

HOW THE PANDEMIC AFFECTED ROHINGYA'S

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Abstract

In the face of the COVID-19 crisis, we are all vulnerable. The virus has shown that it does not discriminate - but many refugees, those forcibly displaced, the stateless and migrants are at heightened risk.

Millions of refugees worldwide are exposed to violence, family separation, culture loss and exile. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) exposes these populations to a new threat, one that could prove to be more devastating than the events forcing them to flee their homelands.

The Rohingya population is under the successive oppression of Myanmar's governments, representing one of the largest stateless populations.

A large part of the Rohingya population lives in overcrowded refugee camps in Bangladesh while another part of them who remained on Myanmar territory in Rakhine State are subject to government persecution, being confined in villages without freedom of movement and without access to food, education, adequate livelihoods and medical care.

Three-quarters of the world's refugees and many migrants are hosted in developing regions where health systems are already overwhelmed and under-capacitated. Many live in overcrowded camps, settlements, makeshift shelters or reception centers, where they lack adequate access to health services, clean water and sanitation.

Millions of refugees worldwide are exposed to violence, family separation, culture loss and exile. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) exposes these populations to a new threat, one that could prove to be more devastating than the events forcing them to flee their homelands.

Humanitarian groups like the International Rescue Committee are concerned that people in refugee camps face a heightened risk of Covid-19.

The UN has warned that, given the conditions in the camps in Bangladesh and the high levels of vulnerability among the population, "the severity of the possible impact of the virus on refugees is of major concern".

Keywords: Rohingya, pandemic, Covid 19, Bangladesh, Cox Bazar.

1. Introduction

When the Covid 19 pandemic escladated in march 2020, the entire world was put in front of a new challenge. The challenge of dealing with something worse than anyone expected. But no one even thought how the most vulnerable populations are going to face this.

When we think at vulnerable populations most of the time we associate them with poor people or with the ones with low income or no income at all, and countries all over the world have imposed measures to help this kind of people, but there is another face of this harsh reality, in this study we want to show how the most vulnerable of them all have been affected, so we study what is happening to the Rohingya's refugees and how they have been affected by this global crissys, which is the Covid 19 pandemic.

They are so vulnerable, because they have so poor conditions of leaving, the camps where they have settled are overcrowded and even if anyone would want to offer better conditions this can't be done, even though the UN organization is trying to do so.

2. Who are the Rohingya's

The Rohingya population is a Muslim minority group in Myanmar, which over time has been discriminated against and persecuted, denied citizenship and faced numerous restrictions from the Myanmar government.

The journalist and the news stations are describing the Rohingya's as the most persecuted minorities in the world¹ have been denied the citizenship under the 1982 Myanmar nationality law²

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¹ "Nobel Peace Prize winner accused of overlooking 'ethnic cleansing' in her own country". The Independent, 9 December 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/burma-rohingya-myanmar-muslims-united-nations-calls-suu-kyi-a7465036.html> ; Lennart Hofman, "Meet the most persecuted people in the world", The Correspondent, 25 february 2016, <https://thecorrespondent.com/4087/meet-the-most-persecuted-people-in-the-world/293299468-71e6cf33> ; "Rohingya Muslims Are the Most Persecuted Minority in the World: Who Are They?", Global Citizen, <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/recognizing-the-rohingya-and-their-horrifying-pers/>.

² Yuichi Nitta, "Myanmar urged to grant Rohingya citizenship", Nikkei Asian Review, 25 august 2017, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics-Economy/Policy-Politics/Myanmar-urged-to-grant-Rohingya-citizenship>; "Annan report calls for review of 1982 Citizenship Law", The Stateless, 24 August 2017, <http://www.thestateless.com/cgi-sys/suspendedpage.cgi>.

and in the same time they are denied the right of movement, education and civil service jobs³.

Even though all the prosecutions and denials that they are facing the Rohingya's, maintain the fact that descend from people in the precolonial Arakan and colonial Arakan, which was an independent kingdom between Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent⁴ but the Myanmar's government does not recognise them as descendent of Arakan muslims.

The modern term Rohingya emerged from colonial and pre-colonial terms Rooinga and Rwangya⁵. The Rohingya refer to themselves as. In Burmese they are known as *rui hang gya*, while in Bengali they are called Rohingga. The term "Rohingya" may come from Rakhanga or Roshanga, the words for the state of Arakan. The word Rohingya would then mean "inhabitant of Rohang", which was the early Muslim name for Arakan⁶.

The usage of the term Rohingya has been historically documented prior to the British Raj. In 1799, Francis Buchanan wrote an article called "A Comparative Vocabulary of Some of the Languages Spoken in the Burma Empire", which was found and republished by Michael Charney in the SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research in 2003⁷. Among the native groups of Arakan, he wrote are the: "Mohammedans, who have long settled in Arakan, and who call themselves Rooinga, or natives of Arakan."⁸ The Classical Journal of 1811 identified "Rooinga" as one of the languages spoken in the "Burmah Empire". In 1815, Johann Severin Vater listed "Ruinga" as an ethnic group with a distinct language in a compendium of languages published in German⁹.

