



Security Council

Chairs:
Octavio Vega
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Letter From the Chairs

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 13th annual MIT Model United Nations Conference and to the Security Council committee! Despite the global health climate and the unfortunately virtual circumstances under which this February's conference must occur, we are delighted to have the opportunity to be your chairs this year!

I'm Octavio, a Junior studying Physics and minoring in Public Policy here at MIT. I've previously chaired DISEC, served as Secretary-General for the conference, and have had the pleasure of serving as Director of Global Expansion for MITMUNC. Ever since I was ten years old, I've had a tremendous interest in geography which has since evolved into a passion for foreign affairs and global conflicts.

I'm Eva, a Freshman planning to major in Mathematics and minor in Urban Studies and Planning. Although I've never chaired before, I have taken part in many conferences as a delegate throughout high school, focusing primarily on DISEC and Security Council. From my experiences, I gained a greater understanding of, and interest in international relations, and I would love to pass this on to others.

This weekend, you'll debate two major challenges in the world of international policy and human rights: The repression of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, and reforming the Security Council itself. We will expect your Position Papers in this Form - <https://forms.gle/pHGYH5hQvJfSn5gp6>. Use this weekend to learn, collaborate, and above all, have fun in exploring the complexities of international peace and security! We are very excited to meet you all and to debate these issues that are ever-pertinent to the real world Security Council!

Sincerely,

Octavio Vega and Eva Goldie

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Topic 1: Responding to the Crises of Rohingya Repression and Militant Buddhism

Situation Overview and Background Information

Myanmar (formerly known as Burma) is a nation in Southeast Asia bordering India, Bangladesh, China, Laos, and Thailand. The country is home to about 55 million people¹ and numerous ethnic groups, the vast majority of whom practice the conservative doctrine of the ancient Theravada Buddhism (87.9%)².

Myanmar has sustained decades of political turmoil and civil unrest ever since gaining independence from Great Britain in 1937. The Burmese government on numerous occasions faced uprisings from ethnic minority groups seeking autonomy in various regions of the country, as well as a slew of political demonstrations involving pro-democracy activists and Buddhist monks, including the famous 2007 Saffron Revolution.

Beginning in the late 1970s, the Burmese Government has enforced discriminatory policies against the nation's minority groups, most notably the Muslim Rohingya, and allowed for militaristic and religious groups to pursue violent discrimination against these populations.

Amidst the significant diversity in Myanmar, there is a small Islamic minority³ (4.3%) in the population, and the most notable ethnic group representing this faith are known as the Rohingya. The Rohingya have lived in Myanmar for centuries, and they predominantly inhabit Myanmar's western Rakhine state, which borders Bangladesh. Buddhism and Islam are two ancient religious philosophies, both of which are largely predicated on upholding peace. The dominance of the Buddhist faith in Myanmar, along with the guidance of militant spiritual leaders, has encouraged a

¹ <https://data.worldbank.org/country/myanmar?view=chart>

² <https://tricycle.org/beginners/buddhism/what-is-theravada-buddhism/>

³ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html>

movement against Muslims seeking to cleanse Islam from Buddhist lands⁴. The Buddhist leaders cite the conversion of ancient buddhists lands such as Central Asia in justifying their violent motivations. This violent rhetoric emanating from the predominantly Buddhist society of Myanmar encouraged military force to pursue the campaign against Muslims.

First declaring the Rohingya illegal in 1977, the Burmese military subjected the Rohingya to mass arrests, violence, human rights abuses, and forced exile into Bangladesh⁵. 12 years later, the Burmese military deployed to Rakhine state in greater numbers as a response to the political uprisings across Myanmar. Consequently, the local Rohingya were routinely tortured, raped, exiled, and executed. Over the next decades leading up to 2016, waves of Rohingya continue to flee Rakhine and populate the environmentally challenged makeshift camps in Bangladesh.

