



# UNSC 2012

## BACKGROUND GUIDE



2012



## LETTER FROM THE DAIS

Dear Delegates,

The United Nations Security Council has a long history of battling international conflict, and you should feel truly honored to be a member of MITMUNC 2012 UNSC. You will be discussing the unrest in Cote d'Ivoire and the controversy in Myanmar's policy regarding children in armed conflict. Along the way, you will grow, gaining a better understanding of what it means to discuss issues related to international security.

As a third-year participant in MITMUNC, I can confidently say that you are in for a great time. You should expect to work hard, but be prepared to have fun in the process. We expect you to argue, compromise, argue again, and compromise some more, until we resolve our issues, or in the more likely scenario, we run out of time. We've picked topics for UNSC that we think will spark this kind of debate and give you a chance to learn about some world conflicts in the process.

To introduce you to us a bit: my name is Arianna Moshary, and I'll be your head chair. This is my third year chairing for MITMUNC, and I have seen this conference blossom in the past few years. I am a Junior from New York City and studying Electrical Engineering and Computer Science. My co-chairs are Nevin Daniel and Sabina Maddila. They are both freshmen, and very excited for their first MITMUNC, although they have MUN experience from High School.

The three of us are so thrilled for this conference; we cannot wait to meet you all. Work hard preparing for the conference. The more effort you put in, the better our debate will be. So read the background guide thoroughly, figure out what is important to your delegation, research the topics, and come to MIT ready for a fierce debate.

See you soon!

*Arianna Moshary*

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## Topic 1: POLITICAL CONFLICT IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

### Background

Once the model of stability and peace in West Africa, Côte d'Ivoire has spent the past decade plagued by ethnic and religious conflict, human rights abuses, high poverty rates, and more. These issues were sparked by and continue to revolve around the competition for power between former president Laurent Gbagbo and current president Alassane Ouattara. The UNSC is responsible for finding one or more permanent solutions to the conflicts in Côte d'Ivoire that will bring about stability and return it to its former prosperity.

### Introduction

Côte d'Ivoire is among the wealthiest nations in Western Africa. Its historically close ties to France have resulted in some of the best developed cocoa plantations and most foreign investments in the region.<sup>1</sup> Still, as evident by recent events, Côte d'Ivoire is not immune to the violence and political strife that has graced other countries in the region. The country's first ever military coup in 1999 was the precursor to over a decade of instability.

The most recent of these political conflicts was the political standoff over November

2010 runoff presidential election ballots. After an election commission declared Alassane Ouattara, a Muslim Northerner and son of foreign migrant workers, as winner of the Ivorian presidential runoff ballot, incumbent president and Christian Southerner Laurent Gbagbo refused to cede power, sparking violence in the streets.<sup>2</sup> In the coming months, ethnic and religious tensions, political protests, and attacks on foreign migrant workers soon escalated to civil war between the supporters of both candidates. Gbagbo was finally captured in April 2011, ending fighting among factions.<sup>3</sup> Ouattara was inaugurated in the next month. In the wake of the five months of civil war, nearly 3,000 people were left dead, while another 500,000 were displaced.<sup>4</sup> Currently, the International Criminal Court (ICC) is investigating hundreds of cases of human rights violations and abuses, including murder, rape, concealment of bodies, and child slavery.<sup>5</sup>

Côte d'Ivoire is of particular economic and political importance in the West African region. Côte d'Ivoire had long been considered as the “miracle” in the region, being most politically stable and economically developed of her neighbors. Côte d'Ivoire has benefited greatly from its production and export of tropical products, especially the cocoa crop and

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<sup>2</sup>Source:

[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/04/world/africa/04ivory.html?\\_r=1&ref=ivorycoast](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/04/world/africa/04ivory.html?_r=1&ref=ivorycoast)

<sup>3</sup>Source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13287585>

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>Source: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/human-rights-watch/cte-divoire-icc-judges-ok\\_b\\_992632.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/human-rights-watch/cte-divoire-icc-judges-ok_b_992632.html)

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<sup>1</sup>Source:

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iv.html>

coffee, as well as the wealth of foreign, particularly French, investment.<sup>6</sup> Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire's economic center, had long been a magnet for migrant workers from neighboring countries and foreign investment before civil war and violence first broke out in 2000.<sup>7</sup> While the Ivorian economy performed poorly in the 1980s and 1990s, it remains among the strongest in West Africa. Yet in the recent turn of events, the mass exodus of people who have fled Côte d'Ivoire during and since the civil war still continues to threaten the economic and political stability of surrounding nations, particularly Liberia.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, trends in recent year show the continuing economic decline and decline in living standards for the Ivorian people.

