

The International European Model United Nations

2018



United Nations Security Council

Topic B: Humanitarian Crisis in Myanmar



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Dear delegates,

During the 2018 TEIMUN Conference you will be tasked with finding a solution to what has been described as the world's longest running civil war, the internal conflict of Myanmar. A troubled colonial past has compounded with multiple failed attempts at a centralized government and ethnic tensions. These are but a few of the factors that have allowed the war to continue since 1948 into the modern day. Yet despite the longevity of the conflict, it was only recently due to the plight of the Rohingya people that the desperate situation within the country caught the attention of the international community. Finding a solution to a decades' long conflict between many parties with deep-seated reasons for hatred will not be easy. A success here will not only save uncountable lives from death and persecution – it will also represent a great success for the Security Council's role as peacemaker and perhaps be a victory for self-determination globally. We urge you to try your best to use your diplomatic powers for this purpose.

Helping you along the way will be your two humble but experienced chairs, Radu Tasca and Hassaan Sudozai. Our hope is that we will make TEIMUN 2018 an unforgettably fun and educative experience that will stay with you forever!

Any questions about the Conference or the Security Council will be answered swiftly, so feel free to ask!

We look forward to meeting you in the Conference Chambers.

Diplomatic regards,

Hassaan and Radu

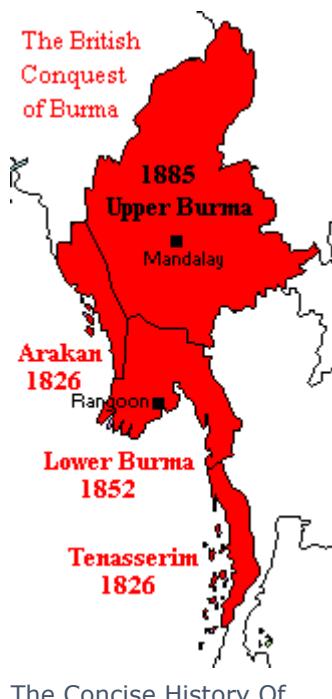
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Introduction:

Myanmar, a country isolated from the outside world for 60 years, home to 135 officially recognized ethnic groups, which has been embroiled in a series of deadly civil wars since its creation. Perhaps one of the reasons for the lack of action by the international community on Myanmar is the sheer complication of the situation. Many of the ethnic groups within the country desire more rights or a state of their own, and others such as the unfortunate Rohingya people are not even allowed citizenship under law.¹

The ethnic divisions of the country are compounded with the economic incompetence of the state's rulers and their authoritative grip of the government over all aspects of the people's lives to create a deadly mix of human rights disasters. The world's longest running civil war has thus far led to the deaths of a quarter of a million people and has externally displaced as many as 900,000.² It is crucial to remember that Myanmar has always been an internally divided country on issues of ethnicity and political beliefs (despite the unified, non-federal government). To understand each of the grassroots conflicts within the country would be nigh-impossible within the context of a Background Paper. Nevertheless, this paper should serve as a good introduction into the conflictual quagmire that is modern day Myanmar and will allow delegates a starting point for conducting further research.

Historical Background:



Like many of its neighboring countries within South-East Asia, Myanmar's history was marked by colonial rule. The relevant section of the country's story begins in the 19th century, when it was known as Burma. After three wars with the British Empire between 1824 and 1885, the country eventually became a British colony, part of the British India administration.³ By the outset of the Second World War, Burma had already become a self-administered colony under the rule of the Burmese Ba Maw. Despite the Prime Minister's attempts to keep the country out of the war, the Japanese invasion of Burma made this impossible. War raged in the country from 1942 all the way to 1945, leaving much of the country's landscape and infrastructure ruined.⁴ Interestingly, even at this early point in history Burma's ethnic division was already apparent: During the war, many Burmese actually fought on the side of the Japanese as part of the Burma Liberation Army, in a bid to overthrow the current puppet colonial government and obtain self-determination. Many more of the ethnic minorities sided instead with the British Colonial Government. This wrought havoc for the country, with its own people fighting each other on their own territory for a war they wished to have no part in.⁵

¹ "Burma/Bangladesh: Burmese Refugees In Bangladesh - Discrimination In Arakan."

