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with the 2030 United Nations agenda.”*



Committee: GA3 - Social, Cultural, and Humanitarian Council

Agenda Item: Protection of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar and Addressing the Humanitarian Crisis in Cox's Bazar

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Introduction

In August 2017, over 750,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh following violent military crackdowns in Myanmar's Rakhine State (UNHCR). This sudden mass displacement was not an isolated event, but the result of decades of discrimination, exclusion, and violence faced by the Rohingya Muslim minority in Myanmar. For many years, the Rohingya were denied citizenship, freedom of movement, and access to basic rights such as education and healthcare, leaving them one of the most vulnerable communities in the world.

The military operations carried out in 2017 involved widespread destruction of villages, killings, and serious human rights abuses, forcing Rohingya families to escape with little more than their lives. As a result, most Rohingya refugees crossed the border into Bangladesh, where they were settled in temporary camps in the Cox's Bazar region. Over time, these camps grew rapidly and turned into the largest refugee settlement in the world, hosting more than one million people in extremely crowded conditions.

Today, the Rohingya crisis is no longer only a refugee issue but a long-term humanitarian emergency. Refugees in Cox's Bazar face limited access to education, restrictions on employment, safety concerns, and increasing pressure due to funding shortages and environmental risks such as floods and fires.

At the same time, conditions in Myanmar remain unsafe, making return impossible for most refugees. This situation has created a prolonged crisis that affects not only the Rohingya population but also regional stability and international responsibility-sharing, highlighting the urgent need for sustainable and rights-based solutions.

Definition of Significant Terms

Rohingya

A Muslim ethnic minority group historically residing in Myanmar's Rakhine State, however not officially recognized as one of the country's ethnic nationalities.

Statelessness

The condition of not being recognized as a citizen by any state. The majority of Rohingya are legally stateless.

Non-refoulement

A core principle of international refugee law prohibiting the forced return of refugees to a place where they face serious threats to life or freedom.

IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons)

Individuals forced to flee their homes but who remain within their country's borders.

Crimes against humanity / Genocide

Categories of international crimes involving widespread or systematic attacks against civilians, currently examined in relation to the Rohingya case.

Cox's Bazar

A coastal district in southeastern Bangladesh hosting the world's largest refugee camp complex.

The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA)

A Rohingya armed group that emerged around 2016 in Myanmar's Rakhine State and gained attention after attacking Myanmar security posts in August 2017, an event that was followed by large-scale military operations and mass displacement of Rohingya civilians.

Exodus

A mass departure of a group of people.

Detailed Background of the Issue

The Roots of the Rohingya Crisis

The crisis that exploded in 2017 was actually the result of decades of systemic exclusion in Myanmar. Even though the Rohingya have lived in Rakhine State for generations, they have been treated as outsiders for a very extended amount of time. A major turning point occurred in 1982, when a new Citizenship Law effectively stripped them of their legal identity by excluding them from the list of recognized ethnic groups.

This legal move turned the Rohingya into stateless people in their own home. Without citizenships, they faced harsh restrictions on almost every part of their lives, including where they could travel, who they could marry, and whether they could go to school or even see a doctor. By the time violence flared up in 2012, many were already being pushed into segregated camps and cut off from the rest of society.

The 2017 Crackdown and Mass Displacement

Everything reached a breaking point in August of 2017. After a militant group called ARSA attacked security posts, the Myanmar military responded with a massive and brutal campaign in northern Rakhine. The crackdown was horrifying, involving the destruction of entire villages and widespread violence against civilians.

The scale of the exodus was staggering. In just a few months, over 750,000 Rohingya fled across the border into Bangladesh, which became one of the fastest refugee movements in history. While international human rights groups have labeled these actions as ethnic cleansing or genocide, the core issues that drove the violence in Myanmar have never been addressed.

Life in the Cox's Bazar Refugee Camps

At the moment, most of these refugees live in the Cox's Bazar district of Bangladesh. Although all of this had started as a temporary refuge, the issue has grown into the largest camp complex in the world. While Bangladesh was quick to offer help at first, the sheer number of people has put a massive strain on the local infrastructure and, as well as resources.

Today, more than a million people are living in extremely cramped conditions and are almost entirely dependent on international aid to survive. Because they aren't legally allowed to work and have very little access to formal education, life is a constant struggle. Additionally, the camps and overall life conditions are significantly dangerous, as families have to deal with frequent fires, flooding from monsoons, and the constant threat of human trafficking.

Current Situation and Ongoing Challenges

Funding is starting to run thin, which means smaller food rations and less medical care for the people in the camps. Meanwhile, Myanmar is still far too dangerous for them to go back. Between the ongoing political instability and the fact that the government still doesn't guarantee them basic rights or citizenship, refugees are understandably terrified of returning.

This has left the Rohingya trapped in a state of uncertainty, as they are caught between a home that won't take them back and a future in Bangladesh that remains totally uninterpretable. It is a massive challenge that the rest of the world is still struggling to solve.