Political conflict in Côte d'Ivoire has historically been driven by political and social grievances over citizenship. As Côte d'Ivoire and her new president seek to unite the Ivorian people and reconcile existing ethnic and religious tensions, it will be your role as the UNSC to determine how to transition and return to permanent stability.

## History of Political Conflict

Côte d'Ivoire has long been the beacon of economic and political stability in Western Africa since its independence in 1960 up

until political unrest that began in the mid-1990s. Widely known as the “father” of Ivorian Independence, Félix Houphouët-Boigny served as president of Côte d'Ivoire until his death in 1993 in his seventh term of office.<sup>9</sup> During Houphouët-Boigny's term in office, Côte d'Ivoire experienced little political strife and sustained developed relations with the West, especially France, resulting in a large flux of foreign investment.<sup>10</sup> Houphouët-Boigny was succeeded by Henri Konan Bédié, who was also part of the same political party and ethnic group of his predecessor.

The first multi-party elections were held in 1990 defeated the then professor and presidential candidate, Gbago. Although the election was unsuccessfully appealed the Supreme Court, the 1990 elections marked the start of rising Ivorian discomfort with the government and system of government. In 1995, elections were largely boycotted by opposition to incumbent Bédié regime.<sup>11</sup> Still, President Bédié attempted to rewrite the constitution to prevent certain challengers, such as Ouattara, from running in the election, playing off of long-standing ethnic and religious tensions. With these tensions, ultimately Brig. Gen. Robert Gueï led a military coup d'état in December 1999. The next year, candidate Gbago was elected into office despite calls by Ouattara, who was not allowed to take part in the election because of his non-

<sup>6</sup>Source:

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2846.htm#econ>

<sup>7</sup>Source:

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iv.html>

<sup>8</sup>Source:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/01/world/africa/01iberia.html?ref=ivorycoast>

<sup>9</sup>Source:

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/139651/Cote-d'Ivoire>

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

Ivorian descent, for a fresh election.<sup>12</sup>

Although Gbago marked a significant milestone for Côte d'Ivoire, fighting still broke out between religious and ethnic factions the same month of Gbago's inauguration.<sup>13</sup>

A failed coup in September 2002 continued to fuel political unrest and ignited the First Ivorian Civil War. As a result, the country was divided into the rebel-held north and the Gbago-government controlled south, divisions that also nicely fell into the religious divisions of the Muslim north and Christian south.

## Ethnic and Religious Tensions

Côte d'Ivoire has more than 60 ethnic groups.<sup>14</sup> Also, of Côte d'Ivoire's 21.5 million people, 5 million are non-Ivorian, or *étrangères*, most of which are of Burkina Faso and Malian heritage.<sup>15</sup> Most *étrangères* inhabit the northern part of Côte d'Ivoire and often refer to themselves as *Nordistes*, or followers of Islam. The polarization of ethnic identity had become a political instrument during the refinement of the Ivorian constitution under the Bédié regime. Indeed, for this reason presidential candidates such as Ouattara, a Nordiste, were blocked from running in the elections until recently.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup>Source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13287585>

<sup>14</sup>Source: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2846.htm>

<sup>15</sup>Source: <http://www.njas.helsinki.fi/pdf-files/vol15num1/kirwin.pdf>

Since 2004, over 9,000 UN forces (United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire: UNOCI) have been or were once stationed in Côte d'Ivoire.<sup>16</sup> Still ethnic conflict has displaced and driven out hundreds of thousands of Ivorians and migrants working on coca plantations from neighboring countries. Ethnic conflict has emerged as a pressing issue around the world, most particularly in Africa in states such as Rwanda, Nigeria, and The Democratic Republic of the Congo. As you proceed to introduce permanent political stability to Côte d'Ivoire, you will need to fully account for the role of ethnic and religious tensions in Ivorian political life.

## Current Developments

Recently, President Ouattara's administration has created the Truth, Reconciliation, and Dialogue Commission.<sup>17</sup> Although the results of the Commission have yet to be seen, the Commission has gone off to a rocky start as the political party of ex-president Gbago, the Côte d'Ivoire Popular Front (FPI), has just withdrawn from the process.<sup>18</sup> Still, it will be in your interest as you write your positions and prepare for debate to monitor the progress and results of the Truth, Reconciliation, and Dialogue

<sup>16</sup>Source:

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iv.html>

<sup>17</sup>Source:

<http://www.npr.org/2011/05/12/135788743/new-ivorian-leader-faces-challenges-criticism>

<sup>18</sup>Source:

<http://www.mmegi.bw/index.php?sid=11&aid=373&dir=2011/December/Friday2>

Commission and other efforts.

