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Rohingya Refugees: A Crisis the World Can't Ignore

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Abstract

The Rohingya refugee crisis is one of the most pressing humanitarian issues in the world today. The Rohingya, a Muslim minority group from Myanmar, have faced decades of discrimination, statelessness, and violence. In 2017, a military crackdown forced hundreds of thousands to flee to neighboring Bangladesh, where they now live in overcrowded refugee camps with limited access to food, education, and healthcare. This abstract highlights the causes of the crisis, the daily struggles faced by refugees, and the lack of a strong international response. It emphasizes the urgent need for global attention, protection of human rights, and long-term solutions for the Rohingya people.

Introduction

The Rohingya are an ethnic Muslim minority from the Rakhine region of Myanmar. For many years, they have faced unfair treatment, including being denied citizenship, restricted movement, and limited access to education and healthcare. Although they have lived in Myanmar for generations, the government does not recognize them as citizens.

How the Rohingya Crisis Began

The crisis involving the Rohingya people is deeply rooted in Myanmar's history, dating back to the colonial era under British rule. During this period, many Muslim laborers were brought from what is now Bangladesh into the region of Myanmar, creating early ethnic tensions. After Myanmar gained independence in 1948, these tensions increased, particularly between the Buddhist majority and the Rohingya Muslim minority.

A major turning point came in 1982, when the government introduced a new citizenship law that excluded the Rohingya from the list of officially recognized ethnic groups. This effectively left them stateless and stripped them of key rights such as citizenship, the right to vote, access to government services, and freedom of movement.

Over time, the marginalization of the Rohingya worsened due to a rise in ethnic and religious nationalism. In Rakhine State, hostility grew between the Buddhist Rakhine and the Rohingya communities. The military regime, which controlled Myanmar for many years, promoted the belief that the Rohingya were illegal migrants and a threat to national unity, further fueling public distrust and discrimination.

In 2012, violent conflict broke out between Rohingya Muslims and Rakhine Buddhists, leading to many deaths and forcing thousands from their homes. Instead of protecting them, the government confined many Rohingya to camps, where they suffered neglect and abuse. The situation became even more severe in 2017, when the military launched a harsh operation following attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). Villages were burned, people were killed, and hundreds of thousands were forced to flee to Bangladesh.

Myanmar's refusal to recognize the Rohingya as citizens and its ongoing oppression turned what began as long-standing discrimination into a major humanitarian disaster.

Crisis Peaks in 2017

In August 2017, a group called ARSA attacked some army posts in Myanmar. In response, the Myanmar military started a violent operation against the Rohingya people. Many Rohingya villages were burned, and there were reports of killings, torture, and attacks on women and children. Thousands of families were forced to run from their homes. Human rights groups around the world said these actions were like ethnic cleansing or even genocide.

During this time, more than 700,000 Rohingya people escaped to Bangladesh. Their journey was very hard. They walked for days, crossed rivers, and faced many dangers. Most of them went to refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, where many other Rohingya were already living. These camps became overcrowded and didn't have enough food, water, toilets, or medical care.

The people in the camps faced not only physical problems but also emotional pain. They had lost their homes, loved ones, and didn't know what their future would be. Diseases like cholera and malnutrition spread in the camps. Although some international help arrived, the world has not solved the main problem. The Rohingya still cannot return home safely because they are not accepted as citizens in Myanmar.

Rohingya Refugees and Their Struggles

Today, most Rohingya refugees live in crowded camps in a place called Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. The shelters are made of bamboo and plastic sheets. People in the camps struggle to get clean water, food, healthcare, and education. Many children do not go to school, and some families have been living in the camps for years with no clear future.

According to **Amnesty International**, after the attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) on Myanmar's security posts on August 25, 2017, the Myanmar military carried out a brutal campaign across Rohingya villages. Soldiers killed men, women, and children; committed sexual violence against women and girls; arrested and tortured men and boys; and burned homes, shops, and mosques in hundreds of villages. The report details these actions, which have been classified as crimes against humanity under international law.

Global Initiatives and Responses to the Rohingya Refugee Crisis

The Rohingya crisis is not just a humanitarian problem, but also a difficult legal issue involving international law and refugee rights. The serious human rights abuses against the Rohingya—such as killings, sexual violence, and the burning of villages—are clear violations of international humanitarian law. Today, over one million Rohingya refugees live in crowded camps in Bangladesh, facing tough living conditions.