Recent ethnic tensions came to a head when the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) initiated skirmishes against the Burmese military in October 2016 and August 2017. The ARSA is a militant body of Rohingya resistance fighters seeking to win rights for the Rohingya in their homeland of Myanmar. Their insurgencies in 2016 and 2017 fueled the Burmese military to launch its most devastating assault against the Rohingya, which devolved into genocidal advances in Rakhine. Led by General Maung Maung Soe, the western command of the Burmese military carried out an offensive that razed Rohingya villages, killed many, and sent scores fleeing out of the country⁶.

Since August 2017, over 730,000 Rohingya refugees have fled Rakhine state to Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Today, approximately 860,000⁷ Rohingya refugees reside in the Kutupalong camp in Cox's Bazar, now the world's largest refugee settlement. This is a critically dire situation for the

⁴ <https://theconversation.com/militant-buddhism-is-on-the-march-in-south-east-asia-where-did-it-come-from-86632>

⁵

<https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/what-we-do/news-stories/news/timeline-visual-history-rohingya-refugee-crisis>

⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-42447510>

⁷ <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/briefing/2020/8/5f3e60124/unhcr-rohingya-crisis-needs-lasting-solutions.html>

inhabitants, especially given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Without adequate space and shelter, the Rohingya face tremendous challenges to their survival even after escaping the reach of violent buddhists and soldiers.

In 2019, the International Criminal Court (ICC) announced that it has jurisdiction to investigate crimes against humanity against the Rohingyas and opened a case⁸. The Burmese government declined to cooperate with the investigations, and Myanmar is not a signatory to the Rome Statute, the establishing document of the ICC. Therefore, the ICC cannot bring individuals in Myanmar to trial in The Hague unless the Security Council agrees on a resolution to authorize their arrest.

It is important to acknowledge that repression of Muslim minorities is not an isolated incident unique to Myanmar; militant Buddhism is on the rise in territories such as Sri Lanka and Thailand, also primarily Theravadin Buddhist lands. Actions taken regarding the oppression of the Rohingya will set a regional precedent for all similar atrocities.

Key Terms and Figures

Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA): The ARSA is a comparatively small body of armed Rohingya resistance fighters who came to prominence in 2016 and 2017 when they launched insurrections and attacks against the Burmese military. The Burmese government has labeled them a terrorist organization, and the ARSA represents the Burmese military's primary justification for the use of excessive force against the Rohingya.

Aung San Suu Kyi: Ms. Suu Kyi is the State Counsellor of Myanmar, equivalent to the Prime Minister. Suu Kyi was once revered as a defender of human rights during her youth when she

⁸ <https://www.icc-cpi.int/Pages/item.aspx?name=pr1495>

traveled around Myanmar to organize peaceful protests calling for democratic reform. Today, her leadership is defined by her striking disregard for the rights of the Rohingya, and despite her national popularity, she is recognized as a contributor to war crimes by the international community.⁹

Bangladeshi Government: The government of Bangladesh is troubled by the influx of refugees from Myanmar, and offers them little more than the destitute camps in Cox's Bazar. Bangladesh does not wish to offer greater provisions in order to encourage the refugees not to make Bangladesh a permanent home, and the refugees themselves only view Myanmar as their true home. Bangladesh faces serious climate concerns, and its coastline water levels are rising at a rate alarming enough to threaten the Rohingya migrants.

Buddhist Leaders: Many religious figureheads in Southeast Asia, including Myanmar, speak publicly to justify sweeping violence targeting Muslims in order to defend Buddhist lands from conversion. These figures have led riots and incited devastating attacks against populations of Rohingya and other Muslims.

Burmese Military: Especially under the Western Command, Burmese soldiers carried out decades of violent campaigns to terrorize and murder scores of Rohingya. Similar abuses under Myanmar's armed forces have transpired in Shan and other states.

International Court of Justice (ICJ): This court is one of the principal organs of the UN. The ICJ is a court seated in The Hague, Netherlands charged with settling disputes between and against

⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-11685977>

nation parties. Unlike its adjoining institution the ICC, this tribunal does not try individuals.

