

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)

Tackling the human rights violations caused by the mass genocide in Myanmar



Forum: Human Rights Council

Issue: Tackling the human rights violations caused by the mass genocide in Myanmar

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Introduction

Genocide, apartheid conditions, entire towns burnt to the ground and innocent civilians being tortured are only some of the many war crimes which are being perpetrated by the current one-party military government in Myanmar.

It all started after Myanmar's (then Burma) independence from the United Kingdom in 1948, prompting political instability in the country. However, the state dramatically escalated in 2021. This was after the National League for Democracy party (NLD) won the 2020 elections promising a new future for the people of Myanmar. However, just before this appointment of the new government the militarised one-party government launched a coup and seized power. This was after claiming that the recent elections had been rigged, however all investigation agencies and independent election observers came to the same conclusion that the accusation was not true and merely a ploy to regain power over the country. Any opposing politicians and critics of the military were immediately imprisoned, including the rightful winner of the elections Aung San Suu Kyi.

Definition of Key Terms

Burma

This was the name of Myanmar until 1989, when it officially changed its name to Myanmar. As the name 'Burma' was given by its British colonisers, they aimed to show separation from its past.

Military coup

A military coup is when the armed forces of a country forcefully take control of the government, usually overthrowing the existing leadership. It's an illegal, unauthorized, and often unconstitutional seizure of power by the military, disrupting the normal political processes and leads to significant social and political consequences.

Military junta

A military junta is a group of high-ranking military officers who seize control of a country, often through a coup. In Myanmar, the military junta refers to the armed forces that took power in a 2021 coup, leading to political unrest and resistance against their undemocratic rule.

NLD

The National League for Democracy (NLD) of Myanmar is a political party known for its role in promoting democracy. Led by Aung San Suu Kyi, it advocates for human rights and played a crucial role in Myanmar's transition to civilian rule. The NLD won the 2015 elections, marking a historic moment.

NUG

The National Unity Government (NUG) in Myanmar is an alternative government formed by elected officials (including Aung San Suu Kyi) after the 2021 military coup. It represents the opposition to the military junta and seeks international recognition. The NUG aims to restore democracy and address the political crisis in the country.

Embargo

An embargo in the context of Myanmar are the restriction on trade and economic activities imposed by one or more countries to put pressure on Myanmar's military junta. It aims to isolate and economically weaken the junta, encouraging a change in their behaviour or policies.

USDP

The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) in Myanmar was established by the military junta, comprising leaders with military backgrounds. The party represented a continuation of military influence in politics, advocating for stability and economic development. However, it faced criticism for its ties to the military regime and perceived authoritarianism.

General Overview

Background

After more than a century of British rule, Burma gained independence following the Second World War. It didn't take long for the military to step in and seize control. At the time, the military essentially controlled all aspects of daily life and dealt with any threats violently. One of the most famous examples of this was during the 1988 uprising, when young Myanmar people took to the streets in a peaceful protest that eventually grew nation-wide, protesting for democracy and fair elections. This was known as the 8888 uprising, which was met with severe military action in September 1988, effectively crushing the protest. To discourage further protests, they fired live ammunition into the streets and invaded hospitals. Similarly, for actions against the government, thousands of civilians were sentenced to prison terms of up to 50 years.

Following the uprising, Aung San Suu Kyi established the National League for Democracy (NLD), which had a significant impact; as a reciprocation she was sentenced to 15 years of house arrest. This party was the favourite for all the Myanmar people seeking a democratic government. This proved popular, as she won by a wide margin in the first ever 1991 elections.

Ethnic groups

Additionally, the military did not only just target protestors or political rivals, but also entire minority groups. Myanmar is a country made up of hundreds of ethnic groups, and the military's political rain severely limited the expression of these cultures. Minorities' languages and religions were suppressed through legislation.

As a result, ethnic tensions rose, and the military responds by implementing even more brutal and extreme tactics. The implementation of an anti-civil liberty campaign aimed at depriving ethnic minorities of civilian support, involving operations to burn, destroy, and target any villages supporting a different party. Nevertheless, since the military was the government, these lines became very blurred, allowing uncontrolled government armies to ravage through villages with minimal regard for human lives, killing tens of thousands and burying them in shallow graves.

