but it is believed that she has little control over them.

This crisis has caused a mass migration of the Rohingya to Bangladesh and, according to rough estimates, as many as 1 million Rohingya have fled Myanmar since the start of the crisis.

## **Major Countries and Organizations Involved**

### **Myanmar**

Since the military coup in 1962, the country has been under direct or indirect control by the military. Even though the military junta ended in 2011, Suu Kyi's NLD party is still in a power-sharing agreement with the military today, and she does not have complete control over the military. The Myanmar military has been accused of various human rights violations against the Rohingya; however, the government has denied any unlawful killings and has also denied any access for investigation to the UN.

### **Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA)**

The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) is a Rohingya insurgent group. ARSA was allegedly responsible for coordinated attacks on officers that led to a military crackdown which caused the mass migration of the Rohingya from Myanmar.

### **Bangladesh**

Bangladesh is both similar to the Rohingya in language and in religion, seeing as the country is majority Muslim, making it a hotspot for the arriving refugees from neighboring Myanmar. Bangladesh is having trouble deal with the influx of migrants and has been receiving from non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

### **The United States and the United Kingdom**

The United States and the United Kingdom have both urged the military action against the Rohingya and the displacement of civilians to stop, and they have pledged aid to support the refugees fleeing Myanmar. The UK has suspended training of the Myanmar military over its treatment of the Rohingya.

### **China**

China, unlike Western countries, has urged the international community to "support the efforts of Myanmar in safeguarding the stability of its national development". China has strong ties with Myanmar and has repeatedly shielded the Myanmar government and military from international criticism over the Rohingya crisis.

### **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**

UNHCR is the refugee agency for the United Nations. . The UNHCR has contributed a lot to improve the Rohingya crisis by working with the Bangladesh government and other partners in order to respond to the immense humanitarian needs of the Rohingya.

### **International human rights organizations and medical charities**

Various human rights organizations and medical charities, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) have immensely helped the displaced Rohingya. While organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have reported various human rights violations by the Myanmar military and have implored organizations and countries to support Rohingya refugees, organizations like the ICRC and the MSF have provided a lot of humanitarian assistance to refugees.

## **Main Issues**

### **Ramifications of the Rohingya Crisis**

#### ***Human rights violations against the Rohingya***

Various human rights organizations and medical charities have reported appalling human rights violations against the Rohingya in Myanmar. According to the 2018 World Report by Human Rights Watch, “military units, assisted by ethnic Rakhine militias, attacked Rohingya villages and committed massacres, widespread rape, arbitrary detention, and mass arson”. Moreover, the report states that many Rohingya who were attempting to flee the country were killed or crippled by landmines that were placed by soldiers near the Bangladesh-Myanmar border. Even Amnesty International reported that the Myanmar military raped and abused Rohingya women and girls. The Rohingya living in Myanmar continue to be persecuted, and those who have fled also face unsafe living conditions.

#### ***Unsafe living conditions for Rohingya refugees***

As a result of the military clearance operations in Myanmar, the Rohingya were forced to flee Myanmar to nearby countries, particularly Bangladesh. Although various organizations and countries are supplying aid and humanitarian assistance, access to food, safe drinking water, and shelter remains limited. According to the Inter Sector Coordination Group report from mid-April 2018, only 70% of the one million Rohingya refugees were receiving food aid. Moreover, diseases such as diphtheria, which causes damage to the heart and to the nervous system, have killed and infected many refugees.

#### ***Lack of legal status for Rohingya in Myanmar***

In 1982, the Rohingya were not part of the 135 recognized national ethnic groups. Later, in 2014, the Rohingya were again excluded from the census. The Rohingya are a stateless ethnic group without any basic rights as the Myanmar government continues to view them as illegal immigrants. As a result, even today, the Rohingya are deprived of fundamental rights such as the access to health services, education, and employment because they have no legal status. In fact, the illiteracy rate among the Rohingya is an astonishing 80 percent. Additionally, they are not granted the right to worship freely, and because of their religious and ethnic identity, they face restrictions on the right to marry, move freely and own property.

