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UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS
COUNCIL

STUDY
GUIDE

SEGMENTS:

- LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD
- INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE
- IMPORTANT LOCATIONS
- HISTORY OF THE AGENDA
- INVOLVEMENT OF MAJOR COUNTRIES
- RECENT DEVELOPMENTS
- LEGAL INSTRUMENTS AND FRAMEWORK
- RESEARCH GUIDANCE
- CITATIONS AND SUGGESTED READING
- KEY STAKEHOLDERS

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

DEAR DELEGATES,

AS THE EXECUTIVE BOARD OF THE UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL, WE ARE HONORED TO WELCOME YOU TO OUR COMMITTEE AT SMUN 2025, WHERE YOU WILL DELIBERATE UPON ONE OF THE MOST URGENT HUMANITARIAN AND POLITICAL CRISES OF OUR TIME: EVALUATING THE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN MYANMAR.

AS REPRESENTATIVES OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, YOU ARE ENTRUSTED WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY OF DEFENDING THE PRINCIPLES OF JUSTICE, DIGNITY, AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS. IN A WORLD WHERE SILENCE CAN ENABLE OPPRESSION, YOUR VOICES, DIPLOMACY, AND DETERMINATION WILL SHAPE THE DIRECTION OF THIS COMMITTEE AND THE IMPACT OF ITS RESOLUTIONS.

THE CRISIS IN MYANMAR PRESENTS A WIDE RANGE OF CHALLENGES, FROM POLITICAL REPRESSION AND RESTRICTIONS ON CIVIL LIBERTIES TO MASS DISPLACEMENT, HUMANITARIAN SUFFERING, AND THREATS TO REGIONAL

STABILITY. WILL YOU ADVOCATE FOR STRONGER ACCOUNTABILITY? STRENGTHEN HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE? ENCOURAGE DIALOGUE AND PEACEFUL RECONCILIATION? THE DECISIONS LIE IN YOUR HANDS.

THIS COMMITTEE DEMANDS NOT ONLY DEBATE, BUT VISION. THE FLOOR IS YOURS TO NEGOTIATE, COLLABORATE, AND THINK BEYOND CONVENTIONAL SOLUTIONS. THE STAKES ARE IMMENSE, AND THE FUTURE OF MILLIONS AFFECTED BY THE CRISIS DEPENDS UPON THE ACTIONS AND IDEAS YOU BRING FORWARD.

WITH HOPE AND ANTICIPATION,

THE EXECUTIVE BOARD OF THE UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL.



INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE

THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL IS THE MAIN INTERGOVERNMENTAL BODY WITHIN UNITED NATIONS RESPONSIBLE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS. ESTABLISHED IN 2006 BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY THROUGH ITS RESOLUTION 60/251, IT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR STRENGTHENING THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS WORLDWIDE. THE COUNCIL, COMPOSED OF 47 MEMBER STATES, PROVIDES A MULTILATERAL FORUM TO ADDRESS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND COUNTRY SITUATIONS. IT RESPONDS TO HUMAN RIGHTS EMERGENCIES AND MAKES RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW TO IMPLEMENT HUMAN RIGHTS BETTER.

THE COUNCIL SERVES AS AN INTERNATIONAL FORUM FOR DIALOGUE ON HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES WITH UN OFFICIALS, MANDATED EXPERTS, STATES, CIVIL SOCIETIES, AND OTHER PARTICIPANTS. THE COUNCIL ALSO ADOPTS RESOLUTIONS OR DECISIONS DURING REGULAR SESSIONS THAT EXPRESS THE WILL OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY ON GIVEN HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES OR SITUATIONS. ADOPTING RESOLUTIONS SENDS A STRONG POLITICAL SIGNAL THAT CAN PROMPT GOVERNMENTS TO TAKE ACTION TO REMEDY THOSE SITUATIONS.

THE COUNCIL'S SUBSIDIARY BODIES ARE THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW MECHANISM (UPR), THE SPECIAL PROCEDURES, THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE, AND THE COMPLAINT PROCEDURE. THE COUNCIL CAN ALSO ESTABLISH INTERNATIONAL COMMISSIONS OF INQUIRY AND FACT-FINDING MISSIONS INVESTIGATING AND RESPONDING TO HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS, TO HELP EXPOSE VIOLATORS AND BRING THEM TO JUSTICE.

THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL CAN ALSO ESTABLISH INTERNATIONAL COMMISSIONS OF INQUIRIES, FACT-FINDING MISSIONS, AND INVESTIGATIONS TO RESPOND TO SERIOUS VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMANITARIAN LAW, WHETHER PROTRACTED OR RESULTING FROM SUDDEN EVENTS, AND TO PROMOTE

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR SUCH VIOLATIONS AND COUNTER IMPUNITY. COMMISSIONS OF INQUIRIES AND FACT-FINDING MISSIONS PRODUCE HARD-HITTING EVIDENCE ON WAR CRIMES AND CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY, FEEDING INTO FORMAL JUSTICE PROCESSES TO HOLD VIOLATORS ACCOUNTABLE.

THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL, CONSISTING OF STATE REPRESENTATIVES AND REPORTING DIRECTLY TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, IS A POLITICAL BODY WITH A COMPREHENSIVE HUMAN RIGHTS MANDATE AND A DISTINCT ENTITY FROM THE OHCHR. THE COUNCIL ADDRESSES VIOLATIONS, PROMOTES HUMAN RIGHTS ASSISTANCE AND EDUCATION, REVIEWS STATES' HUMAN RIGHTS RECORDS, RESPONDS TO EMERGENCIES, WORKS TO PREVENT HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES, AND SERVES AS AN INTERNATIONAL FORUM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DIALOGUE.

THE CHARTER OF THE UNITED NATIONS, THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAWS, AND TREATIES ESTABLISHED THE FOUNDATIONS OF THESE RIGHTS.

THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL IS MANDATED TO:

- PROMOTE AND PROTECT ALL HUMAN RIGHTS FOR ALL
- RECOMMEND THAT BODIES OF THE UN SYSTEM PROMOTE AND PROTECT ALL HUMAN RIGHTS
- IMPROVE AND PROMOTE THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT
- PROVIDE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO STATES FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVITIES
- COORDINATE UN HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION AND PUBLIC INFORMATION PROGRAMMES
- WORK ACTIVELY TO REMOVE OBSTACLES TO THE REALIZATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND PREVENT THE CONTINUATION OF VIOLATIONS
- ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE WITH GOVERNMENTS TO SECURE RESPECT FOR ALL HUMAN RIGHTS
- ENHANCE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION FOR THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF ALL HUMAN RIGHTS
- COORDINATE HUMAN RIGHTS PROMOTION AND PROTECTION ACTIVITIES THROUGHOUT THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM
- RATIONALISE, ADAPT, STRENGTHEN, AND STREAMLINE THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS MACHINERY

IMPORTANT LOCATIONS

NAYPYIDAW: MYANMAR'S CAPITAL CITY, BUILT FROM SCRATCH BY THE MILITARY JUNTA IN 2005 IN THE MIDDLE OF THE COUNTRY. THE DECISION TO MOVE THE CAPITAL FROM YANGON WAS WIDELY SEEN AS AN ATTEMPT TO INSULATE THE MILITARY FROM POPULAR UPRISINGS — A LESSON LEARNED FROM 1988. TODAY IT REMAINS A GHOST CITY OF WIDE EMPTY BOULEVARDS AND GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES, FIRMLY UNDER SAC CONTROL AND LARGELY ISOLATED FROM THE CONFLICT CONSUMING THE REST OF THE COUNTRY.

YANGON: MYANMAR'S LARGEST CITY AND FORMER CAPITAL, YANGON REMAINS THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL HEART. IT WAS THE EPICENTRE OF THE 2021 POST-COUP PROTESTS, WITH MILLIONS TAKING TO THE STREETS IN THE WEEKS FOLLOWING FEBRUARY 1ST. THE MILITARY RESPONDED WITH LIVE AMMUNITION AND NIGHTTIME RAIDS. WHILE THE JUNTA MAINTAINS CONTROL OF THE CITY, UNDERGROUND RESISTANCE NETWORKS OPERATE QUIETLY BENEATH THE SURFACE, AND THE ECONOMY HAS VISIBLY COLLAPSED — SHUTTERED BUSINESSES AND EMPTY STREETS TELL THEIR OWN STORY.

RAKHINE STATE: PERHAPS THE MOST INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED FLASHPOINT IN MYANMAR'S CRISIS. RAKHINE STATE, ON THE WESTERN COAST BORDERING BANGLADESH, IS WHERE THE ROHINGYA MUSLIM MINORITY LIVED FOR GENERATIONS BEFORE THE 2017 MILITARY CRACKDOWN DROVE OVER 700,000 OF THEM ACROSS THE BORDER. TODAY THE STATE HAS LARGELY FALLEN UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE ARAKAN ARMY FOLLOWING THEIR 2024 OFFENSIVE, MAKING IT ONE OF THE MOST CONTESTED AND STRATEGICALLY SIGNIFICANT REGIONS IN THE COUNTRY. ANY DISCUSSION OF ROHINGYA REPATRIATION RUNS DIRECTLY THROUGH RAKHINE.

