



NHSMUN

SOCHUM

BACKGROUND GUIDE

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Director-General
Jordan Baker

Delegate Experience
Nastasja Vásquez

Global Partnerships
Daniela Maciel
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Under-Secretaries-General

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Ximena Faz
Kellie Fernandez

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Adiva Ara Khan

Anshul Magal
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Sofia Velasco
Renata Venzor

Hi Everybody!

I hope you are all doing well and very excited for NHSMUN 2025!

My name is Devansh Bhartia, and I am thrilled to serve as your director for SOCHUM Session I. I am originally from Mumbai, India. Currently, I am studying at Bentley University in Boston, USA. However, at this moment, I am studying abroad at the prestigious Copenhagen Business School in Denmark for a semester (August to January). I am also double majoring in Economics and Marketing and minoring in Business Administration. If you have any questions about colleges, my majors, or applications, I am happy to discuss them with you.

A little bit about me: I have two German Shepherds named Groot and Ezio, and I am a big Formula 1 fan. I have been watching since I was four years old and have supported Sebastian Vettel since his days in Toro Rosso to Aston Martin. In addition, I love traveling, so if you have any recommendations, please let me know. Moreover, my musical tastes include modern pop, 80s rock, opera, and classical music. My favorite band is Green Day, and the artist is Ed Sheeran. On campus, I also work as a tour guide and Residential Assistant. Lastly, I am also part of the Entrepreneurship Society, Model UN Club (obviously), and a theater Fraternity called Alpha Psi Omega.

My Model UN journey started when I was just 14. Since then, I have had the incredible opportunity to participate in and organize over 45 conferences worldwide. In the past, I have served as the Secretary-General of Bentley's Model UN Club and Assistant Director of the Harvard Model UN Conference (Dubai, UAE) and directed multiple conferences in India. Moreover, I was honored to be the Director for UN-Habitat (Session I) at NHSMUN last year. The experience was beyond incredible and was an unforgettable experience.

I am committed to creating a dynamic and enriching learning environment for all of you this year! I want the committee to not only be educational but also incredibly fun. So that you will have the chance to learn about critical global issues and also learn about yourself while meeting some incredible people, if this is your first NHSMUN, prepare for an unforgettable experience. It will be filled with high energy, amazing people, and many memories. As a quick piece of advice: the conference week goes by in the blink of an eye. So please take a moment and let it all soak in.

Lastly, Nicole and I hope this background guide will be helpful to you all. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to us. I cannot wait to meet you all and get to know you better. Safe travels, and see you in the Big Apple!

Stay safe! Stay healthy! And see you all soon!

Warm Regards,

Devansh Bhartia

Social, Cultural, and Humanitarian Committee, Session I

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Dear Delegates,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to NHSMUN 2025 and the Social, Cultural, and Humanitarian Committee! My name is Nicole Vázquez, and I am thrilled to be your Director for Session II. This is my second year as a member of NHSMUN Staff, but my third time attending the conference. I participated in NHSMUN 2022 as a delegate representing Belarus in the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and it was one of my favorite experiences ever! Additionally, last year I was SOCHUM's Assistant Director, so I am very excited to come back to this committee as a Director.

I was born and raised in Caracas, Venezuela, but most of my family is from Spain. I am starting my medical studies at Universidad Central de Venezuela, and I hope to specialize in oncological pediatrics or pediatric traumatology. Outside school, I work as a camp counselor and love outdoor activities! I enjoy spending time with nature, the ocean is my happy place. One of my true passions is working with children. Therefore, I have volunteered at local schools and organized educational workshops to help kids in my community. Currently, I am learning to play piano, so music is always in my head. Just like Devansh, I mostly listen to modern pop. But above all, I have a deep passion for Model UN, debate, and everything it involves.

I have participated in Model UN since my first year of high school (six years total!). I was Secretary-General of my school's MUN conference in my senior year and loved it. This September I start my third year as faculty advisor of my school's national delegation, so if you have any questions about NHSMUN or MUN in general, feel free to ask! After years of practice, I can say that MUN has changed my life completely. It has given me qualities that make me who I am today. I can say that for my six years, NHSMUN has been my favorite MUN experience. You get to know many people and end up with friends worldwide. It is an excellent opportunity to grow in many aspects.

I know conferences can be very stressful, but if you do it with your heart, I assure you that you will have the time of your life! Engaging in activities with passion and sincere dedication generates a sense of empathy and social responsibility in all our undertakings. Devansh and I are looking forward to hearing all your ideas and new research, as we have carefully chosen two interesting topics that I hope you enjoy reading. I am sure that you will surprise us all!

If you have any questions or comments, we are happy to help. We both know what it's like to be a delegate! Once again, I look forward to seeing you all and your excellent debate. Good luck!

Best regards,

Nicole Vázquez

Social, Cultural, and Humanitarian Committee, Session II

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A Note on the NHSMUN Difference

Esteemed Faculty and Delegates,

Welcome to NHSMUN 2025! We are Terry Wang and Jordan Baker, and we are this year's Secretary-General and Director-General. Thank you for choosing to attend NHSMUN, the world's largest and most diverse Model United Nations conference for secondary school students. We are thrilled to welcome you to New York City in March.

As a space for collaboration, consensus, and compromise, NHSMUN strives to transform today's brightest thinkers, speakers, and collaborators into tomorrow's leaders. Our organization provides a uniquely tailored experience for all through innovative and accessible programming. We believe that an emphasis on education through simulation is paramount to the Model UN experience, and this idea permeates throughout numerous aspects of the conference:

Realism and accuracy: Although a perfect simulation of the UN is never possible, we believe that one of the core educational responsibilities of MUN conferences is to educate students about how the UN System works. Each NHSMUN committee is a simulation of a real deliberative body so that delegates can research what their country has said in the committee. Our topics are chosen from the issues currently on the agenda of that committee (except historical committees, which take topics from the appropriate time period). We also strive to invite real UN, NGO, and field experts into each committee through our committee speakers program. Moreover, we arrange meetings between students and the actual UN Permanent Mission of the country they are representing. Our delegates have the incredible opportunity to conduct first-hand research, asking thought-provoking questions to current UN representatives and experts in their respective fields of study. These exclusive resources are only available due to IMUNA's formal association with the United Nations Department of Global Communications and consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. No other conference goes so far to deeply immerse students into the UN System.

Educational emphasis, even for awards: At the heart of NHSMUN lies education and compromise. Part of what makes NHSMUN so special is its diverse delegate base. As such, when NHSMUN distributes awards, we strongly de-emphasize their importance in comparison to the educational value of Model UN as an activity. NHSMUN seeks to reward students who excel in the arts of compromise and diplomacy. More importantly, we seek to develop an environment in which delegates can employ their critical thought processes and share ideas with their counterparts from around the world. Given our delegates' plurality of perspectives and experiences, we center our programming around the values of diplomacy and teamwork. In particular, our daises look for and promote constructive leadership that strives towards consensus, as real ambassadors do in the United Nations.

Debate founded on strong knowledge and accessibility: With knowledgeable staff members and delegates from over 70 countries, NHSMUN can facilitate an enriching experience reliant on substantively rigorous debate. To ensure this high quality of debate, our staff members produce detailed, accessible, and comprehensive topic guides (like the one below) to prepare delegates for the nuances inherent in each global issue. This process takes over six months, during which the Directors who lead our committees develop their topics with the valuable input of expert contributors. Because these topics are always changing and evolving, NHSMUN also produces update papers intended to bridge the gap of time between when the background guides are published and when committee starts in March. As such, this guide is designed to be a launching point from which delegates should delve further into their topics. The detailed knowledge that our Directors provide in this background guide through diligent research aims to increase critical thinking within delegates at NHSMUN.

Extremely engaged staff: At NHSMUN, our staffers care deeply about delegates' experiences and what they take away from their time at NHSMUN. Before the conference, our Directors and Assistant Directors are trained rigorously through hours of workshops and exercises both virtual and in-person to provide the best conference experience possible. At the conference,

delegates will have the opportunity to meet their dais members prior to the first committee session, where they may engage one-on-one to discuss their committees and topics. Our Directors and Assistant Directors are trained and empowered to be experts on their topics and they are always available to rapidly answer any questions delegates may have prior to the conference. Our Directors and Assistant Directors read every position paper submitted to NHSMUN and provide thoughtful comments on those submitted by the feedback deadline. Our staff aims not only to tailor the committee experience to delegates' reflections and research but also to facilitate an environment where all delegates' thoughts can be heard.

Empowering participation: The UN relies on the voices of all of its member states to create resolutions most likely to make a meaningful impact on the world. That is our philosophy at NHSMUN too. We believe that to properly delve into an issue and produce fruitful debate, it is crucial to focus the entire energy and attention of the room on the topic at hand. Our Rules of Procedure and our staff focus on making every voice in the committee heard, regardless of each delegate's country assignment or skill level. Additionally, unlike many other conferences, we also emphasize delegate participation after the conference. MUN delegates are well researched and aware of the UN's priorities, and they can serve as the vanguard for action on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Therefore, we are proud to connect students with other action-oriented organizations to encourage further work on the topics.

Focused committee time: We feel strongly that face-to-face interpersonal connections during debate are critical to producing superior committee experiences and allow for the free flow of ideas. Ensuring policies based on equality and inclusion is one way in which NHSMUN guarantees that every delegate has an equal opportunity to succeed in committee. In order to allow communication and collaboration to be maximized during committee, we have a very dedicated administrative team who work throughout the conference to type up, format, and print draft resolutions and working papers.

As always, we welcome any questions or concerns about the substantive program at NHSMUN 2025 and would be happy to discuss NHSMUN pedagogy with faculty or delegates.

Delegates, it is our sincerest hope that your time at NHSMUN will be thought-provoking and stimulating. NHSMUN is an incredible time to learn, grow, and embrace new opportunities. We look forward to seeing you work both as students and global citizens at the conference.

Best,

Terry Wang
Secretary-General

Jordan Baker
Director-General

A Note on Research and Preparation

Delegate research and preparation is a critical element of attending NHSMUN and enjoying the debate experience. We have provided this Background Guide to introduce the topics that will be discussed in your committee. We encourage and expect each of you to critically explore the selected topics and be able to identify and analyze their intricacies upon arrival to NHSMUN in March.

The task of preparing for the conference can be challenging, but to assist delegates, we have updated our [Beginner Delegate Guide](#) and [Advanced Delegate Guide](#). In particular, these guides contain more detailed instructions on how to prepare a position paper and excellent sources that delegates can use for research. Use these resources to your advantage. They can help transform a sometimes overwhelming task into what it should be: an engaging, interesting, and rewarding experience.

To accurately represent a country, delegates must be able to articulate its policies. Accordingly, NHSMUN requires each delegation (the one or two delegates representing a country in a committee) to write a position paper for each topic on the committee's agenda. In delegations with two students, we strongly encourage each student to research each topic to ensure that they are prepared to debate no matter which topic is selected first. More information about how to write and format position papers can be found in the NHSMUN Research Guide. To summarize, position papers should be structured into three sections:

I: Topic Background – This section should describe the history of the topic as it would be described by the delegate's country. Delegates do not need to give an exhaustive account of the topic, but rather focus on the details that are most important to the delegation's policy and proposed solutions.

