

TOPIC 3: The application of UN membership from the Rakhine state

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I. Introduction to the Topic

The application of UN membership from the Rakhine state, if propitious, offers a myriad of potential benefits to the international community. For starters, the Rakhine's state's independence can set a precedent for other similar ethnic groups that have been affected by their colonial past. This can, in turn, lead to similar resolutions that benefit the currently marginalized groups. Moreover, the independence of the Rakhine state opens up new opportunities for countries across the globe, especially in regards to access to the currently untapped resources in the Rakhine state. However, it is also important to consider whether UN membership can be perceived as a violation of sovereignty under international law.

At a regional level, the official UN membership of the Rakhine state can potentially benefit the ASEAN countries by reducing the strains on the economy from the violent warfare. This can also reduce the strains on infrastructure in the case of countries such as Bangladesh and Myanmar, who are currently being overburdened with an influx of Rohingya refugees. However, although the Rakhine state wants to seek independence from the Burma government, the Government of Myanmar does not want to give up national territory to a group it views as "foreigners" and "terrorists", potentially leading to conflict with countries in its region. Countries that support the Rohingya endanger escalating already high tensions between the countries.

Moreover, the Rakhine state's UN membership would impact the Myanmar economy by preventing the government from siphoning resources from the territory. Although this independence will alleviate current financial problems for the Arakan and the Rohingya, this would also greatly impact the Myanmar government, who would lose access to resources such as timber.

Locally, the Rohingya and the Araka can finally safely return to their homes without fear of persecution by the government. It offers an opportunity for such ethnic groups to achieve equality and claim the land they believe is rightfully theirs. This security and guarantee of human rights will help compensate for the duress the Rohingya and the Araka were forced to endure.

II. Definition of Key Terms & Concepts

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Definition of Key Terms

Rohingya Muslims: The Rohingya Muslims are a stateless Indo-Aryan ethnic group who reside in the Rakhine state. The Rohingya, as the largest Muslim group, is referred to by the pejorative 'Kalar' (black-skinned" by the Buddhist Burmese, and they are often faced with brutalities. However, the exact origins of the Rohingya Muslims remain ambiguous to this day, with disputes between various historians. While the Myanmar Government claims that the Rohingya migrated to the Rakhine state from Bengal during and after the British colonial era, it is widely accepted by scholars and historians that Muslims inhabited the Rakhine State centuries before the independence.

Ethnic cleansing: Ethnic cleansing is defined as the systematic forced removal or killing of ethnic, racial, and religious groups from a given area, with the intent of making a region ethnically homogeneous. The Tatmadaw were accused of committing ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya and the Araka, engaging in segregational acts that dehumanised the ethnic groups.

Ethnic divisions: Ethnic divisions refer to the diversity of ethnic groups that are present in a certain region. This is a concept of paramount importance to consider when debating on the issue of the UN membership from the Rakhine state.

Genocide: A genocide is described as the deliberate killing of a large number of people from a particular ethnic, religious, or racial group, with the aim of destroying that said group. According to the United Nations Genocide Convention, the convention defines five acts of genocide as: killing members of the group, causing them serious bodily or mental harm, imposing living conditions intended to destroy the group, preventing births, and forcibly transferring children out of the group. Using these definitions, the UN among a number of member states, including the US, Canada, Bangladesh, France, and Malaysia, accused the Government of Myanmar of genocide and ethnic cleansing fo the Rohingya.

Burma: Burma is the predominant ethnic group that came into power when colonized by the British. They were given authority over all other ethnic groups in the region to suppress potential revolutions and subsequently maintained their authority even after the proclamation of independence. As a result, the contemporary Myanmar Government mainly consists of the Burma people, who have great disdain for the Arakan and the Rohingya, suppressing such ethnics groups.

III. Key Stakeholders

Myanmar government: The Myanmar government is an important stakeholder in the topic as a central state that has often taken part in genocidal actions against the Rohingya people. The government has consistently portrayed the Rohingya as terrorists or foreign invaders within their territory. Tensions are only further exacerbated by the fact that most government officials are Burmese, causing ethnic tensions with the Araka.

Tatmadaw: The Tatmadaw is the official name of the armed forces of Myanmar. They have been responsible for much of the ethnic cleansing that has occurred in the nation, and have expressed beliefs that the Rohingya are foreigners and terrorists. The Tatmadaw are also responsible for staging the coup d'état that saw the detainment of Aung San Suu Kyi and other high-ranking politicians after a contested election with disputed rules. Since then, the Tatmadaw has become reliant towards military aids from Russia and China.

