

Forum: Human Rights Council

Issue: Measures to protect the rights of persecuted peoples within Myanmar

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Introduction

For several decades, persecutions has been an ongoing issue in Myanmar. However, in the last few years, the problem has grown to an issue of international size, concerning not only bordering countries such as Bangladesh, but also multiple nations from all over the world. Especially an unrecognised ethnical indigenous group called the Rohingya has been the central victim of brutal crimes, causing nearly the entire population of Rohingya to flee Myanmar. However, these are not the only minority group discriminated against, as Muslims and other religious groups have also been affected by this tragedy. As the Myanmar government does little against, and often actually encourages these persecution, this issue has not been raised to one of international priority, as especially Bangladesh is collapsing under the vast amounts of refugees entering their country every day.

Definition of Key Terms

Persecution

Persecution, according to the oxford dictionary, is defined as “Hostility and ill-treatment, especially because of race or political or religious believes”. In other words, when being persecuted, someone is being discriminated against, physically harmed or being shown hostility towards due to their moral values, religious beliefs or political stand points. For example, in Myanmar Muslims are being persecuted as they are a religious minority in a Country with 80% Buddhists.

Rohingya

The Rohingya people are an ethnic group spread across several countries, including Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia and Myanmar. They maintain to be an indigenous group to western Myanmar, with influence from the Arabs, Mughals and Portuguese. Despite having previously

elected Rohingya legislators into the local government, the Rohingya people are considered to be illegal immigrants according to the current government of Myanmar. Since the late 20th century, Rohingya have been exposed to physical violence, hatred and intolerance, having forced more than 600,000 of them to flee from their homes in Myanmar.

Refugee

A refugee is considered to be a person who has been forced to leave their country to escape war, persecution or natural disaster. It refers to people who unwillingly leave behind their homes in order to pursue better and more humane life conditions. In Myanmar, refugees are those persecuted by the government for their ethnicity, having to flee to Bangladesh. In the process of Rohingya persecution, more than 600,000 Rohingya have fled their homes and are considered to be refugees.

General Overview

Persecution of Rohingya in Myanmar

Since 1982, Rohingya are effectively being denied the possibility of acquiring a nationality by the “Myanmar nationality law”, interfering with their basic human rights. Despite their traces leading back to the 8th century, the government does not recognise them as one of the eight “national races”. As such, they do not have freedom of movement and the access to education and civil service jobs. The UN considers Myanmar’s persecution of the Rohingya to be ethnic cleansing.

Military Crackdown

Following several attacks on police stations in October 2016, which the Myanmar government makes the Rohingya responsible for, the Military of Myanmar began a major crackdown in several villages in the north of the country. Dozens of Rohingya were killed and many were arrested without facing lawful charges, and many of which are still waiting for trials to start. Ever since, the number of casualties has rapidly increased, alarming several non-governmental organisations from all over the world. According to the British Broadcasting Channel (BBC), hundreds of Rohingya had been killed by December 2016 and even more had fled to Bangladesh, overloading refugee shelters near the borders. Satellite images released by Human Rights Watch (HRW) prove that more than 1,000 Rohingya houses had been burned down by local authorities. After about a year of ongoing violences, in August 2017, the Myanmar military started a systematic process of driving hundreds of thousands of Rohingya to the common border of Myanmar and Bangladesh. According to a report released by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, the military had the authority to fulfil points of a strategy including measures such as

arresting male Rohingyas between the ages of 15 and 40, arresting any leaders or personalities within the Rohingya community, denying rohingya villages of the access to food or livelihoods and committing repeated acts of humiliation and violence, including strong physical violence and killing.



A town burned down by official forces

Refugee crisis

As a result of the Military crackdown, more than a third of the Rohingya population in Myanmar has fled Myanmar, most of which fled to Bangladesh. Furthermore about 23,000 Rohingya have been internally displaced, meaning they fled from the homes, but remained within the borders of Myanmar. Throughout the course of this crisis, especially the government of Bangladesh has faced severe challenges, not wanting to deny any refugees the access to their country, yet struggling to meet the basic needs of the hundreds of thousands of refugees. As a response, in February 2017 the government of Bangladesh started to relocate newly arriving refugees and about 200,000 refugees already in country to Thengar Char, an island in the Bay of Bengal. This, however, has brought up critics from numerous organisations, who consider this to be forced relocation, once more interfering with the basic human rights of these refugees. Ever since, the government of Bangladesh has faced accusations of inhumane conditions within refugee camps and unfair treatment of Rohingya by government official.

Muslim Persecution in Myanmar

Myanmar, being a Buddhist majority country, has had a history with persecution of Muslims, who make up about 4% of the total population. Being a minority group, Muslims were denied position in the government or the Army starting in 1962. Furthermore, the government would deny citizenship to anyone who couldn't prove Burmese ancestry from before 1823. This displaced Muslims in Myanmar, despite their presence over the course of several generations.