Timeline of Key Events

1948	Myanmar's independence. Rohingya Muslims were gradually excluded from national identity frameworks despite long-term residence in Rakhine State.
1962	A military coup led to systematic discrimination against ethnic minorities, including restrictions on Rohingya movement, education, and access to public services.
1982	Myanmar passed the 1982 Citizenship Law, denying Rohingya citizenship and rendering the majority of the population stateless, a core humanitarian and human rights concern.

1991 - 1992	Military operations in Rakhine State forced approximately 250,000 Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh, highlighting early patterns of forced displacement.
2012	Rohingya communities were confined to camps with severe restrictions on freedom of movement and access to healthcare and education.
October 2016	Myanmar military operations resulted in reports of widespread human rights violations, increasing humanitarian needs, and displacement.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Myanmar:

Myanmar is the country of origin of the Rohingya population and remains central to the crisis. The Government of Myanmar has historically denied Rohingya citizenship under the 1982 Citizenship Law and has imposed severe restrictions on their movement and legal recognition. Military operations since 2017 have been widely linked to human rights violations. Myanmar maintains that security concerns justify its actions, while international bodies emphasise the state's responsibility to protect civilians and ensure accountability.

Bangladesh:

Bangladesh is the primary host country for Rohingya refugees, currently sheltering over one million individuals in Cox's Bazar. While Bangladesh has received international recognition for its humanitarian response and open-border policy, it has consistently emphasised that the situation places immense pressure on national resources and local communities. It advocates and supports the principle of safe, voluntary, and dignified repatriation of Rohingya to Myanmar.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees:

UNHCR plays a leading role in providing protection, shelter, registration, and legal assistance to Rohingya refugees. The organization emphasizes the importance of refugee protection and durable solutions. UNHCR consistently highlights that repatriation cannot occur without guarantees of safety, citizenship rights, and respect for human rights in Myanmar.

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund:

UNICEF focuses on the protection and welfare of children who make up a significant proportion of the refugee population. Its work centers on access to education, child protection services, nutrition, and healthcare. UNICEF warns that prolonged displacement and limited educational opportunities risk creating a "lost generation" of Rohingya youth.

World Food Programme:

The World Food Programme is responsible for food assistance in Cox's Bazar. WFP has repeatedly raised concerns regarding funding shortages, warning that reductions in aid could worsen malnutrition and food security. The organization calls for sustained donor support to maintain basic humanitarian standards in the camps.

International Non-Governmental Organizations:

International NGOs such as Save the Children and Human Rights Watch are actively involved in healthcare delivery, education, protection services, and human rights documentation. These organizations address accountability and increase humanitarian funding. It emphasizes the vulnerability of women, children, and marginalized groups within the camps.

International Criminal Court:

The International Criminal Court plays a significant role in addressing accountability for crimes committed against the Rohingya. In 2019, the ICC authorized an investigation into alleged crimes against humanity, particularly deportation and persecution, directly linked to the forced displacement of Rohingya from Myanmar into Bangladesh. Although Myanmar is not a party to the Rome Statute, the court asserts jurisdiction due to Bangladesh's ICC membership. The ICC's involvement underscores the international community's emphasis on justice, accountability, and deterrence of future atrocities.

International Court of Justice:

The International Court of Justice addresses the responsibility of states under international law. In 2020, the ICJ ordered provisional measures requiring Myanmar to prevent acts of genocide and preserve evidence related to alleged crimes against the Rohingya. While the ICJ doesn't prosecute individuals, its proceedings highlight state accountability and reinforce international legal obligations to protect vulnerable populations.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

UN Human Rights Council Resolution 34/22 (Geneva, 2017)

In March 2017, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) adopted Resolution 34/22, establishing an independent international fact-finding mission to investigate human-rights abuses in Myanmar's Rakhine State (UNHRC). This mission was mandated to gather evidence of alleged violations by the military and security forces, laying the groundwork for later accountability processes.

Advisory Commission on Rakhine State (Naypyidaw, 2017)

Led by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State released its final report in August 2017. The report urged Myanmar's government to lift restrictions on movement, ensure humanitarian access, review discriminatory citizenship laws, and address segregation and marginalisation (Amnesty International). While the commission provided a detailed roadmap, most of its recommendations remain unimplemented.

Bangladesh–Myanmar Bilateral Repatriation Agreements (Dhaka, 2017 and 2018)

Bangladesh and Myanmar signed an initial Repatriation Agreement on 23 November 2017, establishing a Joint Working Group and aiming to begin returns within two months (The Guardian). A second agreement in January 2018 proposed returning up to 1,500 refugees per day (East Asia Forum). Rights groups and refugees criticised these plans for lacking citizenship guarantees and credible security assurances, and no large-scale returns have taken place. (Al Jazeera).

Tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (Naypyidaw, 2018)

On the 6th June 2018, Myanmar signed a tripartite memorandum of understanding with the UNHCR and the UN Development Programme (UNDP). The MoU aimed to create conditions for voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable repatriation of Rohingya refugees and to support longer-term development in Rakhine State (UNHCR). Implementation has been slow, and refugees remain unwilling to return without citizenship and security guarantees.

