The Question of Immediate Humanitarian Aid for the Rohingya

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Introduction

Humanitarian aid has been an integral part of life, and is provided for those trapped in a humanitarian crisis with the objective of saving and protecting lives, ending suffering, and preserving mental stability. Humanitarian aid may be provided after the onset of a natural disaster / debilitating crisis, or to those who are persecuted for ethnic and inhumane reasons. A key example of this would be the plight of the Rohingya people. The Rohingya are a muslim minority who identify the state of Rakhine as their homeland. They have clashed with the native Rakhine people and the Burmese government repeatedly. In modern Myanmar, however, the government does not recognize them as citizens and has persecuted them. Thus, the Rohingya have fled to refugee camps in Thailand and Burma - only to once more face harsh persecution. They have been described as the most targeted ethnic group in the world, and Myanmar recognizes them as “Bengalis” (from Bangladesh).
Definition of Key Terms

**Humanitarian aid:** Aid given to those trapped in a humanitarian crisis (natural disasters, persecution, debilitating poverty, etc) designed to save lives and improve quality of life.

**Persecution:** Condemnation and anger towards a person/persons due to their ethnicity or beliefs.

**Ethnic group:** A group of individuals who share common ancestry, tradition and/or religious belief.

**Rohingya People:** A muslim ethnic minority of 1.4 to 2 million individuals that has been persecuted in Myanmar, and are currently fleeing to refugee camps in other states. They are targeted despite the fact that the region - namely, the Rakhine state - is their ancestral home.

**Myanmar:** An east asian country, (formerly known as Burma) ancestral home of the Rohingya. They have been persecuted by order of the government under the Burmese Basic Law of General Ne Win (died in 2002).

**Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia:** East Asian countries that the Rohingya have moved to on foot or by boat to be placed in refugee camps.

**Rakhine People:** An ethnic group living in the Rakhine state - separate from the Rohingya.
The plight of the Rohingya people first began during the Rakhine State massacres of 1942, in which Rohingya and Rakhine people violently clashed after the withdrawal of British forces from the said state. It should be noted that the Rohingya were armed by the British.

In 2012, the Rohingya and Rakhine clashed once more after years of building tension, which was seen to be let loose after the brutal gang rape of a Rakhine woman. A state of national emergency was observed, and the military was called in to intervene.

As of February 2015, President Thein Sein cancelled the citizenship of the Rohingya. They lost multiple basic rights, such as the right to vote, and had restrictions imposed upon them that dictated everything from their religion to their education and employment.

*This image captures the views of the Thein Sein’s administration on the Rohingya: they are not citizens, and unwelcome.*
Key Issues

The Rohingya have been targeted on multiple fronts in their homeland. They have lost numerous basic rights, and are at the mercy of restrictions the government has imposed upon them. The Rohingya have thus decided to flee to other countries so that they may live freely. However, Rohingyans have died during their dangerous transportation (typically on poorly built boats with little food or water and sanitary facilities) and the exodus has fueled the operations of multiple illegal smugglers. Almost 70% of Rohingyans in exile live in unofficial camps, which are dangerous, dirty, and typically have very little food and water. Moreover, countries have begun to comment on how they can not sustain the Rohingyas refugees for much longer.

“We have treated the migrants humanely, but they cannot be flooding our shores like this.” - The Malaysian Home Minister Wan Junaidi Jafaar
A Map of the Exodus

[Map showing migration routes from Southeast Asia to Australia, highlighting mass graves discovered in Wang Kelian and migrant camp populations in various locations.]

Migration by boat
Migration by land

600 km

Migration that make it to Australia can be shipped to an Australia-funded detention centre in Nauru, and from there to Cambodia.
Major Parties Involved

**Myanmar:** An East Asian country, home of the Rohingya. The government under Thein Sein has classified the Rohingya as “immigrants” and denies their ancestral ties to the nation. As a result of this, they have stripped multiple rights from the Rohingya and in turn instigated a mass exodus out of the country.