II: Country Policy – This section should discuss the delegation's policy regarding the topic. Each paper should state the policy in plain terms and include the relevant statements, statistics, and research that support the effectiveness of the policy. Comparisons with other global issues are also appropriate here.

III. Proposed Solutions – This section should detail the delegation's proposed solutions to address the topic. Descriptions of each solution should be thorough. Each idea should clearly connect to the specific problem it aims to solve and identify potential obstacles to implementation and how they can be avoided. The solution should be a natural extension of the country's policy.

Each topic's position paper should be **no more than 10 pages** long double-spaced with standard margins and font size. **We recommend 3–5 pages per topic as a suitable length.** The paper must be written from the perspective of your assigned country and should articulate the policies you will espouse at the conference.

Each delegation is responsible for sending a copy of its papers to their committee Directors via [myDais](#) on or before **February 21, 2025**. If a delegate wishes to receive detailed feedback from the committee's dais, a position must be submitted on or before **January 31, 2025**. The papers received by this earlier deadline will be reviewed by the dais of each committee and returned prior to your arrival at the conference.

Complete instructions for how to submit position papers will be sent to faculty advisers via email. If delegations are unable to submit their position papers on time, please contact us at info@imuna.org.

Delegations that do not submit position papers will be ineligible for awards.

Committee History

The Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural (Third) Committee, or SOCHUM, is one of the United Nations General Assembly's (UNGA) six main committees. It was founded in 1945, after the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The UDHR outlines the fundamental human rights that SOCHUM must seek to defend globally.¹ SOCHUM follows the UN Charter, which structures the United Nations by describing the responsibilities and procedures that the organs are bound to. It also sets out key principles, such as member state sovereignty, which refers to the autonomy that a member state has when it is part of a larger international organization.²

SOCHUM's mandate extends to discussing social, humanitarian, and cultural issues, as well as protecting human rights among the international community.³ It takes on a broader scope than other committees, allowing comprehensive discussions on important global challenges. The right to life, cultural expression, accessibility, disabilities, the promotion of social development, and other various topics that reflect emerging global challenges are often discussed.⁴ Additionally, SOCHUM is a deliberative body which means that it gathers annually to discuss how to create thoughtful resolutions towards multiple issues. This enhances the international community by influencing the countries future actions and promoting social justice and human rights.

All 193 member states of the UN participate and have an equal vote in SOCHUM. They work with the rest of the General Assembly to discuss issues on their agenda, write draft resolutions, and recommend actions for the GA to consider and approve.⁵ However, the committee faces significant limitations. One limitation of SOCHUM is that it cannot enact policies on its own, which means that it is not authorized to force states to take action, only recommend solutions.

Historically, the committee has worked with other bodies in the UN, such as the Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Together, they investigate global issues and aim to collaborate with non-governmental organizations as well.⁶ SOCHUM references many key documents to carry out its goals, allowing for more consensus among such a diverse group of countries. The committee conducts its proceedings by discussing various agenda items, allowing for the presentation of positions and resolutions, and utilizing voting procedures to finalize decisions, which reflect the diverse perspectives and interests of its member states.

1 "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," United Nations, accessed September 19, 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.

2 "United Nations Charter," United Nations, accessed September 19, 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter>.

3 "General Assembly Third Committee 'anchored' in human rights protection," United Nations, accessed September 22, 2024, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/12/1029321>.

4 "UN General Assembly Social, Humanitarian & Cultural 'Third' Committee," Department of Foreign Affairs, accessed September 22, 2024, <https://www.dfa.ie/our-role-policies/international-priorities/human-rights/our-international-engagement/un-general-assembly-third-committee/>.

5 "Workings of the General Assembly," United Nations, accessed September 20, 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/ga/>.

6 "Social Humanitarian & Cultural Issues (Third Committee)" United Nations, accessed September 21, 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/ga/third/>.



SOCHUM

NHSMUN 2025



**TOPIC A:
PROMOTING THE RIGHTS OF CIVILIANS IN VENEZUELA**

Photo Credit: Alexcocopro

Introduction

Venezuela is a South American country that has been going through a humanitarian crisis for the past 20 years.¹ The government has a progressive constitution that promotes a wide range of human rights. However, it lacks access to various economic and social necessities, which affects most of its citizens.² The ongoing crisis in Venezuela started during the presidency of Hugo Chávez, who used the country's revenue from their oil business to fund government spending. This started a corrupt government that has prevailed over time and has negatively impacted the lives of many Venezuelans.³

The economic hardship and political repression have caused millions of Venezuelans to leave the country in search of better opportunities. This has led to the largest exodus in Latin America and one of the most severe migration crises in the world.⁴ Venezuelans expose themselves to unsafe conditions in search of a better future. They leave their families and loved ones to cross the borders on foot, by plane, or by sea, facing severe risks such as human trafficking or smuggling.⁵ According to the United Nations, over seven million Venezuelans are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.⁶ Most lack access to healthcare, education, or nutrition services. On the other hand, many Venezuelans have been victims of crimes against humanity committed by state members to repress the opposition. This is known as a deprivation of their freedom of speech, which is a common way to control the citizens' comments and contradictory opinions.⁷ Additionally, those who publicly express their political differences tend to be sanctioned by the government⁸

Most Venezuelans have been deprived of their fundamental human rights. There is a massive violation of the population's liberty, security, and dignity. These three pillars encompass the fundamental human rights of a person according to

the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.⁹ For example, Venezuelans' right to liberty is affected when they are dismissed of their right to vote, their right to be recognized before the law, and even their freedom of speech. Their security is compromised when the state is not able to provide safe public spaces and when the military uses its power to encourage violence in peaceful protests. Lastly, their dignity is neglected when they are abused and disrespected by the authorities.¹⁰

All Venezuelans are affected by the humanitarian crisis, but women, children, and refugees are considered the most vulnerable groups.¹¹ However, when referring to the economic crisis, the entire population is affected by severe hyperinflation that destabilizes the country's economy. This causes a loss of value in the currency, compromises a family's savings, and disrupts the lines of production.¹² Children in vulnerable areas do not have access to regular educational facilities, especially in public schools. Both students and teachers are not able to attend school due to social and economic disadvantages. These are just a few of the many violations of fundamental rights in the country.

The United Nations has made several attempts to support Venezuela during the crisis and help Venezuelans achieve

1 "Venezuela 2023," Amnesty.org, accessed June 11th, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/americas/south-america/venezuela/report-venezuela/>.

2 Amnesty.org, "Venezuela 2023."

3 "Venezuela: A Democratic Crisis," US Department of State, accessed June 11th, 2024, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/a-democratic-crisis-in-venezuela/>.

4 "Venezuela Humanitarian Crisis," The UN Refugee Agency, accessed June 11th, 2024, <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/venezuela/>.

5 "Venezuelan Refugee and Migrant Crisis," International Organization for Migration, accessed July 31, 2024, <https://www.iom.int/venezuelan-refugee-and-migrant-crisis>.

6 "Venezuelan Situation," The UN Refugee Agency, accessed June 16th, 2024, <https://www.unhcr.org/emergencies/venezuela-situation>

7 "Venezuela, events of 2022," Human Rights Watch, accessed June 11th, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/venezuela>

8 The UN Refugee Agency, "Venezuela Humanitarian Crisis."

9 "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," United Nations, accessed June 17th, 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

10 The UN Refugee Agency, "Venezuela Humanitarian Crisis."

11 The UN Refugee Agency, "Venezuela Humanitarian Crisis."

12 Francisco Rodríguez, "Hyperinflation in Venezuela," last modified September 2, 2021, https://curate.nd.edu/articles/report/Hyperinflation_in_Venezuela/24816639.

stability. Nonetheless, the actions of the current president, Nicolas Maduro, have ended in international sanctions that limit global assistance.¹³ Delegates must seek solutions to address human rights in the country and manage the multiple overlapping crises that Venezuela is currently facing. At the same time, it is encouraged to take into consideration the UN Sustainable Development Goals and how they affect this issue while prioritizing the protection and promotion of human rights in Venezuela.

History and Description of the Issue

Venezuela's Humanitarian Crisis

A humanitarian crisis is known as a series of events that threaten the integrity, safety, health, security, and well-being of a large group of people.¹⁴ These crises, if not handled well, can end in population displacements, healthcare emergencies, and lack of basic services.¹⁵ Venezuela has been going through a major socio-political and economic crisis for around 25 years. This situation has been fueled by an economic decline and political turmoil that originated due to the actions implemented by one of the country's previous governments.¹⁶

In 1998, when former president Hugo Chávez came to power, Venezuela's economy was run primarily by its oil business. That year, the country had reached its highest-ever production rate. It produced 3.5 million barrels per day.¹⁷ However, a couple of years later, the opposition started a general strike calling for a new presidential election. To take matters into his own hands, Chávez fired around 9,000 employees of the state oil company Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA) and replaced them with

employees who had been showing loyalty to his government.¹⁸ This generated two major consequences, the first was that the number of expertise required to manage the country's heavy oil had decreased. Secondly, the whole oil industry would now be under the government's control. Considering that the government of the moment was considered corrupt, having the biggest source of income on their hands would be an easy path for robbery and fraud. Even though Venezuela's oil production was experiencing a significant decline, Chávez started using its profits to fund food subsidies as well as education and healthcare programs to help the population and gain back their loyalty.¹⁹ At first, this seemed a great solution since it decreased the poverty rates. However, it became noticeable that the country had been extracting a large percentage of the profit, inhibiting the industry's capacity to keep growing. Additionally, the quality of the services provided did not meet any international standards.²⁰

At the beginning of the 2000s, the crashing oil revenues and severe economic mismanagement slowed Venezuela's economy. PDVSA oil company shifted from being a functional state-owned company into a corrupt institution led by the party of Hugo Chávez, which did not have the technical skills and capacities to run the business.²¹ The accumulation of these policies weakened the country's economy and well-being, provoking the emergence of a humanitarian crisis fueled by hyperinflation that continues to threaten the whole state.

Venezuelans face shortages of necessities that affect their quality of life and do not allow them to complete their daily routines efficiently.²² Even though the country ranks number nine in the world in renewable freshwater resources, this service is

13 "UN greenlights massive new humanitarian funds for Venezuelans," The New Humanitarian, accessed June 11th, 2024, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2023/10/17/united-nations-greenlights-humanitarian-fund-venezuela>

14 Lucy Bloxham, "What is a humanitarian Crisis," Concern Worldwide, last modified January 26th, 2022, <https://www.concern.org.uk/news/what-is-a-humanitarian-crisis>.

15 "What are the largest humanitarian crises in the planet today?," Iberdrola, accessed July 6th, 2024, <https://www.iberdrola.com/social-commitment/humanitarian-crisis-causes-effects-solutions>.

16 "Venezuela Crisis," Global Conflict tracker, last modified January 24, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/instability-venezuela>.

17 Robert Rapier, "How Venezuela Ruined Its Oil Industry," Forbes, last modified May 9, 2017 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/rpapier/2017/05/07/how-venezuela-ruined-its-oil-industry/>.