3. The persecution and repression of Rohingya's

The contemporary persecution of the Rohingya population started in 2017, when Rakhine budist attacked a bunch of Rohingya men.

On 25 August 2017, the Government of Myanmar announced that 71 people (a soldier, an immigration officer, 10 police officers and 59 insurgents) had been killed overnight during coordinated attacks by up to 150 insurgents in 24 checkpoints. Police and the army base in Rakhine State¹⁰. The Myanmar Army said the attack began around 01:00, when insurgents armed with bombs, small arms and mock-ups blew up a bridge. He went on to say that most of the attacks took place around 3:00 - 4:00 AM¹¹. The Rescue Army Arakan Rohingya (ARSA) claimed to be taking "defensive action" in 25 different locations and accused government soldiers of raping and killing civilians. The group also claimed that Rathedaung had been blocked for more than two weeks, starving the Rohingya and that government forces were preparing to do the same in Maungdaw¹².

According to the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Human Rights Organization in Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, as of August 25, 2017, at least 1,000 people have been killed as a result of violence between government soldiers and the Rohingya people¹³. Since October 2018, persecution of the Rohingya people continues, with the UN Special Rapporteur describing the situation as "apartheid", with Rohingyas detained segregated by the "Rakhine ethnic community" and without "freedom of movement"¹⁴.

On April 23, 2019, a Burmese army attacked the village of Rohingya Buthidaung. Subsequently, the army planted internationally banned landmines along the northern state of Rakhine to prevent the Rohingya

³ "Discrimination in Arakan". Burma/Bangladesh - Burmese Refugees in Bangladesh: Still No Durable Solution (Report) 12 Human Rights Watch, May 2000, https://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/burma/burm005-02.htm#P132_34464 ; "Kofi Annan-led commission calls on Myanmar to end Rohingya restrictions", SBS, <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/kofi-annan-led-commission-calls-on-myanmar-to-end-rohingya-restrictions>.

⁴ Partha S. Ghosh, *Migrants, Refugees and the Stateless in South Asia*. SAGE Publications. p. 161. ISBN 978-93-5150-855-7, 23 May 2016

⁵ "The Mujahid revolt in Arakan", https://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/FCO-1952-12-31-The_Mujahid_Revolt_in_Arakan-en-red.pdf , retrieved 22 april 2021.

⁶ Mohshin Habib, Christine Jubb, Salahuddin Ahmad, Masudur Rahman, Henri Pallard, *Forced migration of Rohingya: the untold experience*. Ontario International Development Agency, Canada. ISBN 9780986681516, 18 July 2018; "Rohingya etymology at Oxford Dictionary". Oxford University Press, retrieved 22 april 2021; Jacques P. Leider, "Rohingya: A historical and linguistic note", 26 August 2012, retrieved 22 april 2021.

⁷ Francis Buchanan, (1799), "A Comparative Vocabulary of Some of the Languages Spoken in the Burma Empire" (PDF). Asiatic Researches. The Asiatic Society, 5:pp. 219–240; Michael W. Charney, "A Comparative vocabulary of some of the Languages Spoken in the Burma Empire". SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research, retrieved 22 april 2021; Jacques P. Leider, "Interview: History Behind Arakan State Conflict". The Irrawaddy, retrieved 22 april 2021.

⁸ Saquib Salim, "ROHINGYA CRISIS: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE", HeritageTimes, retrieved 22 april 2021.

⁹ Azeem Ibrahim, *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar's Hidden Genocide*, Oxford University Press, pp. 24–25.

¹⁰ "Myanmar tensions: dozens killed in Rakhin militant attack", BBC News. 25 August 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41046729>; Esther Htusan, "Myanmar: 71 people die in militant attacks on police and border posts." Associated Press, 25 August 2017, <https://apnews.com/article/37103be49dd249af8f2e7297b599fb41>; Wa Lone, Antoni Slodkowski, "At least 12 killed in attacks by Muslim insurgents in northwestern Myanmar", 24 August 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-rohingya-idUSKCN1B507K?il=0>.

¹¹ <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/at-least-12-dead-in-muslim-insurgent-attacks-in-north-west-myanmar>.

¹² "Deadly clashes erupt in Myanmar's Rakhine state", Al Jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/08/26/deadly-clashes-erupt-in-myanmars-restive-rakhine-state/>.

¹³ Rebecca Wright, Ben Westcott, "At least 270,000 Rohingya have emigrated from Myanmar as a result of violence in the last two weeks," the UN said, CNN, <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/09/08/asia/rohingya-myanmar-refugees-drowning/index.html>.