Anti-Muslim riots in Myanmar

Since March 2013, riots and violent protests have occurred in several cities throughout Myanmar against the influx of Islam in all of Myanmar. These riots were, at first coincided with the rise of the 969 movement, a group of Buddhist aiming to secure the Buddhist dominance in Myanmar, through acting violently against any other religious groups. However, the leader of this group, Sayadaw U Wirathu, has threatened anyone who has publicly brought up this issue and accused them of misinterpreting his peaceful intentions. In July 2014, a social media post of a Buddhist woman who was forced to have sexual encounters with a Muslim man caused new and more violent riots in several cities. About a dozen people, both Muslim and Buddhist, were killed in the process with hundreds heavily wounded. Recent riots reached their peak in June 2016, when a violent Mob burned down a mosque close to Yangon, the capital of Myanmar. This supposedly was a response to the attack on Buddhist villagers, and the dispute over the construction of said Mosque.



A Mosque burned down by a violent mob

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The United Nations have recently picked up on this issue and debated on the solutions for the first time since the introduction of this problem. In October 2017, France and Britain drafted a resolution that pressures Myanmar to solve the constant violences and persecutions of Rohingya people in their country. This resolution was received as a rather passive attempt to solve the issue by other nations and thus was not further pursued. In November 2017, however, the United Nations restarted its talk to solve this issue through a statement by the UN security council, in which several nations, led by Italy, urged Myanmar to “ensure no further excessive use of military forces” and settle down the issue. However, apart from such actions, the UN has not yet implemented any consequences for Myanmar as a result of their Rohingya conflicts.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1962	Burmese Coup d'état leads to Muslims being denied access to government and military positions
1982	the "Myanmar Nationality Law" denies Rohingya of acquiring a nationality
June 2016	a violent Mob burns down a Mosque close to the capital Yangon
February 2017	government of Bangladesh relocates refugees to Thengar Char, due to being unable to meet their basic needs
August 2017	the government of Myanmar begins to systematically turn Rohingya into refugees, forcing them to flee across the borders in to other countries
November 2017	more than 600,000 refugees have fled the country of Myanmar

Possible Solutions

Myanmars government is officially encouraging the persecution of Muslims and Rohingya. "It is difficult for outside forces to achieve much in a peaceful way, making communication with the government essential to solve this issue. Such efforts have been ongoing since the start of systematic persecution in 2016; however it is urgent to reinforce such efforts to effectively negotiate and communicate with the government. ASEAN countries have done little, with the exception of Indonesia and Malaysia, who willingly helped out in receiving refugees, but criticising Bangladesh for their inhumane treatment of refugees. International conferences with the inclusion of major MEDCs have to be introduced to urge Myanmar to change its policy of systematic discrimination and persecution of the Rohingya population in Rakhine state. Recent talks were ineffective, as the main party in this issue, the Myanmar government, has not attended, claiming that the migrants were Bangladeshis, removing any responsibility off themselves. None of the ASEAN countries that participated in the talk felt the urge of taking over the lead, and a well established force, such as the US or China, have not felt the need to enter the negotiations to resolve this issue.



Rohingya refugees fleeing to Indonesia and Malaysia

Furthemore, while the source of the issue can not be solved and minorities are continuously being persecuted in Myanmar, improvements have to be made to help out the already weakend country of Bangladesh. Indonesia and Malaysia have recently agreed to suspend their policy of towing migrant boats back to the sea, though they have stressed that they were acting on the condition of financial and operational assistance from the international community, and that those taken in would be resettled or repatriated within a year. However, serious foreign aid has yet to be set up, decreasing the willingness of Malaysia and Indonesia to cooperate in this issue. Thus, it is necessary to seek for more support from countries, especially ASEAN members, as well as non-governmental organisation to provide shelters and necessities for the more than 600,000 refugees. At the very least, countries should provide Bangladesh with financial support or deploy troops to help with the setup of further refugee camps or the resettlement of newly arrived refugees.

A third, less peaceful approach of solving this issue, could be the forceful attempt to take control of the Myanmar government, enabling to further practice any persecution against minorities. This, however, would once more require a nation to step up and lead such cooperations. This could potentially be nations such as the US, who has previously shown political involvement in the Asian Area, or China, one of the most powerful nations of Asia, as non of the locally affected nations would have the financial or humanitarian resources to lead such operations. Furthermore, the risks of such a forced attack would have to carefully be considered and the aftereffects and civil casualties have to be minimised. For some nations, however, this seems to be the only way to resolve this issue due to the lack of cooperation and tolerance of the Myanmar government. However, this is likely to stir up several international conflicts, making this a nearly impossible approach to solve this problem.

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