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Study Guide

East Asia Summit
Rohingya Crisis
Introduction

The Rohingya Crisis is the ongoing crackdown and persecution on Rohingya people by the Burmese army and police since 2016 in Rakhine State, Myanmar. The crisis consists of the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya people and the refugee crisis in the neighboring Bangladesh due to Rohingya people fleeing or being driven out of the country. Consequently, more than 10,000 people have lost their lives and more than one million people have left the country by April 2019. The atrocities that the Burmese security forces have committed include mass killings, widespread arson, sexual violence and religious persecution. Local authorities continuously deny any abuse or violence, even though the extensive evidence shows otherwise.

Definition of Key Terms

**Rohingya:** a group of stateless people who have been living in the historical Arakan region in Southeast Asia. They are predominantly Muslim and they describe themselves as the descendants of Arab traders and other groups who have settled in the region many generations ago.

**Genocide:** The deliberate killing of a large group of people, especially those belonging to a particular nation or ethnic group.
General Overview

Myanmar, also known as Burma, is a country located in Southeast Asia. Myanmar is bordered by Bangladesh, China, India, Laos and Thailand and has a population of 53 million people. Its capital city is Naypyidaw and the country is a member of the Association of Southeastern Nations.

The Rohingya have faced decades of oppression and discrimination under Burmese regimes. Due to the 1982 Citizenship Law in Burma, Rohingya people are effectively denied citizenship and they are one of the largest stateless populations in the world. They lack access to basic human rights such as the freedom of movement and the right to get healthcare, hence, they have been living under dire humanitarian conditions in Burma. Moreover, Rohingya people are subjected to forced labor and they were previously required to sign a commitment not to have more than two children. United Nations described Rohingya people as “amongst the world’s least wanted” and “one of the most persecuted” minorities.

The ongoing Rohingya genocide started when the Burmese security forces and local Buddhist extremists started attacking Rohingya people and committing atrocities such as but not limited to looting and arson, sexual violence and mass killings. It has been extrapolated that over 10,000 Rohingya people have lost their lives and nearly 400 villages in Rakhine state have been burnt down and destroyed. (see image)

Northern Rakhine State Clashes

From October 2016 onwards, there have been armed clashes between the Burmese government forces and members of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). The sectarian violence in Myanmar caught international attention and it has been described as an ethnic cleansing by United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. In the summer of 2017 the clashes have intensified and hundreds of thousands of Rohingya people have fled
from Myanmar to Bangladesh. Sectarian violence in 2012 and 2013 have caused mass displacements of people, however the current conflict began on 9 October 2016, when ARSA insurgents attacked Burmese security forces along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border. In response, the army has started “clearance operations” against the Rohingya people with the support of Buddhist militia. In the first week of these operations, 130 Rohingya people were killed and some of them already started to flee the country to the neighboring Bangladesh to save their lives. The Burmese army started to open fire on the fleeing people with machine guns and mortar shells. By the second week, more than one thousand people were killed. The violence had resulted in 389,000 people fleeing from their homes.

**Refugee Crisis**

Since August 2017, because of the military crackdown, a large amount of Rohingya people were displaced and became refugees. They were driven out of the Rakhine state in Burma to Bangladesh. In August 2017, the government of Thailand announced that they were preparing to receive refugees after the events and in September 2017, Nepal increased surveillance at their borders with India, despite the one-thousand-kilometer distance between Nepalese and Burmese borders. A small community of Rohingya refugees live in Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal. In November 2017, the governments of Bangladesh and Burma to return the refugees back to their homes in the Rakhine state.

Many of the refugees who were driven out to Bangladesh have set up camps in the city of Cox’s Bazar. The main refugee camp sites were rapidly overfilled and many unregistered camps were formed. Today, there are more than 30 unregistered settlements. Among the problems that the refugees are faced with are
lack of water, malnourishment of children, restrained access to food, security and intense monsoon seasons, which take place between June and October. The monsoon season can possibly wipe out land and contaminate water, especially in Cox’s Bazar.

**Major Parties Involved**

**Myanmar (Burma):** The government of Burma has actively been repressing Rohingya people for decades and is the main reason of the refugee crisis. The crackdown has been carried out by the security forces of the state of Burma.

**Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army:** ARSA is a Rohingya insurgent group which is mainly active in Northern Rakhine state. The group is led by the Pakistan-born Ataullah abu Ammar Jununi, who grew up in Saudi Arabia. The members of the leadership of the organization are mainly Rohingya émigrés in Saudi Arabia.

ARSA is internationally recognized as a terrorist organization. The group sees itself as the defender of the rights of Rohingya and against the Burmese oppression. However, the attack on Burmese security forces conducted by ARSA has triggered the current crisis, therefore the insurgent activities help the Burmese government alas justify its crackdown on Rohingya civilians. ARSA has also been the most active insurgent group during the Northern Rakhine state clashes and in contrast to other insurgents, ARSA releases press statements online in English, hence they have been getting more attention worldwide.

**Bangladesh:** Bangladesh, neighboring Northern Rakhine state of Burma, has been the recipient of the largest amount of Rohingya refugees during the ongoing crisis. The government of Bangladesh, being a third party that is directly being affected by the crisis, is actively working on getting the attention of the international community on the issue. The president of Bangladesh has suggested that a UN-administered humanitarian corridor be established in Burma for the Rohingya. The Parliament of Bangladesh adopted a resolution that urges the international community to pressure Burma to stop the persecution, create a safe environment and grant the Rohingya citizenship. Other state officials of Bangladesh stress the fact that the government of Burma should have handled the situation with Rohingya insurgents more patiently and they shouldn’t have attacked the common people. National
Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh stated that an international tribunal should take place, in which the government and the army of Burma shall be prosecuted.

**People’s Republic of China:** The government of China has been supporting the acts of the government of Burma and they have been welcoming the “efforts in upholding peace and stability in the Rakhine state”. They further encourage the international community to support the Burmese government in safeguarding its stability and development. There have been protests in support of the Rohingya in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

**India:** Like PR China, the government of India has remained silent to the atrocities committed by the Burmese army. Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India, whose party is also accused of promoting islamophobia, has retained close ties with the State Counsellor of Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi. India announced that they were going to deport Rohingya refugees from India and described them as illegal immigrants. On the other hand, India did not sign the 1951 Refugee Convention, however, Varun Gandhi, the grandson of Indira Gandhi, pointed out that India is a party to South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Terrorism Protocol, one of whose article forbids the party states to deport people based on religious grounds. The government of India dismissed the view of Gandhi by suggesting that it was against National Interest.

**Other Responses:** The persecution of Rohingya people has been condemned worldwide, especially by most of the western countries, Muslim countries, Holy See, supranational bodies, such as the European Union and United Nations, and other Southeast Asian countries. The issue has been described as “ethnic cleansing” and “genocide”. (Image: Protests in South Africa for the Rohingya)

**Timeline of Important Events**
9 October 2016 – Attack by Rohingya insurgents on three Burmese border posts along its border with Bangladesh. 9 border officers and 4 Burmese soldiers lost their lives during the attacks.

13 November 2016 – New clashes between insurgents and security forces: in three days 134 people were killed. (102 insurgents 32 soldiers and policemen)

25 August 2017 – The beginning of the crackdown on Rohingya people by the security forces and local Buddhist extremists after the terrorist attack carried out by ARSA.

12 September 2017 – 370,000 Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

October 2017 – 600,000+ refugees in Bangladesh

**Previous Attempts to Solve This Issue**

Resolution of the 137th Assembly of Inter-Parliamentary Union on the ongoing crisis in Burma:


All United Nations resolutions and press statements regarding Myanmar: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/myanmar/

**Possible Solutions**

When resolving the issue, the delegates should prioritize the circumstances that the Rohingya people are in. They should be provided with humanitarian aid, especially those who are seeking refuge in Bangladesh. Moreover, delegates should focus on how to convince or force the government of Myanmar to stop the crackdown on Rohingya people. Another important aspect to consider is to stop the anti-Rohingya and Islamophobic sentiment in the region. Even if the Burmese government accepts to take back the Rohingya people and grant them citizenship, there might be serious segregation between the Buddhist and Muslim communities.

**Further Reading and Useful Links**
UNICEF report on Rohingya Crisis: https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/rohingya-crisis


**Bibliography**

https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/rohingya-crisis


https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arakan_Rohingya_Salvation_Army

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Rakhine_State_Clashes