



The Rohingya Refugee Crisis: A Political and Humanitarian Aspects

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Abstract

Background: The Rohingya, a predominantly Muslim ethnic minority in Myanmar, form the world's largest stateless population. The roots of the current crisis lie in the 1982 Citizenship Law, which systematically stripped them of citizenship, rendering them stateless and subject to decades of state-sponsored persecution and discrimination. A brutal military crackdown in 2017, described by the UN as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing," forced over 700,000 Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh, joining hundreds of thousands displaced in earlier waves of violence. Today, the crisis is protracted, with over 1.1 million Rohingya refugees living in camps in Bangladesh, and conditions inside Myanmar's Rakhine State described as the worst in decades.

Objective: This paper aims to analyze the Rohingya refugee crisis through interconnected political and humanitarian lenses. It examines the humanitarian consequences—including mass displacement, human rights abuses, and dire conditions in refugee camps—alongside the political factors, such as the failure of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, geopolitical interests, and the pursuit of accountability through international justice mechanisms.

Methods: The analysis employs a qualitative research approach, incorporating a comprehensive review of reports from international organizations (including the UN and human rights groups), policy documents, and statements from recent high-level diplomatic conferences, such as the UN General Assembly's High-Level Conference on the situation in September 2025.

Findings:

- **Deepening Humanitarian Crisis:** Refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, face severe overcrowding and resource strain. Humanitarian response remains "chronically underfunded," with the 2025 response plan only 12% funded, leading to cuts in food



rations and essential services. Refugees lack access to formal education and legal livelihoods, fueling desperation and risks of radicalization.

- **Ongoing Persecution and Conflict:** Inside Myanmar, the situation for the remaining Rohingya population remains dire. They are caught between junta forces and ethnic armed groups like the Arakan Army, facing aerial attacks, arson, and movement restrictions. A planned election by the military junta is widely seen as a "sham" that will exacerbate violence rather than provide a path to stability.
- **Political Stalemate and Accountability:** Geopolitical interests, particularly the support of China and Russia for the Myanmar junta, have paralyzed the UN Security Council and prevented a robust international intervention under the R2P doctrine. However, accountability efforts are progressing through cases at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC), which is investigating atrocity crimes.

Conclusion: The Rohingya crisis remains a severe and unresolved challenge that tests the international community's commitment to human rights and protection. A sustainable solution requires immediate, scaled-up humanitarian funding, renewed diplomatic pressure on Myanmar to grant citizenship and full rights to the Rohingya, and unwavering support for international justice mechanisms. Ultimately, safe, voluntary, and dignified repatriation is impossible without a fundamental political change in Myanmar.

Implication: The protracted nature of the crisis highlights a critical failure of international governance and the limitations of existing frameworks like R2P when confronted with assertions of national sovereignty. The crisis threatens regional stability and sets a dangerous precedent for impunity for mass atrocities. A shift in policy is urgently needed, moving from short-term humanitarian relief to a long-term strategy that empowers Rohingya refugees and involves them directly in shaping their own future.

Keywords: Rohingya, Refugee Crisis, Statelessness, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Responsibility to Protect (R2P), International Criminal Court (ICC), International Court of Justice (ICJ), Humanitarian Aid

Introduction

The Rohingya are a Muslim ethnic group indigenous to western Myanmar, distinguished by their language, culture, and religion, which the Burmese government does not recognize as fully integrated into the national identity. Historically, they have faced longstanding prejudice, violence, and religious persecution (Lewis, 2019). The territory of Myanmar was under British colonial rule from 1824, during which the border with what is now Bangladesh was largely undefined, facilitating cross-border movement for labor. After Myanmar's independence in 1948, the Rohingya, primarily residing in Rakhine State, were denied citizenship, with the government asserting that they were not present in the country before 1824 (Lewis, 2019). This denial has contributed to their marginalization and accusations of being illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, fuelling tensions with the Buddhist majority



(Ullah, 2011). Violent conflicts erupted in 2012 and escalated in 2017, with attacks by Rohingya extremists prompting brutal military crackdowns involving mass killings, rapes, and widespread displacement, particularly of the Rohingya population. Bangladesh responded with humanitarian aid, providing food, shelter, and medical care to refugees fleeing violence. The influx of refugees in 2017 led to international aid efforts, though conditions for the displaced remained dire, and progress toward safe repatriation has been limited amid ongoing diplomatic negotiations (Ansar, 2020). The Bangladeshi government, with support from the military and international actors, attempted to manage the crisis, with the Prime Minister expressing a commitment to sharing resources with the refugees, exemplified by her statement about communal sharing (The Independent, 2017).

