

The word “genocide” is younger than three of my grandparents. A Polish lawyer coined the term in 1944 during Nazi Germany’s “Final Solution.”<sup>1</sup> After four years of tireless advocacy, he succeeded in adding the crime of “genocide” to international law.<sup>2</sup> And yet, since the latter half of the 20th century alone, the world has witnessed genocides in Rwanda, Bosnia, East Timor, Bangladesh, Kurdistan, and Cambodia. Today, Myanmar’s government is trying to exterminate the Rohingya ethnic group, described by UN Secretary-General Guterres as “one of, if not the, most discriminated people in the world.”<sup>3</sup> In 2017, over 700,000 Rohingya fled a new wave of persecution in Myanmar for Bangladesh, creating one of the world’s largest refugee crises ever.<sup>4</sup> Denied citizenship by Myanmar, the Rohingya refugees are stateless.<sup>5</sup> The only way this problem can be permanently resolved is if Myanmar stops perpetuating genocide and lets the Rohingya return home.

History shows us that international intervention is crucial to stop genocide. Vietnamese forces stopped the Khmer Rouge from slaughtering more Cambodians.<sup>6</sup> Without intervention, violence has continued. A UN lieutenant general said that the genocide of some 500,000 to 800,000 Tutsis in Rwanda could have been averted by deploying 5,000 troops at the beginning of

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<sup>1</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "COINING A WORD AND CHAMPIONING A CAUSE: THE STORY OF RAPHAEL LEMKIN," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed June 26, 2021, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/coining-a-word-and-championing-a-cause-the-story-of-raphael-lemkin>

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Antonio Guterres, "Opening Remarks at Press Encounter with President of the World Bank, Jim Yong Kim Secretary-General," United Nations, July 2, 2018, accessed July 01, 2021, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2018-07-02/remarks-press-encounter-world-bank-president-jim-kim>

<sup>4</sup> Vox, YouTube, September 25, 2017, accessed June 28, 2021, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04axDDRVy\\_o&ab\\_channel=Vox](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04axDDRVy_o&ab_channel=Vox)

<sup>5</sup> Kathryn Reid, "Rohingya Refugee Crisis: Facts, FAQs, and How to Help," World Vision, May 14, 2021, accessed June 25, 2021, <https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/rohingya-refugees-bangladesh-facts>

<sup>6</sup> Kevin Doyle, "Vietnam's Forgotten Cambodian War," BBC News, September 14, 2014, accessed June 26, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-29106034>

the crisis.<sup>7</sup> Instead, the UN actually withdrew peacekeeping forces after the onset of the Rwandan Civil War.<sup>8</sup>

Tragically, we are pursuing a similar policy of inaction with the Rohingya genocide. While the International Court of Justice ordered Myanmar to prevent genocidal acts against the Rohingya in 2020, they have no enforcement power and need the backing of the UN Security Council.<sup>9</sup> Despite an American investigative report in 2017 that found the Tatmadaw guilty of gang raping, mutilating, burning, drowning, and killing Rohingya of all ages, the Trump administration refused to officially recognize the Rohingya as victims of genocide.<sup>10</sup> America has incredible influence; President Biden could prompt international protection of the Rohingya if he decides to hold Myanmar's military accountable for genocide.<sup>11</sup> In such a situation, even if the other members of the Security Council did not agree to deploy UN peacekeeping forces, the US could orchestrate a concerted international response, like multilateral implementation of sanctions, that would place pressure on the Myanmar military junta to reform their discriminatory policies and offer the Rohingya citizenship.

Until it is safe for them to return to Myanmar, we also need to provide Rohingya refugees with safe living conditions. Most refugees have ended up in Bangladesh, whose limited resources and land has resulted in cramped and disease ridden refugee camps.<sup>12</sup> In 2019, Bangladesh

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<sup>7</sup> "As Genocide Raged, General's Pleas for Help Ignored," CNN, 2008, accessed June 29, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/africa/11/13/sbm.dallaire.profile/>

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Richard C. Paddock, "U.N. Court Orders Myanmar to Protect Rohingya Muslims," *The New York Times*, January 23, 2020, accessed June 26, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/23/world/asia/myanmar-rohingya-genocide.html>

<sup>10</sup> Lara Jakes, "Genocide Designation for Myanmar Tests Biden's Human Rights Policy," *The New York Times*, June 30, 2021, accessed June 30, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/30/us/politics/biden-genocide-rohingya-myanmar.html>

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Eleanor Albert and Lindsay Maizland, "What Forces Are Fueling Myanmar's Rohingya Crisis?" Council on Foreign Relations, 2020, accessed June 28, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/background/rohingya-crisis>

announced that it would stop accepting Rohingya refugees.<sup>13</sup> The international community needs both to provide Bangladesh with more aid for its refugee camps and also share the burden by taking in refugees themselves. In 1939, America sent the *St. Louis*, a ship with over 900 Jewish refugees, back to Europe resulting in the death of roughly 28% of the passengers in the Holocaust.<sup>14</sup> We should not repeat the mistakes of the past.

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<sup>13</sup> "Rohingya Crisis: Bangladesh Will No Longer Take in Myanmar Refugees," BBC News, March 01, 2019, accessed June 26, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-47412704>

<sup>14</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Refugees," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed June 28, 2021, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/refugees>

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