



جامعة جورجتاون
كلية الشؤون الدولية في قطر
Model United Nations

Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar

I. About the Advisory Panel

As one of the components of the United Nations, the Advisory Panel is designed to resolve international disputes in a diplomatic framework. It first was instituted by the Secretary General. Unlike the other committees in the Model United Nations, it is not composed simply of delegates. Rather, it is a panel of experts, often between 10-20, in various fields in order to bring their perspectives to the issues at hand.¹ They discuss and debate the best course of action on any crisis in order to later closely advise member states with the most appropriate strategy to address the relevant issue.

II. Sectarian Violence in Burma

Though there have been many outbursts of violence in recent years between the two key players, the Muslim Rohingya and the Buddhist Rakhine, the seeds of conflict were planted many years ago. Burma had at one point been colonized by the British Empire, and when the Japanese had invaded, the British evacuated, leaving a power vacuum behind in what was left of Burma.² Tensions that had been brewing finally came to the surface. What was the cause of such underlying

¹ "SEOMUN." Advisory Panel. Seoul Model United Nations. Web. 27 Dec 2013. <<http://seomunkorea.com/archives/seomun-xv/advisory-panel/>>.

² Chan, Aye. Kanda University of International Studies .Development of a Muslim Enclave in Arakan (Rakhine) State of Burma (Myanmar). 205. Web. <<http://www.soas.ac.uk/sbbr/editions/file64388.pdf>>.

tension? One clear strategy to achieving control over a new territory is to 'divide and conquer'. This was not unfamiliar to the British. In fact, the British were able to foment grievances between the Muslim Rohingya and Buddhist Rakhine by importing from Bengal the Zamindary System.³ This new system gave thousands of Bengali's thousands of acres of land on lifetime leases. Thousands of Bengali's were brought in to cultivate the crops for their landowners. It is these people who are in the future to be homogenized as the Muslims of Burma, despite other various ethnic groups who also affiliate themselves with Islam. Unfortunately, the other populations were left behind in this new system brought on by the British. Ultimately even at this time, only 4.5% of the Bengali Muslim population was literate while 22.5% of the Arakanese (from the old Empire of Arakan) population was.⁴ Finally, it is recorded in 1942 that when the British had withdrawn to India, the Arakanese attacked Muslim villagers and the Muslims fled north to take vengeance.⁵ Further, the British armed Chittagonian forces in the effort to fight the Japanese, who instead directed their violence towards Buddhist monasteries. Since then the history has become increasingly convoluted.

Today it has taken on a slightly different form in the flare ups from these past few years. The main tension is between the Rohingya and Rakhine, but more largely the Muslims and Buddhists. It is not simply an ethnic but also religious tension, where the Muslim Kaman have also been attacked in recent years. Muslims only comprise of 4% of the current 60 million population of Burma.⁶ The Rohingya, however, are regarded as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh from those past days from the British imperialism. This idea is further reaffirmed by the military regime of Burma who refused until 1982 to give citizenship to the Bengali's as they were not the ethnic population to exist in Burma before the first Anglo-Burmese war over three hundred years ago in 1824.⁷ It is them who are blamed for the impoverishment that many Burmese suffer today, the

³ ibid

⁴ ibid

⁵ ibid

⁶ "Deadly sectarian violence hits Myanmar." Al Jazeera. 3 Oct 2013: n. page. Web. 27 Dec. 2013. <<http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2013/10/3/deadly-religiousviolencehitsmyanmar.html>>.

⁷ Chan, Aye. Kanda University of International Studies. Development of a Muslim Enclave in Arakan (Rakhine) State of Burma (Myanmar). 205. Web. <<http://www.soas.ac.uk/sbbr/editions/file64388.pdf>>.

Rakhine Buddhist state, holding 43.5% of its people below the poverty line.⁸ They are seen as both an ethnic and religious dominant minority who threaten the wellbeing of the greater population. Organizations such as the 969, a Buddhist group led by charismatic men such as Wirathu, incite violence and hatred against the Muslim minority, even if they are not originally Bengali. Since that time in history, it has grown to become a greater religious conflict rather than purely ethnic.

III. Main Problems and Current Solutions

Last year, 190 were killed and 150,000 homeless in clashes in Rakhine.⁹ If not only a blow in terms of pure loss, it is also a blow judicially as there were no Buddhist perpetrators punished. As a result of the political and social upheaval, people have been unable to operate their businesses normally either, also hurting the already economically fragile state. At the same time, the Muslims feel not quite like an ethnic dominant majority. Hla Sein, a 54 year old Muslim man remarks, "The president is the most responsible person in the country. Up until now, when Muslim people have been killed, their property destroyed, he's been silent."¹⁰ Further, "the Special Rapporteur notes that the report fails to address the issue of impunity and the allegations of widespread and systematic human rights violations against the Rohingya community in Rakhine State. He reiterates that the State has not fulfilled its obligation to properly investigate allegations, dating from June 2012, of extrajudicial killings, rape and sexual violence; arbitrary detention and torture and ill-treatment in detention; deaths in detention; and denial of due process and fair trial rights. It also has not held those responsible to account."¹¹

⁸ I.S., . "The silence of the muezzin." Economist. n. page. Web. 27 Dec. 2013. <<http://www.economist.com/blogs/banyan/2013/10/sectarian-violence-myanmar>>.