In addition, the International Criminal Court has already begun proceedings to try Gbago in court for war crimes and human rights violations.<sup>19</sup> Still, some groups have countered Ouattara's calls for justice with calls for investigations into his and his supporter's actions during the civil war.<sup>20</sup> Such investigations have yet to be seen.

## Bloc Positions

### *Côte d'Ivoire*

As Côte d'Ivoire proceeds with its Truth, Reconciliation, and Dialogue Commission, she faces reconciling two different pasts: a past that has feared foreign influence and has suffered from xenophobia, and a past that been oppressed but finally supported by the outside world. President Ouattara now holds the support from much of the Western world, but he along with Gbago, faces possible investigations for war crimes and human rights violations during the second civil war.<sup>21</sup> These investigations among reconciliation attempts place Côte d'Ivoire in a unique diplomatic situation, much of which is to come apparent as the new regime establishes.

<sup>19</sup>Source:

<http://www.voanews.com/english/news/ICC-Issues-Charge-Against-Former-Ivory-Coast-Leader-Gbagbo-134741173.html>

<sup>20</sup>Source: <http://www.hrw.org/africa/cote-divoire>

<sup>21</sup>Source:

<http://www.npr.org/2011/05/12/135788743/new-ivorian-leader-faces-challenges-criticism>

### *ECOWAS/African Union*

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union have both taken strong stands against returning violence in Côte d'Ivoire. In response to the growing tensions following the runoff elections last year, ECOWAS threatened to withdraw Côte d'Ivoire's membership until Gbago ceded power with Nigeria, considered "linchpin" of ECOWAS, even threatening to use force to remove Gbago from power.<sup>22</sup> Both ECOWAS and the African Union have since endorsed Ouattara as president. ECOWAS and the African Union have publicly stated that the political stability of Côte d'Ivoire is essential to the stability of the entire region.<sup>23</sup> Thus countries part of ECOWAS and the African Union are in support of policies that maintain stability in Côte d'Ivoire.

### *France*

France, with her long history with Côte d'Ivoire, has taken an especially vested interest in current affairs given the nature of their investments in and relations with Côte d'Ivoire. During the post-election violence, French troops and aide were sent for rebel forces aligned with Ouattara.<sup>24</sup> France also played an active role in diplomatic attempts to remove Gbago from power. Still, many Ivoirians distrust the French influence, and many Gbago

<sup>22</sup>Source: <http://www.france24.com/en/20110324-ecowas-nigeria-goodluck-johnathan-un-ivory-coast-crisis-politics-stalemate-gbagbo-outtara>

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup>Source: <http://rt.com/news/cote-ivoire-gbagbo-un/>



supporters claim French conspiracy in recent events.<sup>25</sup> As France, bear in mind both the financial and political interests in determining your position.

#### *United States/European Union*

Following the French lead, the United States and the European Union have largely taken roles in support of Ouattara during the post-election violence, although have not, for the most part, committed on-the-ground military support.

#### *China/Russian Federation*

Both China and the Russian Federation are well known proponents of state sovereignty and have repeatedly used the veto power against UNSC resolutions for this reason. Russia has been openly condemned the presence of U.N. Peacekeepers in Côte d'Ivoire immediately after election violence poured through the country.<sup>26</sup> Other third party non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as *American Against War* have criticized the U.N. for siding too much to Western policies. When considering your positions, bear in mind the issues of state sovereignty and policy neutrality, as the UNSC deals with this issue on every ruling.

- What role can and should UNSC play in the stabilization of governments?
- To what degree should state sovereignty be observed?
- How do the rights of states fare with the rights of humans?
- How can UNSC maintain political neutrality while holding a decisive stance on the affairs of Côte d'Ivoire? Is this possible?
- How may UNSC help achieve political stability in Côte d'Ivoire? What is the best means of proceeding?
- How has the presence of U.N. peacekeepers over the last decade changed the UNSC's role in Côte d'Ivoire?