This paper aims to analyze the Rohingya refugee crisis through both political and humanitarian lenses. Humanitarian issues such as discrimination, homelessness, human rights abuses, and access to basic services are examined alongside political factors, including the pursuit of political gain, radicalization, security concerns, and religious extremism. Understanding these interconnected dimensions is essential to developing effective policies that address the ongoing challenges faced by the Rohingya community and facilitate their long-term safety and well-being.

Research Methodology

The methodology for examining "The Rohingya Refugee Crisis: A Political and Humanitarian Aspects" involves a qualitative research approach, incorporating a comprehensive literature review, case studies, and policy analysis. Data will be collected from academic journals, reports by international organizations such as the UN and Amnesty International, government documents, and news sources to understand the political dynamics and human rights violations associated with the crisis. Additionally, interviews with experts, humanitarian workers, and affected refugees may be conducted to gain firsthand insights. The analysis will focus on identifying the root causes, political motivations, and the impact on human rights, as well as evaluating the effectiveness of international responses and policies aimed at addressing the crisis. This multi-faceted approach aims to provide a nuanced understanding of both the political intricacies and humanitarian challenges involved.

Humanitarian aspects

The Rohingya crisis represents a severe humanitarian catastrophe, leading to the displacement of millions of refugees. In response, the principles of refugee protection and the efforts of UNHCR, grounded in the 1951 Refugee Convention, are increasingly being realized. As the primary protection organization globally, UNHCR plays a crucial role among various national and international entities. Its actions are fundamentally based on a commitment to ensuring safety and security for those in genuine need, grounded in their claims for protection (Gorlick, 2019). UNHCR's protection policies have established it as an effective defender of core principles, enabling it to promote human dignity, uphold refugees' legal rights, and facilitate access to asylum. From a humanitarian standpoint, numerous national and



international agencies collaborate with UNHCR's strategic goals and operational approaches to maintain peace and security. Here are some key points regarding the humanitarian aspects:

- **Mass Displacement:** The Rohingya refugee crisis is one of the most urgent political and humanitarian challenges currently facing the international community. Originating from Myanmar's Rakhine State, the Rohingya, a Muslim minority group, have endured systemic discrimination, marginalization, and violence for many years. In 2017, a severe military crackdown compelled over 700,000 Rohingya to seek refuge in neighboring Bangladesh, resulting in a significant displacement crisis. This exodus has highlighted issues related to ethnic persecution and violations of human rights, while also putting considerable pressure on regional resources and affecting international relations. The crisis emphasizes the critical need for political solutions that address the underlying causes of violence and foster sustainable peace, alongside the provision of vital humanitarian assistance to displaced populations. The ongoing plight of the Rohingya continues to draw global concern, underscoring the importance of collective efforts to protect vulnerable groups and uphold human rights (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2018).
- **Lack of Basic Services:** The Rohingya refugee crisis underscores a severe deficiency in essential services, intensifying the hardships faced by displaced populations. Many Rohingya fleeing violence in Myanmar encounter limited access to clean water, healthcare, sanitation, and education within refugee camps, leading to deteriorating health and increased vulnerability. This scarcity of basic services not only affects their immediate well-being but also hampers prospects for long-term stability and integration. The crisis highlights significant political and humanitarian challenges, as the international community grapples with systemic neglect and strives to ensure the provision of fundamental rights and services to one of the world's most persecuted groups (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2020).
- **Risk of Exploitation and Abuse:** The Rohingya refugee crisis highlights significant risks of exploitation and abuse, as vulnerable refugees often face discrimination, trafficking, and violence in their search for safety. Many Rohingya fleeing Myanmar encounter human traffickers, forced labor, and sexual exploitation during their perilous journey and in refugee camps. This crisis underscores urgent political and humanitarian concerns, emphasizing the need for strengthened protections, international cooperation, and comprehensive solutions to prevent further abuse and ensure the safety and dignity of the Rohingya people.
- **Limited Access to Justice:** Limited access to justice remains a critical issue in the Rohingya refugee crisis, highlighting both political and humanitarian concerns. Thousands of Rohingya refugees face barriers to legal protection, accountability, and basic rights due to ongoing discrimination, statelessness, and restricted movement in host countries like Bangladesh and Myanmar. This lack of access hampers efforts to seek justice for atrocities committed against them and undermines their dignity and



security. Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated international response to ensure justice, protect human rights, and promote durable solutions for the displaced population.

