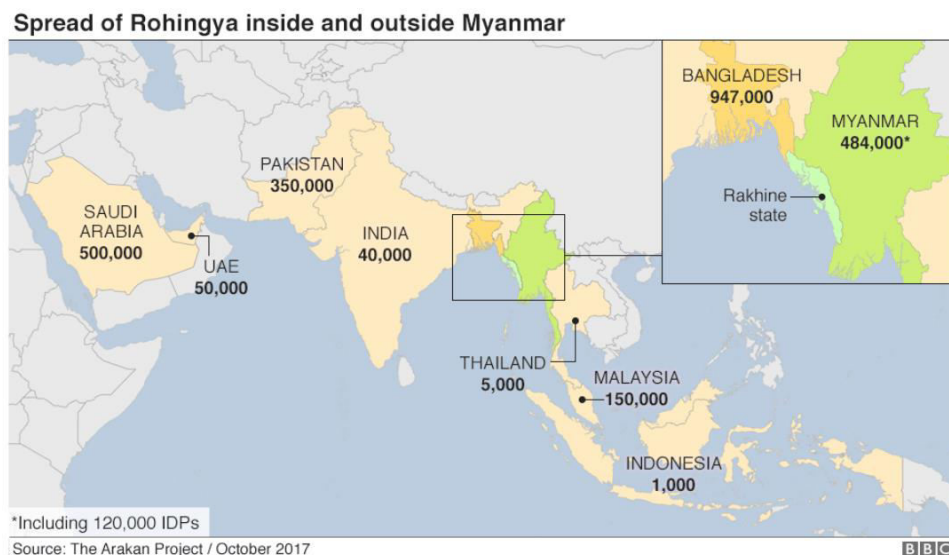


Rohingya - a stateless Muslim minority in Myanmar's Rakhine State, thought to number about 1 million people

GENERAL OVERVIEW

Since the 1970s, Rohingya have migrated across the region in significant numbers, as they do not have official citizenship in Myanmar.



In the last few years, previously to the latest crisis, the Rohingya began to migrate out of Myanmar in hopes of escaping discrimination and violence from the Myanmar citizens and especially military and government security forces. According to Amnesty International the Myanmar military also rapes and abuses Rohingya women. Moreover, Rakhine State, where the Rohingya most commonly live, is the least developed state in Myanmar, with a poverty rate of 78 percent, according to World Bank estimates. Widespread poverty and a lack of employment opportunities in Rakhine have heavily influenced the Rohingya migration. More than half a million have fled the destruction of their homes and persecution in the northern Rakhine province of Myanmar, aiming for neighbouring states, mainly Bangladesh, since August 2017. However, the latest exodus, which began on 25 August 2017, was mainly caused by the Rohingya, when their “salvation army” attacked around 30 police posts. The unofficial response from the Myanmar government, according to the witnesses, was burning Rohingya villages and attacking and killing civilians. According to Medecins

Villages seen on fire in the Maungdaw Township



Source: Human Rights Watch, Satellite image 15 September 2017

BBC

Sans Frontieres (MSF) statistics, minimum of 6,700 Rohingya, out of which around 730 were children under the age of five, were killed within the month after the violence broke out. And according to the Human Rights Watch, at least 288 villages were damaged by the fire in northern Rakhine state. The refugees who escape this violence usually head towards Bangladesh and refugee camps, where they seek shelter. However, the camps are already occupied by so many, they sometimes cannot afford to accept any more refugees without expanding. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), after August 2017 approximately 655,000 Rohingya sought refuge in camps, while there were more than 307,500 already living there. Therefore the ones, who cannot fit into the camp ground try to settle wherever possible, however, unlike inside the camp, they have less access to drinking water, food or healthcare. For example, due to there not being enough space in the largest refugee camp in Bangladesh, Kutupalong, with approximate population of 22 200 (September 2017) forced newly arriving refugees to settle in the surrounding countryside, nearby the Balukhali refugee camp, more than 242,000 people in other sites of the region and 79,000 people in willing host communities. While the Kutupalong refugee camp has grown from 13,901 to 22,241 since the outbreak of violence in August 2017, the number living in temporary settlements outside the camp has moved up from 99,495 to more than 547,616. These numbers cause other problem regarding the treatment of these refugees. The refugees suffer from malnutrition and diseases caused by the living conditions in these camps, naturally, those most affected by these conditions are children. For example, 21,677 children under the age of five have been treated for acute malnutrition. The UN airlifts tons of aid to these camps almost daily.