Myanmar faces a lawsuit at the ICJ accusing the Burmese nation of genocide.

International Criminal Court (ICC): The world's most prominent international tribunal, erected in 2002 to deter war crimes and human rights abuses around the world. Its reach is heavily limited however, in that it can only exercise jurisdiction in territories that are state parties to the Rome Statute. Otherwise, the UN Security Council must agree to authorize ICC action.

Kutupalong-Balukhali Camp: This is the largest refugee settlement of Rohingya escapees from Rakhine state, and one of the world's largest refugee camps. Poor conditions result in the spread of disease and low health standards for the settlers.

Maung Maung Soe: The former General of the Burmese Military's western command led the assaults in response to ARSA uprisings. After being sanctioned by the US Treasury Department, he was terminated from his military position. Maung Maung Soe is one of the primary persons of interest for the International Criminal Court in determining culpability for war crimes, and is an extremely likely defendant for the ICC if a trial occurs.

Rohingya Civilians: Most Rohingya are not militarily affiliated and most who reside in Myanmar live in villages that are extremely vulnerable to armed attacks. The vast majority of Rohingya refugees live in the overcrowded camps of Cox's Bazar. They are the primary victims of persecution against Muslims in Southeast Asia, but there are others as well.

Important Questions and Points of Debate

As the UNSC has the weight of global conflict and peacekeeping on a tremendous scale resting on its shoulders, you can expect our debates to involve many great details and complexities. Your role will be to think critically about the roles and motivations of the actors involved in the Rohingya crisis, as well as those yet to get involved. Disagreements between governments are especially present in this case, but this highlights the importance of finding clever agreements and methods of working together to reach a productive solution. As such, the chairs would look favorably upon agreements and collaboration as opposed to repeated vetoes from the permanent members!

Remember that the United Nations Security Council wields power unlike that of its adjoining committees to intervene in global issues, and that your decisions will model the potential real-world impacts of Security Council decisions that can alter the balance of power in the world. Here are some key questions and ideas to think about before the debates:

- There are 5 permanent members to the UNSC, all of which possess the power to veto resolutions with which they disagree. How will you foster a mindset of collaboration, and how can you assuage conflicting concerns between major global powers (e.g. China and the US) with regards to handling Burmese affairs?
- What provisions and/or actions will your resolutions take to address the security of minorities in Myanmar and fleeing to Bangladesh? What impacts will these have on national interests?
- What roles have individuals played in these transgressions? How will you navigate the legal architecture surrounding international justice with respect to any alleged war criminals involved in the persecution?

- Will you account for religious freedom in your progress to a solution and, if so, how will you guard this right if you decide to protect it?
- What are some of the environmental concerns regarding ocean levels and the wellbeing of Rohingya refugees?
- How will your actions set a precedent for future questions of minority repression?

Bloc and Country Positions

China

The People's Republic of China fiercely defends Myanmar before the Security Council and threats of tribunals. Beijing is primarily interested in Myanmar as another access point to the South China Sea and to expand its sphere of influence across Southeast Asia.

The European Union

The EU champions human rights rhetoric, but has taken few concrete steps beyond sanctioning military officials in Myanmar to defend the rights of the Rohingya. Aside from mobilizing donors to fund aid¹⁰, much of Europe has also not affected significant change in Myanmar. The EU's steadfast commitment to upholding human rights does illustrate its desires to see justice and reform in Southeast Asia.

The United States

The US is largely uninterested in the affairs of the Rohingya, although the Trump Administration's Treasury Department imposed economic sanctions on Maung Maung Soe for his role in the violent

¹⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1966

attacks against Rohingya¹¹. Beyond this, the US has little interest in the conflict; however, the US still recognizes this crisis as a series of ongoing war crimes, and the US State Department has made soft calls for action¹².