## Committee Goals

As you prepare for your role as a member of UNSC bear in mind the following questions:

<sup>25</sup>Source: <http://rt.com/news/cote-ivoire-gbagbo-un/>

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*

## Useful Links and Sources

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13287585>

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2846.htm>

<http://www.njas.helsinki.fi/pdf-files/vol15num1/kirwin.pdf>

<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N11/411/18/PDF/N1141118.pdf?OpenElement>

<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N11/433/39/PDF/N1143339.pdf?OpenElement>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14812517>

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2011/sgsm13375.doc.htm>

<http://www.hrw.org/africa/cote-divoire>

<http://news.ecowas.int/presseshow.php?nb=188&lang=en&annee=2010>

<http://www.npr.org/2011/04/10/135296728/the-ivory-coast-a-jewel-before-its-decline>

<http://www.npr.org/2011/05/12/135788743/new-ivorian-leader-faces-challenges-criticism>

<http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1572/resolutions.shtml>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/01/world/africa/01liberia.html?ref=ivorycoast>

<http://www.france24.com/en/20110324-ecowas-nigeria-goodluck-johnathan-un-ivory-coast-crisis-politics-stalemate-gbagbo-outtara>

<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=94353>

<http://www.starafrica.com/en/news/detail-news/view/cote-divoire-unoci-chief-meets-politi-206351.html>

<http://www.mmegi.bw/index.php?sid=11&aid=373&dir=2011/December/Friday2>

<http://www.voanews.com/english/news/ICC-Issues-Charge-Against-Former-Ivory-Coast-Leader-Gbagbo-134741173.html>

<http://rt.com/news/cote-ivoire-gbagbo-un/>



## TOPIC 2:

**CHILDREN IN ARMED  
CONFLICT: MYANMAR****Basic Facts**

*Name:* The Republic of the Union of Myanmar<sup>27</sup>

*Area:* 677,000 km<sup>2</sup>

*Biomes:* tropical rainforest, alpine

*Population:* 54 million

*Language:* Burmese

*Major Ethnicities:* Burman – 68%, Shan – 9%, Karen – 7%, Rakhine – 4%, Chinese – 3%

*Major Religion:* Buddhist (89%)

*Capital:* Naypyidaw (near Pyinmana)

*Largest City:* Rangoon (~4.3 million)

*Urbanization:* 34% urban, 66% rural

*Literacy Rate:* 90%

*Pop. in poverty:* 33%

*GDP:* \$43 billion

*Major Industries:* Oil, gas, mining, timber, agriculture (70% of population farms)

<sup>27</sup>We'll be referring to the nation as Myanmar through the article just to try keep a standard, though for much of the nation's history (and still as it is recognized by other nations like the U.S. today) it was Burma. We will also refer to Myanmar's people collectively as Burmese though they may not ethnically be so.

**A History<sup>28</sup>***Ancient Times*

Myanmar owes much of its increasingly complex and diverse sociopolitical environment to its geography: it is situated between three of Asia's major historic cultural centers - India, China, and Thailand - and has long been an important thruway within the maritime trade routes of the Indian Ocean.

The Burmese state itself, though, is thought to have first arisen in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century after a collection of nomadic invasions and power shifts by the Pyu, Mon, and Pali with the establishment of the Pagan Kingdom in 1044. While centered on the Irawaddy River, the Pagan kingdom had reach over most of the entire basin forming the outlines of the modern state. And though the kingdom was only the first of many to rule the vast region, its reign saw the cementation of much of Myanmar's present culture: for example, Buddhism and the Burmese script (both adapted from the Mon) were both introduced during Pagan rule.

Still, like much of South and East Asia, the Pagan Kingdom fell to the Mongols near the conclusion of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The result: division of the kingdom into a number of smaller, warring kingdoms, predominantly divided along ethnic lines.

<sup>28</sup>While there are not footnote citations throughout this part of the guide, all sources along with supplementary ones are listed in the Resources section under categories of information provided to facilitate your own research.

While chaotic, this arrangement which spurred constant flurries of warfare and conquest gave rise to a great deal of progression in art, architecture, and technology. Three decades later, however, the Toungoo dynasty was able to reunite much of the country once again, beginning a dynastic cycle that lasted until 1886, the year when colonial rule by the British took full hold.

### *Colonial Rule*

It is important to note, however, that during this last period of autonomy, much of the state was still fragmented by ethnic cleavages that only became more varied as kingdoms expanded their reach into select regions of India and China including Assam, Manipur, and Rakhine. Such ethnic fragmentation is an important theme in Burmese history and nowhere more so than with British rule of the nation. For one, the introduction of Western planning to the largely unorganized societal structure of Myanmar - in particular, the practice of keeping written records of population and societal tracts - forced those in Myanmar to be, in many ways, defined by familial and ethnic heritages, enforcing ethnic cleavages. Censuses, for example, demanded individuals be classified into a specific ethnic group such as the Karen or Shan and while such classifications were often incorrect, differentiated treatment and created stigmas of these various groups persisted. The creation of an Anglo-Burmese elite through miscegenation between Britons and Burmese and importation of Indians and Chinese into Myanmar's major cities by the British to

stimulate a greater concentration of industry (largely absent from the almost entirely agrarian and trade society) only exacerbated these ethnic divisions.

