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The Rohingya Crisis: Ethnic Marginalization and Statelessness

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Abstract

The situation in Myanmar involves the unfortunate plight of the Rohingya, an ethnic minority group who have been deprived of citizenship rights and compelled to seek refuge outside their homeland. The Rohingya endured severe conditions characterized by genocide, torture, executions, and rape. The study elucidates the fundamental and immediate factors contributing to conflict, specifically focusing on critical actors involved in the Myanmar Rohingya crisis. It also comprehends conflict dynamics using the Gurr Model, specifically designed to analyze ethnic disputes. The study examines the systematic denial of fundamental rights, including personal growth, safety, and cultural identity, that ethnic minorities experience. This oppression has resulted in the emergence of insurgent factions that have resorted to armed resistance to reclaim their citizenship status and secure their rights. The oppressive military operation resulted in the displacement of the Rohingya population, who sought refuge in camps for displaced persons. By adopting a qualitative approach and collecting data from secondary sources, such as research papers and opinion articles, as well as primary data from speeches by Myanmar's leadership, the paper presents a comprehensive overview of the situation in Myanmar concerning the Rohingya. An in-depth examination of the conflict reflects that the resolution of the conflict hinges upon the exertion of pressure by major powers and international organizations on Myanmar's military to reinstate democracy and enhance the conditions in the Rakhine state. This is crucial for facilitating the repatriation of the Rohingya minority and reconstructing the infrastructure to meet their fundamental human needs.

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Introduction

The nature of global conflicts has evolved, shifting from traditional interstate battles to a more complex terrain where state and non-state actors engage in combat with one another. Several states have enacted discriminatory laws that have fuelled prolonged conflict, with Myanmar serving as a prominent example. Myanmar is among the countries that have enacted policies targeting the Rohingya minority and have also been complicit and at times actively supported the ethnic cleansing. Since Myanmar's independence in 1948, the Rohingya Muslim minority ethnic group has faced systemic violence and oppression at the hands of the Myanmar government (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2019). In the latest wave of violence in 2017, around 40,000 Rohingya were forced to flee their homes and seek refuge in Bangladesh, including vulnerable groups such as older adults, children, and women (Fareed, 2022). The state's kinetic measures resulted in rendering people stateless, depriving them of citizenship status, and compelling them to seek asylum in neighbouring states, thus exacerbating the refugee problem in Myanmar. The conflict arose from the state's decision to strip the Rohingya population of their statehood and deny them citizenship, classifying them as undocumented migrants from Bangladesh. Considering the human rights violations and condemnation from the United Nations, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada imposed sanctions, but Myanmar continued to commit grave human rights violations (Brooten et al., 2015).

A significant political shift was observed during the 2020 general elections, as Aung San Suu Kyi emerged victorious. However, on February 1, 2021, she was apprehended and placed under house arrest by the military authorities (BBC, 2022). She faced allegations of corruption, election fraud, and inciting a situation akin to a civil war in the country. The prevailing circumstances resulted in intensified and stricter suppression of the civilian population in Myanmar, who were protesting against the military's rule (Regan & Yeung, 2021).

In light of these developments in Myanmar, this paper aims to address the following questions:

- What are the fundamental and immediate factors contributing to the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar, and how can the international community effectively tackle these issues to resolve the conflict and facilitate the repatriation and reintegration of the Rohingya population?
- How has the systematic denial of fundamental rights and identity to the Rohingya ethnic minority contributed to the emergence of armed resistance and ongoing conflict in Myanmar?

The hypothesis of the study is: 'The systematic denial of fundamental rights and identity recognition to the Rohingya minority, combined with the failure of international actors to intervene effectively, has perpetuated armed resistance and prolonged the conflict in Myanmar. A resolution requires sustained international pressure on Myanmar's military to restore democracy and ensure the repatriation and reintegration of the Rohingya population.'