18 Robert Rapier, "How Venezuela Ruined Its Oil Industry."

19 Francisco Rodríguez, "Crude Realities: Understanding Venezuela's Economic Collapse," Venezuelan Politics and Human Rights, September 20th, 2018, <https://www.venezuelablog.org/crude-realities-understanding-venezuelas-economic-collapse/>.

20 Francisco Rodríguez, "Crude Realities: Understanding Venezuela's Economic Collapse."

21 Global Conflict tracker, "Venezuela Crisis."

22 María de los Angeles Graterol, "Water and hunger: Venezuela's water crisis threatens food security," Equal Times, last modified June 16, 2023. <https://www.equaltimes.org/water-and-hunger-venezuela-s-water>.

not guaranteed to all.²³ The water crisis in Venezuela affects approximately 90 percent of the country, limiting access to quality water or even its mere availability.²⁴ The organization HumVenezuela published a report that read that eight of 10 Venezuelans are exposed to unconsumable water conditions.²⁵ This problem was exacerbated since the water distribution rate also dropped about 60 percent, leaving most of the population without access to this service.²⁶ Water scarcity and availability have left several worries among the population as it has spread across most Venezuelan cities. This has obligated citizens to buy water tankers or carry water bottles on foot to refill their personal water tanks.²⁷

About 33.4 percent of Venezuelans have reduced their daily water consumption due to the fear of ingesting unsanitized water and compromising their health.²⁸ Water contamination has become a pressing issue in the country, mainly caused by

the lack of maintenance of the water treatment plants in the city. Outdated infrastructures disrupt the water flow in rural communities. This is why the government suggested installing water tanks on the rooftops. By doing this, water flow would only depend on the force of gravity, and not on functional infrastructure.²⁹ Because of the gravity of the issue, in 2019 UNICEF had to interfere by providing access to clean and consumable water. UNICEF was able to help over 2.8 million people by improving and repairing their water systems and strengthening their sanitation facilities.³⁰

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that in 2024, around seven million Venezuelans required humanitarian assistance.³¹ The UN has been planning several strategies to help the country even though they are limited by its sovereignty. The UNHRC's approach to the issue has been prioritizing the main focus

23 Graterol, "Water and hunger: Venezuela's water crisis threatens food security."

24 Genesis Peña Moreno, "8 in 10 Venezuelans exposed to water unsuitable for human consumption," Hearts on Venezuela, last modified January 26th, 2024, <https://www.heartsonvenezuela.com/8-in-10-venezuelans-exposed-to-water-unsuitable-for-human-consumption/>

25 "A recurring emergency," Hum Venezuela, last modified January 11, 2024, <https://www.heartsonvenezuela.com/a-recurring-emergency/>.

26 Hum Venezuela, *Follow Up Report on the Complex Humanitarian Emergency in Venezuela*, Published November 2023 <https://humvenezuela.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/FOLLOW-UP-REPORT-ON-THE-COMPLEX-HUMANITARIAN-EMERGENCY-IN-VENEZUELA-2023-2.pdf>.

27 Regina García, "Getting safe water a struggle for many of Venezuela's poor," Associated Press News, last modified March 22, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/venezuela-water-crisis-4083bf67d8e063bdb24a18c233ec7527>

28 *Follow Up Report on the Complex Humanitarian Emergency in Venezuela*.

29 Loreal Nix, "10 facts about sanitation in Venezuela," The Borgen Project, last modified May 29, 2020, <https://borgenproject.org/sanitation-in-venezuela/>

30 "UNICEF to aid Venezuela in providing safe drinking water to over 2.8 million people," Water Technology Net, last modified July 8, 2019, <https://www.water-technology.net/news/unicef-venezuela-drinking-water/>.

31 "Venezuela," United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, accessed July 6th, 2024, <https://www.unocha.org/venezuela>.



Venezuela's humanitarian crisis

Credit: Amazônia Real

points that need to be addressed to help the population.³² These objectives run around the protection of refugees and stateless people, and the guarantee of their safe return.³³

Humanitarian aid is known as materials or specific assistance procedures given to a group of people in need in a specific period. Its objective is to relieve suffering in times of emergency and address the possible vulnerabilities of a community.³⁴ Venezuela is classified as a country in need of humanitarian assistance.³⁵ Countries like the United States of America have invested around USD 3 billion in humanitarian aid to help Venezuela.³⁶ This year, the European Union has given around EUR 50 million in humanitarian aid, but since 2017, they have allocated EUR 443 million.³⁷ This assistance is focused on education, health, nutrition, shelter, and legal assistance. This aid is focused on responding to the most urgent needs of Venezuelans.³⁸ This assistance is not only targeted to Venezuelans who reside in the country but also to the ones who are hosted in neighboring countries.³⁹

The humanitarian crisis became more critical in December 2018, when the opposition urged Venezuelans to boycott the May 2018 presidential election considering that there was no political situation conducive to free and transparent elections. Despite this, Maduro carried on with the elections and declared himself the winner. Because of this, the governments of the United States, Canada, and more than a dozen Latin American countries declared the results of the election to be fraudulent.⁴⁰

In December 2018, the National Assembly, primarily composed of opposition members, elected Juan Guaidó as its new leader. On January 5, Guaidó took office as the President

of the Assembly. He condemned the election and branded Maduro's second term as illegitimate. On January 13, 2019, he was seized by members of the intelligence service and illegally detained for over 45 minutes. On January 23, 2019, the National Assembly declared him President of Venezuela. Considering the election was fraudulent, the country was left without a President. Venezuela's Constitution establishes that when there is a "presidential vacuum", the President of the National Assembly must assume the powers of the executive branch. Despite his constitutional right to be President, Maduro denounced the declaration and branded it a coup. Almost immediately the United States recognized Guaidó's claim to the presidency, and over 50 countries followed the US lead. Meanwhile, Maduro only received the support of Bolivia, China, Cuba, Nicaragua, Russia, and Turkey.⁴¹

Meanwhile, humanitarian aid from different countries, but primarily the US, such as food and medicine, was being stockpiled across the Venezuelan border in Colombia and Brazil. Maduro claimed that the aid was a Trojan horse masking a coup attempt and he ordered already-closed border crossings to be blocked by large trucks and containers. Guaidó announced that he and supporters would peacefully escort aid-carrying trucks across the border to bring the much-needed aid inside the country. On February 22, the day before the scheduled crossing, a pop music concert in support of the relief effort was staged by British entrepreneur Richard Branson. Nevertheless, the next day when the trucks started crossing the border, Venezuelan security forces met them by firing rubber bullets and tear gas bombs.⁴²

On April 30 a video of Guaidó was issued in which he appeared at a military base, surrounded by supportive soldiers. Guaidó

32 "Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)," The UN Refugee Agency, accessed July 6th, 2024, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/operations/venezuela-bolivarian-republic>.

33 The UN Refugee Agency, "Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)."

34 "Humanitarian aid: 5 things you should know." Concern Worldwide, last modified June 13, 2022. <https://concernusa.org/news/humanitarian-aid-explained/>

35 "United States Provides Nearly \$485 Million in Additional Humanitarian Assistance for the Western Hemisphere," United States Agency for International Development, last modified November 6, 2023, <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/nov-06-2023-united-states-provides-nearly-485-million-additional-humanitarian-assistance-western-hemisphere>.

36 United States Agency for International Development, "United States Provides Nearly \$485 Million in Additional Humanitarian Assistance for the Western Hemisphere."

37 "Venezuela," European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, last modified May 5, 2024, https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/latin-america-and-caribbean/venezuela_en.

38 European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, "Venezuela."

39 European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, "Venezuela."

40 Jeff Wallenfeldt, "Juan Guaidó," Britannica, August 30, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Juan-Guaido>.

41 Wallenfeldt, "Juan Guaidó."

42 Phillips and Parkin, "Venezuelan troops blockade bridge to stop aid from Colombia."



Protester against the blockade
Credit: Wilfredo Rafael Rodriguez Hernandez

announced that the “final phase” of the efforts to remove Maduro from office was underway. Moreover, he also stated that important contingents of the country’s security forces had come over to the opposition and called upon his supporters to take to the streets in nonviolent demonstrations. After Maduro denied the Venezuelan population of humanitarian aid, many of the government’s intelligence apparatus had switched sides. Nevertheless, all of these efforts were not enough to make Maduro step down from the government, and Venezuela’s humanitarian deepened. Food and medicine became increasingly scarce.⁴³

It is nearly impossible to know the exact percentage of people in need of medicines, food, health, and nutrition assistance in Venezuela because the government has failed to publish reliable data about these matters.⁴⁴ Also, they have been sanctioning those who did publish this type of information. However, Human Rights Watch partnered with the Center for Humanitarian Health and the Center for Public Health and Human Rights has concluded that the healthcare system is in

total collapse, especially when you merge food and healthcare crises with disease spreads. Vaccine-preventable diseases have been reappearing in the country even though they had once been eradicated. This suggests a gap in past vaccination coverages and a weakened healthcare system.⁴⁵

Since the start of 2024, the UN and some NGOs have been working on the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) 2024-2025, which is a modified version of the HRP 2022-2023.⁴⁶ Both plans share the same three objectives: contributing to the well-being of the prioritized population, reducing their vulnerabilities and strengthening their recovery capacities, and reinforcing institutional mechanisms to work and prevent potential risks.⁴⁷ The plan focuses on the most affected states within the country. It works with a multi-year approach to establish long-term support strategies that allow humanitarian aid predictability.⁴⁸ This plan promotes humanitarian development to guarantee a positive impact on the community and sustainable actions. By doing so, the community is promoting an integral approach while also upholding gender

43 Wallenfeldt, “Juan Guaidó.”

44 “Venezuela’s Humanitarian Emergency,” Human Rights Watch, accessed July 6th 2024, https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/04/04/venezuelas-humanitarian-emergency/large-scale-un-response-needed-address-health?j=20085&sfmc_sub=3303214&cl=17_HTML&u=972901&mid=110006177&jb=31007

45 Human Rights Watch, “Venezuela’s Humanitarian Emergency.”

46 “Venezuela: Extension of the Humanitarian Response Plan 2024-2025,” Relief Web, last modified March 18th, 2024, <https://reliefweb.int/report/venezuela-bolivarian-republic/venezuela-extension-humanitarian-response-plan-2024-2025>.

47 Sida, *Humanitarian Crisis Analysis 2024 Venezuela*, Published March 31, 2024, <https://cdn.sida.se/app/uploads/2024/04/22142810/Venezuela-HCA-2024.pdf>.

48 Sida, *Humanitarian Crisis Analysis 2024 Venezuela*.

equality and centralized protection.⁴⁹

Although the ongoing crisis is affecting all of Venezuela, only 8.1 percent of the funds required for the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) have been mobilized to the country.⁵⁰ This shows that there are complex internal challenges that go beyond the scope of humanitarian aid efforts. Yet, delegates are encouraged to look for international aid strategies that provide a sustainable solution to the humanitarian crisis in the country.

