PERSECUTION IN MYANMAR
The Rohingya Crisis

BACKGROUND

In March, WAC learned about the decades of persecution of the Rohingya in Myanmar starting in 1922 when the British Empire\(^1\) is at the height of its power; holding land in Asia from Afghanistan to Thailand—migrants moved in British India, travelling from Bengal into Burma looking for work. When the Second World War raged in the Pacific between the British and Japanese\(^2\) empires, colonial subjects began choosing their sides; in Burma, the Muslim Rohingya remained loyal to the British, while the Burmese Buddhists\(^3\) sought to help the Japanese cause, hoping to be rewarded with independence following the war. As we know, the Second World War ended in Allied victory, and the post-war years of decolonization saw the divides of the war take its toll on Burma. Seen as Bengalis who had come into their land illegally during British rule, the Burmese
government passed a citizenship law in 1962 identifying 135 ethnic groups, among which the Rohingya were not. A stateless people, the Rohingya are not even considered a legitimate ethnicity, maintaining that they’re illegal Muslim immigrants from Bangladesh. This has left the Rohingya population as stateless, without an actual nationality or citizenship.

Tensions came to a head with the 2012 Rakhine State riots between Rakhine Buddhists and the Muslim Rohingya, leaving many dozens dead and thousands displaced. The violence and persecution against the Rohingya has only escalated since. The WAC also talked about the current crisis where currently the Rohingya have been confined to Rakhine State, where government security forces have been accused of committing ethnic cleansing against the native Rohingya through the torching of villages and killing of its inhabitants.

On this matter, many governments and international organizations have called on Myanmar’s de facto leader, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, to push her government to end the systemic atrocities against the Rohingya. However, most of the power in Myanmar lies in the hands of the army, and Kyi seems to not be in the position to enforce a halt to the army’s actions. The United Nations has said that about 370,000 Rohingya have left Myanmar for Bangladesh alone between August and October, with over a million total having been displaced across the world since the government began its crackdown on the population. The Bangladeshi government has said that despite its best efforts the camps that it has opened up for refugees are nearing their limit, and has called on the UN to pressure Myanmar to repatriate its
people; the United States, in fact, has just decided to re-impose sanctions against the country to pressure a change of policy.

1Burma was a province within the British Raj of India, being incorporated into the British Empire in 1824. The Burmese were more nationalistic than the rest of India, with anti-Christian, anti-Imperial sentiment since the early 1900s.

2Japan seized control of many British territories in Asia during World War II, among them parts of Burma, to which they were welcomed by the Burmese who saw them as potential allies in a struggle against Britain for independence.

3Burma, or Myanmar as it is known today, is a deeply Buddhist country. Buddhist monks are and have been looked to for moral and national guidance—they supported independence against Britain and today support the government’s actions against the Rohingya.

4Previously part of Pakistan as East Pakistan province, Bangladesh today it is a Muslim-majority country in Southeast Asia bordered by Myanmar to the east and India to the west and the north.

5A stateless person is an individual without formal ties to a country, usually due to the lack of a formal citizenship.

6The Rakhine state is the westernmost region of Myanmar which borders Bangladesh and is home to the country’s Rohingya population.

7Ethnic cleansing is the process of systemic elimination of a cultural or ethnic group by an organized government. The Burmese armed forces have been accused of this through their attacks and burning of villages which have resulted in the deaths of many Rohingya and flight of many more.

8The State Counsellor is a position of de facto leadership in Myanmar; while she holds influence as leader of the largest party and has a lot of support, she does not hold the power to stop the military’s actions in the Rakhine.
Aung San Suu Kyi (born 1945) is a Burmese diplomat, daughter of Burma’s national hero Bogyoke Aung San. She received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991. She had previously been arrested under the military junta until 2010; in 2015 her party won the general election and she was made State Counsellor the following year.

**LET’S THINK ABOUT IT**

Your SWAC leader will prompt you with questions revolving around the same idea: do you think the Rohingya crisis will see a fair and stable resolution? Express your thoughts and contribute to discussion with your fellow peers!

(room to write your thoughts)

This lesson plan is meant as an aid for the Faculty Sponsor, President or Vice-President to lead their respective SWAC chapter in the discussion of this two weeks’ focus: The Rohingya Crisis.

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Kahoot! Introductory Quiz

Kahoot! is an online Quiz platform. This small ten-question quiz is to test the student’s prior knowledge of Myanmar and the Rohingya people and introduce them to the discussion to come. The quiz does not require the proctor to have a Kahoot account in order to start. Students will use an electronic device in order to answer. The link is below; click START NOW and select Classic mode. After the Game PIN is generated, students will be able to join the session by accessing kahoot.it on their computer or mobile device. Begin the quiz once all students have joined! This activity shouldn’t take more than 15 minutes.

LINK: https://goo.gl/wPtcSh

Lesson Handout

Now is when the handouts should be passed out to students. It is split into two sections, one which covers the historical plight of the Rohingya and a second which addresses the present humanitarian crisis. It is recommended that the handout be read aloud as a group instead of individually. Take some time after the document has been read to cover the material with the students and make sure that its been generally understood. Ask questions to students; get them to summarize what they’ve read and make sure that the students are engaged and understanding. The reading shouldn’t take more than 15 minutes.
Video Resources

We have two video resources below that will go over in more detail the current event portion of the handout and expand upon it. Following each link we’ve included a description of the video and possible questions that you can ask students to see what they’ve taken away from watching the clips. Each video clip is between 4 and 7 minutes; coupled with questions, this segment shouldn’t take more than 15 minutes.

MEET THE ROHINGYA, THE MOST PERSECUTED PEOPLE YOU'VE NEVER HEARD OF

LINK: [https://goo.gl/yDfTFo](https://goo.gl/yDfTFo)

This video by AJ+, a division of Al Jazeera, goes over both the history of the Rakhine situation as well as the current situation, the refugee crisis, Aung San Suu Kyi, and issues beginning since the crackdown of this year.

› Could the Rohingya crisis have been prevented altogether in any way? How so?

THE “ETHNIC CLEANSING” OF MYANMAR’S ROHINGYA MUSLIMS, EXPLAINED

LINK: [https://goo.gl/D4Dxz7](https://goo.gl/D4Dxz7)

This is a shorter video by Vox, which also discusses much of the same historical and modern issues that were touched on in the AJ+ video. It mostly emphasizes the crises that has stem from different incidents of political and social repression of the Rohingya.

› How much of an impact can the international community have on the domestic policy of Myanmar?
DISCUSSION

Do you think that the Rohingya crisis will see a fair and stable resolution?
Will this be achieved by domestic changes only or is there room in their for foreign pressure to play part? What can be done to help those already displaced? How will this crisis come to a conclusion? Will it be a positive or negative ending? Why? In your eyes, is Aung San Suu Kyi complicit in any of the atrocities?
This shouldn’t take more than 10 minutes – total estimated meeting time: no more than 1 hour.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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