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to analyze the complex dynamics of the Rohingya crisis through the lens of the Gurr Model of Ethnic Conflict. The qualitative approach was selected for its strength in providing an in-depth understanding of social phenomena and its ability to explore the multi-dimensional factors contributing to Rohingya's plight. The research draws on primary and secondary sources. Primary Sources, including statements and speeches by government leaders, international organizations, and policymakers, were critically analyzed. These include official declarations, interviews, and public addresses related to the Rohingya crisis, offering firsthand insights into policy decisions and international responses. Secondary Sources include a thorough review of academic literature and reports from international bodies such as the United Nations, think tanks, and NGOs. These sources provided context and allowed triangulation to ensure the reliability of the findings. The analysis also included cross-referencing data from secondary sources to validate findings and ensure a comprehensive perspective.

Myanmar: Demographics and Socio-Economic Profile

Myanmar has a unique geography, with the country bordering four states: Laos and Thailand to the east and southeast, and Bangladesh and India to the northwest, along with China to the northeast. With approximately 55.44 million inhabitants, Myanmar is one of the largest countries in Southeast Asia in terms of population. The religious demography is dominated by Buddhists, who are 88 %, Christians represent 6%, and Muslims account for 4% (United States Department of State, n.d.). Furthermore, the Rohingya population possesses an Indo-Aryan ethnic identity and primarily resides on the outskirts of Myanmar's Rakhine State, near the border with Bangladesh. The Rohingya minority in Myanmar, distinguished by their unique language and customs, differs from the Buddhist majority. These cultural and religious distinctions have exacerbated prolonged conflict and intensified divisions.

According to the United Nations, the country is classified as one of the least developed states. This classification is primarily due to its underdevelopment, which is generally linked to the military's control (The World Academy of Sciences, n.d.). Formerly known as Burma, the government officially changed its name to the 'Republic of the Union of Myanmar' in 1989 under the military junta (Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, 2012). After 2010, the country began transitioning toward a limited form of democracy, primarily influenced by growing pressure from major global powers such as the UK and the US. These countries imposed economic sanctions due to concerns over the lack of democratic governance and repeated human rights violations. In 2008, the military drafted a constitution that granted itself extraordinary powers, thereby ensuring its continued dominance over political decision-making (Beech, 2018). Therefore, it expands influence in the politics and economy of the state.

Historical Context of the Conflict

In the 18th century, the region of Rakhine was ruled by Hindu Kingdoms and was subsequently taken over by the Burmese king (Bhonsale, 2015). Afterwards, Burma was colonized by the British, allowing unrestricted movement of individuals throughout the subcontinent. In World War II, the Rohingya, a minority population of Muslims, supported the British, intending to join East Pakistan. At the same time, the Buddhist majority sided with Japanese forces to oppose British colonial rule. After Burma's independence in 1948, authorities expected the Rohingya to migrate to

Bangladesh, but they chose to remain in Rakhine, viewing it as their ancestral homeland.

Among Myanmar's 135 recognized ethnic groups, the Rohingya have long been denied citizenship. This exclusion is based on Section 3 of the country's citizenship law, which grants automatic citizenship only to those whose ethnic groups have been settled in Myanmar since before 1823 (Online Burma/Myanmar Library, 2019). Minority groups in Myanmar may apply for naturalization by proving their ancestors migrated to the country before 1848. Although the Rohingya claim ancestry dating back a thousand years to Arab merchants and other groups who have been in the region for generations.

However, the government views them as descendants of British-era migrants and, therefore, considers them ineligible for citizenship. The Rohingya's claims have been rejected due to a lack of documentary evidence. As a result, the Rohingya faced increasing discrimination and, in 1978, launched armed resistance against the Burmese government. In response, the state carried out 'Operation Dragon King,' forcing over 200,000 Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh (Mahmud, 2024). The military utilized coercion, persecution, and sexual assault as methods to compel the Rohingya population to depart (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2018).

The Myanmar government has historically justified its actions toward the Rohingya by citing concerns over national security and territorial integrity (Egreteau, 2016). Officials often portray the Rohingya as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, thereby denying their rightful claim to citizenship and justifying restrictive measures under the guise of combating insurgency and maintaining order (Gravers, 2015). These policies are also framed as necessary to preserve socio-political stability, with the government leveraging ethnic and religious tensions to rally domestic support (Leider, 2018).