Hyperinflation in Venezuela and its Effects on Society

Inflation is the rate of increase in prices in a specific period.⁵¹ In simpler terms, it explains how much more expensive a service has become over time. In the market economy, prices are always changing, some will rise and others will fall. The rise of prices over time can cause a reduction in the value of a currency. However, when market prices increase uncontrollably over some time, a transition from inflation to hyperinflation takes place, which consists of extremely rapid inflation.⁵²

In most cases, hyperinflation takes place when there is a significant rise in the money supply. This is caused by the excessive printing of money since the government would be injecting more money into the country's economy.⁵³ This issue causes a decrease in its value and a rise in the prices. The devaluation of the currency does not only affect the state internally, but it also impacts the international market.⁵⁴ Oftentimes, living in a society with hyperinflation increases

the likelihood of experiencing an economic collapse. The cycle consists of the following main points: excessively printing money, prices rising, people buying more goods in greater quantities, the higher demand for goods, and the prices increasing again.⁵⁵

Venezuela's inflation crisis goes back to 2003 when a labor strike took place at the state-owned oil company. This caused the devaluation of the bolívar and the imbalance of the country's economy.⁵⁶ Oil prices started to decrease and international investors pulled back from the business, contributing to the currency's devaluation and worsening the crisis. The crisis evolved because printing more money increased the prices of basic goods significantly.⁵⁷ However, the government decided to print even more money to pay its bills. This started a cycle that generated extreme hyperinflation. When oil prices drop, the government's revenue decreases even quicker since that is its main source of income.⁵⁸

Venezuela is a contemporary example of a country with hyperinflation. In 2013, Nicolás Maduro took the presidency after Chávez's death. At that moment, he received a country in the middle of an economic crisis and chose to solve it by printing more money, which was the main cause of the economic collapse.⁵⁹ Even though printing money may have seemed to be a quick way to decrease the poverty rates, it harmed the Venezuelan economy. Thus the supply of money was significantly larger than the demand for goods, and so the prices began to rise quickly.⁶⁰ In 2016, inflation reached its highest point in history: 800 percent.⁶¹ Additionally, the

⁴⁹ "Venezuela," Humanitarian Action, last modified February 23, 2024, <https://humanitarianaction.info/plan/1158/article/venezuela-hrp-2024>.

⁵⁰ "Venezuela: Situation Report, March - April 2024," United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, July 2, 2024, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/venezuela-bolivarian-republic/venezuela-situation-report-march-april-2024>.

⁵¹ Ceyda Oner, "Inflation: Prices on the Rise," International Monetary Fund, accessed July 7, 2024, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/Series/Back-to-Basics/Inflation>

⁵² "Hyperinflation," Corporate Finance Institute, accessed July 7, 2024, <https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/economics/hyperinflation/>.

⁵³ Corporate Finance Institute, "Hyperinflation."

⁵⁴ Christina Majaski, "Devaluation: What It Is and How It Works," Investopedia, last modified August 13, 2023 <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/d/devaluation.asp>.

⁵⁵ Corporate Finance Institute, "Hyperinflation."

⁵⁶ Sean Gregory Reilly, *Hyperinflation in Venezuela: How to Address the Problem*, published May 2020, <https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/d1abcbc4-5c2e-4a24-9f01-dd107cb6d59b/content>.

⁵⁷ Marc Stocker, John Baffes and Dana Vorisek, "What triggered the oil price plunge of 2014-2016 and why it failed to deliver an economic impetus in eight charts," World Bank Blogs, last updated January 18, 2018 <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/developmenttalk/what-triggered-oil-price-plunge-2014-2016-and-why-it-failed-deliver-economic-impetus-eight-charts>.

⁵⁸ Reilly, *Hyperinflation in Venezuela: How to Address the Problem*.

⁵⁹ Global Conflict tracker, "Venezuela Crisis."

⁶⁰ "Why Can't Nations around the Globe print Money to get Rich?," APAC Entrepreneur, accessed July 7, 2024, <https://apacentrepreneur.com/why-cant-nations-around-the-globe-print-money-to-get-rich/>.

⁶¹ "Crisis in Venezuela," Vaia, accessed July 7, 2024,

country began to experience hyperinflation in 2017 due to its dependence on oil exports, governmental corruption, and the import of basic goods.⁶²

Another important concept when talking about hyperinflation is currency devaluation. This term is known as the reduction of a currency's value when compared to another currency or standard.⁶³ Venezuela's national currency is the bolívar, and its value is in constant change when compared to the US dollar or any other stable currency. For example, as of July 2024, USD 1 is equivalent to 40 bolívares, but in July 2023, it was equivalent to 29,39 bolívares. Because of the extreme devaluation of the bolívar, since 2019, Venezuela has been managing a two-currency system. This means that they have the bolívar as their official currency but most of their citizens would rather work with US dollars to avoid money loss.⁶⁴

Hyperinflation affects the fundamental human rights of every citizen. For example, it affects the right to food since the prices become inaccessible, and it impacts the access to healthcare

due to the scarcity of resources and the unaffordable procedure costs. This situation affects the right to food and water, the right to health, the right to education, and much more. The most prevalent being food accessibility, since hunger is a common issue in Venezuela. The unstable and high food prices in the country have led many people in rural areas to search for leftovers in trash containers on the streets.⁶⁵ The UN published a study stating that 1 in 3 Venezuelans do not have access to proper meals. Low-income families tend to consume roots, cereals, or beans instead of unaffordable proteins like beef, chicken, or pork.⁶⁶

Considering that the monthly minimum wage in Venezuela is under USD 4, families that get paid the minimum salary can barely afford two bags of bread. Even those who get paid in US dollars are struggling to keep up with the rising prices.⁶⁷ This led households to come up with a more affordable solution, work for food instead of getting paid money.⁶⁸ The food crisis was at its worst in 2016, with the emergence of the *bachaqueros*.

<https://www.vaia.com/en-us/explanations/macroeconomics/international-economics/crisis-in-venezuela/>.

62 Rodríguez, "Hyperinflation in Venezuela."

63 "Devaluation," Corporate Finance Institute, accessed July 7, 2024, <https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/economics/devaluation/>.

64 Global Conflict tracker, "Venezuela Crisis."

65 Reuters, "Venezuelans Struggling to Afford Food — Even With Access to Dollars," Voa News, last updated March 7, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/venezuelans-struggling-to-afford-food-even-if-they-have-access-to-dollars-/6993133.html>

66 "One in three Venezuelans not getting enough to eat, UN study finds," UN News, last updated February 25, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/02/1058051>.

67 Reuters, "Venezuelans Struggling to Afford Food — Even With Access to Dollars."

68 UN News, "One in three Venezuelans not getting enough to eat, UN study finds."

Venezuelan Refugees in Bogotá Selling Crafts Made of Worthless Venezuelan Cash

Credit: Reg Natarajan



Bachaqueros are groups of illegal food merchants that started to resell goods at inflated prices due to food scarcity.⁶⁹ They used to buy large amounts of food under the government's subsidized prices and then put them up for sale at the prices they wanted.⁷⁰

This unstabilized industry called for the implementation of policies from the government to stabilize food prices and guarantee accessible goods for all Venezuelans. For some families, going grocery shopping was a luxury. This is why Maduro introduced a social program called CLAP or Local Supply and Production Committee, which consists of gifting the citizens food boxes in a house-to-house distribution system.⁷¹ The government would get food from public and private companies and arrange them in medium-sized boxes. Then, they would contact the community leaders and arrange a distribution system. This is an initiative that still stands today, where boxes contain rice, sugar, flour, pasta, and other non-perishable foods. 83 percent of pro-Maduro voters say that CLAP is their main source of food. However, even though these boxes have been helpful to many communities, they have also created a dependency on the government.⁷²

This initiative has been used as a strategy for political propaganda since vulnerable communities have changed their votes for food security and stability.⁷³ CLAP boxes are only distributed to those who own government ID cards known in Venezuela as *carnet de la patria*. These are hi-tech cards obtained by an

online registration process. They are considered necessary to access food, educational, healthcare services, and even gifts from the government. These ID cards generate a QR code that enables people access to several services.⁷⁴ However, they have been considered a tool to control the population because these cards can track people's necessities and movements. This strategy allows the government to give greater support to all its followers.⁷⁵ Meaning that the citizens are being manipulated, since they are being positioned in an ultimatum that changes their freedom of voting for free food.⁷⁶

Venezuela's food crisis has developed long-term consequences that are affecting the right to health of a great percentage of the population. Children are being fed cereal and bread instead of milk, proteins, and greens. This affects their ideal diet, lowering their nutritional intake.⁷⁷ More than 1.4 million children under five years old are affected by malnutrition.⁷⁸ Organizations like Caritas have been working over the past six years to combat malnutrition. They have helped more than 12 thousand children who are recovering from extreme thinness and malnutrition.⁷⁹ According to UN figures, currently, 41.9 percent of the population is still going through a food crisis.⁸⁰ These inhumane conditions have led to mass migration. Venezuelans look for asylum in neighboring countries in search of bearable living conditions and access to basic human rights.⁸¹

69 Sofia Barbarani, "Meet the bachaqueros: the Venezuelans turning to the black market to survive," The Telegraph, last updated November 8, 2016, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/11/08/meet-the-bachaqueros-the-venezuelans-turning-to-the-black-market/>.

70 Andrea Torres, "Here is how 'bachaqueros' make a living in Venezuela," Local 10, last updated, June 23, 2017, <https://www.local10.com/news/2017/06/23/here-is-how-bachaqueros-make-a-living-in-venezuela/>.

71 Bea Pielago, "Uncovering the 5 Major Causes of the Food Crisis in Venezuela" Glocality, last updated June 2020, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342422780_Uncovering_the_5_Major_Causes_of_the_Food_Crisis_in_Venezuela.

72 Moises Rendon and Jacob Mendales, "The Maduro Diet: Food v. Freedom in Venezuela," Center for Strategic and International Studies, last updated July 9, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/maduro-diet-food-v-freedom-venezuela>.

73 "Local Committees for Supply and Production," DBpedia, accessed July 8, 2024, https://dbpedia.org/page/Local_Committees_for_Supply_and_Production.

74 Sofía Narváez, "¿Qué es y cómo solicitar el Carnet de la Patria para obtener los bonos en Venezuela?," News 19, last updated July 24, 2023, https://www.wxow.com/news/spanish/qu-es-y-c-mo-solicitar-el-carnet-de-la-patria-para-obtener-los-bonos/article_037db1d5-3d5c-5603-ab3b-f9b2c50f238a.html.

75 Rendon and Mendales, "The Maduro Diet: Food v. Freedom in Venezuela."

76 Pielago, "Uncovering the 5 Major Causes of the Food Crisis in Venezuela."

77 John Otis, "Why the kids of Venezuela aren't getting enough to eat," NPR, last updated January 11, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2022/01/11/1071485460/why-the-kids-of-venezuela-arent-getting-enough-to-eat>.

78 Luna Perdomo, "Severe food insecurity grew in 2023 to reach almost half of Venezuelans," Hearts on Venezuela, last updated January 30, 2024, <https://www.heartsonvenezuela.com/severe-food-insecurity-grew-in-2023-to-reach-almost-half-of-venezuelans/>.

79 "Help us fight children malnutrition in Venezuela," Caritas, accessed July 8, 2024, <https://www.caritas.org/caritas-internationalis-70th-venezuela/>.

80 "Venezuela (DG ECHO) Factsheet" Relief, last updated May 15, 2024, <https://reliefweb.int/report/venezuela-bolivarian-republic/venezuela-dg-echo-factsheet-last-updated-15052024>.