But ethnic fragmentation was not the only way British rule affected social life: economic change was also instrumental in challenging the continuation of pre-colonial culture into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Agriculture was not simply a source of revenue for the Burmese people but the center of social life. The patron-client networks built through agriculture helped reinforce a sense of community. In particular, farms often aggregated into villages that were led by a village headman who would coordinate harvests and advocate for the needs of the village in times of low yield - a tradition that instilled in the social structure the affable view of leadership as one and the same with the commoner. Upon British arrival, however, agriculture, like other new industries, became a much more regulated enterprise: colonists expanded farmed land and tripled yield but only at the cost of establishing stringent quotas and forcing headmen to become accountable to the colonists rather than the people. Combined with other imperialist practices including forcing commoners to *shikho* to government officials, a bow previously reserved only for the elderly, and segregating their magnificent abodes from those of villagers, regulation of agriculture permanently transformed the nature of leadership in Myanmar.

*Resistance*

Discontent with this leadership, as well as the general disdain of Burmese culture by the British, fomented resistance. Buddhist monks led much of the movement in response to desecration of the second most significant institutions, aside from agricultural villages, in Burmese culture, Buddhist pagodas. The end of the colonial period began with the separation of Burma from India making it its own, autonomous crown colony in 1937. New Prime Minister Ba Maw sympathized with the resistance and found followers in government. Shortly thereafter, Myanmar became a prime site for battle in WWII between the British and the Japanese as Japan advanced their lines into the nation. Much of Myanmar was sympathetic to the Japanese movement and joined their troops, however many also allied with Japan especially as the tables of the war had turned (~300,000 also migrated to India as refugees).

One such group: the Burma Independence Army led by Aung San, the father of Aung San Suu Kyi and now considered the “Father of Burma”. After coagulating in 1940 and receiving training in Japan, the army fought for the Japanese until 1944 when it renamed itself the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League [AFPFL] and allied with the British. In 1945, the British regained control of Burma but in light of Burmese cooperation during the war, the sentiments of resistance leaders like Aung San fervently advocating for autonomy, and Gandhi’s increasingly popular independence struggle in nearby India, it

avowed the nation independence in 1947 (with official independence in Jan. 1948).

*Independence and Democracy*

The new, independent Myanmar became a democracy and thrived for many years. Aung San along with six of his government allies were assassinated by a nationalist rival in 1947 so U Nu became the new leader of the AFPFL and the new prime minister. The man had served as foreign minister under Ba Saw and besides was positively viewed for a time. He co-founded the Movement of Non-Aligned States during the Cold War along with the likes of Nehru and Nasser.

However, Nu’s tolerance of separatism and promotion of Buddhist belief as the state religion caused anger among military members who, as one can infer, were instilled with the idea of more authoritarian rule (many had fought with Japan in the war) and were also ethnically diverse. Communist factions in the military arose leading the government to trust Ne Win, a former high-ranking member of the Burma Independence Army (Bo Zeya, the leader of the communist factions, actually was a fellow high-ranking member) to form opposite socialist factions and later take control of the entire army, the Tatmadaw, away from the ethnic Karen in charge. The AFPFL split along these ideological lines, but with Ne Win serving as an interim prime minister in 1958, the party blew out another election in 1960.

*Authoritarian Rule*

Tensions eventually ballooned to the point where Ne Win and his allies in the military conducted a nonviolent coup d'état in 1962, installing Ne Win as the new leader. The new regime modeled after communism in China: papers were banned, industry was nationalized, and the party was put in complete power. Like Mao in China, Win also attempted his own "Great Leap Forward", the "Burmese Way to Socialism", to similar results (extreme poverty) and not only did not tolerate ethnic separatist groups (and there were many), but actively racially discriminated against them causing the Diaspora of ~500,000 Indians and Muslims.

Protests to Win's rule were a constant throughout his regime and, as in many authoritarian regimes, grew larger and larger until coercion became unfeasible. After currency devaluation hurled the nation into economic turmoil, On August 8, 1988, protestors at Rangoon University, a site of frequent uprising, incited a movement of millions around the nation known as the 8888 Uprising. The protest was non-violent; however, the government killed thousands in an attempt to repress the movement. In the meantime, a coup was staged by the military which then formed the State Law and Order Restoration Council [SLORC] and made major changes to government infrastructure including imposing martial law and changing the name of the nation to Myanmar.

