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Burma/Myanmar, Human Rights

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The country of Myanmar, is known to those in The United States, The United Kingdom, as well as other countries around the world, as Burma. The reason for this confusion is because in 1989, their military changed the name from The Union of Burma, to The Republic of Myanmar. It has been said while the British had control of the country as a colony, they named it Burma after the Burmese people group living there. The name Myanmar is supposedly more fitting to both the Burmese people and the other ethnic groups in the region. Others argue that there is no distinction in names between people groups, and the name is interchangeable. For purposes of clarification, the researcher will use the name Myanmar.

Myanmar is located in Southeast Asia. It is bordered by Bangladesh, India, China, Laos, and Thailand, as well as the Indian ocean. The recognized government of Myanmar is a parliamentary republic. However, the active government is a civilian government. During the time while writing this paper, a military coup overthrew the government. Myanmar is separated into 7 states or regions: Mon state, Kayin state, Rakhine state, Kayah state, Shan state, Chin state and Kachin state. Myanmar has a population of 54 million people, most of whom speak Burmese. The capital city is Nay Pyi Taw, but Yangon, also known as Ragoon, is the largest.

After the 2010 election, the government in Myanmar transitioned into a civilian government. Being a country that has 135 ethnicities with different languages, making providing one health care for everyone a difficult task. The healthcare systems have drastically changed as the political leaders have switched. There are many problems with the systems accessibility, the coverage on maternal and child health, disease control, and quality of service. While there is a considerable number of facilities, private and public, there is an uneven spread of health care workers between urban and rural.

Until recent years, education in Myanmar has been some of the best in Asia, and has been the idol of other Asian countries. In the past years, religious affiliated schools have been trying to underpin the state schools to the very poor, meaning they are giving the poorest people a chance to go to school, where they will then be able to teach them their specific beliefs. This has caused many of the wealthy families to send their children to go to school in other countries. For the middle classes who can't afford to do this, there have been unofficial schools springing up. These schools have been teaching primarily English and other classes. The major problem with this is that these differing methods of education then lead to a greater differentiation between the upper and lower classes.

An important thing to note is that this country is the number two opium drug dealer in the world. Most of this illegal drug is grown in the golden triangle, which overlaps over three countries: Myanmar, Laos and Thailand. In Myanmar, most of the opium is grown in the Wa Area in the Shan State. Their drug trade is one of the few viable businesses still in this poor area, resulting in opium being their number one crop among many of their farmers. Many of the Wa Leaders are also involved in the dealings of this business, often mixing their personal interests with those of the rest of the people. Although they do lead extravagant lives, they also put a lot of the money back into public interests, such as roads, schools, and power plants.

In most Burmese families, there are two or three kids per couple, but several generations often live together in one home. Cousins are often referred to as brothers and sisters, and all adults are typically called "uncle" and "aunty" no matter the relationship. Their typical diet includes three meals a day, often consisting of tea and rice. Breakfast typically consists of soup or rice. Lunch would be a bowl of noodles or curry and rice. Dinner consists of a soup or rice with meat curries, and vegetables for dipping. One thing that differs from the American way of eating is, they don't have drinks served with their meal a lot of the

time. Instead, they have a communal bowl of light broth or consomme. As you can see, rice is a common staple in many of their meals. One of the most common drinks in Myanmar, other than water of course, is light green tea.

A typical Myanmar farm has an average size of 2.5 hectares, or a little over 6 acres. The farmer who farms this land may make around \$1.80 to \$2.50 a day in the monsoon season, and \$3.00 to \$3.50 in the dry season compared to the \$7 dollars a day in the Philippines and \$8.50 in Thailand. Myanmar has unusually fertile soils, making it easy to grow many different crops there, but some of the most common are rice, pulses and beans, rubber, teak, and opiates. In the northern dry zone, a variety of other crops are grown. The poultry and pork industries in Myanmar are developed and some of their best, while beef is nearly nonexistent and dairy cattle is in its infant stage. Agricultural related jobs make up 38% of Myanmar's GDP, and 60% of the jobs there are ag related. In recent years, they have successfully halved the number of hungry people in their country, a task that is not very easy to do.

There are not very many programs set up for the farmers to use, so therefore they are mostly left to work on their own. Only 15% of their farms are connected to the public irrigation system. Another challenge they are facing is that they only have enough seeds for paddy to meet 1% of the demand. To increase their productivity, they would need to have a better market for their seed. The wages the farmers are being paid is considerably less than the areas around them, and this does not benefit their economy. If they were able to pay at a higher rate then they could plant more seeds and this would continue to cycle back. This problem is likely because there are so many people in the business, that there is simply not enough to go around. There is also a large forestry problem, and improving this situation would be highly beneficial to the ecosystems located in Myanmar.