Rohingya Became Stateless

The Rohingya community lost their citizenship and became stateless in 1982 when the government enacted the Citizenship Act. This law granted citizenship to 135 officially recognised ethnic groups but excluded the Rohingya, leaving them without legal rights to reside in Rakhine State (International Commission of Jurists, 2017). In response, the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation, the largest paramilitary group representing Rohingya separatists, was formed, which was later merged with other factions to establish the Rohingya National Army, aimed at resisting the oppression faced by the minority. The government's denial of citizenship further restricted their access to healthcare, education, and employment.

In 1991, the military launched 'Operation Clean and Beautiful Nation,' a brutal crackdown that forced around 250,000 Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh (Refugee Council of Australia, 2015). Tensions between communities in Rakhine State escalated into violence in 2012 following allegations of sexual assault and murder involving individuals from both Muslim and Buddhist groups. Without a formal investigation, armed groups and security forces launched a widespread crackdown on the Muslim minority. Homes were burned, and reports of abuse emerged, resulting in the displacement of over 10,000 Rohingya.

In 2016, the Arakan Salvation Army, a militant group, was formed and carried out limited attacks against police and security forces, citing retaliation for previous violence (Southeast Asia Program at Cornell University, 2019). In the subsequent year, around 30 police posts were assaulted, leading to the deaths of 12 police personnel.

This incident created a crisis among the Rohingya civilian population (McPherson, 2017). As a reaction, the security forces responded with extreme violence and suppression, resulting in the deaths of 6,700 Rohingya individuals, including women and children. According to Médecins Sans Frontières (2017), many lives were lost, and 288 villages were destroyed, leading to a severe refugee crisis. A United Nations assessment estimates that since the conflict began in August 2017, around 400,000 Rohingya men, women, and children have fled their homes in Myanmar's Rakhine State (Wildman, 2017).

Aung San Suu Kyi, the de facto leader of Myanmar, asserted that 50% of the Muslim villages are secure and undamaged, just as they were prior to the occurrence of the crisis (Steger, 2022). This implies that the other 50% have been destroyed and set on fire. Furthermore, the military has strategically deployed landmines along the Dhaka-Bangladesh border, intending to impede the return of Rohingya individuals.

The Myanmar Government's Stance

The Myanmar government's response to allegations of human rights violations against the Rohingya Muslims reflects a persistent narrative of denial, framed around national security and sovereignty. Authorities have consistently rejected the use of the term Rohingya, instead insisting on Bengalis to reinforce the claim that the group consists of foreign nationals and illegal immigrants. In one instance, the government condemned a United Nations official for referring to the group as Rohingya, stating that the term is not recognized by the state (Ferrie, 2015). The hate speech has played a critical role in inciting and exacerbating violence against the Rohingya population

In response to international accusations of human rights violations, the Myanmar government portrayed its actions in Rakhine State as necessary measures to combat terrorism and maintain national security. For instance, Aung San Suu Kyi, during the peak of the Rohingya crisis, defended the military's actions by framing them as counter-insurgency operations rather than ethnic cleansing or genocide. In her speech at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in December 2019, Suu Kyi acknowledged that 'armed conflict' had occurred in Rakhine State. However, she avoided addressing the specific allegations of widespread atrocities against the Rohingya, such as mass killings, rapes, and forced displacement. Instead, she argued that 'if war crimes have been committed by members of Myanmar's Defence Services, they will be prosecuted through our military justice system, in accordance with Myanmar's Constitution' (Transcript: Aung San Suu Kyi's speech at the ICJ in full, 2019). This statement reflects the government's approach of denying systemic abuses while committing to address individual cases of misconduct internally, rather than through international mechanisms.

Ethnic Cleansing of Rohingya by the Myanmar State?

Ethnic cleansing is generally understood as a deliberate policy by one ethnic or religious group to remove another group from specific geographic areas through violence, intimidation, or other coercive means. The systematic actions against the Rohingya population, including mass displacement, destruction of villages, and reports of violence, align with the 'textbook example of ethnic cleansing' (*UN human rights chief points to 'textbook example of ethnic cleansing' in Myanmar*, 2017). The minority community has been subjected to violence, leading to relocations. These individuals have sought refuge in neighbouring countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, and primarily Bangladesh. The Myanmar state has consistently employed oppression and brutality as

a deliberate policy against the Rohingya population since the conflict began. According to the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission Report on Myanmar, the 600,000 Rohingya living in Myanmar fear persecution and the threat of genocide (OHCHR, 2019).

