

**Houston Area
Model United Nations
Standard Committee**



UNHCR

Topic A

Chair | Siddarth Khurana

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Rohingya Crisis

Letter from the Chair:

Hello and welcome to the 46th edition of the Houston Area Model United Nations Conference. These two days will involve debates, discussions, and deliberations over pressing global issues and will give all you delegates a chance to develop your personal speaking skills as well as your knowledge in international relations.

My name is Siddharth Khurana and I will be your chair for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Committee. I am a sophomore at the University of Texas at Austin double majoring in government and international relations, and minoring in history.

My Model United Nations experience began with my second year in high school, when I joined my school's chapter of the organization. That year, I attended HAMUN, representing South Korea in the Human Rights Committee. In junior year, I became vice president of my school's club and worked to expand our membership. At HAMUN 44, I participated in a Crisis Committee involving Avatar: The Last Airbender, representing the Water Tribes. My three year involvement with HAMUN in high school inspired me to pursue moderating in college; this is the second year I will be a chair at HAMUN. Last year, I led DISEC, and we discussed arms proliferation in Russia as well as growing tensions between India and Pakistan in Kashmir. I also was a staffer at CTMUN, a conference hosted by UT.

This year, the topics of the UNHCR are resolving the Rohingya refugee crisis in Myanmar and the enhancement of food security in refugee camps. Both are pressing topics of global importance and I look forward to hearing your thoughts on the matters.

I will briefly summarize these topics. First, the Rohingya: in August of 2017, a crackdown by Myanmar's army forced thousands of Rohingya, who are a mostly Muslim minority, fleeing across the border into Bangladesh; since then, there have been numerous allegations of genocide against the Myanmar government. Second, the issue of food security in refugee camps. This largely affects Middle Eastern and African settlers, who are disproportionately influenced by the refugee crisis. Ensuring that food can safely get to such camps and that they are consumed by refugees is a top priority.

In short, I anticipate your reflections and thoughts on these pressing issues. I hope that each of you will be prepared with both your country's viewpoints as well as those of others. Lastly, I aim for all of you to have an enjoyable conference.

Thank you, Siddharth Khurana.



Committee Background:

The UNHCR, also known as The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, was founded in 1950, following the deadly and catastrophic events of World War II. The 1951 Refugee Convention established the scope and legal framework of the agency's work. Its initial purpose was to assist the millions of European refugees who had fled or left their homes during the conflict. While the initial mandate of the organization was only three years, the UNHCR is still one of the world's leading refugee-support structures.

For its work in Europe, the UNHCR won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1954. Its next major initiative was during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, when millions of that country's citizens fled to neighboring Austria. UNHCR's actions during this crisis formed the framework of future refugee assistance programs. The 1967 Protocol to the Refugee Convention expanded the geographic and temporal scope of refugee assistance, and during the 1960s, decolonization movements within Asia and Africa once again necessitated the involvement of the UNHCR. Their work in those two continents led to another Nobel Peace Prize in the 1980s.

In the twenty-first century, the UNHCR has had to adapt to the unique complexities of a modern era. While it has continued its previous work by aiding refugees throughout the world, it has also used its expertise to help those internally displaced by conflict as well as stateless people. According to the UN website, many national governments have expanded their constitutions to facilitate a greater role from the UNHCR and similar groups.

UNHCR now has more than 17,324 personnel. They work in a total of 135 countries and their budget, which in its first year was US\$300,000, grew to US\$8.6 billion in 2019. Headed by the Italian diplomat Filippo Grandi, the UNHCR gets most of its financial resources from the United States, Europe, and individual donors. It is one of the largest UN organizations by expenditure, and as of 2020, has assisted more than 50 million refugees. Among its most pressing concerns is the situation of the Rohingya in Myanmar.

Topic Overview:

Described by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres as "one of, if not the, most discriminated people in the world", the Rohingya are one of Myanmar's many ethnic minorities. Predominantly Muslim, they face high levels of prejudice in Myanmar, which is a largely Buddhist country. The group numbers about one million, and are the descendants of Arab traders who migrated to the region generations ago. In addition, they are largely concentrated in Rakhine State. Although Rohingya have been leaving Myanmar since at least the 1970s, the mass exodus began in August 2017.

On 25 August of 2017, Rohingya militants launched deadly attacks on over 30 police posts. In retaliation, troops, backed by radical Buddhist mobs, burned villages and attacked thousands of civilians. At least 6,700 Rohingya were killed and around 288 villages were completely destroyed. While UN investigators have accused Myanmar's military of "genocidal intent," the Myanmar government denies these claims.

Over half a million Rohingya are still believed to be living in Myanmar's Rohingya state. However, massive numbers of refugees have fled to Bangladesh. Kutupalong, the largest refugee settlement in the world according to UNHCR, is home to more than 600,000 refugees alone. In March 2019, Bangladesh announced they would not accept any more Rohingya, but many have stayed, leading to a mass humanitarian crisis within Bangladesh itself.