Human rights are a big issue in Myanmar, and in recent years, the military regime there has been trying to silence any and all dissenting views. They put Nobel Peace Prize laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in jail, simply for being a beacon of hope and change. She was released in November of 2010. But she is not the only one. Thousands have been jailed, harassed, tortured, or even sometimes executed for expressing their beliefs. In August of 2007, a group of peaceful protesters went to protest in Yangon, the capital, overnight to fight the increasing gasoline prices. A few days later, the leaders and organizers of this protest were detained by the government, and their houses were searched, even though they had no warrants. The trials people in these situations face are unfair, and often they face at least 20 years of prison, and sometimes life sentences.

On top of all these issues, there are some even worse, especially in respect to the Rohingya Muslim group, referred to by the government as the "Bengali." In 2017, there were around one million Rohingya muslims in Myanmar, and all of these people are stateless. This is because in 1982, the country made a Citizenship Law, which denies this people group access to the same rights as citizens. Even though they have been living in Myanmar for many years, they are known as "illegal immigrants," supposedly from Bangladesh. Their government sees them as a threat to national security, and therefore, gives them none of the basic human rights that the citizens have. For example, to get married, they must meet "ten administrative requirements" before they can even be considered. Couples can't live together unless they are married, and there is a two child limit per couple. If there is any question about whether the child is actually their real baby, the police can force the mother to breastfeed her baby in front of them.

These aforementioned rights are unjust, and the situation for these unfortunate people has only declined in recent years. In August of 2017, Rohingya Arsa militants attacked more than 30 police posts. These troops then responded by burning their villages and killing people. According to medical charity Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), 6,700 people, with at least 730 of those children under 5, were killed within a month after the initial occurrence. The military also raped and abused women and girls. The Burmese government claims the dead numbered 400, and said these "clearance operations" had stopped, even though there was several pieces of evidence suggesting otherwise. At least 288 villages were destroyed, being reduced to rubble. The Rahkine villages, another Muslim group, were left perfectly intact. The most damage was in the Maungdaw Township which is located in Rakhine state. The UN has responded to this by

saying the military has been acting with “genocidal intent.” A muslim majority group in Western Africa has called for emergency measures to be taken against the Myanmar military also known as Tatmadaw.

Today, Myanmar still deny the genocide that took place in 2017, and have their own investigations going on. UN investigators are concerned that with more than half a million Rohingya still living in the country, these acts against them could occur or recur. Huge amounts of Rohingya went to Bangladesh and joined those who had fled in years prior. In one camp there were over 600,000 refugees, making it the largest refugee settlement in the world. In 2018 an agreement had been reached to return the refugees back to Myanmar. Of course the refugees refused unless they were guaranteed citizenship. Then in March of 2019, Bangladesh announced that it would no longer take the Rohingya people who were crossing the border. Likely if they return, these refugees will go back to essentially being “prisoners in their own land.” The 400,000 Rohingya still living there are confined to camps for “Internally Displaced Persons” where they have no access to healthcare or education, and no freedom of movement. What do you do with half a million people who aren’t wanted in either country?

On January 31, 2021, the military in Myanmar staged a military coup, imprisoning the country’s democratic leaders, including their leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. Presently, troops are patrolling the streets and a night-time curfew is in force. The military has announced that they are planning to replace many of the elected government officials, claiming there was widespread fraud in the latest election. According to BBC, the military, known as the USDP performed poorly in the November Election while the NLD did very well. This has to do with the timing of the coup. The week it was staged was the first week with a parliament session, making the results from the election concrete. This session will no longer happen.

The question now is what is the military’s plan for how they will run their country in the next year they have given themselves? Likely there could be opposition to their actions, as 70% of their population came out to vote in Aung San Suu Kyi. She is known for being a stubborn woman, and likely won’t cooperate, even with a gun to her head. The President, and Aung San Suu Kyi’s ally is the only one who is authorized to enact a state of emergency, but he too was detained. This coup was a direct violation of their constitution, which the military has previously complied to, and agreed to continue to follow. This reckless action by the military has put Myanmar on a perilous path.

