

THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS IN THE ROHINGYA CRISIS: A STUDY OF HUMANITARIAN DIPLOMACY AND INSTITUTIONAL LIMITATIONS

Assignment Type:

Institutional Policy Review / Human Rights Essay

Objective:

To evaluate how the United Nations responded to the Rohingya refugee crisis in Myanmar and Bangladesh, and to assess the practical limitations of international organizations in dealing with ethnic cleansing and mass displacement.

1. Background

In 2017, Myanmar's military launched a brutal crackdown on the Rohingya Muslim minority in Rakhine State, displacing over 700,000 people into neighboring Bangladesh. Despite widespread condemnation, the UN's actions were seen as reactive and ineffective.

2. Key UN Bodies Involved

UN Body	Role in the Crisis
UNHCR	Provided emergency refugee assistance
OHCHR	Issued statements and reports on human rights violations
UNSC	Held multiple meetings, but no resolution was passed
UNGA	Passed non-binding resolutions condemning Myanmar

3. Research Questions

- Did the UN take adequate preventive and humanitarian measures?
- What legal instruments were used or avoided?
- How did geopolitics impact collective decision-making?

4. Timeline of Major UN Actions

Date	Action/Event
Aug 2017	Crackdown begins in Rakhine; mass exodus to Bangladesh
Sep 2017	UN High Commissioner calls it a "textbook case of ethnic cleansing"
Dec 2017	UNGA passes resolution urging Myanmar to stop violence
2018	Fact-Finding Mission concludes Myanmar has genocidal intent
2019	ICJ hears Gambia vs Myanmar genocide case
2021–2022	UN efforts shift to supporting refugee repatriation talks

5. Data Overview

Indicator	Figure	Source
Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh	~920,000	UNHCR
Refugee Camps in Cox's Bazar	34+	UNHCR/ISCG
Children under 18 among refugees	52%	UNICEF
Aid Funding Gap (2022)	\\$375 million	UN OCHA

6. Institutional Challenges

Challenge	Description
UNSC Inaction	Veto powers blocked decisive action (e.g., China and Russia)
Non-binding Resolutions	UNGA statements lacked enforcement capability
State Sovereignty vs. R2P	Myanmar blocked UN access citing sovereignty
Funding Shortages	Chronic underfunding of refugee care operations

7. Legal Framework Referenced

- **Genocide Convention (1948)**
- **UN Charter, Chapters VI & VII**

- **Responsibility to Protect (R2P)** – Contested application
- **ICJ Proceedings (Gambia v. Myanmar)**

8. Visuals and Tables

- **Figure 1:** Refugee flow chart from Rakhine to Cox's Bazar
- **Figure 2:** UN agency coordination map
- **Table A:** Timeline of key UN resolutions and responses
- **Figure 3:** Budget allocation and funding gap bar graph (2017–2022)

9. Analysis and Key Arguments

- UN efforts **lacked enforcement** due to **political divisions** in the UNSC
- UNHCR and NGOs managed large-scale humanitarian response but were **reactive**
- **Structural weakness** in global governance highlighted by refugee repatriation failures
- **Moral leadership** and global advocacy driven more by **civil society than intergovernmental action**

10. Strategic Takeaways for Students

- Understand the limits of **international law vs. state sovereignty**
- Analyze the role of **non-state actors (NGOs, activists)** in global crises
- Examine **realpolitik in UN decision-making**, especially in the UNSC
- Use case as a template to discuss **institutional inertia and reform**

11. Student Deliverables

- 3,000–3,500 word human rights and diplomacy analysis
- UN response timeline in Excel / Visual format
- Annotated maps of refugee camps and aid flow
- Bibliography using APA or Harvard citation style
- Optional infographic summarizing UN vs. NGO impact