SITTWE: THE CAPITAL OF RAKHINE STATE, SITTWE HAS BEEN A SITE OF COMMUNAL VIOLENCE BETWEEN BUDDHIST RAKHINE AND ROHINGYA COMMUNITIES SINCE AT LEAST 2012. FOLLOWING THE VIOLENCE, ROHINGYA WERE CONFINED TO DISPLACEMENT CAMPS ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE CITY, DENIED FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES FOR YEARS. THE ARAKAN ARMY'S TAKEOVER OF THE CITY IN 2024 DRAMATICALLY SHIFTED THE POWER DYNAMICS HERE, THOUGH THE SITUATION FOR REMAINING ROHINGYA COMMUNITIES REMAINS DEEPLY UNCERTAIN.

COX'S BAZAR, BANGLADESH: TECHNICALLY JUST ACROSS THE BORDER IN BANGLADESH, COX'S BAZAR CANNOT BE LEFT OUT OF ANY SERIOUS DISCUSSION OF MYANMAR'S HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS. IT IS HOME TO OVER ONE MILLION ROHINGYA REFUGEES — THE LARGEST REFUGEE CAMP IN THE WORLD — LIVING IN DENSELY PACKED SETTLEMENTS PRONE TO FLOODING, FIRES, AND DISEASE. REPATRIATION TALKS BETWEEN MYANMAR AND BANGLADESH HAVE REPEATEDLY STALLED, AND FOR THE VAST MAJORITY OF RESIDENTS, RETURN REMAINS AN ABSTRACT AND DISTANT HOPE RATHER THAN A REALISTIC PROSPECT.

NORTHERN SHAN STATE: THE MOUNTAINOUS NORTHERN SHAN STATE BECAME THE LAUNCHPAD FOR OPERATION 1027 IN OCTOBER 2023, TRANSFORMING IT INTO ONE OF THE MOST MILITARILY SIGNIFICANT REGIONS IN THE COUNTRY OVERNIGHT. HOME TO SEVERAL ETHNIC ARMED ORGANIZATIONS INCLUDING THE MNDAA AND TNLA, IT SITS ALONG MYANMAR'S BORDER WITH CHINA — WHICH IS PRECISELY WHY BEIJING HAS TAKEN SUCH A KEEN INTEREST IN BROKERING CEASEFIRES HERE. CONTROL OF THIS REGION MEANS CONTROL OF CRITICAL TRADE ROUTES AND BORDER CROSSINGS THAT MATTER ENORMOUSLY TO CHINA'S ECONOMIC INTERESTS.

MANDALAY: MYANMAR'S SECOND LARGEST CITY AND CULTURAL CAPITAL, MANDALAY HOLDS DEEP SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE AS THE LAST SEAT OF THE BURMESE KINGDOM BEFORE BRITISH COLONIZATION. RESISTANCE FORCES HAVE PUSHED INCREASINGLY CLOSE TO THE CITY THROUGH 2024, AND ITS POTENTIAL FALL WOULD REPRESENT A DEVASTATING BLOW TO THE JUNTA — BOTH STRATEGICALLY AND SYMBOLICALLY. IT REMAINS UNDER SAC CONTROL FOR NOW, BUT IT IS FAR FROM SECURE.

KACHIN STATE: LOCATED IN MYANMAR'S FAR NORTH BORDERING CHINA AND INDIA, KACHIN STATE HAS BEEN A SITE OF ARMED CONFLICT BETWEEN THE KACHIN INDEPENDENCE ARMY AND THE MYANMAR MILITARY SINCE THE 1960S — WITH ONLY A BRIEF CEASEFIRE PERIOD BETWEEN 1994 AND 2011. THE KIA HAS BEEN AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT IN THE RESISTANCE SINCE 2021, OPENING ANOTHER FRONT THAT STRETCHES THE TATMADAW THIN. CIVILIAN DISPLACEMENT IN KACHIN STATE PREDATES THE COUP BY DECADES, MAKING IT ONE OF MYANMAR'S LONGEST RUNNING HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES.

KAREN STATE: STRETCHING ALONG MYANMAR'S SOUTHEASTERN BORDER WITH THAILAND, KAREN STATE IS HOME TO THE KAREN NATIONAL UNION — ONE OF THE OLDEST AND MOST ORGANIZED ETHNIC ARMED ORGANIZATIONS IN THE WORLD, HAVING FOUGHT FOR AUTONOMY SINCE 1949. THE KNU HAS BEEN A SIGNIFICANT PARTNER OF THE PEOPLE'S DEFENCE FORCE SINCE 2021, PROVIDING TERRITORY, TRAINING, AND COORDINATION. THOUSANDS OF CIVILIANS HAVE BEEN DISPLACED BY MILITARY AIRSTRIKES AND GROUND OPERATIONS IN THE REGION, WITH MANY SEEKING REFUGE ACROSS THE THAI BORDER.

CHIN STATE: ONE OF MYANMAR'S MOST REMOTE AND LEAST DEVELOPED REGIONS, BORDERING INDIA TO THE WEST. THE PREDOMINANTLY CHRISTIAN CHIN PEOPLE HAVE FACED MILITARY CRACKDOWNS SINCE THE COUP, WITH THE CHIN NATIONAL FRONT AND LOCAL RESISTANCE GROUPS PUTTING UP FIERCE RESISTANCE DESPITE BEING SIGNIFICANTLY OUTGUNNED. THE MILITARY HAS BURNED VILLAGES AND USED CIVILIANS AS HUMAN SHIELDS HERE — ABUSES THAT HAVE RECEIVED RELATIVELY LITTLE INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION GIVEN THE REGION'S ISOLATION AND THE DIFFICULTY OF ACCESS FOR JOURNALISTS AND HUMANITARIAN WORKERS.

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HISTORY OF THE AGENDA

INDEPENDENCE AND EARLY INTERNAL CONFLICTS (1948–1958)

AFTER GAINING INDEPENDENCE FROM BRITISH RULE IN 1948, MYANMAR ATTEMPTED TO MAINTAIN A FOREIGN POLICY OF NEUTRALITY. HOWEVER, DUE TO INTERNAL STRIFE IN THE COUNTRY, THIS WAS NOT POSSIBLE. COMMUNISTS AND THE KAREN, AN ETHNIC MINORITY, WERE AMONG THE FIRST INSURGENTS. BY 1958, MYANMAR WAS ON THE ROAD TO INTERNAL PEACE, WHEN THE RULING ANTI-FASCIST PEOPLE'S FREEDOM LEAGUE (AFPFL) WAS DIVIDED BY QUARRELS AMONG THE PRIME MINISTER, U NU, AND HIS ASSOCIATES. AMID RUMOURS OF A MILITARY TAKEOVER, U NU INVITED NE WIN TO ASSUME PREMIERSHIP, WHO ESTABLISHED SECURITY, STABILIZED THE MILITARY SITUATION AND MADE PREPARATIONS FOR GENERAL ELECTIONS. IN FEBRUARY 1960 U NU RETURNED WITH ABSOLUTE MAJORITY.

NE WIN'S MILITARY COUP AND SOCIALIST RULE (1962–1981)

IN MARCH 1962, NE WIN LED A MILITARY COUP AND ARRESTED U NU, ALONG WITH SEVERAL CABINET MINISTERS. HIS STATED REASON WAS TO PREVENT THE UNION FROM DISINTEGRATING. HE SUSPENDED THE 1947 CONSTITUTION AND RULED WITH A REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL CONSISTING OF SENIOR MILITARY OFFICERS. HE ALSO FORMED A MILITARY-CONTROLLED ONE-PARTY SYSTEM WITH THE BURMA SOCIALIST PROGRAMME PARTY (BSPP). NE WIN ESTABLISHED A COMMAND ECONOMY, WHICH DID NOT IMPROVE THE ECONOMY AS INVESTMENT IN AGRICULTURE WAS SACRIFICED FOR INDUSTRIAL GROWTH. ALSO, THE MILITARY REPLACED CIVILIANS IN KEY ADMINISTRATIVE POSITIONS. IN DECEMBER 1973, A REFERENDUM WAS HELD TO RATIFY A NEW CONSTITUTION AND WAS MET WITH 90% APPROVAL. ELECTIONS FOR THE PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY AND LOCAL COUNCILS WERE HELD IN 1974. THE NEW GOVERNMENT TOOK EFFECT IN MARCH WITH NE WIN AS PRESIDENT. ECONOMIC GROWTH IN THE 1980S WAS HINDERED BY MOUNTING TRADE DEFICITS DUE TO INCREASING IMPORT COSTS AND RISING EXTERNAL DEBT PAYMENTS.

NE WIN RETIRED AS PRESIDENT AND CHAIRMAN OF COUNCIL OF STATE IN NOVEMBER 1981, BUT REMAINED IN POWER TILL JULY 1988 WHEN HE RETIRED AS CHAIRMAN OF THE BSPP AMID PROTESTS WHICH SEEMED AS IF THE COUNTRY WAS ON THE VERGE OF REVOLUTION. THE GOVERNMENT WAS TAKEN OVER BY GENERAL SAW MAUNG.