Critical stakeholders in the Myanmar-Rohingya conflict

Identifying the key actors in the Myanmar-Rohingya crisis is crucial, as these individuals and groups directly shape the conflict.

Internal Stakeholders

The Myanmar state, as the primary perpetrator of crimes against Muslims during the Myanmar-Rohingya Crisis, has consistently denied the Rohingya people's historical claims and refused to recognize them as a legitimate ethnic group within the nation (International Crisis Group, 2020). Moreover, the Buddhist nationalists have played a significant role in exacerbating the conflict, particularly by opposing the voting rights of the Rohingya. In 2015, these nationalists organized protests that led to President Thein Sein's temporary invalidation of the Rohingya's identification cards (Martin, 2017).

Moreover, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) was designated as a terrorist organization. This designation led to escalated violence against military and police forces, resulting in military counter-offensives that frequently targeted unarmed civilians. (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Also, the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, has faced international criticism for failing to recognize the atrocities committed against the Rohingya by the Myanmar Army (Fortify Rights, 2018).

External Stakeholders

External actors are individuals or organizations that have raised concerns about the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar. One prominent actor addressing the situation is the United Nations, which has repeatedly called on the Myanmar government to take meaningful action. However, these appeals have been largely dismissed by the government. According to a 2019 assessment by the UN Fact-Finding Mission, the conditions in Myanmar have continued to deteriorate, with a high risk that acts of genocide may occur (OHCHR, 2019). In addition, the UN panel recommended that Myanmar's military chief be prosecuted at the International Criminal Court for the crime of genocide. The United Nations Secretary-General has called for urgent action, highlighting that the situation has escalated into the world's fastest-growing refugee crisis and a profound humanitarian and human rights emergency (*Amid 'humanitarian and human rights nightmare' in Myanmar…*, 2017).

Analytical Framework

The Gurr Model of Ethnic Conflict serves as the theoretical framework for interpreting the collected data, emphasizing the role of deprivation and grievances in driving ethnic conflict. This makes it especially relevant for understanding the systemic marginalization and persecution of the Rohingya population. The analysis is guided by thematic interpretation and centers on three core aspects:

1. *Relative Deprivation*: Identifying disparities between the Rohingya and other groups in Myanmar.

2. ***State Policies***: Assessing the actions and inactions of the Myanmar government that exacerbate tensions.
3. ***International Responses***: Evaluating the role of global actors in addressing or neglecting the crisis.

Gurr's Model

According to the Gurr model, as shown in figure 1 below, depriving individuals within a group of fundamental rights leads to grievances within that group. The unattended grievances of the marginalized minority might lead to their mobilization against people in positions of authority, exacerbating discrimination and inequality. This mobilization can result in a rebellion, as the group may employ offensive strategies to safeguard its rights. The influential group responds to the uprising with repression, intensifying the strife and violence. This recurring pattern can persist, resulting in protracted confrontations that are difficult to resolve (Gurr, 1993).

Figure 1. Gurr Model

Grievances ⟩ Mobilization ⟩ Rebellion ⟩ Repression

The Gurr Model of instrumental theories effectively elucidates the Myanmar state's perpetration of atrocities against its marginalized ethnic minority. To contribute to this debate, we will examine the dispute surrounding the patterns of warfare that emerged following the end of the Cold War. Gurr's (2000) article on 'Ethnic warfare on the Wane' provides evidence of a pacifying trend since the mid-1990s and predicts a further drop in ethnic conflict, countering the alarming forecasts of growing ethnic violence. By utilizing updated data on ethnic groups and their involvement in ethnic civil wars, this study assesses the accuracy of Gurr's claim regarding the decline in ethnic violence. The research examines whether increased government accommodative policies toward ethnic groups can reasonably account for the reduction in ethnic civil conflict. The findings of this study strongly support the view that promoting group rights, regional autonomy, power-sharing, democratization, and peacekeeping efforts are effective strategies for fostering peace.