Arakan National Party (ANP): The Arakan National Party was established with the aim of representing in the interests of the Rakhine people and is known for their nationalistic policies. Notably, the ANP has faced political repression by the Myanmar government, who refused to share executive power at state level after the ANP won a majority of votes in Rakhine State in the 2015 election. The Arakanese repeatedly complained that their proposals in parliament were being rejected or ignored.

Arakan Army: The Arakan Army is an ethnic armed organization that is composed of the Arakan people that has been engaging in combat against the Tatmadaw. The army purportedly advocates for self-determination for the multi-ethnic Arkanese population, the safeguarding and promotion of the national identity and cultural heritage of the Arakan people, and the national dignity of the Arakan. Although there was eventually a ceasefire agreement, that quickly broke down as the Tatmadaw cracked down on the Arakan that protested against the coup d'état.

Bangladesh: Bangladesh is one of the main stakeholders of the issue as a neighboring Islam country that has also been the site of most of the displaced Rohingya people. Although Bangladesh originally welcomed displaced Rohingya people to seek refuge in its official camps,

it soon faced infrastructural problems, resulting in them officially banning more refugees from entering the country.

IV. Key Issues including Background Information

Ethnic cleansing: There have been a myriad of attempts to oppress the Rohingya, including ousting Muslims from their jobs and replacing with Buddhists, closing Islamic institutes, schools and other Islamic organizations, confiscating properties belonging to Muslim and distributing to the Buddhists, imprisoning or exiling Muslim leaders outside their home countries, and inciting Buddhists to kill Muslim and prove the Muslims as terrorists. To this date, the genocide has consisted of two main phases: the first was a military crackdown that occurred from October 2016 to January 2017, and the second has been occurring since August 2017. The UN found evidence of wide-scale human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings; summary execution; gang rape; arson of Rohingya villages, businesses, and schools; and infanticides. In August 2018, a study estimated that more than 24,00 Rohingya people were killed by the Burmese military and local Buddhists since the clearance operations. These actions were described as “ethnic cleansing” by a number of countries including the US and the UK.

Myanmar Civil War: The Arakan Army’s contribution in the Myanmar Civil War despite their ceasefire agreement as a result of the prosecution of the Rohingya people. On 1 February 2021, the Tatmadaw successfully deposed the elected Myanmar government, following a coup d’etat, forming a military junta. This, however, led to protests by various members of society, leading to the Myanmar government cracking down on such people. The Arakan Army was amongst the groups dissatisfied by the new government, leading to the group declaring their intentions to breach the ceasefire agreement.

Colonization: The Rohingyas have a colonial history that contributed to their current situation. The Bamar people were originally thrust into power by the British due to the policy of indirect rule, which armed the Bamar ethnic group to quell any subversion from other ethnic groups. The Bamar retained power after the collapse of the British Empire 1948; since then, they have remained at war with various ethnic groups who continue to fight for independence. Before

colonization, Rakhine used to be known as the Arakan Kingdom, before being dominated by the Bamar people. The ethnic division also created tensions with the Myanmar Buddhists, who treat the Arkanese like ugly animals. Hence, the effects of colonization continue to remain

Displacement: As a result of decades of ethnic and religious persecution in Myanmar, hundreds of thousands have fled to other neighboring Southeast Asian countries, including Malaysia, Indonesia, and Philippines. The majority of the Rohingya refugees have escaped to Bangladesh, where there were two official refugee camps. On 28 September 2018, at the 73rd United Nations General Assembly, Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said there are 1.1 million Rohingya refugees. However, overcrowding placed great burdens on its infrastructure. Subsequently, on 1 March 2019 Bangladesh announced that it would no longer be accepting Rohingya refugees.

Poverty: Despite being very rich in natural resources, the Rakhine State is one of the poorest areas in Myanmar. Its resources include rice, which occupies around 85% of the total agricultural land, fishing, and wood products such as timber, bamboo and fuel wood from the mountains. This is due to the resources being largely siphoned out of the region with little to no return investment, exacerbating contemporary resentment and prompting the rise of armed insurgent groups such as the Arakan Army. Over 69% of the population is estimated to be in poverty, which is only further exacerbated as a result of violent conflict.

V. Timeline of Resolutions, Treaties, and Events

Timeline of Resolutions, Treaties, and Events

Date	Description of event
1782-1819	Muslim persecution in Burma commenced during the reign of the King Bodawpaya. The first suffering of Rohingya Muslims began in 1784 over fears of the spread of Islam.