Transition

In the late 2000s, the military announced that it would transition to a more democratic system of government in the face of international and economic pressure. However, the military only agreed to 'share' power in this new system. This is due to the new constitution, which was largely composed by the military. It guaranteed that the military would retain control over key areas of daily life and defence, as well as a quarter of the seats in parliament. This basically guaranteed that the military would have veto power over most of what was going on, including any potential changes to the constitution.

2015 Elections

In the 2015, new elections were held which appeared to seem the most fair and registered ones in Myanmar's history. Over 22 million people casted their votes which resulted in the NLD winning in a sweeping victory, taking a very large majority of the seats in the Assembly of the Union. Nevertheless, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) still held around a third of official power but demonstrated much greater political power with the genocide that followed. As well as having very heavy monitorisation in the capital, Naypyidaw, as well as Mandalay and Yangon.

Military dominance

To reflect how little the military power had been diminished one of its bloodiest campaigns against an ethnic minority group came in 2017, despite the NLD being in power. This occurred against the Rohingya ethnic group, in which people from West Myanmar and Bangladesh were subjected to extreme military oppression. As a result of the burning of villages, millions of people were forced to flee their homes, and family members were interrogated. Due to this systematic persecution, it was referred to as a genocide.

Not only this but there was a constant fear from the NDL and other political parties that the military group would over throw the government if challenged. Together with the over 50 years of military propaganda and heavily monitored education systems it led to the people of Myanmar feeling overpowered. As well as little to say about the future of the country. However, even the backed party leaders feared sudden repercussion from the military.

This stemmed from the fact that in early 2017 one of Aung San Suu Kyi's legal advisors was assassinated in broad daylight and was truly seen as a warning to her and the NLD, but also all other people thinking to stand against the current rule.

Military coup

Furthermore, in the 2020 election the NLD once again proved to be the most popular party as it accumulated even more votes than the previous election. With heavy resistance from the USDP to give up control, the coup was on the brink of beginning. The new assembly comprised of majority NLD seats was set to come into place in early 2021. However, just before the transfer of power, the military of Myanmar took extreme radical action and implemented their military coup. They claimed that the elections in 2020 were rigged – yet they didn't provide substantial evidence for these claims. What followed was a series of arrests of political campaigners and the government and parliament were overthrown and taken over by the holding military. The USDP's chairman unrightfully took leadership positions in the country and made new appointments of president and all government employment.

This, of course causes catastrophic consequences socially, economical, and environmentally. In the following month terror struck all Myanmar inhabitants as children were killed for attending religious schools and several other genocides occurred. An accumulative 25000+ people died in the genocides. Furthermore, this coup caused the quality of life to decrease rapidly. This was also due to the international repercussion.

When this occurred several countries united and created trade embargos and sent aid together with several other nongovernment organisations to help the struggling Myanmar people. At this point in 2022, countries like Australia and Singapore were some of the countries with trade embargos. However, several countries like Russia and China continued their supply of arms and other necessities for the military.

Several recent reports show that over 18 million people are in need for humanitarian aid, were before the coup less than 1 million needed it. Additionally, it saw the amount of people below the poverty line skyrocket. With already fragile rural area suffering the greatest, due to the lack of infrastructure and banned trade with foreign nations. Further, the arm had been seen blocking aid from reaching those in need by setting up roadblocks and limiting supplies to uncontrolled areas.

Historical background

The context of Myanmar has heavily been influenced by the decades of colonisation and has been politically unstable ever since the independence. The ethnic groups in the country are diverse. With lots of religions being embraced in the country. Most of the people are Buddhist, there are also many Christians and Muslims. However, after the Rohingyas genocide the number of Muslims greatly reduced as they fled or were killed.

The majority of the historical background is outlined in the timeline of key events.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Description of event
1948	Burma gains independence from the United Kingdom
1948	1961 Democratic government in Burma
1962	First military coup to bring a one-party oppressive military ruled state to power, lead by General Ne Win
March 12 1988	8888 Uprising (pro-democracy peaceful protest)
July 1988	General Ne Win resigns
September 1988	National League for Democracy created by Aung San Suu Kyi
1989	Government changed their name from 'Burma' to 'Myanmar'
1990	First multi-party election, which was won by NLD However, the military refused to honour results and so maintained power
2015	Second ever election, which was heavily won by Suu Kyi's NLD
2020	Third elections, seeing NLD win again
2021	Military Coup, deposing the government. Giving back power to the military party and arresting most democratic politicians
2021	National Unity Government of Myanmar formed
May 5 2021	NUG declared a defensive war on the military government

