United Nations Security Council
Background Guide

Written by: Lauren Radke, The American University of Washington D.C.

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) was established as one of the six main organs of the United Nations in the United Nations Charter. The primary goal of the UNSC is to maintain international peace and security and the Security Council can do so through a few ways: establish principles for agreements in conflict, dispatch missions, appoint special envoys, and request the Secretary-General to use his offices to settle a dispute.¹ However, when a conflict is hostile, the UNSC can issue ceasefire directives, dispatch military observers and peacekeepers, along with other actions such as sanctions, blockades, and severance of diplomatic relations. In the most extreme cases, the UNSC can also call for collective military action to address a crisis.²

I. Ethnic Cleansing and the Rohingya Crisis

Statement of the Issue:

The Rohingya people are a Muslim ethnic minority from Myanmar, once called Burma. The current crisis is a humanitarian and human rights disaster that is growing continually and currently faces no real and concrete solutions. The United Nations refers to the Rohingya people as the “most persecuted minority in the world,” as they have faced struggles for decades.³ The last few years have seen worsening conditions for Muslim-Rohingyas in Myanmar as state actors such as the Myanmar military have carried out acts of violence, such as burning villages, beatings, and rape. As a result of the violence perpetrated against the Rohingya, and their subsequent fleeing from the country, the United Nations, United States,

² Ibid.
Britain, and others have begun to describe this as an ethnic cleansing. The crimes against humanity committed in Myanmar, found in a fact-finding mission report, are a threat to international peace and security.

As they flee, the Rohingya people go to surrounding countries, mainly Bangladesh, to seek refuge and relocate. Even upon seeking refuge in other nations and areas, the living conditions for the refugees remain poor and undesirable. Refugee camp conditions for the Rohingya refugees lack adequate shelter, water, sanitation, and access to basic services; additionally, there is an overall shortage in the availability of housing and refugee camp access. Almost a quarter of the Rohingya refugees that make their way to refugee camps are children from the ages of six months to five years old. Often, these children face issues like malnourishment, stemming from lacking resources and emotional trauma from the journey to camps and exposure to violence throughout the crisis. Members of the council are increasingly divided on the actions that should be taken; the western powers are pitted against Myanmar’s Chinese and Russian allies, who both continue to enforce the idea that this is a situation that can be dealt with domestically and between Bangladesh and Myanmar. As the situation worsens by the day, a collective consensus on action, or inaction, is imperative to alleviate the suffering and pain of thousands of Rohingya people.

History:

In the 1430s, a small group of Muslim settlers came to a small coastal kingdom called Arakan State. In the 1780s, the kingdom was conquered by the Burmese Empire that was in turn conquered by Britain in 1824. Burma ruled as part of British India until 1948. Throughout the duration of British rule, a large population of migrant Muslim workers from Bengal entered Burman, causing the Muslim population to triple over a 40-year period of time. Although promised an autonomous state for their help in World War II, the Rohingya people received no

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7 Ibid.
state, and were resented for being ‘uninvited workers’ despite living there for centuries. The Rohingya people, after Myanmar gained independence, were not acknowledged, and excluded from basic rights in the constitution.

In 1962, when Myanmar became a military state, the Rohingya were the target of state-sponsored persecution. The Burmese military, the main perpetrator of the persecution, was accused of human rights abuses, such as rape and sexual violence. The earliest documented case of Rohingya moving to neighboring countries is in 1978. In the 1990s, more Rohingya people began to flee to Bangladesh, and later, 200,000 more people fled after “Operation Clean and Beautiful Nation” aimed to push more ethnic Rohingya out of the country. Most Muslim-Rohingya refugees flee to Cox Bazar in Bangladesh; Cox Bazar has nine refugee settlements, mostly full of Rohingya refugees, and has the largest refugee settlement in the world. Other countries that are facing an influx of Rohingya refugees are Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, The Gambia, India, and some areas of the United States.

Currently, Myanmar recognizes 135 distinct ethnic groups but refuses to recognize the term Rohingya in reference to the country’s Muslim minority. They are considered illegal immigrants and have no protections under law, or access to government provided social services such as education. In the first democratic election since military rule in Myanmar, in 2015, the Rohingya were not allowed to vote or run for office, and they continue to face barriers to voting in other government matters. Essentially, the Rohingya are completely blocked from civil participation. They also experience restrictions and regulations on reproduction such as limited birth control, two child limit, and restricted or controlled marriages.