81 "Venezuela: UN expert calls for human rights, not charity, to end hunger and malnutrition" Relief, last updated February 14, 2024, <https://reliefweb.int/report/venezuela-bolivarian-republic/venezuela-un-expert-calls-human-rights-not-charity-end-hunger-and-malnutrition>.

Addressing the Right to Education in Venezuela

Education is a human right that should be guaranteed to all without discrimination. It is fundamental for human development and essential to promote the individual and collective well-being of citizens. It is a right from which every community benefits, however, education quality and accessibility vary from country to country.⁸² The UN considers education a sustainable investment since it holds the power to lift people out of poverty.⁸³

Venezuela's education is free and compulsory for children from 5 to 16 years old, every child has the right to attend public school in the country. Additionally, the country has public and private schools that adapt to the different social classes present in the community.⁸⁴ Yet, its quality and accessibility are compromised by several external factors. For example, food scarcity and lack of medical attention affect the teachers and students, causing three million of the country's eight million students to lose school days.⁸⁵ Food is considered the body's fuel, and without proper nutrition, students do not have the energy to complete their lessons and study when they go back home.⁸⁶ Yet, education is not considered a priority in families that cannot afford food for their table.

Another obstacle in the country's educational system is infrastructure. Poor infrastructure in schools in Venezuela is common due to the lack of funding from the government.⁸⁷ Many children are deprived of this fundamental right due to the lack of accessible classrooms and schools.⁸⁸ The deficit of maintenance of these educational areas has compromised

education since classrooms have collapsing walls or lack roofs.⁸⁹ Also, basic infrastructure like drains and bathrooms are failing or malfunctioning; while services like laboratories, auditoriums, libraries, and multipurpose rooms are most likely to be unavailable or non-existent.⁹⁰

The National Survey of Educational Establishments 2021 gathered information about schools in Venezuela that allowed the compilation of certain percentages. Starting with the fact that 86 percent of schools reported lacking internet access, 70 percent reported having constant electricity shortages, and 57 percent reported having a severe lack of water.⁹¹ Water and electricity shortages affect education accessibility as studying under these conditions is un motivating and discourages parents from sending their kids to school. Some schools have even closed their doors for several days a week since their bathroom facilities or common areas are not optimal for their use.⁹²

Another limitation is the restricted or non-existent internet access. While internet connection is not essential for educational purposes, it is a key factor regarding accessibility and efficiency. However, schools in rural zones are most likely to have a weakened online educational system.⁹³

These limitations were a huge obstacle for rural communities and public schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, where online schooling was imperative. Venezuela has limited remote education options since most students and teachers do not have access to computers or stable internet connections at home. There was a technology gap that made asynchronous learning

82 "Understanding education as a right," Right to education, accessed July 8, 2024, <https://www.right-to-education.org/page/understanding-education-right>.

83 "The right to education," UNESCO, accessed July 8, 2024, <https://www.unesco.org/en/right-education>.

84 "Education of Venezuela," Britannica, last updated July 7, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Venezuela/Education>.

85 "Millions of children missing school in Venezuela's hunger crisis," Relief web, last updated May 2, 2018, <https://reliefweb.int/report/venezuela-bolivarian-republic/millions-children-missing-school-venezuelas-hunger-crisis>.

86 "ECW in Venezuela," Education Cannot Wait, accessed July 8, 2024, <https://www.educationcannotwait.org/our-investments/where-we-work/venezuela>.

87 "Unlocking Venezuela's future: Addressing Primary Educational Challenges," Broken Chalk, accessed July 8, 2024, <https://brokenchalk.org/tag/educational-challenges-in-venezuela/>.

88 Broken Chalk, "Unlocking Venezuela's future: Addressing Primary Educational Challenges."

89 Broken Chalk, "Unlocking Venezuela's future: Addressing Primary Educational Challenges."

90 Jose Pineda, "What is the state of schools in Venezuela? National Survey of Educational Establishments 2021 (ENEED 2021)," last updated October 22, 2022, <https://devtechsys.com/insights/2022/10/22/the-state-of-schools-in-venezuela/>.

91 Pineda, "What is the state of schools in Venezuela? National Survey of Educational Establishments 2021 (ENEED 2021)."

92 Humberto Marquez, "Venezuela's Educational System Heading Towards State of Total Collapse," Global issues, last updated, July 10, 2023, <https://www.globalissues.org/news/2023/07/10/34207>.

93 "Venezuela," Freedom house, accessed July 8, 2024, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/venezuela/freedom-net/2022>.

difficult for both parties.⁹⁴ Teachers and students had to adapt very quickly to online studying methods without having a previous warning or preparation. Professors had to prepare to deliver content that had to be accessible to all students from home. On the other hand, students had to readjust their routines and adapt to technological learning methods to keep up with their educational process.⁹⁵ The government failed to guarantee accessible education during times of quarantine.⁹⁶

The pandemic required a level of innovation, skills, and adaptations that rural communities in Venezuela were not ready to handle. This demotivated teachers, which made some quit their jobs and abandon their student's educational journey.⁹⁷ Teacher shortages became very common in the country. Now, they were not only getting paid low wages, but they also had to invest in their technological equipment to keep up with the lessons.⁹⁸ And if summed up to the humanitarian crisis, studies show that from 30 to 40 percent of teachers in public schools do not show up. They have to stay in lines waiting for food or medicines to support their own families, obliging them to partially abandon their jobs.⁹⁹ Additionally, students are not choosing to study education as a career due to the low income and unstable job offers, causing a future problem for Venezuelan society.

Even though most schools in Venezuela are public, the country has several private schools in each sector, especially in Caracas, the capital city. Private schools have a better chance of providing a sustainable and quality education. They do not depend on the government economically, so they are free to make their own internal choices and have the capabilities to

train their staff adequately.¹⁰⁰ However, since the educational system is highly centralized, they are still subject to the supervision of the Ministry of Education of the country. This encourages both private and public schools to meet the same standards and fundamental curriculum.¹⁰¹

Education in Venezuela has its ups and downs, it is a large battlefield with many obstacles but with possible solutions. Addressing the lack of funding from the government, the teacher shortage, and the investment in infrastructure and technology are essential to improve the educational opportunities for Venezuelans.¹⁰² Education has a key role in this country, it is the fundamental piece to empower citizens and break the cycle of poverty among the communities. Accessible and quality education will guarantee the country's development and recovery.¹⁰³

Freedom of Expression and the Role of Civilian Manifestations in the Country

Freedom of expression is a fundamental right that promotes the right to speak, be heard, and participate in peaceful social, political, or religious manifestations without being penalized.¹⁰⁴ Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights calls for the right to freedom of opinion regardless of any social or political barrier.¹⁰⁵ It permits peaceful dialogue and public understanding, benefiting our communities and individuals. Most importantly, it allows the society to question their government, which is key to keeping them accountable. This right is essential for the enjoyment of all human rights since it permits clear communication about a country's successes

94 Geeta Verma, "Science Teacher Education in the Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic," last updated May 28, 2020, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1046560X.2020.1771514>.

95 Verma, "Science Teacher Education in the Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic."

96 "Venezuela: the collapse of public education," International Commission of Jurists, last updated May 30, 2024, <https://www.icj.org/venezuela-the-collapse-of-public-education/>.

97 Mary Triny, "Venezuela's teacher shortage risks leaving the next generation adrift," America CGTN, last updated February 24, 2023, <https://america.cgtn.com/2023/02/24/venezuelas-teacher-shortage-risks-leaving-the-next-generation-adrift>.

98 Triny, "Venezuela's teacher shortage risks leaving the next generation adrift."

99 "Teachers and students quit Venezuelan schools in food shortage crisis," Their world, accessed July 8, 2024, <https://theirworld.org/news/teachers-and-students-quit-venezuelan-schools-in-food-shortage-crisis/>.

100 Their world, "Teachers and students quit Venezuelan schools in food shortage crisis."

101 "Venezuela," State University, accessed July 8, 2024, <https://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1663/Venezuela-EDUCATIONAL-SYSTEM-OVERVIEW.html>.

102 Olimpia Guidi "Unlocking Venezuela's future: Addressing Primary Educational Challenges," Broken Chalk, accessed July 9, 2024, <https://brokenchalk.org/unlocking-venezuelas-future-addressing-primary-educational-challenges/>.

103 Marquez, "Venezuela's Educational System Heading Towards State of Total Collapse."

104 "What is freedom of expression?" Article 19, accessed July 11, 2024, <https://www.article19.org/what-is-freedom-of-expression/>.

105 "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," United Nations, accessed July 11, 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.

and shortcomings.¹⁰⁶ It not only applies to collective needs, such as water, food, education, and shelter; but it also affects individual necessities such as marriage or religion.

Democratic countries have freedom of speech as a basic foundation, being granted by the law and protected by the state. However, several countries restrict this right and control the public's expression.¹⁰⁷ Autocratic governments might take control over the media and regulate the information that is being said about the government. They might also prohibit public manifestations with the excuse of maintaining social order. Venezuela is a clear example of this type of regime.¹⁰⁸

Venezuelan authorities have restricted the right of freedom of speech in the country, affecting a large number of civilians. Journalists and media workers from the opposition are being harassed, persecuted, and imprisoned by the government. Moreover, human rights defenders and social leaders have been targeted and have been victims of the criminal law with accusations of terrorism.¹⁰⁹ All these accusations are generating a behavioral control that is affecting modern society. The control of social manifestations is disabling journalists from exercising their professions as objective and reliable sources of information. By doing so, the government is filtering the information that is available to the public, limiting their freedom to seek data.¹¹⁰

In times of political polarization, where the country is divided on different sides, clear information is key. However, Venezuela does not have these opportunities, which makes reporting violations or injustices a difficult process.¹¹¹ Multiple campaigns against the media have been taking place, promoting media harassment, stigmatization, and repression. Sources that expose the inhumane actions of the government

are being attacked. Those who are trying to defend human rights become the first victims of public defamation since the government closes their radio channels and imprisons those who call for justice and transparency.¹¹²

Former President, Hugo Chávez, created a program called *Aló Presidente* which was first transmitted in May 1999. Its format was that of a talk show in which Chávez talked for an average of four hours, but sometimes for over eight hours about his political ideals. He used such programs to broadcast messages or *cadena*s. All broadcasting outlets in the country were under legal obligation to transmit the *cadena*s. It is estimated that between September 1999 and July 2009, Chávez broadcast 1,992 national blanket messages, which added up to over 1,250 hours or 52 days per year. This communication method is still being used by Maduro. This is particularly concerning as the government imposes a “mediatic hegemony, silences his critics, and weakens democratic practice.”¹¹³

Independent media sources are usually blocked, so the people mostly have access to pro-government disinformation. Political opinions are considered sensitive topics in the digital space, so reporters chose to avoid the subject, generating an information gap and a lack of transparency.¹¹⁴ In online discussions, the government uses its private services to manipulate the information available. They have tools that allow a large-scale recollection of citizens’ personal data, which permits them to pose a threat to those who decide to speak against them.¹¹⁵ More than 40 radio stations and national newspapers have been shut down in the country. Additionally, websites and television news programs have been blocked in Venezuela, among them: Todo Noticias, from Argentina; CNN and The Washington Post, from the United States; Caracol Televisión,

¹⁰⁶ United Nations, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”

¹⁰⁷ “Current Events: Freedom of Speech & Expression Around the World,” Civics Learning Project, January 29, 2024, <https://civicslearning.org/es/resources/current-events-freedom-of-speech-expression-around-the-world/>.

