

Exodus: Will Anyone Help the Rohingya Refugees?



Zubaidah Chowdhury

zubaidahchowdhury13@gmail.com

Fiorello H. Laguardia High School

12th Grade

“My daughter shook me and said, ‘Mom, get up. The house is on fire. You’re burning,’” painfully recalls Mumtaz Begum in PBS Frontline’s documentary *Myanmar’s Killing Fields*. No child should have to shoulder the burden of protecting their parents, but Mumtaz's daughter has had to for most of her life. Of course, in the eyes of the Myanmar government, she is no child at all. All Muslim Rohingyas, such as Mumtaz and her daughter, are seen as illegal immigrants who must be eradicated from Myanmar, even if it means burning them alive.

The crisis in Myanmar’s Rakhine state is a “textbook case of ethnic cleansing,” according to Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Rohingya people have been subject to state-sanctioned violence, systematic oppression, and orchestrated rapes, village-burning, and murder. Since 2017, more than 730,000 Rohingya have fled the persecution. To solve this crisis, international actors have to not only hold Myanmar’s government and military accountable for committing crimes against humanity, but also pressure them to create conducive conditions for the Rohingyas’ repatriation.

Firstly, due to Myanmar’s State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi’s desire for support from Myanmar’s military in increasing her re-election chances, she’s overlooked these crimes against humanity. The international community must recognize that Myanmar’s discussions and claims of plans for repatriation of the Rohingyas are merely a facade in attempts to evade greater condemnation from the U.N. According to the International Rescue Committee, only 11% of Rohingya wish to return to Myanmar, exposing the lack of progress made by the government to uphold their promises. International actors must pressure Aung San Suu Kyi to engage in discussions about democratic reform that allow for her to have greater control over the military

as opposed to the status quo. Freedom of speech also must be protected in Myanmar as journalists who attempt to expose the Myanmar government's crimes are often jailed.

The U.S. State Department must take action by declaring the crimes in Myanmar a genocide. "Defining these atrocities for what they are is critical to building international public awareness – and support – to stop them," states U.S. Representative Ed Royce. Economic pressure must also increase. The U.S. and the E.U. must place harsher sanctions on Myanmar and sanctions, "need to extend to the highest levels, including Senior General Min Aung Hlaing," (Sullivan, *The Rohingya Crisis: What to Watch for in 2019*). Skye Wheeler of the Human Rights Watch states that an arms embargo must be placed on Myanmar as well. The U.S. should also rank Myanmar as the worst offender of humanitarian rights in order to deny aid from the World Bank to Myanmar.

"No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark," beseeched British-Somali poet Warsan Shire in his powerful poem, *Home*. Until the Myanmar Government ceases to make the Rakhine state the mouth of a shark, the Rohingya people will have no choice but to continue to leave home.

Bibliography

- Agency. "Myanmar Willing to Take Back All Rohingya Refugees, Top Official Says." *The Independent*, Independent Digital News and Media, 2 June 2018, www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/myanmar-rohingya-refugees-muslims-bangladesh-burma-thaung-tun-a8380546.html.
- Beech, Hannah. "First Rohingya Are to Be Returned to Myanmar Killing Grounds." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 14 Nov. 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/11/14/world/asia/rohingya-myanmar-repatriation.html.
- "Myanmar's Killing Fields." *PBS*, Public Broadcasting Service, www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/myanmars-killing-fields/.
- Richardson, Bill. "Accountability Alone Will Not Solve Myanmar Rohingya Crisis." *Time*, Time, 5 Nov. 2018, time.com/5442807/myanmar-bangladesh-rohingya-accountability-bill-richardson/.
- Rohingya, Rise For. "Kwame Anthony Appiah on the Rohingya Crisis." *YouTube*, YouTube, 10 Nov. 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GW6b_ATfyc.
- "The Rohingya Crisis: What to Watch for in 2019." *Fair Observer*, 2 Jan. 2019, www.fairobservers.com/region/asia_pacific/rohingya-crisis-refugees-genocide-myanmar-bangladesh-asia-world-news-today-21390/.
- "What Can Be Done to Stop Rohingya Persecution?" *PBS*, Public Broadcasting Service, www.pbs.org/video/rohingya-in-crisis-1524870809/.

Zengerle, Patricia. "Lawmakers Urge U.S. to Call Myanmar's Rohingya Campaign Genocide."

Reuters, Thomson Reuters, 26 Sept. 2018,

www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-myanmar-congress/lawmakers-urge-u-s-to-call-myanmar-s-rohingya-campaign-genocide-idUSKCN1M62ES.