

Conflict Resolution versus Crises Management:

How Is The Rohingya Refugee Crisis Being Dealt With?

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Introduction

The Rohingya, an ethno-religious minority community belonging to the Rakhine state of Myanmar, have been subjected to systematic state persecution in Myanmar for decades. The Citizenship Act of 1982 and other draconian policies have made them one of the largest stateless communities in the world¹. Due to these draconian state policies that denied them any rights and recognition of state citizens, they were either languished in prisonlike villages that kept them restricted to their localities, or they fled persecution, seeking refuge in neighbouring Asian countries. The military crackdown of 2017 however took things on a new level as thousands of Rohingya people crossed borders to Bangladesh in fear of persecution as Myanmar government stayed silent, watching the ensuing genocide that ravaged these people. There is however an acute, astounding lack of effective governance strategies and intervention from unbiased organisations to address this issue. This is a reality attributed by several factors; including the lack of democratic culture in Myanmar from a natal democratic system still overshadowed by their former military rule, lack of any strong civil society in Myanmar, fragmented and uncordial refugee policies in neighbouring countries and the lukewarm response towards resolution by the international

¹ Gaffar, A. (2018). Approaching The Rohingya Crisis: CALLING FOR A SECURITY GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK. World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues, 22(01), 98–121.

community. Such collective failure has escalated into violence against this community from not just Myanmar, but developed miscommunication between them and the host community as well as bred extremism, endangering the broader security aspect of the Asia–Pacific region. What this article will be briefly discussing is how the conflict was ‘managed’ as opposed to being resolved. The article will talk about the factors that warrant a response to resolve the conflict that is becoming dire by the months that followed the crackdown, but instead, was managed to curb the tension that was brewing in the host country to cushion the blow for Bangladesh, giving the refugees a temporary ‘home’ for as long as possible. We will also talk about how management of the conflict has led to the grievances deepening within the several communities involved and is further delaying the process of conflict resolution, cropping more conflicts as well.

Defining Conflict Resolution and Conflict Management

According to the Oxford Bibliographies, Conflict resolution (CR) may be defined as any process used to manage, determine, or settle differences that may arise among individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, nations, or any other social unit². And the same source defines Conflict Management as the process of dealing with (perceived) incompatibilities or disagreements arising from, for example, diverging opinions, objectives, and needs³.

² Barsky, A. E. (2016). Conflict Resolution. Retrieved October 18, 2020, from Oxford Bibliographies website: [https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195389678/obo-9780195389678-0026.xml#:~:text=Conflict%20resolution%20\(CR\)%20may%20be,or%20any%20other%20social%20unit.](https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195389678/obo-9780195389678-0026.xml#:~:text=Conflict%20resolution%20(CR)%20may%20be,or%20any%20other%20social%20unit.)

³ de Wit, F. R. C. (2016). Conflict Management. Retrieved October 18, 2020, from Oxford Bibliographies website: <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199846740/obo-9780199846740->

Conflict resolution and management are not the same, and require quite different methods. While Conflict resolution opts for processes like mitigation, negotiation, conciliation, even arbitration and third-party intervention (armed or unarmed), all these processes end in resolving the conflict or at least, coming to a ceasefire, that buys enough time for a solution. Effective conflict management, on the other hand, are techniques that limit or prevent negative, often violent impacts of conflict, while multiplying potential beneficial effects. But they do not necessarily solve the conflict. That can only be done through resolution. And resolution takes sustainable steps and requires permanency to successfully solve and stop and conflict. Management, while an option liked by many, is not a solution, and can often delay resolution for protracted conflicts, all the while creating a perception that the conflict is resolving.