ASEAN

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is composed of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. ASEAN has thus far failed to take any action to mitigate the abuses inflicted upon the Rohingya, but has received international criticism for this. This bloc's interests are incohesive and at times divergent, but the greatest challenge to ASEAN nations, in addition to deciding how (and if) they should work together, is to address the interests and influence of China.¹³

Suggested Reading and Sources

We urge you to study this conflict in its origins as well as what is happening today. The chairs would encourage you to also consider how this crisis compares to other genocides and ethnic conflicts around the world. Feel free to use the resources below in your research and in crafting your position papers, but do also find other resources on your own!

- [World Bank Data on Myanmar](#)
 - For additional data and statistics on Myanmar, and any other countries relevant to your research.

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<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-sanctions/u-s-sanctions-myanmar-general-others-for-abuses-corruption-idUSKBN1EF221>

¹² <https://www.state.gov/u-s-continues-to-push-for-action-two-years-after-rohingya-ethnic-cleansing/>

¹³ <https://www.cfr.org/background/what-asean>

- [Rohingya Conflict Tracker \(Council on Foreign Relations\)](#)
 - Use this source to find fast facts and updates on the developments of the situation for the Rohingya.
- [International Criminal Court Overview of the Rohingya Case](#)
 - This is a good resource to explore the implications of international law under the ICC for the parties involved in the Rohingya crisis. We encourage you to learn some of the basics of the ICC's operation, and to explore its website to see how international law is applied.
- [Human Rights Watch Reports and Updates on the Rohingya Situation](#)
 - Use this as a portal to collect evidence of human rights abuses against the Rohingya as well as detailed updates on the situation of Rohingya refugees.

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Topic 2: The Question of UN Security Council Reform

Situation Overview and Background Information

The United Nations Charter¹⁴ established six principal organs of the UN, one of which is the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Conceived in 1946, the Security Council claims a broad range of responsibilities, most outwardly the maintenance of global peace and security. It also promotes a desire to foster harmonious collaboration between nations in defending human rights and to convene when peace is threatened.

The powers¹⁵ of the UNSC are greater than that of other UN bodies. All member states of the UN agree to abide by the decisions of the UNSC, and while state parties can make recommendations to the council and to other nations, only the Security Council has the mandate to make decisions with which member states must comply.

To enforce its decisions, the Security Council may draw on many of the options they have to pressure rogue states, including economic sanctions, trade restrictions, cutting diplomatic ties, or establishing blockades. One of the most notable powers the UNSC wields is the ability to military forces in the form of UN Peacekeepers to observe conflicts, intervene in aggressions to separate opposing sides, and establish peacekeeping missions.

Despite the mission and powers of the UNSC, its functionality has come under scrutiny in recent years. The world is plagued with devastating conflicts, refugee crises, genocides, and much more. If the Security Council is the strongest agency in the world's highest international organization, why are these grave situations and abuses of human rights allowed to continue? Since its inception, membership to the Security Council has changed very little. The UNSC has five permanent members: the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China. These five

¹⁴ <https://www.un.org/en/charter-united-nations/index.html>

¹⁵ <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/what-security-council>

powers, especially recently, have come under fire for abusing their veto powers. For instance, Russia and China repeatedly exercised their veto power to protect the Syrian government from sanctions¹⁶ levied due to the regime's rampant crimes against humanity.¹⁷

Other recent issues, including Russia's annexation of the Crimean peninsula and the unmitigated spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, also bring the capability of the council into question. As such, a major question today for the UNSC is how better to respond concretely to threatened world peace and how best to incorporate more voices from around the world.

Key Terms and Figures

Elections to the Security Council

The rules of rotation in the UNSC specify that the ten non-permanent seats have elections every two years. Each of the fifteen total member states to the Security Council has one representative. During our committee sessions and following the results of 2020 UNSC elections, the 10 non-permanent delegations with whom you will be working are Vietnam, Indonesia, Tunisia, Niger, South Africa, Belgium, Germany, Estonia, Dominican Republic, and Saint Vincent.

