

United Nations and The Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis

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Abstract

The Rohingya muslims crisis in Myanmar has been a humanitarian disaster that has received international attention and condemnation. The Rohingya crisis, at present, is the worst humanitarian crisis. The UN (United Nations) describes the Rohingyas as the most persecuted minority in the world. The Rohingya people are ethnic muslim minority, they are pro-active a Sufi-inflected variation of Sunni Muslim of Islam. Myanmar's Rohingya community experienced genocide gradually, and then suddenly decades of increasingly human rights restriction came to global attention during 2017 with brutal army -led clearance operation' within Rohingya community. The Rohingya crisis refers to the persecution and forced displacement of the Rohingya, a Muslim minority group in Myanmar (formerly known as Burma). This paper examines the response of international community and the United Nations to this crisis. It begins by providing a brief overview of the history and background of Rohingya Muslims community in Myanmar. It then discusses the atrocities committed against military and the response of the international community, including the United Nations. The paper analyzes the effectiveness of the United Nations efforts to address the crisis, including the formation of a Fact-Finding Mission and the establishment of a joint response Plan. Finally, the paper deals with the summary and finding of the study with evaluation of the international community's response to the crisis and offers recommendations for future action. Overall, this paper highlights the importance of international coordinated response to address humanitarian crises such as the Rohingya muslim crisis.

Keywords: Rohingya Refugees, Human Rights Violation, Terrorist groups, UNO,

Introduction

Rohingyas are a Muslim minority community in Myanmar and are primarily settled in Rakhine state. Available historical records confirm that the Rohingya have been living in Arakan, now called Rakhine after 1989, for centuries rise with different ethnic identities like Arakan Muslims, Rooinga, Ruinga and Rohingya. The identity of Rohingyas is open to many interpretations. The first, as interpreted and accepted by the government of Myanmar, is that the Rohingyas are a Bengali-speaking muslim

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minority in Myanmar. For the Myanmar government and many other ethnic groups in the country, there is no such word as 'Rohingya'. "The Muslims who call themselves such are considered as those who entered into the country from East Bengal during the British Empire or illegal migrants from Bangladesh".¹ During the colonial period, a fair number of Muslims from other parts of India also moved into Rakhine state.

According to a second interpretation, the Rohingyas describe themselves as descendant of 8th century Arab who sailed through the Bay of Bengal and landed in Myanmar for trade. The word 'Rohingya' become commonly used in the 1990s. There are records providing evidences, that the word 'Rohingya' was used in the 18th century to describe people from the Rakhine region. In contemporary history, in 1947, when India faced partition and Pakistan was established, some muslims in the Rakhine region wanted to be part of Pakistan. However, they did not receive support from the leaders of the Muslim League. According to Tin Maung and Moe Thuzar, sometime in the 1950s, the word 'Rohinga' or 'Rohingya' became commonly used to reflect the ethnic identity of the muslim in Myanmar.²

According to the government of Myanmar, there are 135 ethnic races in Myanmar. Rohingyas are not in the list. The problem lies within that nomenclature itself. Even though they call themselves Rohingyas, this is rejected by the local population who claim this label was given to them by the international community and that they are actually illegal immigrants from neighbouring Bangladesh. In short, Rohingyas can be defined as an ethnic minority of Myanmar even though they are not officially counted as citizens by the government, and are therefore, a stateless people. Myanmar's political party National League for Democracy (NLD) has taken a more diplomatic route, calling them the Muslims of Rakhine so that both sides of issue can be taken into account. As long as the majority of the Myanmar population views the Rohingya as illegal immigrant, neither the military nor the NLD is likely to take steps against the popular sentiments.