The Rohingya, however, have endured prolonged marginalization and denial of fundamental rights by the Buddhist majority in Myanmar. Since the country transitioned to autonomy, they have been denied access to education, healthcare, employment, and citizenship, and have been stigmatized as undocumented immigrants. Prejudice and longstanding discrimination have led some members of the Rohingya community to mobilize and form armed groups, such as the ARSA, to defend their communities and resist systemic violence. In response, state authorities launched harsh crackdowns targeting insurgent groups like the Rohingya National Army and ARSA.

However, government actions extended far beyond these factions, resulting in widespread violence against civilians, including children, women, and the elderly, along with reports of rape, mass killings, and village burnings. These actions triggered a large-scale refugee crisis, as thousands of Rohingya fled to escape military brutality. This sustained pattern of violence and discrimination has evolved into an ethnic conflict, marked by the systematic targeting and expulsion of the Rohingya by those in power, particularly the Myanmar military. According to Gurr's theory, such outcomes

emerge from unresolved grievances, which fuel group mobilization, state repression, and ultimately, protracted and difficult-to-resolve conflict (Cederman et al., 2017)

Determinants of Structural Existence

Social unrest, upheavals, and military coups mark Myanmar's post-independence history. Moreover, the civil-military rift hampered the nation's development, well-being and growth. The military administration stirred nationalist sentiment among Buddhist extremists, leading to state-sanctioned discriminatory measures against Muslim ethnic minorities. In response to coercive state-led policies, the local factions took up arms, contesting the internal security of the state (Albert & Maizland, 2020). These security crises have forced minority communities to flee across borders, particularly into Bangladesh. Once displaced, these groups face systemic marginalization as they are designated illegal immigrants, exacerbating their vulnerability.

Military Rule and Rohingya Persecution

Since Myanmar came under military administration, the political environment has become increasingly hostile to the protection of human rights and individual freedoms. Numerous violent incidents involving human rights abuses have been reported. For example, a group of Buddhist extremists set fire to an entire Rohingya village, forcing its residents to flee their homes (*Buddhist mob sets fire to Rohingya village*, 2014). The state's discriminatory policies favour the Buddhist majority while targeting the Rohingya Muslim minority, appeasing hardliners and reinforcing military dominance. The rise of insurgent groups and ongoing power struggles between Buddhist nationalists and military factions have created a deeply troubling situation in which the Rohingya are systematically marginalized and forced to abandon ancestral lands (Rahman, 2024).

Socio-Economic Factors

Socioeconomic factors played a considerable role in exacerbating the crisis. The economic policies implemented by the Myanmar government were discriminatory, causing severe hunger and unemployment within a specific community. According to World Bank research, Rakhine is the most underdeveloped region in the country, with a poverty rate of 78% (International Organization for Migration, 2016). The prevailing socioeconomic conditions have compelled some members of the Rohingya community to resort to armed resistance as a way of asserting their rights. However, this has further heightened the existing security challenges. The revocation of their citizenship has resulted in their exclusion and marginalization, denying them access to economic opportunities and social rights.

Cultural Identity and Perception as Root Causes of Prejudice

Culture is deeply connected to individual identity, shaping a unique personality. The discrimination faced by the Rohingya partly stems from their distinct cultural and religious identity, which differentiates them from the majority in Myanmar. The Rohingya community speaks a distinct language that differs from the official language of Burma, and government policies have limited their ability to practise cultural traditions. For example, Muslim individuals are required to present photographs to authorities before marriage, where the bride is without a hijab and the groom has no beard (Albert & Maizland, 2020). Furthermore, due to their involvement in opposition during World War II, these two groups have a troubled past, resulting in longstanding

hostility. From the beginning, Buddhists have consistently rejected the presence of Rohingya in their territory.

Rohingya Migration Trends

The majority of Rohingya are migrating to Bangladesh, which borders Myanmar's Rakhine State. According to the UN Refugee Agency, nearly 900,000 Rohingya currently reside in the Cox's Bazar district, home to the largest refugee camp in the world. The Bangladeshi government has relocated some refugees living in Cox's Bazar to an offshore island. While they can move freely within the island, travelling to the mainland requires official permission. About 100,000 Rohingya have fled to Malaysia, where they live in harsh conditions due to their undocumented and stateless status (Kim, 2020). In India, roughly 8,000 Rohingya are officially registered; however, estimates suggest the real number could be as high as 40,000 (India Says to Deport All Rohingya..., 2017). Several Rohingya individuals have also sought sanctuary in Indonesia and Thailand.