Aung San Suu Kyi and the Current State

Aung San Suu Kyi, the Western educated daughter of Aung San, was coincidentally in 1988 to tend to her mother. When the protests arose, however, Suu Kyi came to become a symbol of the protests, addressing 500,000 in Rangoon and starting the National League for Democracy [NLD]. Pressure from the protests forced free elections in 1990 but thought the NLD won 80% of party seats, the military ignored the results and resumed their junta. Suu Kyi was also placed under house arrest until 1995 and won the Nobel Prize for her non-violent solidarity, using the money for a charitable trust in Burma.

Since then, she has repeatedly been released and placed under house arrest with no visits from her family due to the regime's refusal to grant them a visa. But even with her husband on his deathbed, she has refused to leave the country in fear that she would be denied the ability to return if she left. She has become the undoubted symbol of the democracy movement in the nation: the 2007 protests in the nation, the most significant since 1988, were a response to the decision of the junta (in 1997, renamed the State Peace and Development Council [SPDC]) to remove fuel subsidies, however soon were centered around a group paying homage to Suu Kyi outside her house and were highlighted by the first sighting of her in years.

Now, the SPDC, renamed as the Union Solidarity and Development Party [USDP] is still in power though much has changed. Currently, it seems the government has greater desires to open up to the world

and accommodate the people, the impetus potentially coming from the experience of Cyclone Nargis in 2008 (~200,000 dead) and growing ethnic conflict (Kokang Conflict, border clashes). 2008 saw the permission of a constitutional referendum and 2010 a round of peaceful elections (though their result of 77% of votes going to the USDP is highly contested) as well as the release of Suu Kyi from house arrest and the promise of another free election with the NLD involved.

Economically, the nation has also been experimenting with more aspects of mixed economy and welcoming businesses from abroad, unionization, less censorship, and currency regulation.

Myanmar is then clearly on the brink of sliding towards a full-fledged democracy, however, only time will tell how the nation moves. Will the USDP really be willing to concede power if the NLD wins the next election? Do they simply believe they will be able to stay in power regardless (they are, after all, banning Suu Kyi from running herself)? What course of action will be best in encouraging Myanmar to tend toward democracy? And even if democracy does come about, will people still be free considering ethnic conflict, corruption, and other major human rights issues running deep in the country? These questions, along with the political culture of Myanmar as it has developed throughout history, are essential when considering any policy to enact in the state.

## **The Issue: Children in Armed Conflict**

### *The Conflict*

Myanmar is not formally involved in a war however, as has been a constant of Burmese history, there is still a substantial amount of conflict between ethnicities (of which there are ~120 in Myanmar)

It is important to first understand why Myanmar might have such unusually complex ethnic conflict – these are central to considering how the problem can be solved. Major factors include Myanmar's geographic positioning, ancient history, the environment of the nation (which has forced guerilla warfare in which no side has accumulated a strong advantage, political culture, technological growth, etc. It is left to you to determine how highly such issues may factor in to the creation of this problem and affect its solution.

Ethnic clashes in Myanmar are currently the longest ongoing conflict, though it fluctuates in magnitude. An estimated 500,000 have died while more hundreds of thousands have become refugees in China, Malaysia, India and Thailand and it is recognized to have first formally gained structure upon Burmese independence when numerous ethnic groups vied for power along with the communist factions previously mentioned which certainly offered the most prominent resistance to AFPFL rule. Resistance from these groups intensified when Buddhism was made the official religion by U Nu and the AFPFL split in 1960, but it really came to full ferocity (like much of the nation) in the



Ne Win years. Previous to this, ethnic groups were only vying for greater tolerance or, in the case of the Karen National Union, their own state. Now, however, with state-driven racial discrimination as well as obvious government inefficacy, organizations rallied to fully overthrow the state and combat violence.