The Rohingya Crisis: The International Organisations Taking Measures toward the Issue

The International Organisations so far have all pitched in to support Bangladesh in supporting the Rohingya people who have fled Myanmar and crossed the border in 2017. Back in September 2020, Representatives of the international community in Bangladesh, including Ambassadors of the United States and the European Union, the British High Commissioner, the Head of Humanitarian Aid of the Canadian High Commission, the Country Director of the World Bank, and the United Nations Resident Coordinator, completed a two-day visit to Cox's Bazar and the Rohingya refugee

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camps⁴. The delegation in their visit talked about the refugees, discussing their requirements, and reopening different facilities in the camps. They also discussed and observed efforts to keep the camps and surrounding areas safe and secure in Cox's Bazar. The delegations kept reassuring their commitment towards the conflict and ensured a resolution, but no concrete solution.

And although donations have been dwindling over the last few years, there are always hopes of new pledges and talks of more donations, whether from the IOM or the UN. In 2020, IOM has claimed that it will continue to provide life-saving and sustaining support to meet the needs of the Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, "while strengthening early recovery and preparedness initiatives to prevent further crises". The U.S Ambassador, Earl Miller said that since 2017, the United States has contributed nearly \$800 million to support the humanitarian efforts including specific funding to support Bangladesh host communities in Cox's Bazar District (Reliefweb, 2020). Through localisation efforts and sustainability-driven growth, IOM promises that 2020 will bring greater ties with local partners. IOM will expand and enhance programming to address host communities' needs and vulnerabilities.

The United Nations agencies and NGO partners had launched the 2020 Joint Response Plan (JRP) back in March, 2020 for the Rohingya crisis. Planning by building on the efforts and success of previous years, the UN appeal plans to raise US\$877 million to respond to the needs of approximately 855,000 Rohingya refugees and over 444,000

⁴ International Community in Bangladesh Visit Cox's Bazar, Reiterate Support for Bangladesh and Commitment to Rohingya Response [EN/BN]. (2020). Retrieved October 18, 2020, from reliefweb website: <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/international-community-bangladesh-visit-cox-s-bazar-reiterate-support-bangladesh>

vulnerable Bangladeshis in the communities generously hosting them⁵. The 2020 JRP puts a finer and stronger focus on areas that have the strongest influence on host populations, such as infrastructure and delivery of public services, access to sustainable livelihoods, environmental rehabilitation and energy measures.

ASEAN leaders on the other hand, having done almost nothing for years, should dramatically and swiftly rethink their approach to the Rohingya crisis. Myanmar being on amicable terms with the Philippines, is quite concerned with the Philippines and the rest of ASEAN. Bangladesh hopes that political pressure from Philippines should help leverage the refugee crisis resolution from Myanmar's behalf⁶.

Issues That Require Conflict Resolution

While repatriation is a conflict of interest, and needs the most attention, over time, the Rohingya refugee issue has cropped up several other conflicts that require attention as well. They need to be addressed and there has to be better **peacemaking** processes underway for them to be stopped while the conflicts are still latent. These conflicts include but are not limited to:

1. Miscommunication and internal conflict between the local Host Community and Migrant community (regarding resources, land, work, etc.)
2. Drug trade, human trafficking, small arms trafficking, etc.

⁵ UN appeals for US\$877 million for Rohingya refugee response in Bangladesh. (2020). Retrieved October 19, 2020, from UNHCR website: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/3/5e5cfb984/un-appeals-us877-million-rohingya-refugee-response-bangladesh.html>

⁶ Global security to be at stake if Rohingya crisis left unresolved: Dhaka. (2020). Retrieved October 18, 2020, from The Daily Star website: <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/news/global-security-be-stake-if-rohingya-crisis-left-unresolved-dhaka-1980201>

3. Terrorism and radicalisation (where the vulnerable refugee community is targeted by terrorist organisations for recruitment with a promise of finances, better living and security)
4. Rise of insurgency
5. Rise of social unrest and issues that promote conflict (such as: domestic violence, internal organised crimes and violence), etc.