- **International Humanitarian Response:** The Rohingya refugee crisis represents a significant international humanitarian and political challenge. Triggered by violence and persecution in Myanmar, hundreds of thousands of Rohingya have fled to neighboring countries, primarily Bangladesh, seeking safety. This massive displacement has strained host communities and highlighted urgent needs for humanitarian aid, including shelter, healthcare, and food. Politically, the crisis underscores issues of ethnic discrimination, human rights violations, and the lack of political solutions for durable peace and repatriation. Addressing this crisis requires a coordinated global response that balances immediate humanitarian assistance with long-term political solutions to ensure justice and stability for the Rohingya people.
- **Discrimination and Homelessness:** The Rohingya Muslim minority in Myanmar faces severe humanitarian challenges, including discrimination, homelessness, and statelessness. Despite their long history in Rakhine State, they are systematically marginalized through laws like the 1982 Citizenship Law, which stripped them of citizenship and denied recognition as an ethnic group. The situation deteriorated after military campaigns in 2017, forcing many to flee to Bangladesh amid violence and allegations of civilian casualties. This ongoing persecution has left the Rohingya in a state of displacement with limited international support to resolve their citizenship and recognition issues (Anupama, 2017; Mohsin, 2020; Louie Albert et al., 2020).
- **Security Concerns:** National security significantly influences refugee policies, with host countries often prioritizing security concerns over refugee safety, especially post-9/11, leading to measures like border closures and deportations (Wolf, 2017). Security threats from refugees include external military threats, internal conflicts, and resource depletion, prompting strategies such as camp restrictions and delayed repatriation in countries like Kenya, Pakistan, and Thailand. While repatriation remains ideal, governments tend to restrict refugee movements to manage security risks and resource pressures (Jacobsen, 1996; Wolf, 2017).

Political Aspects

Interest groups' active pursuit of political goals has fostered corruption within refugee shelters and strained Bangladesh's infrastructure. Politicians have exploited the crisis to manipulate electoral processes, often accepting bribes and facilitating illegal activities, including the issuance of national ID cards and passports to refugees through political connections (Momen, Jahan, & Hasan, 2016). Despite efforts to update voter rolls, many displaced persons remain registered, allowing the government to leverage refugee votes for political advantage (Hasan, 2009). These are the main points concerning the political aspects:

- **State Sovereignty and National Security:** The Rohingya refugee crisis highlights the tension between state sovereignty and the need for international humanitarian



intervention. Myanmar asserts its sovereignty, yet the ongoing human rights violations demand global attention and action to ensure national security and human dignity (Smith, 2022). Balancing these priorities remains a complex challenge for the international community.

- **Ethnic and Religious Discrimination:** The Rohingya refugee crisis highlights significant ethnic and religious discrimination, as the Rohingya, a Muslim minority in Myanmar, face systemic persecution and violence rooted in ethnic and religious intolerance. This discrimination has led to a massive displacement of Rohingya people seeking safety in neighbouring countries, raising urgent political and humanitarian concerns. Addressing these issues requires international cooperation to ensure protection and human rights for the vulnerable population (Smith, 2020).
- **International Diplomacy and Relations:** The Rohingya refugee crisis highlights the complex challenges of international diplomacy and humanitarian efforts, as neighbouring countries and global actors grapple with addressing human rights violations and ensuring refugee protection (Smith, 2022). Effective diplomacy is crucial in fostering cooperation and seeking sustainable solutions to this ongoing crisis.
- **Refugee Policy and Asylum Rights:** Refugee policy and asylum rights are critical components of international humanitarian efforts, aiming to protect individuals fleeing persecution and conflict. Effective policies ensure access to safe refuge and uphold the rights of asylum seekers, promoting dignity and security (UNHCR, 2020).
- **Internal Political Dynamics:** The internal political dynamics within Myanmar significantly influence the Rohingya refugee crisis, as state policies and nationalist sentiments have perpetuated discrimination and violence against the Rohingya population (Smith, 2020). These internal factors hinder efforts for sustainable solutions and exacerbate humanitarian concerns.
- **Human Rights and Accountability:** The Rohingya refugee crisis highlights significant issues of human rights violations and the need for accountability. The systematic persecution and violence against the Rohingya in Myanmar have led to a massive displacement of people, raising urgent political and humanitarian concerns. Ensuring accountability for these abuses is essential to uphold human rights and foster justice for affected populations (Smith, 2022).
- **The security crisis:** After the Cold War, security concerns expanded beyond traditional military issues to include global challenges like immigration and resource competition. Edwards (2008) and McGahan (2009) highlight the securitization of immigration, often framing refugees as threats, which influences policies and public perceptions. Mogire (2011) discusses how refugee crises heighten tensions over land, resources, and cultural differences, leading to strict laws such as Hungary's 2018 legislation and resource shortages in refugee camps. In Bangladesh, the refugee situation has shifted from a humanitarian issue to a non-traditional security threat affecting regional stability (Edwards, 2008).