### *The Players*

The players have changed in recent years: for example, the communist party is now no more but new organizations raised as recent as the 1990s have tens of thousands of members. Many have also agreed and honored upon ceasefires currently (the government is clashing with their troops now) are:

#### *Karen National Union*

The most active ethnic militant group now, the KNU (its army is known as the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)) is a separatist organization of the Karen. Originally focused on independence for its own state, Kawthoolei, it now mainly advocates a federal system. It is focused near the Thai border and gains much of its funds through illegal trafficking in the area. While the Karen state is mostly Buddhist, the Christian section the population dominates its militant wing. A Buddhist wing of the organization separated off near the fall of the organization's headquarters in 1994 to form the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), though it has mostly allied with the government against its former ally. Still, it finds support among parts of the West and others due to its Christian

composition and the brutal "ethnic cleansing" of Karen through the Four Cuts campaign that the government has waged in retaliation. Most recently, it killed a senior government general and resumed some alliance with the DKBA to wage what is now the hottest conflict in Myanmar: war with the government along the Thai border over the November general elections.

#### *Karenni National Progressive Party:*

Ceasefire conversations between the KNPP and the government have arisen frequently but have equally as often been disbanded with continuing mistreatment of the Karenni people. The Karenni (a sub-tribe of the Karen) have complained of military personnel forcing civilians to provide food or labor for their causes in the jungle and engaging in a number of constant crimes including rape, assault, and killings. These stem from extreme discrimination against the race. While, along with the Mon, the Karenni are one of the oldest races in the nation, this discrimination stems from the unique culture of state and the fact that it was originally independent from Myanmar but, without the knowledge of the state (smallest in Myanmar), annexed the state into Myanmar upon independence. An estimated 50,000 are Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs).

#### *Shan State Army – South:*

Also based on the Thai border, the SSA-South is presumably the most militarily-advanced of resistance groups with members undergoing extensive training and equipment including M16s and AK-47s. It has consolidated with a number of



groups and also receives much revenue from the opium trade as well as the trafficking of other major illegal material and human commodities.

The government is also a key player. Its army, the Tatmadaw Kyi has about ~500,000 official members.

### *Children in Conflict*

As the UNSC's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (est. July 2005) states, "Children are the primary victims of armed conflict." When we refer to children in armed conflict, we not only refer to child soldiers but also abduction, sexual violence, trafficking, starvation, emotional trauma, and displacement.

Still, child soldiering is a primary issue that has made the situation in Myanmar especially heinous. Of the estimated 300,000 child soldiers around the world, Myanmar is thought to have the most by far at about 70,000 with children as young as 11. This has resulted from not only the poverty and educational deficiency in the nation (after all, many other developing nations face these issues on an even more dramatic scale), but also the sheer number of groups involved, the guerilla nature of the conflict, and the ethnic nature of the conflict (which limits a group's recruiting pool).

### **Past Actions**

Quite simply, very little has yet been done about the issue of children in armed conflict. Myanmar is considered a rogue state by many and the guerilla nature of

the conflict has made intelligence gathering difficult. The UNSC and its working group have - besides nominally strongly condemning the use of child soldiers, encouraging all associated resistance groups to shy away from using them, and making some localized recommendations as how to curb their use - just made contact with two parties about the issue: the government and the Wa State Army, the largest child recruiters.

With regard to the government, the UN has appreciated the formation of the Committee for the Prevention of Military Recruitment of Underage Children but has asserted that such actions have not been enforced on a local level and that access to UNICEF and UNCT are continually being blocked.

With regard to the Wa State Army, the group is currently in ceasefire with the government and has admitted children were among ranks though none are being recruited now. Talks encouraged granting access to frequent inspection and the formulation of an Action Plan for ridding the group of all child soldiers.

These recommendations are still works in progress as this issue has just in the past few years fell into significance. Action also hasn't pursued in great deal on the issue since action is already being taken by most Western nations on Myanmar for other human rights abuses, the detention of Aung San Suu Kyi, and lack of free elections: namely, the EU has placed sanctions on the government and the US has placed several trade restrictions and banned all military trade, though such

transactions may grow as meetings between the two nations have quite recently resumed.

These actions should be a major point of research and consideration during the conference.

## Country Blocs

Nations with prominent groups of child (under 18) soldiers: Colombia, Russia, Myanmar, Philippines, Indonesia India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel, Yemen, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea, Chad, Cote D'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, C.A.R., Republic of the Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Angola.

Obviously the degree to which recruitment and violations against children's rights occurs in each of these nations varies greatly: for example, Congolese children are recruited as young as 10 into haphazard rebel groups and can face sexual assault while Israel's issue is just that it continues to allow 17-year-olds to enter the military.<sup>29</sup>

If your nation is also plagued by the issues of child soldiering or actively soldiers itself, consider that it will likely have greater sympathies for the issues of

Myanmar. Also, if it faces similar conditions that give rise to soldiering including ethnic tensions and poverty, it may also have these sympathies and will react strongly to certain recommendations for change.