## **Barriers to solving the crisis**

### ***Great influence of the military in Myanmar politics and economy***

When the NLD won the elections in 2015, it was believed that the military junta that oppressed the country would step down. However, even though the NLD won the elections, the political and economic aspects of the country are tightly controlled by the same soldiers, and the power of the military is undiminished. There is no firm control over the oppressive military, and policies cannot be freely implemented. The present political system in Myanmar will continue to be oppressive toward the Rohingya as long as the military maintains its power.

### ***Deep cultural divide between the Buddhist community and the Rohingya muslims***

Since the late 1900s, the government has been excluding the Rohingya as seen in the 1985 citizenship law and the 2014 census. This issue is especially hard to solve given that public opinion also sides with the authorities on this matter. The hatred has become a deep cultural divide, and a majority of the population view the Rohingya as illegal migrants from Bangladesh who are a threat to the Buddhist community. Therefore, it is important that the government start portraying the Rohingya more positively in order to change the negative perception of the Rohingya.

## **Previous Attempts to solve the Issue**

### **Humanitarian assistance by countries and organizations**

Although humanitarian assistance does not really tackle the root problem, it is important to note the various nations and organizations that are contributing to taking care of the physical survival of the refugees.

Countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia have pledged aid to support the refugees fleeing Myanmar. Since 2017, the US has pledged more than US \$299 million, the UK has pledged £129 million, and Australia has pledged more than US \$53 million. Moreover, various organizations, such as UNHCR, ICRC, and MSF, have helped improve the living conditions of the Rohingya refugees. They are supplying necessities and are

helping to prevent the outbreak of diseases.

As previously mentioned, the UNHCR has contributed a lot to improve the Rohingya crisis by working with the Bangladesh government and other partners. The organization is also helping the Bangladesh government to develop the Kutupalong Extension, which is a new site near Kutupalong refugee camp in Bangladesh.

### **Attempts at repatriation of the Rohingya**

In November 2017, Myanmar and Bangladesh agreed to begin the return of the Rohingya in two years. However, this agreement has raised a lot of concerns regarding the safety of the Rohingya. The Rohingya refugees and human rights organizations such as Amnesty International have expressed concern that they would be forced to return and would again face unsafe conditions in Myanmar.

Till now, not a single Rohingya refugee has returned under the formal framework agreed with Bangladesh. Thus, although the repatriation timeframe has been decided, it is necessary for the Myanmar government to tackle its' own issues facing before the Rohingya are repatriated.

In June 2018, the UN reached a secret agreement with Myanmar to ensure the "voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable" repatriation of Rohingya to Myanmar or wherever they choose. Under the deal, UNHCR and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will be given access to Rakhine State. However, according to Reuters, the agreement does not explicitly guarantee citizenship or freedom of movement beyond the borders of Rakhine; thus, the Rohingya are not willing to accept this deal.

### **Possible Solutions**

Below is a list of ideas in order for the Myanmar government to address the underlying causes of the crisis and ensure the safe repatriation and treatment of the Rohingya. Persecution against the Rohingya should stop, humanitarian aid groups and UN investigators should be allowed in Rakhine, and the Rohingya should be repatriated and given citizenship. Solutions should include measures to tackle the current humanitarian crisis and long-term solutions for the "voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable" return of the Rohingya.

- Address the humanitarian needs of the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.
- Calling upon Myanmar to allow all UN fact-finding missions and humanitarian assistance from the UN and other human rights organizations by expanding the June deal.
- Understanding the requirements of the Rohingya refugees before making any more decisions regarding their repatriation.

- Asking neighboring countries such as India and relevant groups such as the Non-Aligned Movement to play a bigger role in solving the crisis
- Calling for government programs in Myanmar to include Rohingya in society and to change public perception of the ethnic group.
- As a last resort, placing economic sanctions against Myanmar's military and government.

## Appendices

- I. What you need to know about the Rohingya Crisis: [www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41566561](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41566561) . This is a detailed overview of the Rohingya Crisis by the BBC, which explains who the Rohingya are, why they are fleeing Myanmar, and what is the international response to the crisis.
- II. Rohingya crisis - How we got here: <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/11/12/asia/rohingya-crisis-timeline/index.html>. This is a timeline by the CNN on how the conflict between the Rohingya Muslims and the Buddhist community began.