⁹ I.S., . "The silence of the muezzin." Economist. n. page. Web. 27 Dec. 2013. <<http://www.economist.com/blogs/banyan/2013/10/sectarian-violence-myanmar>>.

¹⁰ "Deadly sectarian violence hits Myanmar." Al Jazeera. 3 Oct 2013: n. page. Web. 27 Dec. 2013. <<http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2013/10/3/deadly-religiousviolencehitsmyanmar.html>>.

¹¹ Quintana, Tomás Ojea. United Nations. Special Rapporteur. Situation of human rights in Myanmar. New York: , 2013. Web. <<http://www.altsean.org/Docs/Envoys Reports/Ojea UNGA September 2013.pdf>>.

Various solutions to this complex conflict have been proposed at many stages of the issues development. The Muslims of Mayu Frontier for example had attempted to submit a proposal in the aim of separating the Muslims from the main state. They were of course turned down in 1972 and so was their request for representatives to the state in 1974.¹² Some branches of the frontier radicalized and called for Rohingya National Liberation. However, such violent outbursts are often only met with acts of revenge, and lead only to a bloody spiral downwards. Such options are not sustainably good for both sides.

The president has in recent months made hundreds of presidential amnesties which has been a great help to the current problems in the judicial system but is only an aid to the solution, not a full solution. In July the president granted 737 presidential amnesties by releasing prisoners of conscience.¹³ It is important that those released receive psychological and medical care. There are also many more imprisoned arbitrarily, such as Tun Aung who must be addressed immediately. The conditions of these very prisoners must also be addressed- they are not easily accessible to UN or other NGO workers to make sure they are abiding by international law. Evidence of torture has also been discovered in these facilities. Further, Muslim leaders have increasing chances of becoming arbitrarily arrested much like Tun Aung.

Cease-fires have also been tried as solutions to other conflicts in Burma. There have been successes found there. The Union Peacemaking Central Committee and the Myanmar Peace Centre, headed by the Minister in the President's Office, Aung Min, have been leading the way in these negotiations and have been able to cooperate with the many groups they must approach. This may be a great strategy to apply to the situation in Rakhine with the ethnic tensions which have flared up. Bringing diplomatic discussions and dialogue to the fore can perhaps alleviate the severity of grievances between the Muslim and Buddhist populations.

¹² Chan, Aye. Kanda University of International Studies .Development of a Muslim Enclave in Arakan (Rakhine) State of Burma (Myanmar). 205. Web. <<http://www.soas.ac.uk/sbbr/editions/file64388.pdf>>.

¹³ Quintana, Tomás Ojea. United Nations. Special Rapporteur. Situation of human rights in Myanmar. New York: , 2013. Web. <<http://www.altsean.org/Docs/Envoys Reports/Ojea UNGA September 2013.pdf>>.

Further solutions which has brought hope to the current sectarian violence in Burma can be seen with the disbanding of border troops at Nasaka who had been alleged to have committed systematic acts of torture and human rights abuses against the Rohingya, such as enforcing a two mile limit and restricting their travel.¹⁴ However this is also not enough in order to fix the problems in Burma.

Severe displacement internally is also another problem which has only limited solutions currently. Over 140,000 peoples internally have been displaced since 2012 clashes and the United Nations and other NGO's have been able to build temporary shelter for those affected. As a result, providing for food has also been another hurdle that the UN has attempted to tackle with moderate amounts of success and provided for 127,000 in June 2013 along with administering polio vaccinations.¹⁵ Further, children in affected areas have increasingly less access to education which has become a mounting problem to overcome and access to education has become paramount.

Additionally, the new Muslim enclaves are becoming more and more permanent and stratified from the other Burmese populations. Such social stratification can only lead to further conflict down the line as there will be an alienation between the two social groups. Therefore educational and grassroots campaigns are extremely important to the future connecting and livelihoods of the two religious groups. Such incorporation of the two groups must happen on all levels, local, state, and institutional. Examples of this being undertaken may be seen with the Immigration Minister in Nay Pyi Taw who was putting his efforts towards involving mediating third parties to improve the communication between the Rohingya and the government. In Yangon,

¹⁴ Della-Giacoma, Jim. "Myanmar's "Nasaka": Disbanding an Abusive Agency." *Resolving Conflict in SouthEast Asia*. (2013): n. page. Web. 27 Dec. 2013. <<http://www.crisisgroupblogs.org/resolvingconflict/2013/07/16/myanmars-nasaka-disbanding-an-abusive-agency/>>.