¹⁰⁸ Civics Learning Project, “Current Events: Freedom of Speech & Expression Around the World.”

¹⁰⁹ Pedro Vaca, Irena Khan, *Freedom of Expression in Venezuela: state of play and lines of action* (Washington D.C: Inter-American system Rapporteurs, 2022), <https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/expression/reports/VEN-UN-OAS-Statement-AUG22.pdf>

¹¹⁰ Vaca and Khan, *Freedom of Expression in Venezuela: state of play and lines of action*.

¹¹¹ “2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Venezuela,” U.S Department of State, accessed July 12, 2024, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/venezuela/>

¹¹² “Venezuela: Attacks Against Freedom of Expression Must Cease Immediately,” Human Rights Watch, last updated January 14, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/01/14/venezuela-attacks-against-freedom-expression-must-cess-immediately>.

¹¹³ Ed Bracho Polanco, “Chávez’s Aló Presidente and its Impact on Venezuela’s Journalistic Practice,” Iberoamericana, 2020, <https://iberoamericana.se/articles/10.16993/iberoamericana.474>.

¹¹⁴ “Venezuela,” Freedom House, accessed July 12, 2024, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/venezuela/freedom-net/2023>.

¹¹⁵ Freedom House, “Venezuela.”



Venezuelan protest
 Credit: Andrés E. Azpúrua

El Tiempo TV, RCN and NTN24, from Colombia.¹¹⁶

Due to media restrictions, many Venezuelans use social networks to obtain truthful information, since television and radio are mainly controlled by the government. The main network where Venezuelans searched for information was X (formerly Twitter). Nevertheless, in August 2024, Maduro ordered the block of the social network X, for “inciting hatred” and violating “all the laws” of the country.¹¹⁷ This meant yet another restriction on Venezuelans and their right to information.

Although a great part of this speech repression is online, political manifestations such as marches and rallies are also targeted by the regime.¹¹⁸ The opposition protested by demanding a way out of this humanitarian crisis. At the beginning of 2019, protests in the country started as peaceful gatherings and long walks around the city. However, the government

started responding aggressively. During the rallies, the military committed arbitrary mass arrests, deliberate executions, and illegal use of lethal force, all addressed to people who spoke out against Maduro’s government. Even the UN Human Rights Council has declared both Maduro and other government officials guilty of committing crimes against humanity, torture, and kidnapping.¹¹⁹

In 2023, there were about 300 political prisoners who were incarcerated while being innocent.¹²⁰ They were tortured inside the prisons while their families were being overwhelmed with threats.¹²¹ Most of these prisoners were incarcerated in 2019, and some, in 2024 are still captured. They have to pay for food, water, and electricity while in prison. Some are heavily tortured and others are obligated to watch their cell mates be executed, which is all part of a psychological game.¹²² This mistreatment could include the use of electric shocks,

116 “Cómo fue la destrucción de la prensa venezolana durante los años de Hugo Chávez,” Infobae, last updated october 18, 2018, <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2018/10/18/como-fue-la-destruccion-de-la-prensa-venezolana-durante-los-anos-de-hugo-chavez/>.

117 “Maduro ordena el bloqueo de la red social X (Twitter) durante diez días en Venezuela,” ABC International, last updated September 2, 2024, <https://www.abc.es/internacional/maduro-ordena-bloqueo-red-social-twitter-diez-20240809023457-nt.html?ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.abc.es%2Finternacional%2Fmaduro-ordena-bloqueo-red-social-twitter-diez-20240809023457-nt.html>.

118 “Venezuela protests: thousands march as military faces call to abandon Maduro,” The guardian, January 23, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/23/venezuela-protests-thousands-march-against-maduro-as-opposition-sees-chance-for-change>.

119 The Guardian, “Venezuela protests: thousands march as military faces call to abandon Maduro.”

120 “Venezuela: UN Experts warn of persisting attacks on civil society, media and trade union leaders,” United Nations, last updated March 22, 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/03/venezuela-un-experts-warn-persisting-attacks-civil-society-media-and-trade>.

121 United Nations, “Venezuela: UN Experts warn of persisting attacks on civil society, media and trade union leaders.”

122 “Los presos políticos liberados en Venezuela: en casa, pero en el limbo,” El país, January 6, 2024, <https://elpais.com/america/2024-01-07/los-presos-politicos-liberados-en-venezuela-en-casa-pero-en-el-limbo.html>.

beatings, suffocation, threats of sexual violence, and death.¹²³

Maduro's strategy during the civilian protests was to show terror to stop the opposition acts. This began with the appearance of political motorcycle gangs that support the regime, known as *colectivos*.¹²⁴ They chased protestors and were ready to shoot any person who crossed a specific frontier or dared to speak up against the government. Maduro relies on paramilitary groups such as this to generate terror among the community and promote the stopping of the protests.¹²⁵

During the protests, around a thousand people were injured and more than 100 people were killed.¹²⁶ Mothers lost their children to the streets, but the youth never hesitated to defend their country. The opposition, mostly university students, went out to face the government with tear gas bombs and fecal weapons. They started with paint bombs to block the view of the police vehicles, but later on ended with fecal bombs, which did the same job but generated tension.¹²⁷

Security forces would throw gas grenades, used water cannons, and plastic pellets to cause unnecessary harm. Uncontrollably, the Venezuelan government's brutal response ended in the persecution and mistreatment of hundreds of citizens, depriving them of their right to freedom.¹²⁸ This crisis highlights the urgent need for the restoration of democratic principles, the end of the crisis, and the protection of human rights in the country.¹²⁹

Upholding the Rights of Women and Children in Venezuela

Women and children are considered vulnerable groups since they are most likely to face several threats that affect their well-being. Women who have access to healthcare and education can raise children with the same opportunities.¹³⁰ That being said, it can be suggested that these groups will directly impact the future of the world's population. By protecting women and children, communities can protect their future.¹³¹

Humanitarian crises are never gender-neutral, each group is affected differently. Women in Venezuela face several challenges that put them in disadvantaged positions compared to the rest of the population. They are expected not to participate actively in the labor market. Instead, they are encouraged to work at home and focus exclusively on their children.¹³² Although women in Venezuela tend to show interest in political matters, they are often restricted to local or subordinate positions, limiting their range of actions.¹³³ For example, in 2021, Venezuela scored 0.2 on the gender gap index, especially in the area of political empowerment. This showed that women are 80 percent less likely than men to have equal opportunities in political participation, which increases the gender gap in the society.¹³⁴

Moreover, gender-based violence continues to be a concern for the population in Venezuela. Women and girls are vulnerable to physical and psychological violence. In this

123 "Human rights violations and abuses in the context of protests in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela," United Nations Office for the Commissioner, last updated July 2017, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Countries/VE/HCRReportVenezuela_1April-31July2017_EN.pdf.

124 Lucia Newman, "Venezuela: Who are the colectivos?" Aljazeera, last updated May 9, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2019/5/9/venezuela-who-are-the-colectivos>.

125 Mary Beth Sheridan, Mariana Zuñiga, "Maduro's muscle: Politically backed motorcycle gangs known as 'colectivos' are the enforcers for Venezuela's authoritarian leader," Washington Post, last updated May 14, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/maduros-muscle-politically-backed-motorcycle-gangs-known-as-colectivos-are-the-enforcers-for-venezuelas-authoritarian-leader/2019/03/13/2242068c-4452-11e9-94ab-d2dda3c0df52_story.html.

126 Genesis Cramona, "VENEZUELA: VICTIMS OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS DURING PROTESTS DEMAND JUSTICE," last updated March 2015, <https://www.amnesty.org/es/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/AMR5310372015ENGLISH.pdf>.

127 "Poop bombs: the Venezuelan opposition's new weapon," El País, last updated May 9, 2017, https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2017/05/09/inenglish/1494320882_977138.html.

128 "Crackdown on Dissent: Brutality, Torture, and Political Persecution in Venezuela," Human Rights Watch, last updated November 29, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/11/29/crackdown-dissent/brutality-torture-and-political-persecution-venezuela>.

129 U.S Department of State, "2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Venezuela."

130 "Why women and children," Catholic medical mission Board, accessed July 28, 2024, <https://cmmb.org/about-us/why-women-children/>.

131 Catholic medical mission Board, "Why women and children."

132 "From Crisis to Inclusion: The Story of Venezuela's Women," Center for Strategic and International Studies, last updated March 4, 2024, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/crisis-inclusion-story-venezuelas-women>.

133 Peter Stansbery and Virginia Yopez, "A Political Solution to the Crisis in Venezuela Needs to Include Women," International Republican Institute, last modified March 8, 2022, <https://www.iri.org/news/a-political-solution-to-the-crisis-in-venezuela-needs-to-include-women/>.

134 Center for Strategic and International Studies, "From Crisis to Inclusion: The Story of Venezuela's Women."

matter, one pressing issue is the lack of accountability. Some victims attempt to report these attacks, but they end up facing challenges when trying to call for justice and support.¹³⁵ Many cases go unreported, and from those who are, many do not have the opportunity to go to trial. This has promoted silence among women who are victims of these acts, increasing the fear that no one will believe what happened.¹³⁶

Violence against women and girls continues to be minimized. They continue suffering from human rights violations that not only impact their physical and mental health but also their lives and development.¹³⁷ Additionally, when they seek support and reception in neighboring countries, they are severely stigmatized. Venezuelan refugee women are not supported by protection laws in many countries due to the persistent discrimination against them.¹³⁸

Women are also victims of an unstable healthcare system in the country. The lack of medical resources has impacted the prenatal care and needs of pregnant women, causing preventable deaths and miscarriages.¹³⁹ These women choose to leave Venezuela to give birth in other countries that can provide them with safe medical attention for their children.¹⁴⁰ The risks in Venezuelan hospitals are not only due to the medical procedures or unavailable medical resources. Infection rates are increasing constantly in public hospitals since they do not have the necessary disinfectants and sterilizers to eliminate bacteria and biological residues. In case of emergencies,

there are no effective blood banks available to respond immediately.¹⁴¹ Moreover, women with low resources tend to give birth at home or in the streets since they cannot afford medical attention, increasing the percentages of infections and complications, which can lead to deaths.¹⁴²

In 2020, the maternal mortality ratio was 259.2 deaths per 100,000 live births due to these unfavorable conditions.¹⁴³ In response, UNICEF has launched campaigns that fight for the protection of women and their children, while also providing psychosocial support to these families.¹⁴⁴ They have contributed with oxygen support in various hospitals, which have saved the lives of many women and children in the country.¹⁴⁵ Hospitals in Venezuela have constant shortages of electricity, staff, and resources. However, UNICEF fights for the inclusion of access to water, hygiene, nutrition, and healthcare in the Venezuelan population.