**The Rakhine People:** An ethnic group the Rohingya have clashed with on multiple occasions and are native to the Rakhine state.

**UNHCR:** The United Nations office for the High Commissioner of Refugees, in charge of the housing and care of refugees. Currently they operate numerous fairly small camps for the Rohingya.

**Bangladesh:** An East Asian country, the nation the Myanmar government affirms is the true homeland of the Rohingya. Many Rohingya flee to this nation for safety. The government has also banned NGOs from helping the Rohingya, stating that such aid would only encourage more people to move into their borders.

**Malaysia:** A Southeast Asian country, and the home of multiple other refugee camps. The Malaysian government are starting to grow tired of the flow of refugees trickling into their borders.
Major Parties Involved

**Australia**: A nation containing multiple refugee camps that is also beginning to tire of the constant flow of Rohingya entering its borders.

**World Food Programme**: An NGO dedicated to providing all refugees with the food and water they need to survive. They are extremely necessary due to their supply of provisions for the Rohingya.

**Médecins Sans Frontières**: An NGO that provides healthcare and medical attention to refugees. It should be noted that their services are especially valuable, as the refugee camps are in complete squalor. They have been banned from Bangladesh.

**Unnamed Smuggling Operations**: These illegal smugglers are paid by the Rohingya for passage out of Myanmar. Often times, the passage is dangerous, filthy, and cramped. Diseases contracted during the passage may be passed on to Rohingyaans in refugee camps.

**Action Against Hunger**: An NGO that helps provide food and water for the refugees. They have been banned from Bangladesh.

**Muslim Aid UK**: An NGO that helps the situation of the refugees in their camps. They have been banned from Bangladesh.
In 1800, the Rakhine fled to what is now Bangladesh to escape the British Raj. Most were captured, however, and deported away to modern day Myanmar (at the time it was called Burma).

In 1911 Burmese and Indian Muslims alike began to move into the state of Arkan to work as farmers under the British in an oppressively racist environment.

During World War 2, Muslims armed by the British clashed with the Rakhine and pro-Japanese people. These muslims would become the ancestors of the Rohingya.

In the late 1990s, present-day Myanmar came under heavy Buddhist influence. The government began to start discriminating against other religions such as Islam, the religion of the Rohingya.

In 2012, clashes between the Rohingya and Rakhine people began to heat up tension. Villages were demolished in what was essentially a clash between Muslims and Buddhists. The military intervened, though they were somewhat on the side of the Rakhine.

In 2015, violence against the Rohingya came to a climax. They had their identity and citizenship revoked, leaving them with little to rights and no home. The government controlled every moment of their lives - leading them to flee the country and find safety in refugee camps abroad.
The UNHCR (the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) currently has a foothold in Myanmar. They are assisting over 240,000 “displaced” Rohingyans currently. The UNHCR is also responsible for the support and maintenance of multiple refugee camps near the Bangladesh/Myanmar border.

The United Nations has also called for Rohingyans to be considered full citizens, and has even passed a resolution urging Myanmar to make them members of the country. The resolution has, naturally, done nothing to change the mind of Thein Sein and therefore a security council directive is required in order for a concrete solution to be integrated.
Possible Solutions

Naturally, the Rohingya must be given a stable home and must be secured safely before any plan of action can take place. Delegates should concentrate on finding residence for them before any true plan of action may take place. Perhaps new refugee camps, or temporary citizenship would work. However, delegates must keep in mind both the pros AND cons of such solutions. Delegates will also need to keep in mind the burdens a sudden influx of refugees may put on a country. Furthermore, they must be willing to accept the fact that certain countries may not house the refugees without certain incentive.

The government of Myanmar must also be reasoned with somehow, and ultimately, the Rohingya need to find a long term home. This should be the ultimate goal for delegates. Talks, slow reintegration, or other solution may help.

Finally, a side not to keep in mind would be of the situation of the refugees stuck in transit, and how illegal smugglers are beginning to profit off the terrible yet valuable boating system refugees use to escape Myanmar. Investigations or the funding of new systems of transport could be helpful here.
Citations