SAW MAUNG AND THE SLORC REGIME (1988–1992)

SAWMAUNG IMPOSED MARTIAL LAW OVER THE COUNTRY AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT WAS REPLACED BY A MILITARY BODY ESTABLISHED BY MAUNG, THE STATE LAW AND ORDER RESTORATION COUNCIL (SLORC). THE MILITARY CRACKED DOWN ON THE PROTESTORS AND SUPPRESSED THE DEMONSTRATIONS. THOUSANDS OF UNARMED PROTESTORS WERE KILLED BY THE MILITARY, WHO FIRED AT THE PROTESTORS INDISCRIMINATELY. MAUNG WAS THE CHAIRMAN OF THE SLORC AS WELL AS THE PRIME MINISTER. HE CALLED FOR A REVISION OF THE 1974 CONSTITUTION AND A NEW ELECTION.

MYANMAR'S FIRST MULTIPARTY ELECTION IN 30 YEARS WAS HELD IN MAY 1990. AMONG DOZENS OF PARTIES, THE IMPORTANT ONES WERE THE GOVERNMENT'S NATIONAL UNIT PARTY (NUP) WHICH WAS THE SUCCESSOR OF THE BSPP AND THE NATIONAL LEAGUE FOR DEMOCRACY (NLD). THE NLD WON BY A LANDSLIDE AND SECURED FOUR-FIFTHS OF THE SEATS. HOWEVER, THE SLORC DID NOT PERMIT THE LEGISLATURE WHICH HAD BEEN DECLARED AS THE NEW CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY TO CONVENE AND REFUSED TO RELEASE THE NLD LEADERS. TIN U AND AUNG SAN SUU KYI WERE UNDER HOUSE ARREST SINCE JULY 1989 AND SEIN WIN WAS EXILED TO THE WEST.

THE MILITARY FACED STRONG AND WIDESPREAD INTERNATIONAL CONDEMNATION FOR ITS BLOODY REPRESSION OF DEMONSTRATIONS AS WELL THEIR ACTIONS IN THE 1990 ELECTIONS. AUNG SAN SUU KYI WAS AWARDED THE NOBEL PRIZE FOR PEACE IN 1991, HOWEVER, SHE REMAINED IN HOUSE ARREST TILL 1995. GENERAL THAN SHWE REPLACED SAW MAUNG AS PRIME MINISTER AND CHAIRMAN OF THE SLORC IN APRIL 1992. BY THE 1990s, THE MILITARY HAD SOLIDIFIED THEIR ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL HOLD ON THE COUNTRY AND APPOINTED A NATIONAL CONVENTION TO DRAFT A NEW CONSTITUTION WHICH WOULD GIVE GREATER CONTROL TO THE MILITARY IN 1993. HOWEVER, THE CONVENTION WAS UNABLE TO PRODUCE THE DRAFT UNTIL 14 YEARS LATER IN 2007.

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SPDC RULE AND INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE (1990s–2007)

THE MILITARY ALSO FORMED A NEW SOCIAL ORGANIZATION CALLED THE UNION SOLIDARITY AND DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION (USDA) WHOSE AIMS PARALLELED THOSE OF THE SLORC. BY THE EARLY 2000S, MORE THAN ONE-FIFTH OF THE POPULATION WAS A PART OF THE USDA. THEY ALSO CHANGED THE NAME OF THE SLORC TO THE STATE PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL (SPDC). THE SPDC CONTINUED TO HARASS THE NLD AND THE MILITARY RETAINED ITS CONTROL. THE UNITED STATES CALLED FOR THE MILITARY TO HONOUR THE 1990 ELECTIONS AND INVOKED ECONOMIC SANCTIONS. THEY ALSO CONDEMNED THE HUMAN-RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND FORCED-LABOUR PRACTISES WHILE THE EUROPEAN UNION (EU) RESTRICTED TRADE WITH THE SPDC.

THE SPDC CONDUCTED SOME NEGOTIATIONS WITH AUNG SAN SUU KYI IN 2000 AND, AS A RESULT, RELEASED OVER 200 POLITICAL PRISONERS. GENERAL KHIN NYUNT WAS NAMED THE PRIME MINISTER IN 2003 AND PROMISED TO USHER THE COUNTRY TO A NEW CONSTITUTION AND FREE ELECTIONS, BUT HIS RULE WAS CUT SHORT BY ALLEGATIONS OF CORRUPTION AND WAS PLACED UNDER HOUSE ARREST IN 2004 AND WAS REPLACED BY GENERAL SOE WIN. MYANMAR GAINED STRATEGIC AND ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE IN THE YEARS LEADING UP TO THE 21ST CENTURY, BUT DESPITE INCREASED GLOBAL INTERACTION, THE EU AND THE US CONTINUED TO IMPOSE SANCTIONS, ESPECIALLY AFTER AUNG SAN SUU KYI WAS ONCE AGAIN DETAINED IN 2003. IT WAS CLEAR THAT ANY FURTHER ECONOMIC GROWTH WOULD BE DEPENDENT ON DEMOCRATIC PROGRESS AND IMPROVED HUMAN RIGHTS. IN SEPTEMBER 2007, A LARGE SCALE-DEMONSTRATION CALLING FOR DEMOCRATIC REFORMS WAS HARSHLY RESPONDED TO BY THE MILITARY, DRAWING INTERNATIONAL CRITICISM.

2008 CONSTITUTION AND 2010 ELECTIONS

ON MAY 3RD AND 4TH, 2008, A REFERENDUM TO RATIFY THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION APPROVED BY THE NATIONAL CONVENTION WAS INTERRUPTED BY A CYCLONE WHICH STRUCK THE IRRAWADDY DELTA REGION AND OBLITERATED VILLAGES, KILLING AROUND 138,000 PEOPLE. THE GOVERNMENT FAILED TO PROVIDE RELIEF FOR THE PEOPLE AND REFUSED TO ACCEPT FOREIGN AID, DRAWING FURTHER CRITICISM. LATER IN MAY, THE CONSTITUTION WAS RATIFIED AND WHILE OBSERVERS WERE SCEPTICAL OF THE PROCESS, IT WAS TO TAKE EFFECT AFTER THE ELECTIONS OF A BICAMERAL LEGISLATURE CALLED THE ASSEMBLY OF THE UNION IN NOVEMBER 2010.

IN ORDER TO PREPARE FOR THE ELECTIONS, ELECTION REFORM LAWS WERE PASSED IN MARCH 2010. ONE OF THEM ANNULLED THE 1990 ELECTIONS, WHILE TWO OTHERS BARRED ANY PERSON WHO HAD BEEN MARRIED TO A FOREIGN NATIONAL OR HAD BEEN CONVICTED OF A CRIME. AUNG SAN SUU KYI WAS MARRIED TO A BRITISH CITIZEN AND HAD BEEN CONVICTED OF VIOLATING THE TERMS OF HER HOUSE ARREST IN 2009, AND WAS THUS DISQUALIFIED FROM THE ELECTION. ALSO, POLITICAL PARTIES WERE REQUIRED TO REREGISTER, OR ELSE WOULD BE DISBANDED. SINCE THIS WOULD REQUIRE THE NLD TO ACCEPT THE ANNULMENT OF THE 1990 ELECTIONS AND ALSO EXPEL AUNG SAN SUU KYI AS WELL AS OTHER LEADERS FROM THEIR RANKS, THEY CHOSE NOT TO REGISTER AND WERE THUS DISBANDED.

AROUND THREE DOZEN PARTIES PARTICIPATED, INCLUDING ONE FORMED BY A FACTION OF FORMER NLD MEMBERS AND THE USDA WHICH WAS RENAMED THE UNION SOLIDARITY AND DEVELOPMENT PARTY (USDP). THE USDP AND NUP FIELDING AT LEAST ONE CANDIDATE BETWEEN THEM AND USUALLY ONE EACH FOR EVERY RACE, WHILE THE MUCH SMALLER OPPOSITION HAD ONLY A FRACTION OF THE NUMBER OF CANDIDATES AND THUS, THE GOVERNMENT RAN UNOPPOSED FOR SEVERAL POSTS. THIS WAS CONSIDERED AN UNFAIR MEANS FOR THE MILITARY JUNTA TO LEGITIMIZE ITS POWER BY THE INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS.

THEIN SEIN'S REFORMS AND DEMOCRATIC OPENINGS (2011–2015)

THEIN SEIN, WHO HAD THE PRIME MINISTER SINCE 2007, WAS ELECTED AS THE PRESIDENT AND THE SPDC WAS DISSOLVED. THEIN SEIN'S CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT IMPLEMENTED SOCIAL REFORMS IN 2011 AND RELAXED PRESS RESTRICTIONS, RELEASED SEVERAL POLITICAL PRISONERS, IMPLEMENTED LAWS ALLOWING PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATIONS AND UNIONS. A CEASE-FIRE WAS INITIATED WITH THE SHAN COMMUNITY AND A SIMILAR ONE WITH THE KAREN IN 2012.

THE NLD WAS ALLOWED TO REGISTER AS AN OFFICIAL PARTY AND FIELD CANDIDATES IN DECEMBER FOR THE PARLIAMENTARY BY-ELECTIONS HELD APRIL 2012 WHERE THEY WON 43 OUT OF 45 SEATS. AUNG SAN SUU KYI WON THE YANGON SEAT. ALONG WITH POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE, THE NEW GOVERNMENT ALSO TOOK EFFORTS TO END INTERNATIONAL ISOLATION. AFTER THE ELECTIONS, THE UNITED STATES AND THE EUROPEAN UNION BEGAN TO LIFT SANCTIONS. EARLY IN 2012, KYAT, THE CURRENCY OF MYANMAR WAS ALLOWED TO FLOAT ON WORLD MARKETS, INCREASING FOREIGN INVESTMENT IN THE COUNTRY AND ATTRACTING TOURISTS, RESULTING IN ECONOMIC GROWTH.