¹⁵ Quintana, Tomás Ojea. United Nations. Special Rapporteur. *Situation of human rights in Myanmar*. New York: , 2013. Web. <<http://www.altsean.org/Docs/Envoys Reports/Ojea UNGA September 2013.pdf>>.

interfaith civil society groups were also in the midst of bettering their communication and trust and knowledge between the Muslim and Burmese population as a whole.¹⁶

The larger anti-Muslim sentiments on hand in the state are also important to keep in mind for the greater need to fix misunderstandings. The Special Rapporteur from the United Nations reported in late 2013 that “ In the Mandalay region, which experienced anti-Muslim violence between 20 and 23 March 2013 that resulted in 43 deaths, including pupils at an Islamic boarding school and a Buddhist monk, and led to some 13,000 persons being displaced. He also visited Lashio, in Shan State, where anti-Muslim violence from 28 to 30 May 2013, sparked by the inexplicable burning of a Buddhist woman, led to one death and the burning of buildings, including two mosques, an orphanage and local shops. In Lashio, he met a senior monk, Sayadaw Baddhanta Ponnya-Nanda of the Lashio Mansu Shan Buddhist monastery, who provided shelter to more than 1,000 Muslims fleeing the violence.”

IV. Key Players

Parties on the Burma-Bangladesh border:

1. RSO (Rohingya Solidarity Organization)
2. ARIF (Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front)
3. RPF (Rohingya Patriotic Front)
4. RLO (Rohingya Liberation Organization)
5. IMA (Itihadul Mozahadin of Arakan)

¹⁶ Quintana, Tomás Ojea. United Nations. Special Rapporteur. Situation of human rights in Myanmar. New York: , 2013. Web. <<http://www.altsean.org/Docs/Envoys Reports/Ojea UNGA September 2013.pdf>>.

Several of these groups have been radicalized in their political interests and have taken violent action against their opposing groups.¹⁷

Additionally, as is obvious, the Muslim and Buddhist groups at large. In specific, the Rohingya and Rakhine ethnic groups. However, it is not necessarily just Rohingya that are targeted; it has grown to be Muslims in general as targets of hateful sentiments.

The government of Burma is additionally another important actor which is necessary to bringing justice between the two parties in order to bring peace. Their acts of injustice towards the Rohingya in the court of law has only further exacerbated the conflict between the two parties. Their abuses of human rights which is evident in not only the torture of Rohingya in prison cells but also other facets of the state is also a cause for concern as they are such big players in this scheme.

V. Current Status

Unfortunately, as described by the recent 2013 special UN report, “The Special Rapporteur believes that Rakhine State continues to experience a profound crisis. There is little evidence that the Government has taken steps to tackle the underlying causes of the communal violence or has put in place the policies that are necessary to forge a peaceful, harmonious and prosperous future for the state.”¹⁸ There have been many recent clashes as cited above and there is a void of positive intervention which can meaningfully contribute to the overall overcoming of the tension between the Muslims and Buddhists in Burma today.

VI. Questions to think about

1. What are the special interests of the government in favoring either group in either way?

¹⁷ Chan, Aye. Kanda University of International Studies .Development of a Muslim Enclave in Arakan (Rakhine) State of Burma (Myanmar). 205. Web. <<http://www.soas.ac.uk/sbbr/editions/file64388.pdf>>.

¹⁸ Quintana, Tomás Ojea. United Nations. Special Rapporteur. Situation of human rights in Myanmar. New York: , 2013. Web. <<http://www.altsean.org/Docs/Envoys Reports/Ojea UNGA September 2013.pdf>>.

2. Which parties in diplomatic talks in the case of sectarian violence would be the best grouping to reach a solution?
3. Is the conflict purely ethnic or religious? Is it perhaps a combination of both- and why?
4. If one group has special interests which lead it to committing human rights abuses, and this group has the most amount of legitimate power, how is it possible to change the status quo in a way that will not threaten that structure? Is it possible at all?
5. What are some conflicts today which, too, embody many of the same themes as here?
6. Will the Muslim populations become radicalized in reaction to their victimization by the greater Buddhist population?

Bibliography

Chan, Aye. Kanda University of International Studies .Development of a Muslim Enclave in Arakan (Rakhine) State of Burma (Myanmar). 205. Web. <<http://www.soas.ac.uk/sbbr/editions/file64388.pdf>>.

"Deadly sectarian violence hits Myanmar." Al Jazeera. 3 Oct 2013: n. page. Web. 27 Dec. 2013. <<http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2013/10/3/deadly-religiousviolencehitsmyanmar.html>>.

Della-Giacoma, Jim. "Myanmar's "Nasaka": Disbanding an Abusive Agency." Resolving Conflict in SouthEast Asia. (2013): n. page. Web. 27 Dec. 2013. <<http://www.crisisgroupblogs.org/resolvingconflict/2013/07/16/myanmars-nasaka-disbanding-an-abusive-agency/>>.

I.S., . "The silence of the muezzin." Economist. n. page. Web. 27 Dec. 2013. <<http://www.economist.com/blogs/banyan/2013/10/sectarian-violence-myanmar>>.

"SEOMUN." Advisory Panel. Seoul Model United Nations. Web. 27 Dec 2013. <<http://seomunkorea.com/archives/seomun-xv/advisory-panel/>>.

Quintana, Tomás Ojea. United Nations. Special Rapporteur. Situation of human rights in Myanmar. New York: , 2013. Web. <<http://www.altsean.org/Docs/Envoys Reports/Ojea UNGA September 2013.pdf>>.