1978	A wide-scale census operation known as Nagamin was carried out to supposedly clear out illegal immigrants. The Government of Myanmar proceeded to destroy mosques and historical schools of Islamic monuments. The Rohingya faced various forms of violence including: brutality, rape, starvation, torture, and the murder of 50 Rohingyas. This subsequently led to the exodus of more than 200,000 Rohingyas from northern Arakan to Bangladesh.
1983	In the 1983 nationwide census report, the Rohingya were completely excluded
May 2015	About 139 graves suspected to be Rohingya from Myanmar were found on the Thai-Malaysian border.
2016	A violent crackdown occurred in the Northern Rakhine villages that resulted in dozens being killed and hundreds being arrested.
February 2021	A coup d'etat sees the Tartadaw overthrow the Myanmar government and imprison important officials. This leads to a series of protests that escalate to violent conflict.
2017 - Present	The second phase of the Rohingya genocide began since August 2017, indicating the start of even more aggressive persecution and segregation against the Rohingya.

VI. Possible Challenges & Solutions

Ethnic cleansing: Countries that condemn the current ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya may consider passing a resolution that prosecutes the current Myanmar government at the International Court of Justice for their egregious transgressions of human rights and crimes against humanity. A separate international criminal tribunal can also be established to judge people responsible for the Rohingya genocide and other serious violations of international law.

Resolutions to grant the official UN membership to the Rakhine state can also deter aggression and brutality from Myanmar due to their status as a separate state. Their elevated status will increase the convenience of receiving humanitarian assistance from UN bodies, and the Rakhine state will also be given protection by international law from the Myanmar government. Subsequently, the Myanmar government will be deterred from initiating conflict, unless it is willing to start war upon another sovereign entity.

Myanmar Civil War: The Myanmar Civil War can be deterred by condemning military involvement from other countries, including military aid from countries such as China and Russia. This would dissuade further escalation of the war.

Moreover, peace negotiations between relevant parties can help de-escalate the current civil war. The Rakhine state may attempt to seek reparations and independence from Myanmar, similar to how South Sudan became an independent country in 2011.

Colonization: Myanmar may attempt to seek reparations from the United Kingdom for their former colonization of the territory. However, considering how the current Myanmar government benefits from their colonial background, they may also attempt to pass resolutions that further affirm their power. This may include further reducing the political power of the Rohingya and the Arakan.

In contrast, the Rakhine state may seek to create resolutions that bridge the current inequality between different ethnic groups. This may include increased political representation, increased equality in voting procedures, and equal opportunities in regards to education, work, etc.

Displacement: Countries supporting the displaced Rohingya may consider the establishment of more official refugee camps in neighboring countries, although given the overpopulation of refugees in Bangladesh, the Bangladeshi government would likely be against the resolution.

Passing a resolution that grants UN membership to the Rakhine state can also mitigate the issue of displacement by establishing internationally recognized sovereignty. The formal recognition of the Rakhine state, independent of Myanmar, gives the Rohingya and the Araka indisputable

rights to live in the territory, with any acts of aggression from the Tatmadaw being a severe breach of international law.

Poverty: From the perspective of the Rakhine state, their poverty can be alleviated by humanitarian aid from relevant UN bodies and NGOs. Resolutions can encourage countries to give foreign aid to the Rohingya and the Araka, supporting recovery from the on-going civil war. A resolution can also be passed that aims to reduce the inequality between the Rohingya and the Myanmar government in an attempt to decrease forced unemployment in the Rohingya. Similarly, a resolution can be passed that encourages a certain profit cut for the workers in Rakhine State and grants the Araka greater autonomy over their resources, preventing the Myanmar government from siphoning resources without compensation.

VII. Recommendations for Resolution Writing including Research

Delegates writing their resolutions should consider solutions based on their relations with Myanmar. Countries that are economically and/or politically allied with Myanmar, such as China and Russia, should argue against the UN membership, commenting on matters, such as the violation of sovereignty. Although such countries cannot outwardly support a genocide, it is important to note that such countries can characterize the genocide otherwise. It is important to note that only a few UN Member States outwardly labeled the current conflict a genocide, with more resorting to more moderate terms.

On the other hand, countries that have previously condemned the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya should create resolutions that advocate for the UN membership of the Rakhine state. This can grant the Rakhine state international protection from the brutalities of the Myanmar government, in addition to addressing issues of inequality.

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