The UN estimates that one-third of the children in the country require basic nutrition and healthcare.¹⁴⁶ They are one of the most vulnerable groups in the country and need to be immunized through vaccines to be protected from viruses and bacteria.¹⁴⁷ Reducing the infant mortality rates in the country has been a top priority. However, having weakened and unstable childcare services are obstructing this goal.¹⁴⁸

A significant percentage of Venezuelan children are deprived of some of their human rights since the day they are born. By living in extreme poverty under a corrupt regime, their right to

135 "In Venezuela to protect women and children victims of violence," Cesvi, last modified January 15, 2024, <https://www.cesvi.eu/news/in-venezuela-to-protect-women-and-children-victims-of-violence/>.

136 "Venezuelan women at high risk of experiencing psychological and physical violence at home and abroad, warns IRC," Relief web, last updated November 29, 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/venezuela-bolivarian-republic/venezuelan-women-high-risk-experiencing-psychological-and-physical-violence-home-and-abroad-warns-irc>.

137 Bárbara Cervantes, "For Every Girl, NO More Violence," UNICEF, last updated March 5, 2021, <https://www.unicef.org/venezuela/en/stories/every-girl-no-more-violence>.

138 "Americas: Women and girls who flee Venezuela are unprotected against gender-based violence and discrimination," Amnesty international, last updated November 25, 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/11/americas-women-girls-flee-venezuela-gender-based-violence/>.

139 Anastasia Moloney, "As Venezuela's healthcare collapses, pregnant women, girls bear brunt of crisis," Reuters, last updated, July 8, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/as-venezuela-s-healthcare-collapses-pregnant-women-girls-bear-brunt-of-crisis-idUSL8N24635L/>.

140 Alejandra Romo, "Pregnant women flee lack of maternal health care in Venezuela," UNHRC, last updated July 23, 2019, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/pregnant-women-flee-lack-maternal-health-care-venezuela>.

141 Moloney, "As Venezuela's healthcare collapses, pregnant women, girls bear brunt of crisis."

142 Moloney, "As Venezuela's healthcare collapses, pregnant women, girls bear brunt of crisis."

143 "Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)," Pan American Health Organization, accessed July 29, 2024, <https://hia.paho.org/en/node/221>.

144 Cervantes, "For Every Girl, NO More Violence."

145 Jesús Fonseca, "Venezuela: UNICEF strengthens oxygen system to help save lives at a hospital in Caracas," UNICEF, last updated May 16, 2023, <https://www.unicef.org/venezuela/en/stories/venezuela-unicef-strengthens-oxygen-system-help-save-lives-hospital-caracas>.

146 "UNICEF ramps up humanitarian assistance to children in Venezuela, delivers 55 tons of health supplies since January," UNICEF, last updated June 7, 2019, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unicef-ramps-humanitarian-assistance-children-venezuela-delivers-55-tons-health>.

147 UNICEF, "UNICEF ramps up humanitarian assistance to children in Venezuela, delivers 55 tons of health supplies since January."

148 "Health and Nutrition," UNICEF, accessed July 29, 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/venezuela/en/health-and-nutrition>.

education, liberty, and a decent standard of living are severely restricted. They are not able to attend school since they do not have access to transportation and food, and those who can go, cannot give their best since they are not receiving the necessary nutrients they should.¹⁴⁹ Some schools have been forced to reduce their curriculums and prioritize the lessons they give to fit the necessities and possibilities of their groups of students. For example, instead of giving sports classes, which require a lot of energy from the students, they choose to eliminate that bloc and add grammar classes.¹⁵⁰

The weakened nutrition plans and feeding can result in future consequences for the children's health, causing diseases that could be inherited later on. These circumstances lead them to make difficult decisions to prioritize their health and well-being. For example, some families have to stop providing an education to their children to be able to cover food expenses.¹⁵¹ Children have to work to be able to sustain themselves day by day. They enter the agricultural labor market, domestic work, and mining. Another common alternative is joining the military, which provides them with food and shelter in return for their services.¹⁵²

While exposed to these working conditions, children often become victims of human trafficking, violence, and sexual exploitation. They are vulnerable in these environments and are abused in the labor market since they do not have the voice and experience to stand up for their rights. Working is their only solution to obtain resources and help their families, so they settle for any conditions or limitations imposed by their

bosses.¹⁵³ In the last five years, reports show that children from 5 to 17 years old in disadvantaged areas are estimated to be working instead of attending school.¹⁵⁴

Just as children are forced to be part of the labor market, women are also affected when discussing job opportunities. The majority have paused their careers and education to be able to provide for their families. Many women have been forced into sex trafficking, forced labor, and prostitution.¹⁵⁵ In 2022, 1,390 Venezuelan women were rescued from sexual trafficking, of whom 294 were girls and adolescents.¹⁵⁶ Being exposed to these environments increases the chances of becoming a victim of trafficking.¹⁵⁷ Also, these practices require constant medical checkups, but the lack of medical services available to treat the population is jeopardizing women's safety.¹⁵⁸

The ongoing political and economic crisis in Venezuela is considered an open battlefield for human rights violations. Both groups, women and children are deprived of most of their necessities every day in Venezuela.¹⁵⁹ Under SOCHUM's mandate, protecting women and children is a priority, so the committee must address the multifaceted issues that affect these vulnerable groups and ensure their safety.¹⁶⁰

Current Status

Migration Crisis

According to the International Organization for Migration

149 Lidija Misić, "Children of Venezuela," Humanium, last updated October 16, 2022, <https://www.humanium.org/en/venezuela/>.

150 Misić, "Children of Venezuela."

151 "Child Soldiers Global Report," UNHRC, accessed July 29, 2024, <https://www.refworld.org/reference/annualreport/cscoal/2001/en/65406>.

152 Misić, "Children of Venezuela."

153 Naky Soto, "Child Labor Grows in Venezuela," Caracas Chronicles, last updated, November 10, 2020, <https://www.caracaschronicles.com/2020/11/10/child-labor-grows-in-venezuela/>

154 "Govt: Hundreds of Venezuelan Children Victims of Child Labor in Colombia," Voa News, last updated, June 12, 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/a/venezuela-child-laborers/4436566.html>.

155 Maria Magallanes, "Venezuelan Women are Leading the Charge to Construct a Prosperous and Democratic Venezuela," Global Americans, last updated, May 18, 2022, <https://globalamericans.org/venezuelan-women-are-leading-the-charge-to-construct-a-prosperous-and-democratic-venezuela/>.

156 "Venezuelan Women at Risk From Expanding Trafficking Rings" Insight crime, last updated May 10, 2024, <https://insightcrime.org/news/venezuelan-women-at-risk-from-expanding-trafficking-rings/>

157 "2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Venezuela," U.S Department of State, accessed July 29, 2024, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/venezuela/>

158 Paddy Dowling, "A dollar for sex: Venezuela's women tricked and trafficked," The Guardian, last updated July 30, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/jul/30/a-dollar-for-sex-venezuelas-women-tricked-and-trafficked>.

159 "Human Rights in Venezuela," Amnesty international, accessed July 29, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/americas/south-america/venezuela/report-venezuela/>.

160 "Social, Humanitarian & Cultural Issues (Third Committee)," United Nations, accessed July 29, 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/ga/third/>.

(IOM), migration is the movement of people away from their usual place of residency to settle in another.¹⁶¹ People might move in search of better economic opportunities, to study, or to join their families. Additionally, a migration crisis is a large-scale migration flow commonly caused by situations in their home country that affect their well-being.¹⁶²

More than 7.7 million people have left Venezuela since 2014 due to the ongoing crisis. Venezuela has a population of over 28 million people, which means that around 30 percent of the citizens have fled their country, becoming the largest exodus in Latin America.¹⁶³ Around 6.5 million Venezuelan refugees are being hosted by countries in Latin America, the majority being in Colombia, with a total of three million Venezuelans.¹⁶⁴ An estimated 2,000 people are leaving Venezuela every day because of the lack of opportunity, security, and stability.¹⁶⁵

In neighboring countries, Venezuelans have the opportunity to live more stable lives and contribute to the country's economy. However, due to Maduro's corrupt regime, many Venezuelans have been victims of stigmatization in their host countries.¹⁶⁶ Venezuelans tend to be discriminated against due to a false generalization that expresses that most Venezuelans are related to corrupt practices.¹⁶⁷ This discrimination has affected their access to healthcare, education, food, and other necessities. Many are denied shelter and job opportunities, which can make it difficult to maintain a livelihood and affect their emotional well-being.¹⁶⁸

The UN Refugee Agency has monitored the rights of refugees' by responding to the forced displacement. They have been

trying to guarantee protection and access to efficient asylum procedures for many Venezuelans.¹⁶⁹ Moreover, the Agency has been making efforts to cover any socio-economic needs and legal-stay arrangements. However, the number of refugees exceeds the amount of resources available, which obstructs the total inclusion of every refugee that is migrating from Venezuela.¹⁷⁰

Migrants have been using any route available to leave the country, by land, plane, or sea. They leave their families and loved ones behind in search of a better future. Sometimes, they start their journey without any documentation or legal backup.¹⁷¹ The lack of identification makes them vulnerable to smugglers and human trafficking when crossing borders. Those who cross the border by land are constantly putting their lives at risk. They tend to face armed criminals and walk miles carrying their belongings.¹⁷²

Most Venezuelans buy their bus tickets to reach the border of Colombia. However, then they have to part ways in clandestine routes since they do not have the documentation to go through the official checkpoints.¹⁷³ These paths are often crowded by armed groups that take away most of their belongings or ask for a sum of money to cross to the other side. Venezuelans are assaulted and recruited for drug trafficking in these areas since they are under no supervision.¹⁷⁴ Those who cross the borders are often left with nothing and cannot afford a place to stay. Many seek shelter in squares or public spaces, but most of the time authorities will ask them to leave. Additionally, they can be exposed to harsh weather and are affected by hunger and

161 "What is Migration?," International Organization for Migration, accessed July 31, 2024, <https://wmm-educatorstoolkit.iom.int/module-1-what-is-migration-resources>.

162 "What is a migration crisis and how to address it integrally," International Organization for Migration, accessed July 31, 2024, <https://rosanjose.iom.int/en/blogs/what-migration-crisis-and-how-address-it-integrally>.

163 "Venezuela Humanitarian Crisis," The UN Refugee Agency, accessed July 31, 2024, <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/venezuela/>.

164 The UN Refugee Agency, "Venezuela Humanitarian Crisis."

165 Arturo Castellanos, "The Reasons Behind the Increased Migration from Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua," National Immigration Forum, last updated February 9, 2023, <https://immigrationforum.org/article/the-reasons-behind-the-increased-migration-from-venezuela-cuba-and-nicaragua/>.

166 "Venezuela Situation," The UN Refugee Agency, accessed July 31, 2024, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/situations/venezuela-situation>.

167 The UN Refugee Agency, "Venezuela Situation."

168 The UN Refugee Agency, "Venezuela Situation."

169 "Venezuela Crisis Explained," The UN Refugee Agency, last updated April 17, 2024, <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/venezuela-crisis-explained/#/WhatotherdisplacedpopulationsarelivinginEthiopia>.