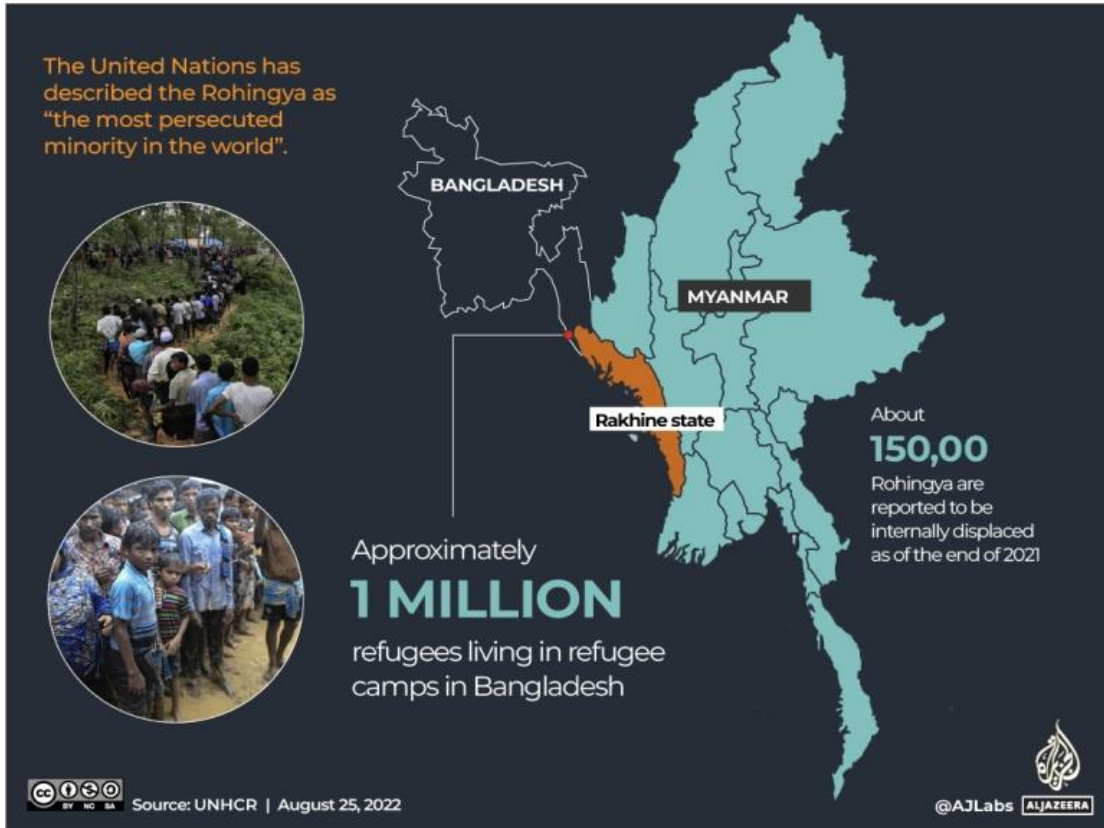
Myanmar military known as the Tatmadav engaged scorched earth tactics that targeted the civilian population, razed hundreds of Rohingya villages with fire, murdered at least 9,000 Rohingya men, and unleashed a monstrous campaign of sexual violence against Rohingya women's and girls.³ The violence in Myanmar has driven large numbers of Rohingya to flee to neighbouring countries, including Bangladesh, India, and Thailand. Many Rohingya Muslim refugees have also settled in Malaysia, Indonesia, and other countries in Southeast Asia. The United Nations has called the Rohingya crisis "a textbook example of ethnic cleansing".

The Rohingya's are a minority- muslim (Sunni) community representing around 1million people among Myanmar's total population of 52 million.⁴ According to Equal Right trust 2014, an estimate 1-1.5 million Rohingyas in Rakhine state are concentrated in the few township of north rakhaine state such as Maungdw, Buthudaung, Rathedaung, Akyab and Kyauktaw.⁵

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Rohingya as “the most persecuted minority in the world”



Source: “Rohingya exodus explained in maps and charts” Internet Source: [Rohingya exodus explained in maps and charts | Rohingya News | Al Jazeera](#). (Accessed On 17th November 2022).