² Hampton, Internally Displaced People: A Global Survey.

³ Baten, A History Of The Global Economy: From 1500 To The Present, pp. 216.

⁴ Towle, Kosuge and Kibata, Japanese Prisoners Of War, pp. 48.

⁵ Fellowes-Gordon, The Magic War.

In 1948, the country officially gained independence and became sovereign. Unlike most other former British Colonies, the new government decided against becoming a part of the British Commonwealth. What is important to note about the new state was its territory: The new Burma was comprised of Lower and Upper Burma, as well as the Frontier Areas. Each of these had been administered separately by the British, but were now part of a single, unitary and centrally governed state.⁶ The new centralized government adamantly refused any calls for federalization, referring to them as anti-national, pro-disintegration or anti-unity.⁷

The situation would become worse after the military coup of 1962, led by General Ne Win, succeeded in taking control of the country. Burma thus became a one-party soviet-inspired nation, wherein the military saw a greatly increased role in the national economy, politics and state bureaucracy. Furthermore, all major industries were nationalized by the state in a manner similar to the Stalinist ideology. This is the system that continues to exist in the country today as the regime has vehemently defended its position by silencing protests against its rule.⁸

Discontent with the country's leadership came to a head in 1988, when large scale protests spread across the country in what would later become known as the 8888 Uprising.⁹ The Uprising ended in a little over a month after another military coup occurred and caused the deaths of as many as 3000 civilians at the hands of the military.¹⁰ The new government subsequently signed peace treaties with some of the insurgent groups it had been at war with, but as of 2017 most or all of these treaties have been breached by either side and fighting has resumed anew.

Current Conflicts In Myanmar:

It must be stated that referring to the current situation in Myanmar as a singular civil war is inaccurate. The reality is that there are a number of conflicts currently ongoing in the country. For the most part, these are fought between government forces, known as the Tatmadaw, and the various ethnic rebel groups who desire their own state or more autonomy as part of a Federation. We will go over the five main fronts of the conflict, and explain who is currently fighting who, where and why.

⁶ Smith, *Burma - Insurgency And The Politics Of Ethnicity*.

⁷ Kipgen, "The United States Of Myanmar?"

⁸ Fink, *Living Silence: Burma Under Military Rule*.

⁹ Aung-Thwin, "Burmese Days."

¹⁰ "The Saffron Revolution."

The Kayah State Front:

A small state located on the country's eastern border with Thailand, the Kayah state is known for its rich deposits of natural resources and for being ruled by the Karen National Progressive Party.

In an attempt to undermine the state's hopes for independence, the government has even gone as far as to change the name that the state bears. This attempt to dissolve the British legacy's borders of the state has had mixed results.



The state has its own dialect and writing system, which it developed in the 1960s in an attempt to separate itself from Myanmar. The main reasons why the state desires independence have to do with the exploitation of resources and unfair treatment of the Kayah/Karen people.¹¹

There has existed a ceasefire between the Tatmadaw and the Karen army since 2012, but in the past such agreements have been very fragile.¹² It wouldn't be unfair to consider the current situation akin to a powder keg, and delegates would be wise to also consider Thailand's contentious position on the issue: The Eastern neighboring country more closely supports the independence seeking Karen people than the national government.

The Kachin State Front

Following a 17-year cease-fire, fighting between the Tatmadaw and Kachin Independence Army (KIA) began anew in 2011. The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) is currently in charge of the Kachin state, and runs it autonomously.¹³

The KIO desires independence due to ethnic differences and unfair treatment of the Kachin people by the Myanmar government. Similarly to the Kayah state, Kachin is also rich in natural resources – Myanmar's principal motivation for reconquering the state. The Kachin front is home to some of the fiercest fighting in the area: As many as 100,000 people have so far been displaced, and casualties on both sides are in the thousands.¹⁴

In addition, around 4000 refugees have fled to China. The wave of refugees threatens to prompt Beijing to institute tighter border controls and perhaps even take the issue to the international arena. The superpower has loudly complained in the past of the spillover that Myanmar's conflict has had over its borders.¹⁵

¹¹ "Karen And Kayah: The Nature Of Burma'S Ethnic Problem Over Two Names And The Path To Resolution."

¹² "Burma: Government, Rebels Sign Ceasefire."