Myanmar does not recognize the Rohingya as citizens, mainly because of the 1982 Citizenship Law. This leaves them stateless and without legal protection. Because of this, they continue to face violence from the military and local groups.

International laws, like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1951 Refugee Convention, protect the rights of people who are forced to leave their homes. However, returning the Rohingya to Myanmar is difficult due to legal and political problems. Bangladesh has given them temporary shelter, but is cautious about giving them citizenship due to concerns over changes in its population.

Many international human rights groups have said that Myanmar's actions are crimes against humanity. They are calling for justice through courts like the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ). In 2019, The Gambia brought a case to the ICJ, accusing Myanmar of genocide. Still, Myanmar refuses to accept international help and says the crisis is an internal issue.

Legal actions and global pressure have not been very successful because of political problems and weak enforcement. While many countries support justice for the Rohingya, it is still hard to take strong, united action. The ongoing violence shows how hard it is to apply international laws in conflicts and to find lasting solutions.

Bangladesh's Role in Managing the Rohingya Refugee Situation

Bangladesh has played a vital role in helping Rohingya refugees despite many challenges. As the main country hosting the refugees, Bangladesh opened its borders to those fleeing violence in Myanmar and provided temporary shelter in Cox's Bazar, a district already facing economic and environmental problems. The local population, which was struggling with poverty and limited resources, has been further stressed by the sudden arrival of many refugees.

The Bangladesh government, with help from international groups, tried to supply food, water, and medical care, but the large number of refugees quickly became too much for the existing facilities. The crowded camps have led to social and economic difficulties, including competition for food and land. Poor sanitation and healthcare in the camps have also caused disease outbreaks. Even though Bangladesh keeps its borders open, the refugee crisis has become a sensitive political issue, as hosting over a million refugees is costly. Bangladesh has repeatedly asked the international community for help and wants Myanmar to take responsibility for allowing the refugees to return safely.

Despite these hardships, Bangladesh remains committed to helping the refugees and stresses the importance of finding a lasting solution. International organizations like the United Nations and the World Health Organization have supported Bangladesh, but long-term solutions are still missing. "Myanmar's refusal to guarantee safety and citizenship for the Rohingya has made it difficult to repatriate the refugees, leaving their future uncertain."

India's Response to the Rohingya Crisis

India has taken a careful and balanced approach to the Rohingya crisis. While the Indian government has expressed concern about the violence in Myanmar, it has avoided strongly criticizing the Myanmar military. This is because Myanmar is an important neighbor for India, especially in terms of trade, security, and countering China's growing influence in the region.

India has provided some humanitarian aid to help the refugees and has supported Bangladesh's efforts. However, India has not officially recognized the Rohingya as refugees and has even tried to send some Rohingya back to Myanmar. This has led to criticism from human rights groups.

India wants to solve the crisis through diplomacy. It has called for a peaceful return of the Rohingya to their homeland, but it has not put strong pressure on Myanmar. Overall, India's response has been shaped more by political and security interests than by human rights concerns.

Why This Crisis Matters

This is not just a regional issue—it's a human rights problem that affects us all. Every person deserves to live in safety and with dignity. The Rohingya have been pushed out of their own country and forgotten by many. If the world stays silent, their suffering will only continue.

The Urgent Need to Protect the Rohingya

The Rohingya refugee crisis shows what can happen when people are not treated fairly or equally. For many years, the Rohingya have faced discrimination, violence, and fear in their own country. They have lost their homes, their families, and their safety because their basic human rights were taken away. As a result, many have been forced to flee and live in refugee camps with very little support.

It is important for governments, communities, and each of us to speak up and take action. We must raise awareness, offer help, and push for justice. No one should have to live in fear because of who they are. When we all work together with kindness and care, we can give the Rohingya and others like them the chance to live safe, peaceful, and hopeful lives.

“Pathways to Lasting Solutions for the Rohingya Crisis”

Long-term solutions to the Rohingya refugee crisis must focus on ensuring justice, dignity, and security for displaced communities. A key challenge in resolving this crisis is the issue of repatriation, which has been slow and largely ineffective due to the continued instability in Myanmar. Many Rohingya refugees remain fearful of returning to their homeland because of ongoing military operations, lack of legal protections, and the absence of citizenship rights.

For any repatriation to be successful, Myanmar must take the first step by restoring the civil rights of the Rohingya, including citizenship, freedom of movement, and protection under the law. Without these basic guarantees, returning home remains a dangerous and unacceptable option for many refugees. Bangladesh, which continues to bear the humanitarian burden, also needs consistent international support to manage overcrowded camps and provide essential services.