¹⁴ "Rohingya genocide is still active, says top UN investigator", The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/24/rohingya-genocide-is-still-going-on-says-top-un-investigator>.

from escaping northwest to Bangladesh. Burmese soldiers allegedly shot Rohingya civilians fleeing south. Those who remained were targeted by airstrikes. Some have described the Rohingya as being trapped in a "genocide zone."¹⁵

In early April 2020, the government of Myanmar issued two presidential directives: Directive no. 1/2020 and Directive no. 2/2020. These were followed by January orders issued by the International Court of Justice for the government and army to stop genocide against the Rohingya Muslim ethnic group. Directive no. 1/2020 stipulates that the authorities are responsible for ensuring that anyone under their control does not commit activities that lead to genocide. Directive no. 2/2020 prevents all ministries and the government of Rakhine State from destroying the order of the International Court of Justice in January and also required the retention of evidence of any criminal activity that could lead to genocide¹⁶.

4. How the Covid 19 affected the Rohingya's

Displaced people and host communities are most at risk as the COVID-19 pandemic spreads. The most vulnerable are people in refugee camps, with limited access to health care, hygiene needs and where social distance is impossible. According to the International Rescue Committee, the health care system available to these groups will be overwhelmed without the capacity to cope with the COVID-19 outbreak¹⁷.

The rapid spread of the new coronavirus has made practices such as social or physical removal and standard hand washing a fundamental part of everyday life. In any case, these measures can be particularly difficult to try in densely populated urban settlements, especially in refugee camps, where congestion makes the "two-meter division rule" virtually impossible to maintain - and where many need it. access to basic needs such as water and sanitation, the chances of having an outbreak are obvious¹⁸.

Most Rohingya refugees have fled to Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, but the vast majority have fled to Bangladesh, where there are two official refugee camps¹⁹. [11]

The virus can be transmitted to Rohingya refugee camps from one person to another very easily in two ways, one through direct physical contact and the other through close indirect contact with patients with

COVID-19 (through drops caused by coughing or sneezing). a person infected with COVID-19).

Given the general life characteristics of refugee camps, where there is no hygiene or adequate hygiene, and where people are forced to share toilets with their neighbors, followed by tight living conditions, the ubiquity of disease and lack of access to medical care, and clean water, leads to difficult survival and the fight against the threat of COVID-19 becomes a major threat.

Given the large number of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, about 860,000, the COVID-19 virus could easily kill more than 1,600 people. The first case of Coronavirus in Bangladesh, where most Rohingya refugees are located, was reported in the Cox Bazar by a local community, followed by the recoding of the first COVID-19 death in March.

In the thick camps of Cox's Bazaar, alternatives to social separation or self-disconnection are removed, with many displaced people living in squeezed conditions in makeshift bamboo and cloth shelters.

Cleaning practices are not practical when standard hand washing becomes a luxury, as access to clean water is severely restricted. On average, 40,000 people live in every square kilometer in the camps, if a refugee is infected with this virus, many refugees will die in a short time. There are concerns about overcrowded Rohingya camps where the virus can spread and become a hotbed in no time.

The Bangladeshi government has imposed a blockade on a southern district, housing more than a million Rohingya Muslims fleeing Myanmar to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Recent news reports in BBC News Asia say about 350,000 people displaced from Myanmar are "on the verge of a public health catastrophe," says human rights group Human Rights Watch (HRW).

The Government of Bangladesh and humanitarian agencies are trying to create the inclusion of Rohingya refugees in the Bangladesh Government's national response plan to COVID-19²⁰. However, there is a constant fear of allowing foreign distributors to enter refugee camps. Food distribution agencies are thus developing new ways to eliminate contact from one person to another. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR) has established isolated camp areas for COVID-19-infected refugees in temporarily isolated areas until they can be transferred to specially designated isolation units²¹.

¹⁵ "Rohingya trapped in a genocide area", <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/rohingya-trapped-inside-a-genocide-zone-26095>.

¹⁶ "Myanmar directives are not enough to stop genocide", <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/09/myanmars-directives-not-enough-protect-rohingya-0>.

¹⁷ R. Root, This is what the COVID-19 response looks like in refugee camps, 2020, <https://www.devex.com/news/here-s-what-the-covid-19-response-looks-like-in-refugee-camps-96874>; S. Volkin, How are the refugees affected by Covid 19? John Hopkins Magazine, April 2020.

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5. Conclusions

What is happening in Myanmar related to the Rohingya population, is affecting deep all the entire world.

We could face a new Holocaust, if the competent authorities are not going to take more serious actions soon.

Even though the United Nations and European Union imposed sanctions to Myanmar and that International Court of Justice opened an investigation, the crimes did not stop and the genocide is still on going.

The Myanmar Government does not fear the sanctions based on the fact that is not part of the Rome treaty, that goes against the crimes against humanity, so it is on going against the Rohingya.

When all this is going to stop? Hopefully soon, because the world could not face another Holocaust and the consequences are not of those that the world would want.

Already the crisis that is on going because of huge number of Rohingya refugees, has catastrophic consequences, for the country of Bangladesh, that is overwhelmed.

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