Background/Timeline:

The Rohingya have been in what is now modern-day Myanmar for centuries, yet many ethnic Burmese claim that they are outsiders. Religious and ethnic intolerance towards the largely Muslim Rohingya has been present for generations, but has accelerated in recent decades.

1977: Myanmar, then known as Burma, launches Operation Naga Min (Dragon King) in Rakhine State, stripping citizenship and political rights from the Rohingya.

1977-1978: Mass arrests, persecution, and bloody conflict drive over 200,000 Rohingya to neighboring Bangladesh. Bangladesh opens refugee camps and MSF (Doctors Without Borders) provide medical aid.

1979: Most of the Rohingya who fled are repatriated. 10,000 of those who remained in Bangladesh die, the majority of whom were children.

1989: Burma is renamed Myanmar, and the new government compels Rohingya to compulsory labor, rape, and executions. 250,000 more flee to Bangladesh.

1992: Another military crackdown occurs, and more Rohingya flee. However, refugee camps are closed, and hundreds of thousands are sent back to Myanmar.

2012: Riots break out between the Buddhist Rakhine and Rohingya following the murder of a Rakhine woman. A state of emergency was declared and 88 ended up dead.

2016: Crackdown by Myanmar military following the death of nine police officers lead to another exodus of Rohingya to Bangladesh.

2017: Continued repression leads to over 600,000 Rohingya crossing the border to Bangladesh.

2020: ICJ orders Myanmar to prevent genocidal violence and preserve evidence of past attacks.

Past UN Action:

The UNHCR has played a significant role in the Rohingya crisis, although it has come under fire for failing to adequately address the situation earlier. The UNHCR was in fact one of the groups that facilitated the repatriation of Rohingya to Myanmar back in the seventies. They also performed a similar role in 1992.

More recently, however, the UNHCR has provided aid to Bangladesh. According to the organization themselves, “in the opening days, weeks and months of the crisis, UNHCR airlifted more than 1,500 metric tons of emergency life-saving aid to Bangladesh – including blankets, plastic sheets, sleeping mats, family tents, plastic rolls, kitchen sets, jerry cans and buckets.”

The UNHCR is also working to build more refugee settlements in conjunction with the government of Bangladesh. This includes roads, buildings, and more. To improve sanitation and access to drinking water, latrines and toilets are being constructed. The group is also working to address situations of gender violence and the protection of children.

UNHCR has increased its presence in the field through the deployment of emergency teams and relief specialists in different sectors. We have 300 staff in Bangladesh, including 208 national colleagues. On 16 March 2018, the UN and its partners launched a Joint Response Plan (JRP) for the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis calling for US\$951 million to continue delivering lifesaving assistance from March to December 2018. The UNHCR also is working to address Bangladeshi capabilities during the monsoon season.

Current Situation:

More than two years after the Myanmar military's campaign of ethnic cleansing in northern Rakhine State, over 900,000 Rohingya refugees remain in overcrowded camps in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, now the largest concentration of encamped refugees in the world.

According to Human Rights Watch, "The FFM's final report in September 2019 found that the 600,000 Rohingya remaining in Rakhine State were still the target of a government campaign to eradicate their identity, and were living under "threat of genocide." The report found the laws, policies, and practices that underpin the government's persecution of the Rohingya—and which serve as causal factors for the killings, rapes and gang rapes, torture, and forced displacement by the military and other government authorities—remain in place."

Although representatives from the Myanmar government have come to the Bangladeshi refugee camps to offer repatriation, they are still refusing to offer citizenship to the Rohingya people. The UNHCR recommends that conditions in Myanmar are not currently conducive for voluntary returns of refugees in dignity and safety.

Blocs/Countries Affected:

Unlike many international conflicts, the concept of blocs does not particularly mesh well with the Rohingya crisis. The vast majority of countries and international organizations have denounced the actions of the Myanmar government as a genocide.

Myanmar- for decades the Myanmar government and military has been pursuing oppression of the Rohingya, and has

Bangladesh- the vast majority of Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh, and as aforementioned, the majority of UN initiatives have involved the refugee camps within the country.

India- supported Myanmar in their fight against "terrorism," although thousands of Rohingya have settled within the country.

China- has been one of the strongest supporters of Myanmar, but has worked to mediate between the varying governments involved.

The United States and most Western countries have denounced the Myanmar government's actions and accused them of genocide.

Discussion:

How should international organizations such as the UNHCR work to prevent the genocidal actions of the Myanmar government?

What are the best ways for the UN to aid the Bangladeshi government in the maintenance and security of Rohingya refugees?

Should Rohingya be integrated into Bangladeshi society, or should the focus be on reforming the Myanmar government?

What specific measures should be taken to improve the refugee camps within Bangladesh?

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