REPUBLIC OF THE UNION OF MYANMAR

Annexed by the British during the 19th century, Burma was occupied by the Japanese from 1942 to 1945 and became an independent republic in 1948. In 1962 an army coup led by Ne Win overthrew the government and established an authoritarian state. In 1989 the name Union of Myanmar was accepted as the official name for Burma (later as part of the Burmese constitutional referendum, it was changed to Republic of the Union of Myanmar). The National League for Democracy (NLD) won the election held in May 1990, even though its leader Aung San Suu Kyi was under house arrest; however, the military regime did not relinquish power, and held it until the general elections of 2015, at which the NLD won a majority. In 2017 its estimated population was 55,123,814. Its official language is Burmese and the capital Naypyidaw. The majority of the Myanmar population are Buddhists and it recognizes 135 minority groups, however the Rohingya are not one of them, which undoubtedly deepens the refugee crisis, currently present in Myanmar. Most of Myanmar's problems seem to arise from its poor economic stability, for example, its income gap is one of the widest in the world and Myanmar is facing a lot of pressure from the international community. Moreover, in 2016 Myanmar was positioned 145 out of 188 in the human development. One of the reasons for this instability would be long lasting civil wars which broke out in Myanmar during its independent years, consistently violating human rights in this country, which the UN has been monitoring and drawing attention to.

THE ROHINGYA

The Rohingya who number around 1 million people in Myanmar, which is nearly a third of the population, according to the statistics from 2017, are the largest Muslims minority practicing Sunni Islam in Myanmar, they have their own language and culture, and their vast majority lives in the Rakhine state. As Myanmar is predominantly a Buddhist country, the Rohingya are discriminated against, denied citizenship and even viewed as less than human. The Human Rights Watch confirms they are withheld their freedom of movement, education and employment, the right of property ownership, marriage or religious choice. For example, Rohingya couples in the northern towns of Maungdaw and Buthidaung are only allowed to have two children. They also must seek the permission, often from the government to marry, or travel. The Rohingya originally come from Bangladesh (the first arrived in the 15th century) and although most of them were born in Myanmar, they are often viewed as illegal immigrants and outsiders by the Myanmar citizens.

MAJOR PARTIES INVOLVED

Amnesty International - a London-based non-governmental organization focused on human rights

Medecins Sans Frontieres - an international, independent, medical humanitarian organisation

Security Council - one of the six principal organs of the United Nations, charged with the maintenance of international peace and security as well as accepting new members to the United Nations and approving any changes to its United Nations Charter

Human Rights Watch - is an international non-governmental organization that conducts research and advocacy on human rights

UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) - a United Nations programme with the mandate to protect refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people, and assist in their voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement to a third country

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO RESOLVE THE ISSUE

The Myanmar government's actions are often condemned, however, no radical action has been taken. The UN Security Council appealed to Myanmar to stop the violence but no sanctions have been imposed (like because of Myanmar's unstable economy). The UN's human rights chief Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini confirmed that an act of genocide against Rohingya Muslims by state forces in Myanmar cannot be ruled out. There are also continuous plans to building more shelters in the Cox's Bazaar in Bangladesh to help the refugees. The UK has pledged £59m in aid to support those fleeing to Bangladesh. UK Prime Minister Theresa May also said the military action in Rakhine had to stop and suspended training courses for the

Myanmar military. China also tried to resolve the issue with its “three-phase plan”. (http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1512592.shtml).

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