Major Parties Involved

Myanmar	Myanmar, also known as Burma, is a country located in Southeast Asia. It is situated on the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea, sharing borders with Bangladesh to the northwest, China to the northeast, Laos to the east, Thailand to the south, and a sea to the southwest. Myanmar is the country where the war crimes and mass genocide took place and the main country impacted by the human right violation that took place.
China	China was the largest provider of arms for the military government currently in power. Due to its proximity as a land boarder country, it can easily transport the supplies. It profits from the supply of this, however due to recent moral concerns and international pressure China is reducing their connections to limit the militaries power. Similarly, in recent months many bombings to the military occupied land have been dropped on the Chinese side of their boarder which is increasing tensions between the countries further giving reason to China's reduce trade with Myanmar.
USA	The USA is a country geographically located far from Myanmar and is not an active participator in the war. However, in the past has traded with the country heavily.
Russia	Russia, like China has supplied the Myanmar's government with arms in the past. Regarding its current stance is very unknown due to current conflict. Nevertheless, Russia sees Myanmar as a longstanding partner. Moreover, together with China, Russia vetoed an UN security council resolution which aimed to cease military attacks against civilians in ethnic minority regions.
Bangladesh	Bangladesh as a sovereign country has had no direct attacks on its land. However, the indirect influx of refugees at their eastern connection boarder has been immense. Millions of people from Myanmar wish to flee their country because they are at risk of serious human rights violations and persecution. On top of this Bangladesh has had its own population pressure problems and can not handle often illegal migration.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

There have been several past attempts to resolve or limit conflict in the Myanmar area as well as hold people responsible for the genocide that is occurred.

In 2007 the United Nations Security Council tried to pass a resolution which called on Myanmar's Government to cease military attacks against civilians in ethnic minority regions and begin a substantive political dialogue that would lead to a genuine democratic transition. The USA and the UK forward brought the resolution. It received 9/15 votes for and was due to pass, however China and Russia both Vetoed this resolution causing it not to pass and not be implemented. The reason for this is as China did not believe that it should have been handled internationally but was instead an internal affair.

Early in 2023 the Human Rights Council passed a resolution which outlines multiple countries which will have to abide and protect human rights of their inhabitants. One of these countries was Myanmar, which made a pledge for the victims of the genocide to have access to proper human rights requirements. However, several reports show that no action has been undertaken by Myanmar nor have any other countries held them responsible this is due to the resolution being a pledge which is not legally binding.

Moreover, there have been internal attempts to take back control from ethnic minority parties towards the current government. The three main parties banded together to form an allegiance called the 'Brotherhood Alliance', which have rebelled violently back towards the militarized government. The largest scale campaign was 'Operation 1027' in 2023, where heavy weapons were used to fight against areas of military control and attempt to eradicate cybercrime hubs around the country.

Possible Solutions

There are various viable solutions that can be put in place and some of them have already been implemented. but these solutions are not only vital for peace and fair elections in Myanmar but the entire world. some of the solutions could include:

- Negotiating a peaceful settlement between the current militarized government and NUG, where Myanmar becomes a fully independent state that has fair elections. This

solution requires diplomatic effort to find common ground between the two sides and address their concerns and interests which could be discussed and planned meetings where further agreements could be established.

- Having an international mediation where a third party would help facilitate negotiations between the political parties.
- Alternatively, one approach could be separating the country into two sovereign states where one democratic Myanmar will be formed and create a sovereign nation and the current occupied land by the USDP/military will become its own sovereign nation as well.
- The country could unify under the current militarized government which would allow communication and increase quality of life in the country. It would also allow aid to come into the country however the government will then officially be controlled by the military and have full autonomy in legislation.
- In the current civil war, the involvement of other superpowers has been a major cause for escalation and the longevity of the war. It could prove to be very beneficial to have a united arms embargo between all relevant UN member states to reduce trade to the area to prevent provoking conflict and limits future escalation.

No matter what path is taken the solution to this problem should be non-violent as the United Nations courage peace. Not all solutions need to be tailored specifically to stop the conflict however they should aim to resolve the violations of human rights happening in Myanmar.

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