

NAMING AND SHAMING: THE ROHINGYA CRISIS

In the wake of World War II, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was proposed—a vow to never allow the atrocities witnessed during the war to happen again. Among the countries that ratified or signed this document were Myanmar and Bangladesh. Despite their adoption of the document, they have not lived up to meeting all the articles presented by it, in particular Article 15, which guarantees “the right to a nationality”. Their negligence to enforce this right is reflected by the Rohingya crisis; along with the almost million Rohingya refugees that have fled to Bangladesh, the remaining Rohingyas in Myanmar are also currently found stateless. The refusal to recognize the Rohingyas by either nation leaves them unprotected and they stand to exist as an obvious case of a population whose human rights are violated.

Although the UDHR may not be legally binding, it does reflect the states’ acceptance of such values, hence it is only appropriate that their lack of commitment to these ideals are recognized. Otherwise, staying silent on the matter suggests to the perpetrators that their actions can continue without consequence. Thus, to correct the behavior of these states, they *should* experience the consequences and be shamed by the international community. Shaming is effective as administrations have an aversion to negative publicity, feeling pressured to preserve their international and domestic legitimacy. With their viability as a potential trading partner and domestic power threatened, states will often yield to the pressure and modify their policies or behavior suitably.

Instances where naming and shaming has proven to be effective are not uncommon. Nearly two decades ago, the United Nations released a report that listed and condemned major groups in Africa, Asia, and Latin America for the use of child soldiers. Since then, nearly half of the

offending groups have amended their operations, and have consequently been taken off the list—the report and its effects clearly has not gone unnoticed. More recently, about a decade ago, China was met with intense international criticism for their involvement in the Darfur conflict of Sudan. The Beijing Olympics, which were held in 2008, were popularized as the “Genocide Olympics” by human rights activists, and this international backlash was instrumental in affecting China’s relations with Sudan. China enacted substantial policy changes in an effort to pressure Sudan’s government into resolving the conflict: financial incentives for Chinese companies to invest in Sudan were removed; a UN resolution that pressed the Sudanese government to support humanitarian campaigns was recommended; and a special envoy for Sudan was appointed, indicating China’s concern over its relationship with Sudan. This shift in policy clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of shaming and the pressure an administration feels to respond appropriately. Thus, a similar approach should be adopted in addressing Myanmar’s and Bangladesh’s treatment of the Rohingyas. The best way to encourage these states to act in accordance to the UDHR is to shame them—then, we may finally start to see improvement for the Rohingya crisis.

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