AFTER THE FIRST FREELY CONTESTED ELECTIONS, HELD IN NOVEMBER 2015, NLD WON A CONSIDERABLE MAJORITY IN BOTH LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLIES, WHILE THE MILITARY RETAINED CONTROL OF SECTORS SUCH AS DEFENCE AND POLICE. WHILE AUNG SAN SUU KYI WAS NOT PERMITTED TO ASSUME THE POSITION OF PRESIDENT DUE TO HER HAVING A FOREIGN NATIONAL SPOUSE, HTIN KYAW, ONE OF HER ASSOCIATES WAS INAUGURATED AS PRESIDENT IN MARCH 2016. AUNG SAN SUU KYI WAS APPOINTED TO THE NEWLY ESTABLISHED POWERFUL POST OF STATE COUNSELLOR. IN HER NEW POSITION, AUNG SAN SUU KYI FOCUSED ON SUBDUING THE ETHNIC INSURGENCIES. SHE OPENED THE 21ST CENTURY PANGLONG PEACE CONFERENCE IN AUGUST 2016, WHICH CONTINUED TO HAVE REGULAR MEETINGS.

ROHINGYA CRISIS (2016–2019)

IN 2016 AND 2017, THERE WAS A BRUTAL CRACKDOWN ON THE ROHINGYA, ONE OF THE MINORITIES WHO LIVED PRIMARILY IN THE RAKHINE STATE. THE VIOLENCE WAS CONDEMNED BY THE UNITED NATIONS. THE PEOPLE WERE ARBITRARILY DEPRIVED OF THEIR NATIONALITY AND SUFFERED THROUGH RESTRICTED FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT, THREATS TO THEIR LIFE, DENIAL OF EDUCATION AND HEALTHCARE AND FORCED LABOUR. MEN AND WOMEN WERE RANDOMLY ARRESTED WITHOUT FORMAL CHARGES, WERE NOT GIVEN A FAIR TRIAL AND ONLY RELEASED WHEN THEY OFFERED BRIBES. HOUSE, LAND AND PROPERTY RIGHTS WERE VIOLATED AND FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF WERE RESTRICTED.

THE MILITARY DELIBERATELY SHOVED FAMILIES INTO HOUSES AND BURNED THEM. THEY MASS EXECUTED, RAPED, BEAT AND KILLED PEOPLE, INCLUDING THE ELDERLY, CHILDREN AND THOSE WITH DISABILITIES. THERE WAS A LACK OF TRANSPARENCY AROUND HARD LABOUR CAMPS WHERE SHACKLES WERE USED AS PUNISHMENT. YOUNG CHILDREN WERE KILLED IN FRONT OF THEIR MOTHERS AND THE WOMEN WERE TAUNTED AS THEY WERE BEATEN OR RAPED, MOCKING THEIR RELIGION. THE UN STRONGLY CONDEMNED THESE HORRIFIC ACTIONS AND URGED MYANMAR TO CEASE THE VIOLENCE. BY 2018, IT IS ESTIMATED THAT AROUND 800,000 ROHINGYA PEOPLE HAD FLED THE COUNTRY.

ON 29TH JANUARY 2017, A RESPECTED MUSLIM LAWYER U KO NI WAS BRUTALLY SHOT WHILE HE WAS HOLDING HIS GRANDCHILD. “THIS ACT WAS ALSO AN ACT OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN. IT WAS COMMITTED WHILE U KO NI WAS HOLDING HIS GRANDCHILD, EXPOSING THE CHILD TO WITNESS ONE OF THE MOST HORRIFIC ACTS OF VIOLENCE,” SAID SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE SITUATION MS. YANGHEE LEE.

AUNG SAN SUU KYI’S HISTORY AS A HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST STOOD IN SHARP CONTRAST TO HER TEPID RESPONSE AND FAILURE TO DENOUNCE THE MILITARY. SHE DEFENDED THEM IN THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE (ICJ) IN DECEMBER 2019, SAYING THAT IF ANY WAR CRIMES WERE COMMITTED, THEY WOULD BE PROSECUTED IN MYANMAR’S MILITARY JUSTICE SYSTEM.

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS AND THE 2020 ELECTIONS

THE NLD INTRODUCED SOME CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS WHICH WOULD GRADUALLY REDUCE THE NUMBER OF LEGISLATIVE SEATS RESERVED FOR THE MILITARY OVER 15 YEARS. HOWEVER, SINCE THE 2008 CONSTITUTION ENSURED THAT THE MILITARY HAD A MINIMUM OF 25% OF THE SEATS, THESE AMENDMENTS WERE NOT PASSED.

THE NEXT ELECTIONS WERE HELD IN NOVEMBER 2020 AND WHILE SOME ETHNIC GROUPS WERE EXCLUDED FROM THE POLLS DUE TO THE UNREST BETWEEN THE MILITARY AND ARMED ETHNIC GROUPS, THIS AFFECTED LESS THAN 10% OF THE TOTAL ELECTORATE. THE NLD WON AROUND 82% OF THE SEATS. THE USDP CLAIMED THAT THE NUMBERS WERE SKEWED DUE TO FRAUDS AND IRREGULARITIES, BUT THIS CLAIM WAS REJECTED AS MOST OBSERVING PARTIES AGREED THAT THE ELECTIONS HAD BEEN FAIR. THEY ALSO APPEALED FOR THE OPENING OF THE PARLIAMENT TO BE DELAYED BUT WERE REFUSED. FEBRUARY 1ST, 2021 WAS CHOSEN AS THE DAY THE PARLIAMENT WOULD MEET FOR THE FIRST TIME.

INVOLVEMENT OF MAJOR COUNTRIES:

CHINA

BEIJING'S INVOLVEMENT IN MYANMAR COMES DOWN TO ONE THING REALLY — MONEY AND BORDERS, IN THAT ORDER. MYANMAR SITS ON CRITICAL BELT AND ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE. PIPELINES RUNNING INTO YUNNAN PROVINCE. DEEP SEA PORT PROJECTS. ROAD NETWORKS GIVING CHINA ACCESS TO THE INDIAN OCEAN IT WOULDN'T HAVE OTHERWISE. THAT'S NOT SOMETHING YOU WALK AWAY FROM BECAUSE A NEIGHBOUR IS HAVING A BAD TIME POLITICALLY. SO CHINA KEPT ITS DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH THE SAC INTACT, CONTINUED SHIELDING IT AT THE SECURITY COUNCIL, AND STEPPED IN TO BROKER CEASEFIRES IN NORTHERN SHAN STATE WHENEVER THE FIGHTING CREPT TOO CLOSE TO THE BORDER. THIS ISN'T IDEOLOGICAL SYMPATHY FOR THE JUNTA. IT'S PURE INTEREST PROTECTION. THE DISTINCTION MATTERS THOUGH BECAUSE IT ALSO MEANS BEIJING HAS OCCASIONALLY LEANED ON THE SAC WHEN ITS BEHAVIOUR BECAME GENUINELY INCONVENIENT FOR CHINESE INTERESTS. JUST NEVER HARD ENOUGH TO PRODUCE ANY REAL CHANGE.

RUSSIA

RUSSIA'S FOOTPRINT IN MYANMAR IS SMALLER THAN CHINA'S BUT IT FILLS A SPECIFIC GAP THE JUNTA CAN'T IGNORE. THE TATMADAW HAS BOUGHT A SIGNIFICANT CHUNK OF ITS MILITARY HARDWARE FROM MOSCOW OVER THE YEARS. AIRCRAFT, AIR DEFENCE SYSTEMS, WEAPONS. THAT PIPELINE KEPT FLOWING AFTER THE COUP WHEN WESTERN SANCTIONS CUT OFF OTHER SUPPLIERS. RUSSIA GETS SOMETHING OUT OF THIS TOO. A RELIABLE PARTNER, CONTINUED ARMS REVENUE, AND YET ANOTHER DATA POINT IT CAN USE TO ARGUE THAT ITS RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOVERNMENTS OUTSIDE THE WESTERN ORBIT REMAIN FUNCTIONAL DESPITE UKRAINE. MYANMAR IS NOT A STRATEGIC PRIORITY FOR MOSCOW THE WAY IT IS FOR BEIJING. IT IS HOWEVER A CONVENIENT ONE, AND CONVENIENT RELATIONSHIPS TEND TO PERSIST.

INDIA

INDIA'S SITUATION IS THE MOST UNCOMFORTABLE OF ANY MAJOR POWER INVOLVED AND NEW DELHI KNOWS IT. THERE ARE GENUINE DEMOCRATIC VALUES ON ONE SIDE AND SERIOUS STRATEGIC CALCULATIONS ON THE OTHER, AND THEY POINT IN COMPLETELY DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS. SHARED ETHNIC COMMUNITIES LIVE ACROSS THE BORDER IN MANIPUR AND MIZORAM. THERE ARE INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS AT STAKE. THERE IS THE EVER PRESENT CONCERN ABOUT CHINESE INFLUENCE FILLING WHATEVER VACUUM INDIA LEAVES BEHIND. SO INDIA HAS DONE WHAT COUNTRIES DO WHEN THEY CAN'T CHOOSE — IT HAS TRIED TO KEEP ALL ITS OPTIONS OPEN. IT HASN'T STRONGLY CONDEMNED THE SAC. IT KEPT DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT GOING. IT ABSORBED REFUGEES INTO ITS NORTHEASTERN STATES WITHOUT FORMALLY CALLING THEM REFUGEES. THE RESULT IS A POSITION THAT HAS MANAGED TO FRUSTRATE EVERYONE WITHOUT FULLY COMMITTING TO ANYONE.

