

FORUM: Human Rights Council
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What is the UNHRC and how does it work?

The United Nations Human Rights Council is a subdivision of the United Nations tasked with monitoring the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). It plays a significant role in safeguarding human rights, enforcing accountability, and addressing allegations of violation. The committee reviews reports from member states on their human rights practices, as well as holding emergency meetings to respond to pressing situations and appointing experts to act as watchdogs in specific countries. It has played a particularly relevant role recently in monitoring human rights in Ukraine, Syria and Gaza, among others.

The UNHRC is composed of 47 Member-States, elected for three-year terms by ballot in the General Assembly of the United Nations, and a bureau presiding over the council. There are 13 seats for African states, 13 for Asia-Pacific States, 8 for Latin American and Caribbean, 7 for Western European and other, and 6 for Eastern European states. HRC vice-presidents in 2025 were Indonesia, Lithuania, Honduras, Finland and Paraguay, while its president was Switzerland.

More information can be found in the guidance documents available on the WESMUN website.

Background

The origins of the Rohingya community in Myanmar trace back centuries, with their presence in the Rakhine State predating colonial rule. However, tensions surrounding their identity intensified during British rule in the 19th and 20th centuries; these changes created friction between the predominantly Buddhist ethnic Rakhine population and the Muslim Rohingya. After Myanmar's independence in 1948, the government grappled with national unity amidst its vast ethnic diversity. The Rohingya were increasingly marginalized, culminating in the 1982 Citizenship Law, which excluded them from recognition as one of Myanmar's official ethnic groups. Successive military regimes amplified this exclusion, portraying the Rohingya as "illegal immigrants" and fueling widespread discrimination. The Rohingya crisis remains a significant international concern, with ongoing debates over accountability, repatriation, and the broader issues of ethnic identity and human rights within Myanmar.

Current situation

The Rohingya crisis remains one of the most pressing humanitarian challenges in the world today. Myanmar, ruled by a military junta since the 2021 coup, continues to face

widespread condemnation for its treatment of the Rohingya population. The regime is accused of systemic human rights abuses, including mass killings, sexual violence, and the destruction of villages, actions many international bodies have described as ethnic cleansing or genocide. Most Rohingya Muslims remain stateless as a result, denied citizenship and basic rights within Myanmar, while over 900,000 have fled in an exodus to live in refugee camps in Bangladesh. Efforts at repatriation have repeatedly stalled due to a lack of guarantees for safety, rights, and citizenship in Myanmar. Meanwhile, international bodies, including the United Nations, struggle to find durable solutions as a result of Myanmar's non-cooperation. The crisis has also strained Bangladesh, whose resources are stretched by hosting the vast refugee population – this has led to a high risk of regional instability. Some voices argue that international pressure, including targeted sanctions, may exacerbate Myanmar's stubbornness and increase the hatred faced by the Rohingya people, further complicating humanitarian and diplomatic efforts. The plight of the Rohingya underscores a dire need for coordinated global action to address not only immediate relief but also long-term solutions rooted in justice.

Barriers to Resolution

The resolution of the Rohingya crisis faces serious challenges. Deep-seated ethnic and religious tensions, entrenched discrimination, and the systematic denial of citizenship to the Rohingya are significant barriers to progress. The Myanmar military junta's control over the state and its persistent refusal to acknowledge the Rohingya as a legitimate ethnic group exacerbate the situation. International efforts to pressure Myanmar through sanctions and diplomatic engagement have achieved limited success, as the junta remains resistant to external influence and continues its oppressive policies. The humanitarian and logistical challenges of repatriating Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh are equally immense; economic constraints on Bangladesh only intensify the urgency of the crisis. Efforts to mediate a resolution are further complicated by regional geopolitical dynamics, with key players such as China and India maintaining strategic ties with Myanmar which lead to the prioritisation their own interests over humanitarian considerations.

That being said, a sustainable resolution could pave the way for regional stability and mitigate one of the most significant humanitarian crises of modern times. Proposals for resolution often centre on a phased approach, encompassing immediate humanitarian aid, legal recognition of the Rohingya, and long-term social integration within Myanmar. While this approach offers a roadmap for resolution, it hinges on the Myanmar government's willingness to cooperate and the international community's capacity to enforce accountability. The UNSC, with its mandate for global peace and security, is uniquely positioned to mediate, legislate, and enforce a solution, encouraging all members to participate actively in addressing this enduring crisis.