The international community must act decisively. Diplomatic pressure on Myanmar to uphold international human rights standards, combined with humanitarian aid for host countries, is essential. Organizations working on the ground must be empowered to address both immediate and long-term needs, including education, healthcare, and psychosocial support.

Additionally, cooperation among regional powers—especially India, Bangladesh, and ASEAN members could help build a more sustainable and politically balanced solution. India, given its strategic influence, can play a crucial role in mediating dialogue between Myanmar and Bangladesh. Regional collaboration should also focus on preventing the crisis from being manipulated by broader geopolitical tensions.

Ultimately, a lasting solution must address both the symptoms and root causes of the crisis. That includes holding those responsible for violence accountable and ensuring that Rohingya voices are included in every stage of the peace-building and repatriation process. Without this, the cycle of displacement and suffering is likely to continue.

Conclusion

The **suffering** of the Rohingya people is not just a crisis for Myanmar or Bangladesh; it is a global test of our commitment to human rights, justice, and compassion. The world has watched as an entire community was stripped of its identity, violently uprooted, and forced into uncertain exile. While aid has helped them survive, survival is not the same as dignity or justice.

A long-term solution demands more than temporary shelters or short-term policies. It requires sustained international pressure on Myanmar to restore rights, ensure accountability, and recognize the Rohingya as rightful citizens. It also calls for greater support to host countries like Bangladesh, which have shouldered the burden with limited resources.

We need to see that the Rohingya crisis is part of a bigger problem: what happens when the world ignores unfair treatment. We cannot look away. Their future depends on people coming together, brave leadership, and the belief that everyone deserves a place to belong, a voice to be heard, and a life without fear

Literature Review

The Rohingya refugee crisis has been widely studied by academics, international organizations, and human rights groups, revealing the deep-rooted causes and ongoing challenges in addressing this humanitarian emergency. The literature largely agrees on several key themes: the statelessness of the Rohingya, the systemic

nature of the violence they have faced, the regional implications of their displacement, and the difficulties surrounding their repatriation.

In their 2025 research paper, "The Rohingya Crisis: A Humanitarian Disaster and its Impact on South Asia's Geopolitics", Dr. Rajbir Singh Dalal and Vinay Yadav discuss how the Rohingya crisis has become a major issue in the South Asian region.

The authors explain that while the crisis is mainly about human suffering, it also affects the political relationships between countries. Bangladesh, for example, has taken in a large number of Rohingya refugees and is carrying the biggest burden. The country is doing this mostly for humanitarian reasons.

On the other hand, India and China have responded more carefully. Both countries have strong political and economic connections with Myanmar, where the crisis began. Because of this, they are less willing to speak out or take action against Myanmar. Instead of focusing on helping the refugees, they are mainly thinking about what is best for their own national interests.

Dalal and Yadav show that, in this crisis, many countries are acting based on strategy and self-interest, rather than doing what is right for people in need.

In her article, "The Liminality of Rohingyas and Challenges to their Repatriation", Khandaker Fatema Zahra (2019) talks about how the Rohingya people live in an "in-between" situation. Because of a law made in Myanmar in 1982, they were not given citizenship. This means they are stuck without any legal rights or clear identity.

Zahra says this makes it very hard for them to return to Myanmar. Since they don't have official citizenship, they are almost "invisible" in the eyes of both Myanmar and international law. She believes that to solve this problem, the first step should be giving them legal recognition and restoring their citizenship rights

Amnesty International's 2018 report, "We Will Destroy Everything", offers critical documentation of atrocities committed by the Myanmar military during the 2017 crackdown in Rakhine State. The report provides chilling evidence of war crimes, including mass killings, rape, and the systematic burning of villages. Amnesty concludes that these acts amount to crimes against humanity under international law. This documentation plays a vital role in global legal efforts, including proceedings at the International Criminal Court (ICC) and International Court of Justice (ICJ), and underscores the urgency of international accountability.

Ty, R. (n.d.). The Rohingya Refugee Crisis: Contexts, Problems, and Solutions. Rey Ty's work examines the complex and ongoing Rohingya refugee crisis by exploring its historical and political context, identifying key issues faced by the displaced population, and proposing possible solutions. The text provides a comprehensive overview of the root causes of the crisis, such as systemic discrimination, statelessness, and violence against the Rohingya in Myanmar. Ty also offers insights into international responses and the roles of regional actors. This work contributes valuable perspectives to the broader discussion on forced migration, human rights, and international accountability.

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