Recently, some Rohingya people have decided to fight and push back against Myanmar and its army, inciting the beginning of violent resistance. In 2017, a collection of Rohingya militants attacked the Myanmar army; this in turn caused another wave of anti-Rohingya sentiment with the country and persecution was gaining strength once again. This has caused
another wave of Rohingya (around 725,000 more Muslim-Rohingya)¹⁹ to flee to Bangladesh as they look to avoid violence and further harm on behalf of the government.²⁰

Analysis:

In Myanmar, failure to bring about democratic reform is linked to the government falling back on its previous military regime actions. This includes repression of not only freedom of speech and press, but also the persecution of minorities.²¹ In the case of the Rohingya people being rejected from the places in which they sought refuge, Myanmar does little to prepare for an influx of these people; instead, they continue a campaign of violence, intimidation, and harassment.²² This going against a tripartite memorandum of understanding between Myanmar authorities, the UN Refugee Agency, and the UN Development Programme that is meant to support the creation of conditions for the "voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable" returns of Rohingya refugees.²³ Ms. Yanghee Lee, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, stated that there are still significant issues in the country with the marginalization and discrimination of minorities, as well as tensions among religious and ethnic divisions.²⁴ As such, the refugees have voiced concerns for their safety and well-being if they were to return, and UN officials have cautioned against the forceful return of refugees to Myanmar.²⁵

The return of refugees to their original home and nation can be one goal of the international community, but returning the refugees prematurely could exacerbate the conditions that they currently face. Ms. Lee, after observing the situation in Myanmar, established that if the root causes of the problem are not addressed before refugees are forced to return, then this will be a recurring issue in Myanmar.²⁶ Upon return, Rohingya refugees would still currently face a lack of enforcement of their fundamental human rights. Without citizenship, health services, education, and the right to dictate their own lives in full, the conditions for a dignified and safe return are not met.²⁷ The Special Rapporteur has stressed that rushed plans, especially in relation to the livelihoods of other people, will not solve the issues presented to the international

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²⁰ Blakemore. "Who Are the Rohingya People?"
²² Ibid.
²⁴ Ibid.
²⁵ Ibid.
²⁷ Ibid.
community.\textsuperscript{28} Myanmar, despite claiming that it is willing and ready to accept Rohingya refugees back into the country continue to burn down and otherwise destroy Rohingya buildings and communities.\textsuperscript{29}

There have been claims by UN inquiry chairs that the situation in Myanmar constitutes as genocide against the Rohingya-Muslims. The situation in Myanmar meets the requirements for genocide apart from killing: the Rohingya people face serious bodily harm, measures have been imposed to prevent the birth of new members of this ethnicity, and other conditions are designed to destroy the Rohingya people.\textsuperscript{30} Myanmar has rejected the findings of the UN report, as well as the accusations of the situation being an ethnic cleansing.\textsuperscript{31} Myanmar’s lack of cooperation with both the United Nations and other human rights mechanisms and entities makes solving issues in this crisis increasingly difficult.\textsuperscript{32} Russian and Chinese officials in the Security Council have emphasized that the circumstances around this crisis require long-term and patient approaches, rather than pressuring leaders to make fast decisions.\textsuperscript{33} It is important for the international community, especially the acting members of the Security Council, to establish the best approaches to dealing with the issues, especially in light of the lack of cooperation from Myanmar and some nations that are involved in the conflict. New measures and steps may need to be taken to solve the pressing issues.

Action has been taken by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to alleviate issues that the Rohingya refugees face in refugee camps, mainly in Bangladesh.\textsuperscript{34} By working with the Bangladesh government, the UNHCR has been providing aid to the refugees in terms of food resources, improving existing camp infrastructure, and developing sanitation measures in the camp to improve water quality and prevent illness.\textsuperscript{35} Non-governmental organizations, such as Mercy Corps, are working to secure resources that are critical to refugee livelihoods, as well as extra supplies and services, such as solar powered lights, that can continue to improve conditions. Mercy Corps specifically installed solar powered lights to ensure that young girls and women feel safe when moving around camps at night.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[28] Ibid.
\item[31] Nichols. "U.N. Security Council Mulls Myanmar Action."
\item[32] UNSC. "Myanmar's Refugee Problem among World's Worst."
\item[33] Ibid.
\item[35] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
Additional support for programs such as this is needed, and the international community should answer the call for help, especially given the magnitude of this situation.

**Conclusion:**

As the international community works to alleviate the suffering of the Rohingya refugees, there are major issues that are not being addressed. By failing to address the core issues of this crisis, such as the lack of rights and access to resources, the suffering of the Muslim-Rohingya people will continue. The rejection of accusations against Myanmar, and subsequent failure to further investigate and take action against the discriminatory and violent policies of Myanmar serve to undermine the effectiveness of the United Nations Security Council. With continued disagreement amongst the members of the council, cohesive action will be impossible. It is imperative for the Security Council to form a unified plan to protect the livelihoods and rights of the Rohingya people, and prevent the extermination of their culture and identity.