UNITED STATES

WASHINGTON ACTED FASTER THAN MOST AFTER FEBRUARY 2021. SANCTIONS WENT ON SAC LEADERS AND MILITARY ENTERPRISES QUICKLY. BILATERAL ASSISTANCE WAS SUSPENDED. THE NUG GOT RECOGNITION. HUMANITARIAN FUNDING CAME THROUGH. THE MAGNITSKY STYLE SANCTIONS TARGETING ENTITIES LIKE MYANMAR ECONOMIC HOLDINGS LIMITED WERE SPECIFICALLY DESIGNED TO HURT THE MILITARY ECONOMICALLY WITHOUT THE DAMAGE SPILLING OVER ONTO ORDINARY PEOPLE. WHETHER THAT WORKED IS GENUINELY UNCLEAR. THE JUNTA ADAPTED. CHINA STEPPED IN WITH ECONOMIC COVER. THE SAC KEPT DOING WHAT IT WAS DOING. AMERICAN LEVERAGE IN MYANMAR HAS ALWAYS BEEN REAL BUT GEOGRAPHICALLY AND POLITICALLY CONSTRAINED IN WAYS THAT MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO TRANSLATE INTO ACTUAL OUTCOMES ON THE GROUND.

EUROPEAN UNION AND UNITED KINGDOM

THE EU AND UK ESSENTIALLY FOLLOWED THE AMERICAN PLAYBOOK WITH THEIR OWN VARIATIONS. MULTIPLE ROUNDS OF TARGETED SANCTIONS ON SAC OFFICIALS AND MILITARY LINKED ENTITIES. SUSPENDED ASSISTANCE. HUMANITARIAN FUNDING. VOCAL PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE ICJ CASE AND OTHER ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS. THE UK USED ITS POST BREXIT AUTONOMOUS SANCTIONS FRAMEWORK TO MOVE INDEPENDENTLY WHERE NEEDED. NONE OF IT HAS FUNDAMENTALLY ALTERED THE JUNTA'S CALCULUS FOR THE SAME REASON AMERICAN PRESSURE HASN'T. MYANMAR'S ECONOMIC DEPENDENCIES RUN TOWARD BEIJING NOT BRUSSELS OR LONDON. FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS AND LEGAL PROCESSES IS WHERE EUROPEAN INVOLVEMENT HAS ARGUABLY HAD THE MOST TANGIBLE IMPACT, EVEN IF IT RARELY MAKES HEADLINES.

JAPAN

TOKYO'S RESPONSE STANDS OUT MAINLY BECAUSE OF HOW MUCH MORE CAUTIOUS IT HAS BEEN COMPARED TO OTHER DEMOCRATIC NATIONS AND HOW MUCH CRITICISM THAT CAUTION HAS ATTRACTED. JAPAN HAS BEEN ONE OF MYANMAR'S LARGEST AID DONORS FOR DECADES AND HAS DEEP ECONOMIC TIES THAT IT WAS CLEARLY RELUCTANT TO JEOPARDISE. AFTER THE COUP IT MOVED SLOWLY ON SANCTIONS, KEPT SOME AID FLOWING, AND MAINTAINED A TONE TOWARD THE SAC THAT READ AS MORE CONCILIATORY THAN CONDEMNATORY. THE REASONING OFFERED WAS THAT ENGAGEMENT PRODUCES BETTER RESULTS THAN ISOLATION AND THAT CUTTING TIES RISKED PUSHING MYANMAR DEEPER INTO CHINA'S CORNER. JAPAN HAS SINCE TOUGHENED ITS STANCE SOMEWHAT, SUSPENDING NEW PROJECTS AND ACKNOWLEDGING THE SEVERITY OF THE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION. BUT THE HESITATION IN THOSE EARLY MONTHS LEFT A MARK ON HOW ITS POSITION IS PERCEIVED INTERNATIONALLY.

ASEAN MEMBERS

ASEAN AS A BLOC HAS FAILED ON MYANMAR AND MOST OF ITS OWN MEMBERS KNOW IT. BUT ZOOM IN AND THE PICTURE GETS MORE COMPLICATED. THAILAND SHARES A LONG BORDER, HOSTS LARGE NUMBERS OF REFUGEES, AND HAS A MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT THAT HAS SHOWN LITTLE APPETITE FOR CONDEMNING A FELLOW INSTITUTION THAT TOOK POWER BY FORCE. CAMBODIA INVITED SAC REPRESENTATIVES TO ASEAN MEETINGS IN 2022 IN DIRECT DEFIANCE OF THE BLOC'S OWN DECISIONS. SINGAPORE MOVED IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION, IMPOSING FINANCIAL MEASURES AND OPENLY ACKNOWLEDGING THAT THE FIVE POINT CONSENSUS HAD NOT WORKED. INDONESIA PUSHED HARDER THAN MOST FOR GENUINE ACTION. THE RESULT IS A REGIONAL ORGANISATION THAT CANNOT REACH INTERNAL AGREEMENT, HAS NO ENFORCEMENT MECHANISM, AND HAS WATCHED ITS ONE POLICY FRAMEWORK ON MYANMAR BE COMPLETELY DISREGARDED WITHOUT ANY REAL CONSEQUENCE.

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RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

THE MILITARY COUP AND ARRESTS

ON FEBRUARY 1ST 2021, A FEW HOURS BEFORE THE PARLIAMENT WAS SCHEDULED TO MEET FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE MILITARY INITIATED A COUP D'ETAT AND ARRESTED STATE COUNSELLOR AUNG SAN SUU KYI AND PRESIDENT WIN MYINT AMONG SEVERAL OTHERS. VICE PRESIDENT MYINT SWE, ACTING PRESIDENT, DECLARED A STATE OF EMERGENCY FOR ONE YEAR, THUS HANDING OVER CONTROL OF THE EXECUTIVE, JUDICIARY AND LEGISLATURE TO GENERAL MIN AUNG HLAING. HE CLAIMED THAT THE TAKEOVER WAS DUE TO ALLEGED UNSOLVED ELECTORAL IRREGULARITIES AND BECAUSE THE MILITARY'S REQUEST TO POSTPONE THE PARLIAMENT MEETING WAS NOT HEEDED. MOBILE PHONES, TELEPHONES, INTERNET AND RADIO AND TELEVISION CHANNELS WERE REPORTEDLY CUT. SEVERAL BANKS AND AUTOMATED TELLER MACHINES WERE ALSO CLOSED.

FORMATION OF THE STATE ADMINISTRATION COUNCIL

THE NEXT DAY, A STATE ADMINISTRATION COUNCIL WAS FORMED WITH GEN. MIN AS CHAIRMAN. ON AUGUST 1 THE COUNCIL WAS REPLACED BY A MILITARY-LED CARETAKER GOVERNMENT, WITH SENIOR GENERAL MIN NAMED PRIME MINISTER, AND THE STATE OF EMERGENCY WAS EXTENDED UNTIL AUGUST 2023.

PUBLIC RESPONSE AND MILITARY CRACKDOWN

THE COUP WAS INTERNATIONALLY CONDEMNED AND RESULTED IN PROTESTS, DEMONSTRATIONS AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE FROM THE CITIZENS. THE MILITARY RESPONDED WITH DISPROPORTIONATE FORCE, USING VIOLENCE AGAINST UNARMED DEMONSTRATORS. BY THE END OF 2021, AROUND 12,000 PEOPLE HAD BEEN KILLED DUE TO THE INCREASING VIOLENCE FROM THE MILITARY, FROM RUBBER BULLETS, TO SOLDIERS PATROLLING THE STREETS. MEN AND WOMEN WERE DETAINED AND ARRESTED INDISCRIMINATELY. MOST OF THEM RECEIVED UNFAIR TRIALS.

FORMATION OF THE NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL WAR

IN APRIL, A PARALLEL CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT, THE NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT (NUG), WAS FORMED, WHICH OFFICIALLY ESTABLISHED A MILITARY WING CALLED THE PEOPLE'S DEFENCE FORCE (PDF) IN MAY. THIS WAS LARGELY CONSIDERED THE BEGINNING OF CIVIL WAR. SOON, THEY BEGAN COLLABORATING WITH ETHNIC ARMED FORCES (EAOs) AND LOCAL MILITIAS, WHICH COMPLICATED THE CONFLICT, SINCE THE DIFFERENT ORGANIZATIONS HAD DIFFERENT GOALS AND AGENDAS FOR WHAT THE COUNTRY SHOULD BE LIKE IF THE JUNTA WAS OVERTHROWN. BY THE END OF 2021, THE KACHIN INDEPENDENCE ARMY (KIA), KAREN NATIONAL UNION (KNU), KARENNI NATIONAL PROGRESSIVE PARTY (KNPP), CHIN NATIONAL FRONT (CNF), AND ALL BURMA STUDENTS' DEMOCRATIC FRONT (ABSDF) HAD ALL OPENLY ALLIED THEMSELVES WITH THE PDF AND THE NUG.