¹³ "Kachin War Explodes Myanmar'S Peace Drive."

¹⁴ Idem

¹⁵ Idem

The Kayin State Front:

The people of the Kayin state are known as the Karen. They are their own ethnic group, and they make up about 7% of the country's population. There are multiple independence groups within the state, but the largest is known as the Karen National Union (KNU) which commands the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) – The KNU's main armed body.¹⁶



Kayin State.

The KNLA has been fighting for independence since 1949, citing reasons such as oppression by the Myanmar government, lack of representation in parliament and discrimination.¹⁷ Since the early 90s, the KNU has changed its objective from Kayin independence to demands for a federal government with Karen representation and autonomy.¹⁸

Historically, the Thai government has used the Kayin state as a buffer zone between its territory and Burma. Thailand even went as far as to provide supplies and resources to the rebels until Myanmar's accession to the Association of South Eastern Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1997.¹⁹ But despite the end of the country's involvement in the civil war, as many as 10,000 refugees continue to live in makeshift camps along the Thai border. The KNLA has even made use of the strategic positions of these camps to resupply and avoid the Tatmadaw during the Four Cuts offensive of 1984 and to a lesser extent today.²⁰

The Shan State Front:

The Shan people are originally thought to have immigrated from Yunnan in China. In Myanmar, they represent a separate ethnic group from the rest of the country, and are the second largest such group in Myanmar. The conflict between the Shan state and

the government stems from actions that took place during the country's period of heavy militarization in the late 1940s and early 1950s. During this time, the Shan people allegedly suffered gross mistreatment, robbing, rape, torture and massacre at the hands of the Tatmadaw.²¹

In response to these actions, the Shan state created various rebellion groups, with the most important being the Shan State Army – South (SSA-S), probably the largest rebellion group within Myanmar. The Tatmadaw and SSA-S have been fighting on and off since the army's creation in 1996.²² The ultimate aim of the SSA-S has also shifted over the years from the creation of an independent state to obtaining

¹⁶ Falcone et al., "Myanmar And The Karen Conflict: The Longest Civil War You Have Never Heard Of | Reiff Center Blog."

¹⁷ Idem

¹⁸ Idem

¹⁹ Brouwer and van Wijk, "Helping Hands: External Support For The KNU Insurgency In Burma."

²⁰ South, "Burma's Longest War: Anatomy Of The Karen Conflict."

²¹ "RCSS, Restoration Council of Shan State - Summary"

²² Idem

more representation and autonomy as part of a federal government. Hostilities between the SSA-S and Tatmadaw have been on hold since a cease-fire was signed in 2011, but there are other military groups in the state which have not been stopped by the armistice.²³

The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) is a militant group operating in the Kokang region, in the northern area of the Shan State. Despite signing a separate armistice with the Tatmadaw in 1989, the MNDAA has broken the peace several times since 2009, most recently in 2017. Fighting between the two armed groups has led to another wave of displaced persons and several hundred losses for both sides. There is currently no peace agreement between the Tatmadaw and MNDAA.²⁴



Shan State.

The Rakhine State Front:

Finally, we must discuss what is possibly the most important of Myanmar's conflicts for the international community. To understand the Rakhine State conflict, it is necessary to briefly explain the background of the Rohingya people. Their situation represents the crux of the conflict.

Before the beginning of the current crisis, there were around 1 million Rohingya people living within Myanmar.²⁵ Despite being such a large ethnic group, they are not recognized officially by Myanmar as such,²⁶ and international observers have cited their Muslim faith as one of the principal reasons for persecution in the majority-Buddhist country.²⁷ They are a stateless people, and are thus barred from education, free movement and public jobs.²⁸ In an attempt to further alienate the community from the rest of the country, Myanmar's government refuses to accept the name Rohingya, and instead refers to the community as 'Bengali' in a bid to frame the Rohingya as outsiders.²⁹

²³ Idem

²⁴ "Deadly Clashes Hit Kokang In Myanmar's Shan State."

²⁵ Mahmood et al., "The Rohingya People Of Myanmar: Health, Human Rights, And Identity."

²⁶ "Burma/Bangladesh: Burmese Refugees In Bangladesh - Discrimination In Arakan."

²⁷ "Rohingyas Facing 'Catastrophic' Situation."