International Court of Justice (The Hague, 2020)

In January 2020, the International Court of Justice issued provisional measures in the case brought by The Gambia under the Genocide Convention. The Court ordered Myanmar to prevent genocidal acts against the Rohingya, preserve evidence, and report on compliance (Human Rights Watch). The legally binding order increased international pressure but has yet to translate into tangible protection on the ground.

UN General Assembly Resolution 75/238 (New York, 2020)

The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on 30 October 2020 condemning human-rights abuses in Myanmar and emphasizing that any returns of Rohingya refugees must be voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable (UN). The resolution called on Myanmar to address root causes, including revising the 1982 Citizenship Law, and stressed the need for accountability.

ASEAN Five-Point Consensus (Jakarta, 2021)

At an emergency summit in April 2021, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Myanmar's junta leader agreed on a Five-Point Consensus: 1, an immediate end to violence; 2, dialogue among all parties; 3, appointment of a special envoy; 4, humanitarian assistance; and 5, the envoy's visit to meet all parties (Human Rights Watch). The agreement marked a regional diplomatic effort but has seen little progress, with violence and restrictions continuing.

UN Security Council Resolution 2669 (New York, 2022)

In December 2022, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2669, demanding an end to violence in Myanmar, the release of arbitrarily detained prisoners, and respect for democratic processes (UN). The resolution underscores the need to address root causes in Rakhine State and calls for conditions conducive to safe, dignified, voluntary return of Rohingya refugees, while also urging full implementation of ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus.

General Observations

Unfortunately, implementation has been poor despite a number of resolutions, agreements, and legal procedures. International fact-finding and legal actions have not yet resulted in accountability or safe conditions for return, and bilateral repatriation agreements failed because of a lack of trust and protection. Non-interference norms have harmed regional diplomacy through ASEAN. Humanitarian organizations in Cox's Bazar continue to support refugees and push for long-term solutions, but financial constraints and political impasses continue to exist.

Alternative Solutions

Addressing the Rohingya crisis requires a comprehensive and sustained humanitarian approach that goes beyond short-term emergency responses. One alternative solution is strengthening international humanitarian assistance through long-term and predictable funding mechanisms. Consistent financial support would allow humanitarian actors to maintain essential services such as food distribution, healthcare, shelter, water, and sanitation in Cox's Bazar, while also enabling better planning for protracted displacement.

In addition to funding, enhancing protection mechanisms within refugee camps remains a critical priority. Improved protection systems, increased monitoring, and accessible reporting mechanisms for abuse could help address risks such as gender-based violence, trafficking, and

exploitation. Ensuring the safety and dignity of refugees, particularly women, children, and other vulnerable groups, aligns closely with SOCHUM's human rights and social protection mandate.

Expanding access to education and skills development represents another long-term solution to reduce vulnerability and dependency. Providing inclusive educational opportunities, informal learning programs, and vocational training for Rohingya children and youth may help prevent the emergence of a lost generation while promoting resilience, social cohesion, and future self-reliance. Education also plays a key role in protecting children from early marriage, child labor, and recruitment by criminal networks.

Supporting host communities is equally essential to the sustainability of humanitarian efforts. Investment in local infrastructure and environmental rehabilitation in Cox's Bazar could ease pressure on host populations and reduce social tension. Balanced assistance that benefits both refugees and local communities may foster coexistence and long-term stability in the region.

While SOCHUM doesn't directly enforce legal accountability, continued international advocacy for human rights and justice remains an important alternative approach. Encouraging cooperation with international legal mechanisms, documentation of violations, and diplomatic engagement may contribute to accountability and help deter future abuses against the Rohingya population.

Finally, durable solutions should be explored alongside humanitarian assistance. While voluntary, safe, and dignified repatriation remains the preferred outcome, alternative pathways such as third country resettlement or temporary legal arrangements may help alleviate pressure on host countries. A coordinated regional and international response is necessary to ensure that any long-term solution upholds the rights, safety, and dignity of the Rohingya people.

Useful Links

Amnesty International <https://www.amnesty.org>

Provides advocacy reports and research on human rights violations and protection concerns

Human Rights Watch (HRW) <https://www.hrw.org>

Offers detailed human rights reports and analysis on conditions in Myanmar and refugee camps

International Criminal Court (ICC) <https://www.icc-cpi.int>

Provides information on investigations related to crimes against humanity concerning the Rohingya

International Court of Justice (ICJ) <https://www.icj-cij.org>

Includes official case documents and provisional measures concerning allegations of genocide against Myanmar

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

<https://www.ohchr.org>

Documents human rights violations, investigative reports, and advocacy related to the Rohingya crisis

Rohingya Refugee Response – Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG)

<https://rohingyaresponse.org>

Central platform for humanitarian response plans, situation reports, and sectoral analysis in Cox's Bazar

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) <https://www.unicef.org>

Offers information on child protection, education, nutrition, and health issues affecting Rohingya children

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) <https://www.unhcr.org>

Provides official data, protection frameworks, and updates on Rohingya refugees and displacement in Cox's Bazar

World Food Programme (WFP) <https://www.wfp.org>

Contains reports on food security, humanitarian assistance, and funding gaps in refugee camps

World Health Organization (WHO) <https://www.who.int>

Includes health-related data and emergency response information for refugee populations

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