“ ‘The most common reaction from my Burmese friends has been anger. They feel deeply betrayed by the military and the USDP.’ ” Says Michael Ghilezan, a partner of a US law firm who lives in Yangon. (Obtained from BBC) BBC has also said that there have been similar comments on the streets, even though there are some people who are very supportive of the military taking over. Many people feel mad, because they feel they had a successful election last November, and were looking forward to seeing it through. The U.S. views this as a serious blow to democratic efforts, but President Biden says “ ‘force should never seek to overrule the will of the people or attempt to erase the outcome of a credible election.’ ” (Quote from BBC) He also said that the U.S. would stand for democracy where it is under attack.

How do we solve these issues? What can be done about the Rohingya people, and about the military coup? These problems have many different layers, and there is no obvious solution, because if there was, then something would already have been done. First, the researcher will discuss how to get the Rohingya Muslim problem solved. The number one priority is to get their people group out of Myanmar, and into another country where they can start a new life for themselves. There is one geological benefit they have, and that is they are relatively close to the ocean. If the UN could form a rescue benefit, then they could send ships over and take pods of these people to new countries, where they could have a chance to form new communities. With some fundraising, getting these ships would be a possibility.

If several countries in the United Nations took a large group of Rohingya people, and provided them with materials to begin a new life, then they could successfully migrate them out of the hostile country they are currently in. These groups of course would have to be strategically placed, because you wouldn’t want to separate families, or close groups. And the countries picked for these people would have to be places where they could be accepted, and could set up a community. According to Conversation.com, the coun-

tries that have the most immigrants, include the US, with 48.2 million, Russia, with 11.2 million, Saudi Arabia with 10.6 million, and Germany with 10.2 million. Sending some groups to a refugee camp in the U.S. would be a logical first step.

“The U.S. has long been a global leader in the resettlement of refugees,” says an article by the American Immigration Council, written in January of 2020. To take a group of these refugees would in no case be easy, but for the betterment of their lives, it should be carefully considered. After the U.S. took the lead, many other countries would likely follow suit, and thousands of Rohingya people could be relocated to locations where they could have their own choices on simple decisions, such as whether or not they want to have kids. This would be a chance to live a new life for these people.

To solve the problem of the military coup is a problem that has many layers. To start with, many of the Myanmar citizens are unhappy, and the officials are imprisoned. The military plans to rule the country for the next year for sure, but will they really only be in power for a year, and will they step down willingly? They have control of many of the weapons and things, so how can there be an uprising? These people are too poor to try to negotiate with the government, and likely, they wouldn't listen anyways. To get their country back, other countries would need to step in and help them to make steps in the right direction.

To combat the issues the military government has with the previous elections, the U.N. could administer new elections where they could assist in assuring the fairness of the results. By requesting assistance, Myanmar would receive help from the UN and then would be able to prove to people that they would be able to vote however they feel is right, and that no one there would ever have to know how they voted. They would monitor and make sure no one is finding a way to stuff ballot boxes, or sending only people they know will vote in their favor. This is an opportunity the UN has provided since 1991, and in the past, it has shown great success. More than 100 countries have received electoral assistance, according to dppa.un.org.

To make this sort of election possible, Myanmar could have a request sent in by the Member State, or a mandate from the Security Council or General Assembly. The UN would then discuss then, and tailor a plan of action that suits the needs of Myanmar specifically. They must conduct the votes with total impartiality, and respect to sovereignty. The most challenging part of the process would be getting a request, or a mandate, because likely, the military regime may not go for this. It could take several organized meetings or negotiations to convince them of the benefits of this plan of action.

If Myanmar were to go through with the plan, then once the election was done and over with, whoever was voted in by the people, should be able to rightfully take the leading positions. This way, no matter what the outcome, we know that it is the people who have spoken, and they are getting whatever they want, and what they deserve to have. With a simple request and approval from the United Nations, Myanmar might be able to restore peace and avoid potential conflict through having an honest and fair election, and simply following the results through. This could be the best solution to getting out of their current situation, without ruffling any feathers, and avoiding conflict.

In conclusion, Myanmar, while being a country who has great agriculture and is working hard to improve the lives of some citizens, has its fair share of problems. If the world can make a strong attempt to help the Rohingya Muslims, and to help them start new lives, then a great injustice could be solved. Everyone should strive to make the situation these people face everyday better, one step at a time. By putting in a request of help to the United Nations, Myanmar could finally have a fair election, and hopefully, could gracefully get out of the situation they are currently in with the military coup. Myanmar has an opportunity to make a fresh start, and to improve their country.

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