The International Criminal Court (ICC)¹⁸

The highest international tribunal is responsible for trying individuals accused of grave crimes against humanity. The individuals tried must hail from state parties to the Rome Statute, otherwise the UN Security Council must resolve to pursue the arrest and extradition of defendants to The Hague, Netherlands. The UNSC thus has an important stake in the international justice system.

¹⁶ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/02/un-russia-and-chinas-abusive-use-of-veto-shameful/>

¹⁷ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14298.doc.htm>

¹⁸ For a more in depth definition with sources, please see the key terms & figures from topic 1.

The P5

The Permanent Five -- the US, the UK, Russia, China, France-- are the five delegations which possess veto power on the Security Council and whose membership, as enshrined in Article 23 of the UN Charter¹⁹, is not temporary. These are arguably the most powerful members as their decisions carry the most weight. The Soviet Union (USSR) and the US emerged as the victors following the Second World War, rooting their privileged status at the UNSC in the largely unchanged post-war balance of power.

Veto Power

Veto Power is afforded to the P5, and enables any of them to unilaterally reject a resolution on which the council decides. The UN charter stipulates²⁰ that on procedural matters (meeting logistics, approval of reports, submission of recommendations or questions to the Secretary General and/or General Assembly), decisions proceed with an affirmative vote of nine members. All other decisions proceed with nine affirmative votes, including the agreeing votes of the P5.

Important Questions and Points of Debate

This topic will be unlike many that you have debated. This is a question not specifically related to a global issue but rather about the very structure of a UN organ, meaning that many critical issues are implicitly tied to the decisions you make regarding reform. Your arguments and resolutions have very heavy weight for the future of international peace and security across all issues, not just one! Choose your words carefully, and really consider the impacts that changes to the Security Council will have on the world.

¹⁹ <https://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-v/index.html>

²⁰ <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-security-council-working-methods/procedural-vote.php>

The chairs would recommend that delegates remain objective in their considerations; that is, do not let specific world issues that go unaddressed cloud your judgement as to how the UNSC should be structured. While it is important to recognize that many issues exist because of the UNSC's impotence, do not let debates become mired in a discussion of competing world issues.

To aid you in your thinking and researching, your chairs have prepared the following guiding questions. The chairs would encourage all delegates to consider these, but urge the delegates also to pursue other questions and considerations as they look into how to reform the UNSC. Creativity is welcome!

- What priorities do you and your delegation envision for the UNSC? To what issues do you think the Security Council must respond, but has thus far failed to do so?
- What strategies will you employ to negotiate with other powerful state parties in determining a better structure for the UNSC?
- What role should smaller and/or newer countries have in the Security Council? What about historically underrepresented nations?
- How will your delegation address veto power and the status of the P5?
- What issues around the world -- including genocides, armed conflicts, human rights abuses-- will be affected by the solutions you pursue? Are there any that stand out?
- Get to know and remember which members are on the Security Council for the upcoming 2021 term. Although the UNSC responds to a robust array of global challenges, to what issues are these nations sensitive? How can you incorporate the interests of your fellow delegations into discussions about UNSC reform?

Bloc and Country Positions

As we have seen, the P5 countries sometimes use their veto power on certain issues over others, and this gives them somewhat of an advantage over the nonpermanent members of the Council. If you are a P5 country, how will you balance protecting your country's interests with the greater fairness of voting within the Council? If you are a nonpermanent member, how may you negotiate the restructuring of the Council to serve your own interests as well as the greater good of the Council and the world?

Suggested Reading and Sources

- [A 2014 General Assembly meeting concerning equitable member representation on the Security Council](#)
- [A historical list of vetoes by the P5](#)
- [Council on Foreign Relations backgrounder on the UNSC](#)
- [Chapter V of the UN Charter, outlining the powers and functions of the UNSC](#)
- Any of the footnotes' contents furnished throughout this background guide

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