**Questions:**

1. What are the most pressing matters of this conflict? (humanitarian, human rights, etc)
2. How can governments and non-governmental organizations work together to help solve problems presented in the Rohingya crisis?
3. What Security Council actions will be most effective in achieving the collective goal to maintain peace and enforce human rights?
Resources


II. The Use of Chemical Weapons and International Implications

Statement of the Issue:

Chemical weapons are toxic chemicals, which can be defined as, “any chemical which through its chemical action on life processes can cause death, temporary incapacitation or permanent harm to humans or animals.” The definition of chemical weapons includes all chemicals that have this effect on life, regardless of their specific origin or the way in which they were produced. Prior to be made into chemical weapons, the toxic chemicals themselves are referred to as “precursors.” The chemicals themselves can be delivered by mortars, artillery shells, missiles, bombs, spray tanks, mines, and other munitions or devices. Lastly, there is equipment that can be used to deploy and release the chemical agents and weapons; this equipment is directly connected with the munitions and devices so that the agents can be released effectively. Under the international Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), the official definition of a chemical weapon includes all toxic chemicals, and their precursors, except when these chemicals are used for specific purposes that are allowed per the Convention. Although chemical weapons are banned by the Convention, their use has still been prevalent in conflict today, and their use continues to require international action.

History:

Toxic chemicals have been used in war for thousands of years. The most historical accounts of chemical use in warfare include arsenic smoke, noxious fumes, and poisoned arrows. The very first international agreement on the use of chemical weaponry was signed all the way back in 1675; this agreement was between France and Germany and was signed to prohibit the use of poisonous bullets. Centuries later, in 1874, the Brussels Convention on the Law and Customs of War was signed. This Convention prohibited the use of poisoned weapons and projectiles to cause “unnecessary suffering” in war. Despite the original intention of the Brussels Convention, it was never enforced. The third historical international agreement on chemical weapons came in 1899 with the Hague Peace Conference. This agreement, along with a second Hague Convention agreement in 1907, declared that parties to the agreement would abstain from “the use of projectiles with the sole object of which is the diffusion of asphyxiating or deleterious gases.”
Despite all of the aforementioned efforts, chemical weapons caused extreme suffering and damage in World War I, when the first large scale attack with chemical weapons took place in Belgium in 1915. At the end of the war, more than 90,000 soldiers had suffered death due to exposure to chlorine, mustard gas, and other chemical agents. These atrocities led to the negotiation and signature of the 1925 Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare. This is also known as the 1925 Geneva Protocol. After witnessing the horrific effects of chemical weapons and agents in World War I, the majority of leaders and nations were hesitant to introduce additional, and deadlier, chemical weapons in World War II. Despite these hesitations, most countries moved forward in preparing chemical weapons in order to use them as a deterrent and to defend or retaliate if other nations used them in war. During both WWI and WWII, chemical weapons were deployed on large scales and in numerous smaller battles; this usage left stockpiles of abandoned chemical weapons, which to this day presents an issue for many countries. Additionally, during the Cold War, the Soviet Union and the United States held massive stockpiles of chemical weapons; these were meant to deter military action from either side. The amount of stockpiled weapons totaled to over tens of thousands of tonnes, and the quantity was enough to completely destroy the majority of both human and animal life on Earth. Even after seeing the destructive qualities of chemical weapons, countries still spent resources on developing new chemical weapons, and the weapons themselves were used throughout the 20th century.

International action on chemical weapons was again taken in 1968 at the Disarmament Conference in Geneva, where the Biological Weapons Convention was drafted. The Biological Weapons Convention concluded and was signed in 1972; again, this Convention lacked verification measures and enforcement. The Convention, however, did ask the states party to it to attempt to institute measures that would lead to the destruction of existing chemical weapons and the prohibition of development of additional weapons. The next major international action on this issue was with the Chemical Weapons Convention, which established a working group on chemical weapons. The Chemical Weapons Convention, marking the world’s first multilateral disarmament agreement, was entered into force in April of 1997.

The Chemical Weapons Convention prohibits:

- Developing, producing, acquiring, stockpiling, or retaining chemical weapons.
- The direct or indirect transfer of chemical weapons.
- Chemical weapons use or military preparation for use.
- Assisting, encouraging, or inducing other states to engage in CWC-prohibited activity.
The use of riot control agents “as a method of warfare.”