²⁸ "Will Anyone Help The Rohingya?."

²⁹ Monitor, "Why Myanmar's Rohingya Are Forced To Say They Are Bengali."

Finding safe haven in Bangladesh

Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya have left their ethnic homeland of Rakhine State for the district of Cox's Bazar in Chittagong, Bangladesh.



Rohingya Crisis Explained In Maps.

Under the banner of the Arakan Liberation Army (ALA), many within the Rakhine state have fought for independence and self-determination since the 1950s.³⁰ Periods of protest and civil unrest among the people of the Rakhine state are not uncommon. One recent such period was in 2012, when large scale anti-government protests engulfed the state. Following a crackdown by the government of Myanmar, the Tatmadaw began intensely persecuting the Rohingya population, to the extent that some have referred to the government's actions as genocide.³¹ This led to a mass exodus which culminated in the 2015 refugee crisis, wherein as many as 25,000 people were forced to flee death and persecution in Rakhine.³² It is important to note that not all members of the ALA are Rohingya people. Rather, they have been chosen as a scapegoat by the government and now face persecution for actions most of them did not personally take part in.

The most recent crisis began in 2016, when Rakhine militants allegedly attacked a border guard post within the state killing eight Tatmadaw soldiers and stealing a large amount of military equipment.³³ In response, government forces began a major crackdown on the Rohingya, singling them out as the perpetrators.³⁴ Thus, the government began performing vicious human rights abuses against the Rohingya, including killings, burnings and rapes,³⁵ prompting many international observers to label the Tatmadaw's actions as ethnic cleansing.

³⁰ "ALP."

³¹ The Economist, "The Most Persecuted People in the World?"

³² "Malaysia Tells Thousands Of Rohingya Refugees To 'Go Back To Your Country'."

³³ "Eight Dead In Clashes Between Myanmar Army And Militants In Rakhine."

³⁴ "Myanmar Says Nine Police Killed By Insurgents On Bangladesh Border."

³⁵ "New Wave Of Destruction Sees 1,250 Houses Destroyed In Myanmar's Rohingya Villages."

Government forces intensified their actions, and in August of 2017 the Tatmadaw began performing “clearing operations” within the Rakhine state in an attempt to drive out the ethnic minority from the state altogether.³⁶ All said, at the time of writing some 625,000 Rohingya people have fled into neighboring Bangladesh, leading to intense overpopulation in the refugee camps in the region of Cox’s Bazaar.³⁷ Conditions within the many camps have been described as horrible, yet the Bengali government refuses to resettle the Rohingya within its state. Similarly, the states of Malaysia and Indonesia have so far also avoided any responsibilities over the displaced people, claiming that accepting them would cause excessive social unrest.³⁸

Conclusion:

The internal conflict within Myanmar has been ongoing for almost 70 years. Although the recent refugee crisis of the Rohingya people has brought the issue to light, it is important to remember that similar such abuses have been taking place since the country first gained independence.

Navigating the political labyrinth within Myanmar in order to find a solution that will please everyone and save lives certainly won’t be easy, but it is the Security Council’s duty to ensure human lives are no longer threatened. The United Nations can and should take action, but it must do so cautiously and with consideration for the difficult situation within the country.

Questions a Resolution Must Answer (QARMAs):

1. What can the UN do to ensure the safety of the Rohingya people still within Myanmar?
2. What actions should be undertaken with regard to the hundreds of thousands of Rohingya people who currently reside in Bangladesh?
3. Who should be held accountable for the atrocities and war crimes committed by the Tatmadaw during the 2016-2017 crisis?
4. What should the UNSC do to end the civil war within the Rakhine State?
5. Should the Security Council become involved in the conflicts currently ongoing in the Kayah, Kachin, Kayin and Shan states? Is this an issue of self-determination that the UNSC needs to become invested in?
6. How can the UNSC help to restore the international community’s trust in Myanmar? What must be done in social, economic and institutional terms in order to pave the way for future development and peace?

³⁶ "UN Report Details Brutal Myanmar Effort To Drive Out Half A Million Rohingya."

³⁷ "Rohingya Widows Find Safe Haven In Bangladesh Camp."

³⁸ "Who Will Help Myanmar's Rohingya?."

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