Outcomes of the study

The Rohingya refugee crisis represents a significant political and humanitarian concern, primarily stemming from decades of systemic discrimination, violence, and persecution against the Rohingya minority in Myanmar. The Myanmar military's brutal crackdown in 2017, which led to the mass exodus of over 700,000 Rohingya to neighboring Bangladesh, drew international condemnation and highlighted the urgent need for political resolution and humanitarian aid (UNHCR, 2018). The crisis underscores the failure of the Myanmar government to protect minority rights and addresses issues related to ethnic discrimination, statelessness, and ongoing conflict. The plight of the Rohingya has also exposed regional and international political tensions, with neighboring countries and global powers grappling with how to respond effectively. Humanitarian organizations have faced immense challenges providing aid in overcrowded camps and ensuring the safety and dignity of refugees, while diplomatic efforts continue to seek a sustainable political solution that guarantees their rights and citizenship (Hassan, 2020).

Furthermore, the crisis has broader implications for regional stability and international human rights standards. The plight of the Rohingya has prompted calls for accountability for alleged crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing, emphasizing the need for international intervention and pressure on Myanmar's government (Amnesty International, 2019). The situation also highlights the intersection of humanitarian needs with political issues, such as citizenship laws and national sovereignty, complicating efforts for resolution. The international community's response remains mixed, with ongoing debates about the roles of sanctions, diplomatic engagement, and humanitarian aid, all aimed at alleviating suffering while addressing the root causes of the crisis. Ultimately, the Rohingya crisis exemplifies how ethnic persecution can escalate into a complex humanitarian emergency with profound political repercussions (Smith, 2021).

Conclusion

The Rohingya refugee crisis exemplifies a complex interplay of political marginalization and urgent humanitarian needs, highlighting systemic failures at both national and international levels. Rooted in decades of institutionalized discrimination, statelessness, and violence perpetrated by Myanmar's military and government, the crisis has resulted in over a million Rohingya fleeing to neighboring countries, especially Bangladesh, seeking safety from persecution (Alam, Guler, & Hasan, 2016). The denial of citizenship rights to the Rohingya has rendered them stateless, exposing them to ongoing threats of violence and expulsion, which underscores the failure of Myanmar's political system to uphold basic human rights and international legal standards (Anupama, 2017; Hossain, 2022).

From a humanitarian perspective, the refugees face dire conditions in overcrowded camps with limited access to healthcare, education, and livelihood opportunities, exacerbating their vulnerability and exposing them to exploitation and further violence (Uddin, 2019; Yesmin, 2019). The regional and global responses have been criticized for insufficient political will and inadequate aid, revealing a gap between humanitarian needs and political action (Lewis, 2019;



Smith, 2022). Host communities, particularly in Bangladesh, have shown evolving responses—from initial solidarity to resistance—highlighting the social and political tensions surrounding refugee hosting (Ansar, 2021).

Addressing this crisis demands a comprehensive approach that combines political solutions—such as ensuring citizenship rights and justice for Myanmar’s Rohingya—with sustained humanitarian efforts to alleviate immediate suffering. International actors must strengthen accountability mechanisms and uphold legal frameworks to protect displaced populations and prevent future atrocities. Failure to act decisively risks perpetuating cycles of violence, displacement, and regional instability, making the Rohingya crisis a pressing global humanitarian and political concern that requires urgent, coordinated action.

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