The Convention itself also has declaration requirements, which require states to declare their chemical weapons stockpiles and facilities, and destruction requirements, which force parties to destroy specific types of chemical weapons. This enforcement of the Convention was the start of the chemical weapons disarmament regime, which is led by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). Together, the signatories of this agreement set up a Preparatory Commission to prepare for meetings between the parties that signed the Convention; the majority of this work took place at The Hague.

The Convention entered into force in 1996, when Hungary became the 65th state to ratify it. Despite international advances in these areas, a number of problems remain. Issues that have come up include states desiring chemical weapons disarmament to be linked to nuclear weapons disarmament; other states have requested assistance from the international community in arming against chemical attacks. There has also been concern amongst parties that the Convention would not be properly enforced or supported. With 130 countries signing on to the Convention, the Chemical Weapons Convention had an unprecedented amount of international support. Overall, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons was the first organization of its kind as a global and treaty based international organization that led the way in disarmament efforts. Over time, the Organization also developed mechanisms to ensure compliance and address situations when countries were not complying to mandates. For these efforts, the OPCW was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013. At this point, the Chemical Weapons Convention, within the OPCW, has 193 state parties, with three states that have not signed or ratified the convention (Egypt, North Korea, and South Sudan).

Analysis:

Although the international community has taken significant and somewhat effective action, there are still a number of states that have either not ratified or not signed the agreement. Additionally, although measures exist to ensure compliance of the agreement, there has not been complete success in punishing signatories that are not complying fully with the agreement and Convention. At this point, one major threat that remains is Syria, as the Arms Control Association has noted that there are undeclared chemicals within Syria, despite the Syrian government claiming that their stockpiles have been eliminated. To date, there is no projected timeline for the elimination of the remaining chemicals in Syria. Additionally, in 2018, populations in Douma, Syria, suffered from chemical weapons attacks. Unfortunately, this was not the first instance of chemical weapons use in the Syrian war or within the Syrian state.
Overall, it is believed that the Syrian government has used sarin gas and chlorine gas a number of times, including attacks in 2013 and 2017. White House estimates claim that attacks back in 2013 killed over 1,400 people. Separately from the White House reports, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons has accused the Islamic State of using mustard gas in Syria. This example highlights the significance that although the number of states that possess chemical weapons has significantly declined, there still is interest in acquiring these weapons through the means of “chemical terrorism.” U.S. Administrations have condemned the use of chemical weapons in Syria, and, following the chemical weapons attacks in 2012, the U.N. Security Council brokered an agreement on the issue. In a deal negotiated by Russia, the Syrian government agreed to destroy its remaining chemical weapon stockpiles. With Assad’s government agreeing to the Chemical Weapons Convention in 2013, the government was technically supposed to fully relinquish its chemical weapons stockpiles. The Assad government claimed to have done so in June of 2014. Despite this claim, there have been countless reports of the Syrian government using chlorine gas against its own civilians. Additionally, these worries spread throughout the Middle East, as Egypt has not signed the Chemical Weapons Convention, and as they historically transferred chemical weapons and chemical weapons related technology back in the 1970s and 1980s.

Other recent uses of chemical weapons include the 1995 Tokyo Subway Sarin attack and in smaller scale threats and attacks that have been stopped by international law enforcement. The Security Council must take note that Syria, as a signatory to the Chemical Weapons Convention, continues to use nerve and other chemical agents on civilian populations in what could be argued to be war crimes and crimes against humanity. The use of chemical weapons is among the most serious threats, with worrying consequences that extend past the communities directly affected.

**Conclusion:**

Vast strides have been made in the international realm to prohibit the use of chemical weapons, stop them from being created, and destroy existing stockpiles. Despite these efforts, it is clear that chemical weapons still exist and that the threat they pose is now being used as a weapon against helpless civilians. Direct action should be taken in order to fully remove this international threat. So long as the chemical weapon technology exists, there is a possibility of the technology and weaponry being used by state actors and non-state actors. A primary example of this is the suspected use of chemical weapons by the terrorist organization, the Islamic State. Although the Chemical Weapons Convention is multifaceted and partially
successful in implementation, there are clear gaps in its implementation and effectives that must be addressed, as chemical weapons remain a serious threat and challenge for governments and policy makers.

Questions:

1. How significant is the threat of chemical terrorism? What can be done to prevent the spread of weapons through non-state actors?
2. What efforts can be made to safely rid the world of old chemical weapons and debris from past wars?
3. How can the existing framework in the CWC be more efficient and effective?
Resources

https://www.opcw.org/about-us/history
https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/cwcglance
https://www.opcw.org/our-work/what-chemical-weapon
https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/chemical/
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