ASEAN'S FIVE-POINT CONSENSUS

ON 24TH APRIL 2021, ASEAN REACHED A FIVE-POINT CONSENSUS REGARDING THE MYANMAR SITUATION. FIRST, THERE WOULD BE AN IMMEDIATE STOP TO ALL VIOLENCE FROM ALL PARTIES. SECONDLY, THERE SHOULD BE CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE AMONG THE PARTIES IN ORDER TO SEEK A PEACEFUL SOLUTION WITH THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE PEOPLE. THIRD, A SPECIAL ENVOY FROM ASEAN WOULD MEDIATE THE DIALOGUE. FOURTH, ASEAN WOULD PROVIDE HUMANITARIAN AID THROUGH THE AHA CENTRE. LASTLY, THE SPECIAL ENVOY WOULD VISIT MYANMAR AND MEET WITH ALL CONCERNED PARTIES.

OPERATION 1027 AND THE MILITARY'S TERRITORIAL LOSSES (2023–2024)

OCTOBER 2023 CHANGED THE WAR. THE THREE BROTHERHOOD ALLIANCE: ARAKAN ARMY, MNDAA, TNLA, HIT NORTHERN SHAN STATE WITH OPERATION 1027 AND THE MILITARY JUST WAS NOT READY FOR IT. OUTPOSTS FELL ONE AFTER ANOTHER. TOWNS THE JUNTA HAD HELD FOR YEARS WERE GONE. IT WASN'T A GRADUAL SHIFT, RATHER IT WAS A COLLAPSE. BY 2024 RESISTANCE FORCES CONTROLLED SOMEWHERE AROUND 70-80% OF MYANMAR'S TERRITORY. THE TATMADAW, THE SAME INSTITUTION THAT OVERTHREW A DEMOCRATICALLY ELECTED GOVERNMENT BECAUSE IT BELIEVED ITSELF INVINCIBLE, WAS REDUCED TO DEFENDING CITIES AND HOPING ITS AIR FORCE COULD COMPENSATE FOR EVERYTHING IT HAD LOST ON THE GROUND.

RAKHINE STATE AND THE ARAKAN ARMY (2024)

THE ARAKAN ARMY NOW CONTROLS MOST OF RAKHINE STATE. BORDER CROSSINGS WITH BANGLADESH AND INDIA, GONE FROM JUNTA HANDS. WHICH CREATES A DEEPLY UNCOMFORTABLE REALITY FOR THE ROHINGYA SITUATION. THE REGION THEY WERE ETHNICALLY CLEANSED FROM IN 2017 ISN'T EVEN CONTROLLED BY THE SAME PEOPLE ANYMORE. A THIRD ARMED ACTOR NOW HOLDS IT, ONE WITH ITS OWN POLITICAL GOALS AND NO PARTICULAR OBLIGATION TO THE ROHINGYA. RETURN WAS ALREADY COMPLICATED. NOW IT'S A QUESTION NOBODY HAS A REAL ANSWER TO.

CONSCRIPTION (2024)

FEBRUARY 2024 — THE JUNTA ANNOUNCED MANDATORY CONSCRIPTION FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MYANMAR'S HISTORY. MEN 18-35, WOMEN 18-27. THE REACTION WASN'T PATRIOTIC RALLYING. IT WAS MASS PANIC. PEOPLE STARTED LEAVING THE COUNTRY RATHER THAN FIGHT FOR A GOVERNMENT THEY DESPISE IN A WAR THE MILITARY IS VISIBLY STRUGGLING TO WIN. CONSCRIPTION IS USUALLY WHAT HAPPENS WHEN VOLUNTARY RECRUITMENT HAS FAILED. DRAW YOUR OWN CONCLUSIONS.

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

3 MILLION PLUS DISPLACED. 18.6 MILLION IN ACUTE NEED. 1 IN 4 PEOPLE ARE FOOD INSECURE. THE JUNTA HAS SEIZED AID CONVOYS, ARRESTED HUMANITARIAN WORKERS AND BOMBED HOSPITALS, NOT AS ISOLATED INCIDENTS BUT AS CONSISTENT, DOCUMENTED PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOUR. GETTING AID INTO THE WORST AFFECTED AREAS HAS BECOME NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE. THE PEOPLE PAYING THE PRICE FOR ALL OF THIS ARE OVERWHELMINGLY CIVILIANS WHO HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH STARTING IT.

AIRSTRIKES ON CIVILIANS

LOSING ON THE GROUND, THE MILITARY LEANED HARDER ON AIRSTRIKES THROUGH 2024 AND INTO 2025. VILLAGES. MARKETS. SCHOOLS. MONASTERIES. THE UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR CONDEMNED IT. HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS DOCUMENTED IT IN DETAIL. IT KEPT HAPPENING. THERE'S A CERTAIN LOGIC TO IT FROM THE JUNTA'S PERSPECTIVE, IF YOU CAN'T HOLD TERRITORY, YOU CAN AT LEAST MAKE IT UNINHABITABLE.

INTERNATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

THE GAMBIA'S ICJ GENOCIDE CASE IS STILL GOING. THE ICC HAS DEPORTATION AND PERSECUTION CHARGES IN MOTION. THE 2020 ICJ PROVISIONAL MEASURES RULING WAS GENUINELY SIGNIFICANT — ORDERING MYANMAR TO PROTECT THE ROHINGYA IS NOT NOTHING. BUT CHINA AND RUSSIA HAVE CONSISTENTLY BLOCKED STRONGER SECURITY COUNCIL ACTION, AND THE DISTANCE BETWEEN WHAT INTERNATIONAL LAW DEMANDS AND WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENS ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR IS CONSIDERABLE. PROGRESS EXISTS. IT'S JUST NOWHERE NEAR ENOUGH.

2023 ONWARDS-

OPERATION 1027 IN OCTOBER 2023 DIDN'T JUST CHANGE THE WAR — IT BROKE SOMETHING IN THE MILITARY'S IMAGE OF ITSELF. THE THREE BROTHERHOOD ALLIANCE HIT NORTHERN SHAN STATE AND THE TATMADAW FELL APART FASTER THAN ANYONE EXPECTED. OUTPOSTS SURRENDERED. TOWNS CHANGED HANDS. BY EARLY 2024 THE JUNTA WAS DEFENDING CITIES WHILE RESISTANCE FORCES HELD SOMEWHERE AROUND 70-80% OF THE COUNTRY'S TERRITORY. FOR AN INSTITUTION THAT STAGED A COUP BECAUSE IT BELIEVED ITSELF UNTOUCHABLE, THAT'S A REMARKABLE PLACE TO END UP.

RAKHINE STATE FOLLOWED A SIMILAR TRAJECTORY. THE ARAKAN ARMY SPENT 2024 METHODICALLY TAKING CONTROL OF THE REGION — BORDER CROSSINGS, TOWNS, EVENTUALLY MOST OF THE STATE ITSELF. WHICH CREATES A DEEPLY UNCOMFORTABLE SITUATION FOR THE ROHINGYA QUESTION. THE LAND THEY WERE DRIVEN FROM IN 2017 IS NOW UNDER THE CONTROL OF A THIRD ARMED ACTOR WITH ITS OWN POLITICAL AGENDA AND NO PARTICULAR OBLIGATION TO THEM. RETURN WAS ALREADY COMPLICATED. NOW IT'S SOMETHING CLOSER TO HYPOTHETICAL.

FEBRUARY 2024 BROUGHT CONSCRIPTION — MANDATORY MILITARY SERVICE FOR MEN 18-35 AND WOMEN 18-27, THE FIRST TIME IN MYANMAR'S HISTORY. THE PUBLIC REACTION WASN'T PATRIOTIC. IT WAS PANIC. PEOPLE STARTED LEAVING THE COUNTRY RATHER THAN FIGHT FOR A GOVERNMENT THEY DESPISE IN A WAR THE MILITARY IS VISIBLY LOSING. CONSCRIPTION IS WHAT YOU DO WHEN VOLUNTARY RECRUITMENT HAS DRIED UP. THE JUNTA DIDN'T ANNOUNCE IT FROM A POSITION OF STRENGTH.

THE HUMANITARIAN NUMBERS BY 2024 WERE THE WORST ON RECORD. OVER 3 MILLION DISPLACED. 18.6 MILLION IN ACUTE NEED. ONE IN FOUR PEOPLE FOOD INSECURE. THE JUNTA HAS BLOCKED AID CONVOYS, ARRESTED HUMANITARIAN WORKERS AND BOMBED HOSPITALS — NOT OCCASIONALLY BUT CONSISTENTLY,

AS A DELIBERATE STRATEGY. GETTING ASSISTANCE INTO THE HARDEST HIT AREAS HAS BECOME NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE, AND THE PEOPLE BEARING THE COST OF THAT ARE OVERWHELMINGLY CIVILIANS.