But again, all these issues have cropped up because of how long it is taking to reach a concrete repatriation plan that is executed in practice and not just written and approved in theory. The ultimate solution to the Rohingya crisis will not be anything other than the safe, voluntary, dignified, and sustainable return of the refugees who have fled, back to their homes or, for those many whose villages have been destroyed by the juntas, the return to the lands where their villages stood. And when we say sustainable, we mean a safe and stable home for them where they can remain unharmed and undiscriminated against, with full dignity as citizens of Myanmar.

So, What Was Expected?

The moment the 2017 influx of Rohingya people came flooding in through the borders, the expectation on a global scale was to work toward immediate repatriation. Instead what we received as a consolation was conflict management to appease the humanitarian groups, the host government and the refugees in the form of donations, relief, and words of condolences and support for Bangladesh and criticism for Myanmar. Conflict management has led up to this, an adjustment of thousands of lives that risk millions more for over three years and counting.

The government of Myanmar has stated its willingness to take back Rohingya and signed a Memorandum of Understanding on returns with the government of Bangladesh⁷ and another more recently with UNHCR and UNDP⁸. The government of Myanmar has built new reception centres and said it is ready to accept Rohingya back.

However, it is becoming more and more apparent that such promises might not be as it is presented due to failure of addressing the root causes of the crisis, including the refusal to recognise the Rohingya people as citizens of Myanmar. The MoUs signed are meaningless if the key address of the recognition of the refugees is not taken into consideration at all. A leaked version of the MoU revealed that there was no reference to Rohingya citizenship or ethnic identity⁹. The fact that the MoU of 2018 has not been made public is yet another cause for concern, especially among Rohingya people, who have not been involved in drafting it at all.

The international community on the other hand are still attempting to address only the financial implications of it, ignoring the blaring sirens of impending regional as well as global security threats that can rise from the Rohingya refugee crisis.

⁷ Myanmar, UNHCR, UNDP extend MoU on Rohingya repatriation. (2020). Retrieved October 18, 2020, from Dhaka Tribune website: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/rohingya-crisis/2020/05/11/myanmar-unhcr-undp-extend-mou-on-rohingya-repatriation#:~:text=This%20framework%20for%20cooperation%20between,repatriation%20of%20Rohingya%20from%20Bangladesh.>

⁸ Myanmar signs MOU with UN agencies on repatriation of Rohingya refugees. (2018). Retrieved October 19, 2020, from Refworld website: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5bb72dc5a.html#:~:text=Myanmar%20signed%20an%20agreement%20with,overcrowded%20displacement%20camps%20in%20Bangladesh.>

⁹ Sullivan, D. (2018). 5 KEY PRIORITIES TO ADDRESS THE ROHINGYA CRISIS. Retrieved from <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2018/8/22/5-key-priorities-to-address-the-rohingya-crisis>

Conclusion

The solution is said to be lying in Myanmar, where unless they accept the people back, there cannot be a resolution of the Rohingya conflict. But Myanmar is only this blatantly passive about the situation because of the regional support it is receiving. The Rohingya crisis is at the end, a collateral damage of a geopolitical ploy, which is beginning to show the head of much bigger crises. So, unless international organisations do not stop 'managing' the crisis and put more effort into resolving it, we cannot expect a solution any time soon. Southeast Asian leaders in Myanmar and abroad should immediately implement concrete plans to resolve the crisis facing ethnic Rohingya. As this year's ASEAN chair, Vietnam should have led efforts to strengthen regional cooperation and prepare to safeguard Rohingya's rights with concerned governments and United Nations agencies. Vietnam has recently been urged by Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin to take a greater role in solving the crisis¹⁰. The UN and other regional and international organisations need to readdress the signed MoUs and need to demand implementations. Any future moves toward repatriation should involve input from the refugees, have greater transparency, and guarantee of independent international overview and monitoring to ensure the process is safe, secured, voluntary, dignified, and most importantly, sustainable.

¹⁰ ASEAN: Overhaul Regional Response to Rohingya Crisis Protect Asylum Seekers, Press Myanmar to End Persecution. (2020). Retrieved October 19, 2020, from hrm.org website: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/26/asean-overhaul-regional-response-rohingya-crisis>