Before the recent violence and persecution of the Rohingya in Myanmar, many of the Rohingya in Myanmar, many of them lived in villages and towns in Rakhine State, which is located in western Myanmar. However, since August 2017, the Myanmar military has been accused of burning down Rohingya villages and committing human rights abuses against the Rohingya population. The majority of Rohingya refugees are currently living in refugee camp in Bangladesh, with a smaller number in other countries in the region.

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Settlements before and after village burning

SOURCE- Group Amnesty International has Released Satellite Images Which it Says an “Orchestrated Campaign” to Burn Rohingya Villages in Western Myanmar. Internet Source : [Rohingya crisis: Satellite images of Myanmar village burning - BBC News](#) (Accessed on 9th September 2

Role of the United Nations: Rohingya refugee crisis

In 21st century Refugee protection is at a crisis point. The desperate crises of the Rohingya echoed all over the world. Rohingya community have traced their root in Myanmar. The Rohingya refugee crisis is one of the world’s largest humanitarian crises. The majority of Rohingya refugees are women and children. The Rohingya people are declared by the UN as world’s most persecuted minority, they have been facing various forms of discrimination, exploitation, oppression and deprivation of basic human rights for decades in Burma/Myanmar. The Rohingya people have been suffering a long system persecutions and violence and the series of persecutions they have been facing in Myanmar is considered as a “genocide” ⁶

The convention relating to the status of Refugees adopted on 28th July 1951 by the United Nations Conferences of plenipotentiaries on the status of refugees and stateless persons convened under General Assembly resolution 429(5) of December, 1950 and it enters into force on 22nd April, 1954.

According to the article 1(A) (2) of the 1951 convention, “the term ‘refugee’ shall apply to any person who as a result of events occurring before 1st January, 1951 and owing to well – founded fear of being

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persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”⁷

Despite its universal vocation, it is worth noting that this refugee definition contemplates a temporal and geographic limitation—one being recognized as a refugee only in relation to events occurred in Europe and before 1st January 1951. Such limitations were removed sixteen years later with the adoption of the 1967 protocol relating to the status of Refugees. Therefore, it is only with the 1951 convention that has indeed become a valuable universal instrument for the protection of refugees. In 1979, the UNHCR published the “Handbook and guidelines on procedures and criteria for determining refugee status”, where “persecution” was defined as any threat to life or freedom, whose existence had to be assessed on the basis of both objective and subjective criteria. However, this definition of the term persecution remains unsatisfactory: because on one hand, it is still very broad and therefore difficult to be implemented.⁸

It was the first truly international agreement covering the most fundamental aspects of a refugee’s life. It spelled out a set of basic human rights, which should be at least equivalent to freedoms enjoyed by foreign nationals living legally in a given country and in many cases those of citizens of that state. It recognized the international scope of refugee crises and the necessity of international cooperation, including burden-sharing among states, in tackling the problem. This is all about 1951 refugees’ convention. Now it is necessary to understand who Rohingyas are and what are the root cause of Rohingya crisis was?

The Rohingya are an ethnic minority in Myanmar who trace their origin to Rakhine state formerly known as Arakan state in Myanmar since the 8th century. The Rohingyas are a minority- muslim (Sunni) community representing around 1million people among Myanmar’s total population of 52 million.⁹ According to Equal Right trust 2014, an estimate 1-1.5 million Rohingyas in Rakhine state are concentrated in the few townships of north rakhaine state such as Maungdw, Buthudaung, Rathedaung, Akyab and Kyauktaw.¹⁰

It is widely known that Rohingyas are world’s most persecuted ethnic minority and often identified with Muslim religion. After witnessing the susceptible conditions of the Rohingya muslims in the world, they have been viewed primarily from two opposite perspectives, namely as ‘illegal immigrants’ and ‘security threat’. Awami League government in Bangladesh make them hysterical to cross the border of the north-eastern part of India, often with the help of human traffickers. Rohingya muslims refugees in Bangladesh to be recruited by extremist groups. The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) emerged as a shadowy organisation called the “Harakat-ul-Yaqin”, mentored by one Abdu Qadoo Burmi, a Pakistani of Rohingya origin who was born in Karachi. Burmi has appeared in social media videos calling for “jihad” in Myanmar and has intimate link with the Pakistan state-sponsored terrorist organization Lashkar-e-Taiba. Pakistani Jihadi outfits have called for jihad against

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Myanmar to avenge the atrocities committed against the Rohingya Muslims.