AIRSTRIKES BECAME THE MILITARY'S PRIMARY TOOL AS GROUND LOSSES MOUNTED THROUGH 2024 AND INTO 2025. VILLAGES, MARKETS, SCHOOLS, MONASTERIES — HIT REPEATEDLY AND DOCUMENTED EXTENSIVELY BY HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS. THE UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR HAS CONDEMNED IT IN REPORT AFTER REPORT. IT KEEPS HAPPENING. WHEN YOU'VE LOST THE GROUND WAR, APPARENTLY YOU BOMB FROM THE AIR INSTEAD. THAT LOGIC HAPPENS TO CONSTITUTE A WAR CRIME UNDER INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW.

ON THE LEGAL FRONT, THE GAMBIA'S GENOCIDE CASE AT THE ICJ IS STILL MOVING FORWARD, BUILDING ON THE 2020 PROVISIONAL MEASURES RULING THAT ORDERED MYANMAR TO PROTECT THE ROHINGYA. THE ICC CONTINUES PURSUING DEPORTATION AND PERSECUTION CHARGES AGAINST MILITARY LEADERSHIP. PROGRESS IS REAL BUT SLOW — CHINA AND RUSSIA HAVE BLOCKED ANYTHING STRONGER AT THE SECURITY COUNCIL, AND THE DISTANCE BETWEEN WHAT INTERNATIONAL LAW DEMANDS AND WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENS ON THE GROUND REMAINS VAST. JUSTICE EXISTS IN THIS SITUATION. IT JUST DOESN'T EXIST ON A TIMELINE THAT HELPS ANYONE RIGHT NOW.

BY 2025 THE JUNTA CONTROLS LESS TERRITORY THAN AT ANY POINT SINCE THE COUP. THAT'S THE MILITARY REALITY. THE POLITICAL REALITY IS MESSIER — THE SAC STILL HOLDS NAYPYIDAW, YANGON, MANDALAY, AND THE ECONOMIC INFRASTRUCTURE THAT COMES WITH THEM. IT STILL HAS THE AIR FORCE. IT STILL HAS ENOUGH EXTERNAL SUPPORT FROM CHINA AND RUSSIA TO AVOID COMPLETE INTERNATIONAL ISOLATION. LOSING A WAR AND LOSING POWER ARE NOT THE SAME THING, AND THE JUNTA UNDERSTANDS THAT BETTER THAN MOST.

THE NUG AND ITS ALLIES FACE THEIR OWN CHALLENGES. COORDINATING DOZENS OF ARMED GROUPS WITH DIFFERENT HISTORIES, DIFFERENT GOALS, AND DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIPS WITH EACH OTHER IS GENUINELY DIFFICULT. MILITARY GAINS HAVE BEEN SIGNIFICANT BUT CONVERTING TERRITORY INTO FUNCTIONING GOVERNANCE IS A DIFFERENT PROBLEM ENTIRELY. LARGE PARTS OF THE COUNTRY THAT RESISTANCE FORCES NOW CONTROL HAVE NO SCHOOLS RUNNING, NO HEALTHCARE, NO ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES. WINNING THE WAR AND REBUILDING THE COUNTRY ARE TWO SEPARATE TASKS AND BOTH NEED TO HAPPEN SIMULTANEOUSLY.

FOR ORDINARY MYANMAR CIVILIANS CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE, 2025 LOOKS A LOT LIKE 2024 — DISPLACEMENT, FOOD INSECURITY, AIRSTRIKES, AND A PEACE PROCESS THAT EXISTS MOSTLY ON PAPER. THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE SUFFERED MOST THROUGHOUT THIS CRISIS, PARTICULARLY THE ROHINGYA, REMAIN WITHOUT A CLEAR PATH FORWARD REGARDLESS OF HOW THE BROADER CONFLICT RESOLVES. WHATEVER MYANMAR EVENTUALLY BECOMES AFTER THIS WAR ENDS, THE QUESTION OF WHETHER IT BECOMES A PLACE THE ROHINGYA CAN ACTUALLY RETURN TO SAFELY REMAINS UNANSWERED. THAT QUESTION SITS AT THE HEART OF WHAT THIS COMMITTEE IS HERE TO ADDRESS.

LEGAL INSTRUMENTS AND FRAMEWORK

1. CONVENTION ON THE PREVENTION AND PUNISHMENT OF THE CRIME OF GENOCIDE (1948)
2. UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (1948) AND GENEVA CONVENTIONS (1949) WITH ADDITIONAL PROTOCOLS I AND II (1977)
3. INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS (1966)
4. INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS (1966)
5. CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (1979)
6. CONVENTION AGAINST TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT (1984)
7. CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (1989)
8. ROME STATUTE OF THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT (1998)
9. VIENNA DECLARATION AND PROGRAMME OF ACTION (1993)
10. DECLARATION ON THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN (1993)
11. WORLD SUMMIT OUTCOME DOCUMENT, PARAGRAPHS 138 AND 139, CODIFYING THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT DOCTRINE (2005)
12. BASIC PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES ON THE RIGHT TO A REMEDY AND REPARATION FOR VICTIMS OF GROSS VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW AND SERIOUS VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW (2005)
13. UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1325 ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY (2000)
14. UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1265 ON THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS IN ARMED CONFLICT (1999)
15. UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 2417 ON ARMED CONFLICT AND HUMANITARIAN ACCESS (2018)
16. ASEAN FIVE-POINT CONSENSUS ON MYANMAR (2021)
17. HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL RESOLUTION S-29/1 ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS OF THE CRISIS IN MYANMAR (2021)
18. INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATIVE MECHANISM FOR MYANMAR (IIMM), ESTABLISHED BY THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL (2018)
19. CONVENTION RELATING TO THE STATUS OF REFUGEES (1951) AND ITS 1967 PROTOCOL
20. UNITED NATIONS CHARTER (1945)

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RESEARCH GUIDANCE

- GAIN A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF THE STRUCTURE, MANDATE, AND FUNCTIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM, PARTICULARLY THE UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL.
- CONDUCT IN-DEPTH RESEARCH ON YOUR ASSIGNED COUNTRY'S STANCE. THIS INCLUDES IDENTIFYING THE COUNTRY'S OFFICIAL POSITION, PREVIOUS NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL MEASURES TAKEN, PROPOSED OR SUPPORTED INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES, POLICY DOCUMENTS, OFFICIAL STATEMENTS, AND SPEECHES FROM RELEVANT MINISTRIES, AMBASSADORS, OR ECONOMIC COUNCILS.
- UNDERSTAND AND STRICTLY ADHERE TO YOUR COUNTRY'S OFFICIAL CONDUCT. ENSURE ALL STATEMENTS, PROPOSALS, NEGOTIATIONS, AND DIPLOMATIC BEHAVIOUR DURING COMMITTEE SESSIONS ALIGN WITH NATIONAL INTERESTS AND YOUR COUNTRY'S FOREIGN POLICY.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

UN REPORTS:

- ALL UN REPORTS ARE CONSIDERED CREDIBLE INFORMATION OR EVIDENCE FOR THE EXECUTIVE BOARD.

STATE REPORTS:

- THESE REPORTS CAN BE GOVERNMENT OPERATED NEWS AGENCIES REPORTS AND CAN, IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES, BE ACCEPTED IN A SIMILAR WAY BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD. HOWEVER, A REPORT THAT IS DENIED BY A CERTAIN COUNTRY CAN STILL BE DENIED BY ANOTHER COUNTRY.

NEWS SOURCES:

- ANY REUTERS ARTICLE THAT MAKES MENTION OF THE FACT STATED OR IS IN CONTRADICTION OF THE FACT BEING STATED BY ANOTHER DELEGATE IN THE COMMITTEE CAN BE USED TO SUBSTANTIATE ARGUMENTS. ANY STATE-OPERATED NEWS AGENCY'S REPORTS CAN BE USED IN SUPPORT OF OR AGAINST THE STATE THAT OWNS THE NEWS AGENCY. THESE REPORTS, IF CREDIBLE OR SUBSTANTIAL ENOUGH, CAN BE USED IN SUPPORT OF OR AGAINST ANY COUNTRY AS SUCH, BUT IN THAT SITUATION, THEY CAN BE DENIED BY ANY OTHER COUNTRY IN THE COUNCIL.

CITATIONS AND SUGGESTED READING

- UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL. (2022). REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATIVE MECHANISM FOR MYANMAR (IIMM). UNITED NATIONS.
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- SELTH, A. (2018). MYANMAR'S ARMED FORCES AND THE ROHINGYA CRISIS. UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE.
- FORTIFY RIGHTS. (2022). MYANMAR: SYSTEMATIC ATTACKS AGAINST CIVILIANS.
- UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS. (2024). MYANMAR HUMANITARIAN NEEDS AND RESPONSE PLAN.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

STATE ADMINISTRATION COUNCIL (SAC) / THE TATMADAW

THE MYANMAR MILITARY LOST A DEMOCRATIC ELECTION IN 2020 AND SIMPLY DECIDED THAT RESULT WASN'T ACCEPTABLE. SO IT TOOK POWER. MIN AUNG HLAING NOW LEADS AN INSTITUTION THAT CONTROLS MAJOR CITIES, KEY ECONOMIC ASSETS, AND AN AIR FORCE IT HAS INCREASINGLY TURNED ON ITS OWN CIVILIAN POPULATION. THE HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD SINCE FEBRUARY 2021 IS EXTENSIVE AND DAMNING. AIRSTRIKES ON VILLAGES, TORTURE IN DETENTION, HOSPITALS DELIBERATELY BOMBED, THOUSANDS DISAPPEARED. SEVERAL COUNTRIES HAVE DESIGNATED IT A TERRORIST ORGANISATION. IT CONTINUES TO FUNCTION REGARDLESS.

NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT (NUG)

THE NUG EXISTS BECAUSE A GROUP OF ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES, ACTIVISTS AND ETHNIC COMMUNITY LEADERS REFUSED TO DISAPPEAR AFTER THE COUP. THEY BUILT A PARALLEL GOVERNMENT INSTEAD. IT COMMANDS THE PDF, ADMINISTERS TERRITORY IN PARTS OF THE COUNTRY, AND HAS BEEN GAINING INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION INCREMENTALLY. ITS STATED VISION IS A FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC MYANMAR WHERE PROTECTIONS FOR MINORITIES ARE GENUINE RATHER THAN DECORATIVE. THE GAP BETWEEN THAT VISION AND THE CURRENT REALITY IS VAST. CLOSING IT IS THE WORK THIS GOVERNMENT HAS CUT OUT FOR ITSELF.

PEOPLE'S DEFENCE FORCE (PDF)

THE PDF WASN'T PLANNED. IT WAS BUILT AFTER THE COUP BY PEOPLE WHO NEVER EXPECTED TO BECOME SOLDIERS — STUDENTS, TEACHERS, DOCTORS, ENGINEERS WHO FELT THEY HAD RUN OUT OF OTHER OPTIONS. THAT ORIGIN HAS TURNED OUT TO MATTER IN UNEXPECTED WAYS. BECAUSE THE PDF WASN'T FORMED AROUND A SINGLE ETHNIC IDENTITY IT HAS MANAGED TO BUILD WORKING RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS COMMUNITIES THAT HAVE SPENT DECADES NOT TRUSTING EACH OTHER. IT IS STILL OUTGUNNED IN TERMS OF HEAVY WEAPONRY. IT IS STILL FIGHTING.

ETHNIC ARMED ORGANIZATIONS (EAOS)

THE KAREN NATIONAL UNION STARTED FIGHTING IN 1949. THE KACHIN INDEPENDENCE ARMY IN THE 1960S. THESE GROUPS HAVE BEEN PURSUING AUTONOMY LONGER THAN MOST LIVING PEOPLE HAVE BEEN ALIVE AND THEY BRING THAT ACCUMULATED EXPERIENCE INTO EVERY ALLIANCE THEY FORM. SINCE 2021 MANY HAVE PARTNERED WITH THE NUG AND PDF AGAINST THE SAC, SIGNIFICANTLY SHIFTING THE WAR'S MOMENTUM. BUT EACH ORGANISATION HAS ITS OWN POLITICAL GOALS, ITS OWN INTERNAL HISTORY, ITS OWN COMPLICATED RELATIONSHIP WITH THE TATMADAW. TREATING THEM AS A SINGLE UNIFIED BLOC IS A MISTAKE THAT TENDS TO PRODUCE BAD ANALYSIS.

THE ROHINGYA

STRIPPED OF CITIZENSHIP BY LAW IN 1982. DRIVEN FROM THEIR HOMES IN 2017 IN WHAT THE UN CALLED ETHNIC CLEANSING. OVER A MILLION LIVING IN CAMPS IN BANGLADESH WITH NO REALISTIC PATH TO RETURN. THOSE STILL INSIDE MYANMAR ARE CAUGHT BETWEEN ARMED ACTORS NONE OF WHOM HAVE MADE ROHINGYA PROTECTION A GENUINE PRIORITY. THEY HAVE NO ARMY, NO FORMAL POLITICAL REPRESENTATION, NO VOTE IN ANY PROCESS THAT DETERMINES THEIR FUTURE. JUST DECADES OF BEING SUBJECT TO DECISIONS MADE BY PEOPLE WITH POWER OVER THEM. THEIR SITUATION REPRESENTS THE MOST ACUTE AND UNRESOLVED HUMAN RIGHTS FAILURE IN THIS ENTIRE CRISIS.

CHINA

BEIJING HAS PIPELINES, PORTS AND BELT AND ROAD INVESTMENTS IN MYANMAR IT HAS NO INTENTION OF WALKING AWAY FROM. SO IT HAS MAINTAINED RELATIONS WITH THE SAC, SHIELDED IT AT THE SECURITY COUNCIL, AND INTERVENED DIPLOMATICALLY WHEN FIGHTING IN NORTHERN SHAN STATE THREATENED CHINESE BORDER INTERESTS. THIS IS NOT IDEOLOGICAL ALIGNMENT WITH THE JUNTA. IT IS STRAIGHTFORWARD INTEREST PROTECTION. THE DISTINCTION IS WORTH UNDERSTANDING BECAUSE IT ALSO EXPLAINS WHY CHINA HAS OCCASIONALLY APPLIED QUIET PRESSURE ON THE SAC WHEN ITS BEHAVIOUR BECAME GENUINELY PROBLEMATIC FOR CHINESE INVESTMENTS. NOT ENOUGH TO CHANGE ANYTHING FUNDAMENTAL. ENOUGH TO REVEAL THAT THE RELATIONSHIP IS TRANSACTIONAL RATHER THAN UNCONDITIONAL.

ASEAN

IN APRIL 2021 ASEAN PRODUCED ITS FIVE POINT CONSENSUS. END THE VIOLENCE. START DIALOGUE. ALLOW HUMANITARIAN ACCESS. APPOINT A SPECIAL ENVOY. THE JUNTA ACKNOWLEDGED IT AND THEN IGNORED VIRTUALLY ALL OF IT. ASEAN'S FOUNDING NON-INTERFERENCE PRINCIPLE MEANS IT HAS NO REAL MECHANISM TO COMPEL COMPLIANCE FROM A MEMBER STATE. SEVERAL MEMBERS HAVE MAINTAINED QUIET TIES WITH THE SAC REGARDLESS OF THE BLOC'S OFFICIAL POSITION. ASEAN REMAINS THE PRIMARY REGIONAL DIPLOMATIC FRAMEWORK FOR MYANMAR AND THAT IS WORTH SOMETHING. ITS ACTUAL RECORD ON THIS CRISIS HOWEVER IS DIFFICULT TO LOOK AT HONESTLY AND COME AWAY IMPRESSED.

BANGLADESH

WHEN OVER A MILLION ROHINGYA ARRIVED AT BANGLADESH'S BORDER IN 2017 BANGLADESH OPENED IT. THAT DECISION DESERVES TO BE ACKNOWLEDGED PLAINLY. WHAT FOLLOWED WAS YEARS OF AN UNDERFUNDED HUMANITARIAN OPERATION, REPEATED CYCLES OF STALLED REPATRIATION TALKS, AND MOUNTING PRESSURE ON A COUNTRY THAT WAS ALREADY MANAGING SIGNIFICANT DOMESTIC CHALLENGES OF ITS OWN. BANGLADESH DID NOT CREATE THIS SITUATION. IT HAS BEEN LEFT TO ABSORB ITS CONSEQUENCES WHILE THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY DEBATES AND THE SITUATION INSIDE MYANMAR CONTINUES TO DETERIORATE. DHAKA'S FRUSTRATION WITH THAT ARRANGEMENT IS ENTIRELY REASONABLE.

THE UNITED NATIONS AND LEGAL MECHANISMS

THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON MYANMAR PRODUCES DETAILED REPORTS DOCUMENTING VIOLATIONS IN DEPTH. THE GAMBIA'S GENOCIDE CASE AT THE ICJ CONTINUES, FOLLOWING THE COURT'S 2020 PROVISIONAL MEASURES RULING ORDERING MYANMAR TO PROTECT THE ROHINGYA. THE ICC PURSUES DEPORTATION AND PERSECUTION CHARGES AGAINST MILITARY LEADERSHIP. THESE ARE ALL REAL AND MEANINGFUL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ARCHITECTURE OF INTERNATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY. THEY ARE ALSO SLOW IN WAYS THAT MATTER ENORMOUSLY WHEN MEASURED AGAINST WHAT IS HAPPENING ON THE GROUND. CHINA AND RUSSIA CONTINUE BLOCKING STRONGER SECURITY COUNCIL ACTION. THE MACHINERY EXISTS. THE POLITICAL WILL TO USE IT FULLY DOES NOT.

WESTERN NATIONS

THE UNITED STATES, EUROPEAN UNION AND UNITED KINGDOM HAVE APPLIED THE TOOLS AVAILABLE TO THEM. TARGETED SANCTIONS ON SAC OFFICIALS AND MILITARY ENTERPRISES SUSPENDS SEVERAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS FOR READ ACCOUNTABILITY PROCESSES. THE HONEST ASSESSMENT IS THAT NONE OF IT HAS BEEN DECISIVE. MYANMAR'S ECONOMIC DEPENDENCIES RUN TOWARD BEIJING NOT WASHINGTON OR BRUSSELS, WHICH LIMITS HOW MUCH WESTERN PRESSURE CAN ACTUALLY MOVE. IT HAS COMPLICATED THINGS FOR THE JUNTA WITHOUT FUNDAMENTALLY CHANGING WHAT THE JUNTA DOES. THAT GAP BETWEEN INTENT AND IMPACT IS ONE OF THE HARDER REALITIES OF THIS CRISIS TO SIT WITH.

UNHRC