*Africa, Asia (Russia included)/Pacific, Middle East*

Some might be in the category of a developing nation or nations actively recruiting child soldiers (especially if it is affirmed by the nation itself) in order to control opposition and so will have concerns about the feasibility of sanctions, for example, that can have strong economic effects on developing nations and other modes of action. Political and economic concerns are also important to consider. Many Asian nations still trade with Burma including nations like China that engage in military trade due to political alignment. Certain modes of action will have complex effects on the dynamic of socialist prominence and/or the network of trade in the area.

*Americas*

Most states here are democratic and will support the remediation of their human rights violations, but will weigh modes of action with their effect on the ongoing political change happening in the nation. The U.S.'s December visit to Myanmar and meeting with Gen. Thein Sein mark a possible new era of relations between the U.S., a model for many nations of the Americas, and Myanmar. It will important to many not to stand in the way of those relations.

<sup>29</sup>Refer here to individual nation's situations and those of nations relevant to your agenda: <http://www.child-soldiers.org/regions/regions> (the site also has a great report on Myanmar also listed in Resources.)

*Europe, Australia/New Zealand*

Most states here will stand by the EU in strict sanctions against Myanmar and will be firmly be opposed to most efforts to tolerate the nation's human rights violations and non-democratic practices. While stringent, however, be wary that this does not mean supporting modes of action that you do not believe in logically as beneficial to the welfare of the Burmese people in the long run.

## Resources

### *History/Facts*

BBC Country Profile:

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country\\_profiles/1300003.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/1300003.stm)

BBC Timeline:

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/country\\_profiles/1300082.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/country_profiles/1300082.stm)

CIA World Factbook:

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

Dept. of State:

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35910.htm>

*A Modern History of Burma* by Michael W. Charney

### *Current Events*

Burma Campaign:

<http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/>

Irrawaddy.com:

[http://www.irrawaddy.org/article\\_category.php?sub\\_cat\\_id=2](http://www.irrawaddy.org/article_category.php?sub_cat_id=2)

NY Times:

<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/myanmar/index.html>

The Guardian:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/burma>

### *Ethnic Conflict*

Chatham House:

[http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Asia/1109pp\\_lall.pdf](http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Asia/1109pp_lall.pdf)

Human Rights Watch:

<http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2011/burma>

Karenni State:

<http://www.unpo.org/members/7886>

Transnational Institute:

<http://www.tni.org/page/ethnic-conflict-burma>

UNHCR:

<http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e4877d6.html>

UNHRC:

<http://www.ohchr.org/en/countries/asiaregion/pages/mmindex.aspx>

Ethnic Conflict and the Challenge of Civil Society in Burma:

<http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs3/smithpaper.htm>

*Ethnic Conflict: Causes, Consequences, Responses* by Karl Cordell and Stefan Wolff

*State of Strife: The Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict in Burma* by Martin T. Smith

### ***Children in Conflict***

Child Soldiers International:  
<http://www.child-soldiers.org/regions/country?id=146>

Child Soldiers International (psycho-social effects):  
<http://www.child-soldiers.org/psycho-social/psychosocial>

Child Soldiers Global Report:  
<http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/content/myanmar>

Convention on the Rights of the Child:  
<http://www.unicef.org/crc/>

HRW:  
<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2002/10/15/burma-worlds-highest-number-child-soldiers>

The Guardian:  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jul/07/burma-rebels-child-soldiers-vow>

UN World Map of Child Soldiers:  
<http://www.un.org/works/goingon/soldiers/childsoldiersmap.html>

UN Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict:  
<http://www.un.org/children/conflict/english/myanmar.html>

Watchlist:  
[http://watchlist.org/reports/pdf/PolicyPaper\\_09.pdf](http://watchlist.org/reports/pdf/PolicyPaper_09.pdf)

### ***Relevant UN Documents***

UNSC Resolutions:  
<http://www.unscburma.org/UNSCUpdates.htm>

<http://www.un.org/children/conflict/english/resolutions.html>

Resolution 1261  
 Resolution 1539  
 Resolution 1612  
 Resolution 1882

### ***UNSC Reports***

7/24/06 from President

11/16/07 from SG

2007 Visit (transcripts of conversations also online):  
[http://www.un.org/children/conflict/\\_documents/countryvisits/MyanmarVisitReport.pdf](http://www.un.org/children/conflict/_documents/countryvisits/MyanmarVisitReport.pdf)

7/25/08 from Working Group

4/29/09 from President

6/1/09 from SG

11/28/09 from Working Group