It is undeniable that foreign jihadis are now part of the ARSA. Reports indicate that Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Malaysians and Thailand Muslims have joined the ranks of the ARSA. Training of jihadis have taken place along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border and also in Aceh in northern Sumatra in Indonesia. Jihad elements in Bangladesh have extended support to the ARSA.¹¹ The various separatist yet powerful groups like Al-Qaeda's offshoot, Aqa Mul Mujahideen or Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and their anticipated solidarity in favour of Rohingya Muslims create a paradigm of the question of identity and interrogating their lived experiences in India.¹² In the world all countries and organizations have different perception on Rohingya refugees and this has posed a huge challenge in adopting a unified framework or policies for the treatment of Rohingya refugees. The number of refugees is increasing at a high rate and it has posed anxiety and problem to the host country in terms of social, economy and security. Apart from the geo-strategic concern, there is a real security interest in remaining tight-lipped on the Rohingya Muslim refugee issue.

The Rohingya crisis is a complex and ongoing humanitarian crisis involving the persecution and displacement of Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar's Rakhine state. Here are some of the key initiatives undertaken by the UN:

Humanitarian Assistance: The UN has been providing humanitarian assistance to the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, where hundreds of thousands of people fled from Myanmar. The UN agencies such as UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund), and WFP (World Food Programme) has been providing food, shelter, healthcare, and other forms of assistance to the refugees.

Advocating for the Rohingya: The UN has been advocating for the rights and protection of the Rohingya. The UN has been calling on Myanmar to address the root causes of the crisis and take steps to prevent further human rights violations against the Rohingya. The UN has also been calling for the safe and voluntary return of Rohingya refugees to their homes in Myanmar.

Independent Investigation: The UN has called for an independent investigation into the human rights abuses committed against the Rohingya. In 2018, the UN established an independent international fact-finding mission to investigate the situation in Myanmar.¹³

International Criminal Court: The UN has called for the international criminal court to investigate the crimes committed against the Rohingya Muslims. In 2019, the ICC authorized an investigation into the alleged deportation of Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar to Bangladesh.¹⁴

Overall, the UN's efforts for the Rohingya crisis have been crucial in providing humanitarian assistance to the refugees, advocating for their rights and protection, and calling for an end to the human rights abuses committed against them. The UN's work in this regard remains ongoing and is an important part of the international community's response to the crisis.

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Suggestions and Conclusion

Because Rohingya muslim crisis has erupted from Myanmar, the government of Myanmar is highly responsible on this issue and should take initiative in solving the issue. Any such solution needs to take the following steps:

First, provide them full citizenship status along with fundamental and political rights. Second, the government of Myanmar has to take back all the Rohingya muslims who have fled to different parts of Asia due to military operations against them in their country. Also, a safe zone has to be demarcated for the Rohingya muslims in Myanmar where they can live after their return. The process of further “Burmanisation” of Myanmar has to be stopped. India must play important role in resolving Rohingya crisis. Because India is also a party of Human Rights Law. Particularly those state who are party to the Human Rights and International Refugee Law, are expected to provide humanitarian assistance to the persecuted people by the international communities.

Rohingya crisis create a security threat for neighbouring countries including India. So, India has to be very vigilant and India will continue to cooperate with the security apparatus.

Finally, although the global community has come forward to provide humanitarian assistance to the Rohingyas. The international community need to reinforce the Rohingya refugee repatriation process.

The Rohingya muslims have faced decade of discrimination and repression under successive Myanmar government. Only Myanmar can solve this longstanding crisis by either amending or repealing the 1982 Citizenship law to recognize Rohingya as an ethnic group of Myanmar. There is an urgent need for the UN & International and regional communities to remain firm in exerting pressure on the government of Myanmar to meet its obligations.

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