Post-Coup Crisis and the Plight of the Rohingya

The Myanmar military staged a coup following the general elections, in which the NLD, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, secured a decisive victory. In the aftermath, the military seized power under Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing. The coup drew widespread international condemnation from the global media, the United Nations, and key actors, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union. The country soon descended into civil unrest, a crisis further worsened by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The United Nations reported that attacks on healthcare workers significantly disrupted Myanmar's pandemic response (UN News, 2021). Amid this turmoil, the Rohingya population faced increased vulnerability, with restricted access to healthcare and necessities due to the military regime's negligence and discriminatory practices.

The Rohingya people, already displaced by military-led atrocities, continued to endure harsh conditions both in refugee camps in Bangladesh and within Myanmar's Rakhine State. In overcrowded and unsanitary camps, they lacked access to necessities and adequate humanitarian aid, which greatly worsened the spread of disease, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the international community, including the United Nations, exerted pressure on both Myanmar and Bangladesh to protect the Rohingya during the crisis, meaningful action remained limited. While countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States provided aid to improve camp infrastructure, these short-term measures proved insufficient. However, lasting solutions, such as political mediation, rehabilitation, and reconciliation, were essential. Without legal status, protection, or access to fundamental rights, the Rohingya remain stateless and vulnerable.

Weak Commitment to Liberal Democracy in Myanmar

Myanmar has shown a limited commitment to liberal democracy, mainly due to prolonged military dominance, ethnic divisions, and authoritarian traditions. Since independence in 1948, the military (Tatmadaw) has controlled the country for most of its history. Even during the democratic transition from 2011 to 2021 under Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD, the military retained significant power behind the scenes. Ethnic divisions have played a major role in weakening Myanmar's commitment to liberal democracy. The country is home to more than 135 recognized ethnic groups (Al Jazeera, 2017), yet the Bamar majority has historically dominated politics. This has led

to the marginalization of ethnic minorities, including the Rohingya, fueling long-standing tensions and conflict. The exclusion of these groups and the denial of equal rights have hindered the formation of a unified national identity and obstructed democratic development.

The Bamar majority's dominance has marginalized ethnic minorities, including the Rohingya, who are denied citizenship and fundamental rights under the 1982 Citizenship Law. This exclusionary policy framework reflects the limited pluralism essential for liberal democracy. According to Diamond (1999), liberal democracy requires not just competitive elections but also the protection of minority rights, adherence to the rule of law, and the separation of powers, all of which are deficient in Myanmar.

Contrasting International Responses: The Former Yugoslavia and the Rohingya Crisis

The contrasting international responses to the crises in the former Yugoslavia and Myanmar stem from factors such as geopolitical interests, the nature of each conflict, and the strategic importance of the regions. In the case of the former Yugoslavia, the international community, particularly NATO and European countries, intervened during the 1990s to halt ethnic cleansing and atrocities against Muslim minorities, most notably in Bosnia and Kosovo. Several factors drove this intervention. First, the conflict in Yugoslavia occurred in Europe, a region of significant strategic importance to Western powers, particularly during the post-Cold War period.

The proximity of the conflict to NATO member states and the potential for destabilisation in the heart of Europe made it a priority for international intervention. Additionally, the atrocities committed during the Yugoslav wars, including the Srebrenica massacre, generated widespread international outrage and pressure on governments to take action. The existence of robust international legal frameworks, such as the United Nations and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), also facilitated coordinated intervention efforts.

In contrast, the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar has not seen the same level of international intervention, despite widespread human rights violations. Several factors contribute to this disparity. Myanmar is located in Southeast Asia, a region where Western powers have historically had less strategic interest compared to Europe. The geopolitical stakes are different, and the global powers involved are more focused on maintaining regional stability and balancing China's influence. The international response has been further complicated by the fact that Myanmar's military has maintained close ties with powerful neighbouring countries like China and India, which have significant economic and strategic interests in the region.

These countries have generally opposed foreign intervention in Myanmar's internal affairs, limiting the options available to the international community. Moreover, Myanmar's strategic partnerships with China and Russia have shielded it from substantive UN-led interventions, with both nations consistently vetoing resolutions at the Security Council. Additionally, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) adheres to the principle of non-interference, further limiting regional pressure. Furthermore, the international legal mechanisms available to address the Rohingya crisis have been less effective. While the United Nations has condemned the atrocities, efforts to hold Myanmar accountable through the International Criminal Court (ICC) or other international legal bodies have faced significant challenges, including opposition from key global powers.

International Approaches to the Rohingya Crisis: Pathways and Challenges

International community intervention, while challenging, remains a critical pathway for addressing the Rohingya crisis due to Myanmar's persistent disregard for minority rights and its entrenched authoritarian governance. Practical implementation could involve a phased approach: first, diplomatic pressure through sanctions and targeted actions against Myanmar's military leadership to weaken their hold on power; second, coordinated humanitarian efforts led by the United Nations and regional organizations to ensure the safety and rehabilitation of displaced Rohingya, and finally, international oversight of democratic reforms and reconciliation processes within Myanmar. Although intervention faces hurdles, such as geopolitical interests and regional non-interference norms, it stands as a feasible option when other avenues, including bilateral negotiations and internal reforms, have consistently failed.

Advocacy efforts should focus on addressing structural barriers within international institutions, such as the UN Security Council's veto mechanism, that often hinder timely and effective responses to humanitarian crises. Collaboration among middle-power nations, such as Canada and Norway, could spearhead initiatives to reform aspects of global governance, particularly in promoting more equitable and responsive international decision-making. Beyond the restoration of democratic governance, international engagement should prioritize the implementation of inclusive policies that safeguard the rights of ethnic minorities. In the context of Myanmar, this includes advocating for the revision of the 1982 Citizenship Law and the establishment of constitutional protections for minority groups. Regional organizations, particularly ASEAN, could assume a more active role by adopting human rights-based frameworks that move beyond the traditional principle of non-interference.

To address the Rohingya refugee crisis, international support in the form of financial and technical assistance to host countries, especially Bangladesh, is critical. A regionally coordinated framework, supported by ASEAN and relevant international bodies, could help standardize refugee protection, service delivery, and resettlement procedures. For longer-term integration, efforts should include access to education and vocational training to reduce dependency and promote self-reliance among refugees. While the notion of territorial autonomy remains complex and politically sensitive, future discussions on durable solutions must be grounded in international law and involve inclusive, multilateral dialogue to ensure legitimacy and feasibility.

Conclusion

Despite the imposition of sanctions and widespread condemnation from international actors, the plight of the Rohingya in Myanmar remains dire. Those who remain in Rakhine State continue to be denied citizenship, security, recognition, and the basic opportunities essential for personal development. To address these longstanding grievances, the Myanmar authorities must engage in constructive dialogue with Rohingya representatives, including armed groups where relevant, and commit to granting full citizenship and legal recognition to the Rohingya people.

The international community, especially organizations like the United Nations and influential countries such as the United States and China, must increase its engagement. This includes implementing targeted sanctions in response to Myanmar's ongoing human rights abuses, along with consistent diplomatic pressure on its military leadership. Global stakeholders have a moral obligation to value human life and defend

the rights of persecuted minorities without discrimination. Humanitarian efforts must also be expanded to improve living conditions for displaced and stateless Rohingya populations, many of whom are suffering inhumane conditions. Restoring citizenship is crucial, not only to ensure access to basic rights but also to allow the Rohingya to live with dignity and security in their own country.

Furthermore, restoring democratic governance in Myanmar must remain a top priority. The military's systematic repression has destabilized the country and led to armed resistance, particularly in Rakhine State, which threatens both national and regional stability. In an age where statelessness strips people of identity and basic protections, the ongoing suffering of the Rohingya exposes major flaws in the international response, especially within organizations like the United Nations that were created to promote human rights and maintain global peace. The international community must act decisively, not only to alleviate suffering but also to reaffirm the principles of justice, dignity, and equal rights for everyone.

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