170 The UN Refugee Agency, "Venezuela Situation."

171 International Organization for Migration, "Venezuelan Refugee and Migrant Crisis."

172 Christine Armario, "Follow the trek of Venezuelan migrants fleeing on foot," AP News, last updated October 18, 2018, <https://apnews.com/article/immigration-financial-markets-caribbean-ap-top-news-venezuela-a46f4cb58fc94c22bf2b5418ea956c5b>.

173 Armario, "Follow the trek of Venezuelan migrants fleeing on foot."

174 Armario, "Follow the trek of Venezuelan migrants fleeing on foot."



Venezuelan Refugees seeking shelter in Colombia's border

Credit: National Police of Colombia

dehydration, but most of them rather make that sacrifice than return to their country.¹⁷⁵

The Darien Gap at the Colombia-Panama border is one of the most dangerous migration routes in the world.¹⁷⁶ It is a dense rainforest that connects Central and South America. Migrants that cross this Gap are exposed to disease, criminal groups, and unsafe roads.¹⁷⁷ Most of the migrants are coming from Venezuela, followed by Ecuador and Haiti. In August 2022, from the 30,055 people that crossed the gap, 76 percent were Venezuelan migrants, of which 15 percent were children.¹⁷⁸ During 2023, 37 Venezuelans crossed the Darien per hour, resulting in this being considered forced migration.¹⁷⁹ Forced migration is “the involuntary movement of people who fear harm or even death.”¹⁸⁰

The Gaitanistas, also known as the Gulf Clan are a criminal

group that controls the human and drug transit in the gap. They come from a Colombian paramilitary movement that is currently assaulting migrants and promoting violence.¹⁸¹ They receive around USD 125 per migrant, which adds up to a yearly revenue of USD 57 million.¹⁸² With 5.6 per 1,000 people, Venezuela has the highest rate in Latin America of people exploited in human trafficking, which mainly occurs on their way to leave the country.¹⁸³ Children are one of the most vulnerable groups as many cross the borders unaccompanied, which exposes them to child abduction and trafficking, especially when encountered with criminal groups like the Gaitanistas.¹⁸⁴

Different types of initiatives have been taken by governments around the world to help Venezuelan migrants. For instance, in 2023, the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

175 “Venezuela, the needs in remote and border areas,” Intersos Humanitarian, accessed July 31, 2024, <https://www.intersos.org/en/venezuela-the-needs-in-remote-and-border-areas/>.

176 “Venezuelan migrants cross the Darien jungle,” World Vision, last updated September 27, 2022, <https://www.wvi.org/es/stories/venezuela-crisis/venezuelan-migrants-cross-darien-jungle>.

177 Diana Roy, “Crossing the Darién Gap: Migrants Risk Death on the Journey to the U.S,” last updated July 22, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/article/crossing-darien-gap-migrants-risk-death-journey-us>.

178 World Vision, “Venezuelan migrants cross the Darien jungle.”

179 World Vision, “Venezuelan migrants cross the Darien jungle.”

180 “Forced Migration,” Study Smarter, accessed September 5, 2024, <https://www.studysmarter.co.uk/explanations/human-geography/population-geography/forced-migration/>.

181 Juan Diego Cárdenas, “Gaitanistas concesionan el tráfico de migrantes en el Darién colombiano: informe,” November 24, 2023, <https://insightcrime.org/es/noticias/gaitanistas-concesionan-traffic-migrantes-darien/>.

182 Cárdenas, “Gaitanistas concesionan el tráfico de migrantes en el Darién colombiano: informe.”

183 “2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Venezuela,” U.S. Department of State, accessed July 31, 2024, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/venezuela/>.

184 Misisic, “Children of Venezuela.”

extended the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Venezuelans due to the lack of safety and instability in the country.¹⁸⁵ The TPS is a temporary immigration status provided to migrants who are facing armed conflicts, natural disasters, or unsafe conditions in their home countries.¹⁸⁶ It can be granted for a period of six to 18 months, allowing migrants to obtain a temporary work permit. The TPS “prevent the country’s nationals from returning safely, or in certain circumstances, where the country cannot adequately handle the return of its nationals.”¹⁸⁷ Over 242,700 Venezuelans are current TPS holders.¹⁸⁸ This initiative has certainly been helpful, but more is still needed by countries all around the world.

Addressing the migration crisis in Venezuela is essential to achieving regional stability, promoting human rights, and encouraging economic development.¹⁸⁹ To do so, it is important to take a multifaceted approach that handles the root issues that are causing the forced displacement. Delegates are encouraged to propose solutions that provide opportunities for Venezuelan citizens that allow the fostering of a prosperous region.

Presidential Elections 2024

In Venezuela, presidential elections are hosted every six years. Commonly, most of the votes go for two principal candidates, one from the government and one from the opposition. This year, after having completed his second presidential term, adding up to eleven years in power, Nicolás Maduro ran again as a candidate for the presidential elections in Venezuela in 2024.¹⁹⁰

To ensure free and fair elections, the Barbados Agreement was created. It is a pair of agreements signed by Maduro’s government and the opposition’s Democratic Unitary Platform in October 2023.¹⁹¹ Its goal was to facilitate dialogue between both parties and promote free and fair elections.¹⁹² For the 2024 presidential elections, despite winning 90 percent of the votes in the opposition’s primary elections, María Corina Machado ran as the opposition leader, but not as a candidate. This is because, in 2021, the government banned her for 15 years, which prevented her from running for office. The accusations were based on false “financial irregularities” that occurred when she was a national legislator.¹⁹³

As the opposition leader, María Corina Machado did not stop when being banned. She focused her support on an alternate candidate. Corina Yoris, an 80-year-old historian and professor, was the new candidate for the opposition. The strategy was to have Yoris as the face of the campaign. However, Machado would be the one behind the political strategy. Yet, once again the government unconstitutionally blocked Yoris’ postulation, leaving the opposition without a candidate.¹⁹⁴

Machado’s party announced the postulation of a third candidate, Mr. Edmundo González, a Venezuelan career diplomat and international analyst.¹⁹⁵ He would be backed by Machado, who has mobilized most of the country in her campaign, generating the most significant threat to Maduro’s regime in years.¹⁹⁶ Days before the election, Machado’s campaign was able to move thousands of voters. Although the government blocked the highways to limit the campaign,

185 “US offers almost 500,000 Venezuelans legal status,” BBC News, last updated September 21, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-66875264>.

186 “Temporary Protected Status: An Overview,” American Immigration Council, last updated July 12, 2024, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/temporary-protected-status-overview>.

187 “Personas de Venezuela elegibles para TPS huyen de un régimen autoritario y una crisis humanitaria,” Woola, September 23, 2023, <https://www.wola.org/es/2023/09/personas-venezuela-elegibles-tps-huyen-regimen-autoritario-crisis-humanitaria/>.

188 Woola, “Personas de Venezuela elegibles para TPS huyen de un régimen autoritario y una crisis humanitaria.”

189 Betilde Muñoz-Pogossian and Alexandra Winkler, “The Persistence of the Venezuelan Migrant and Refugee Crisis,” last updated November 27, 2023, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/persistence-venezuelan-migrant-and-refugee-crisis>.

190 “President Nicolás Maduro presented Government Plan of the Seven Transformations,” RNV News, last updated, July 26, 2024, <https://rnv.gob.ve/prensa/?p=380720>

191 “Pacto en Barbados: la ruta sinuosa de Venezuela hacia comicios competitivos,” International Crisis Group, last updated October 20, 2023, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/es/latin-america-caribbean/andes/venezuela/barbados-deal-sets-venezuela-rocky-path-competitive-polls>.

192 International Crisis Group, “Pacto en Barbados: la ruta sinuosa de Venezuela hacia comicios competitivos.”

193 Genevieve Glatky and Isayen Herrera, “Venezuelan Opposition Names New Candidate in Show of Unity,” New York Times, last updated March 23, 2024 <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/22/world/americas/venezuela-election-corina-yoris.html>.

194 Glatky and Herrera, “Venezuelan Opposition Names New Candidate in Show of Unity.”

195 Stefano Pozzebon, “The woman behind Venezuela’s upstart opposition movement,” last updated July 25, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/07/25/americas/maria-corina-machado-interview-intl-latam/index.html>.

196 Pozzebon, “The woman behind Venezuela’s upstart opposition movement.”

Machado was seen hiking overpasses, walking through the guards on the highways, and mobilizing in motorcycles to reach every corner of the country.¹⁹⁷

María Corina Machado has been a symbol of hope to many Venezuelans, unifying all the opposition parties to go against Maduro's regime. This is why, days before the election on July 28th, 2024, the population was sure that the voting results would favor the opposition.¹⁹⁸ However, during the first hours of July 29th, after hours of delay and having the electoral body website down, the National Electoral Council (CNE) announced the results. Nicolás Maduro was the elected President for the next six years, falsely claiming to have won with 51 percent of the votes.¹⁹⁹

Venezuelans vote through electronic screens that record each vote and generate a paper receipt that is deposited at ballot boxes.²⁰⁰ When the voting centers close, each machine prints a tally sheet that reads the number of votes that each candidate received. However, the electoral council is run by members of the current regime, which permits them to have full control over the voting system.²⁰¹ A couple of hours after the electoral results were announced, Machado and González went live, declaring that they had 70 percent of the voting tallies. Even so, they showed that the victory was clearly for Mr. Edmundo González.²⁰² At that time, both parties were celebrating their victory, which generated debate nationally and internationally.²⁰³ Many countries started to show interest in accessing the voting receipts that showed the total votes per voting center. These documents were the only proof the

opposition had in its favor.²⁰⁴

The morning after the election, Venezuelans went to the streets and protested peacefully. However, police caravans started to surround the gathering, using tear gas to disperse the protesters.²⁰⁵ Venezuelans from every neighborhood in Caracas participated in long walks while raising flags and banners that asked for justice and freedom. The opposition demanded the electoral council authorities to present the remaining voting tallies that had not been available to the people.²⁰⁶ Just 48 hours after the elections, the nonviolent protests in the streets from the opposition had led to 16 deaths, more than 200 wounded, and 700 arrested, all caused by the government's disagreement with the protests.²⁰⁷ The regime even accused María Corina Machado and Edmundo González of "criminal violence," calling for their immediate arrests.²⁰⁸ They blamed the opposition leaders for promoting violence on the streets, however, the regime was the only side that had brought weapons.²⁰⁹

Currently, several countries like Argentina, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the United States, and Uruguay, among others, have already recognized González's victory. Even countries with leftwing governments once seen as sympathetic to Maduro, such as Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico, are demanding proof of his alleged victory. Meanwhile, only Bolivia, China, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Russia have recognized Maduro as the winner of the elections.²¹⁰

197 Regina Garcia and Fabiola Sanchez, "Venezuela opposition leader provides hope for many, even though she isn't on the presidential ballot," last updated July 26, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/venezuela-presidential-election-maduro-opposition-corina-machado-14158c34f9709f9b73b31a07383e0e51>.

198 Jorge Rueda, "Venezuela election, as it happened: Maduro declared winner, González claims victory," Last updated July 29, 2024, <https://apnews.com/live/venezuela-election-updates-maduro-machado-gonzalez>.

199 Rueda, "Venezuela election, as it happened: Maduro declared winner, González claims victory."

200 "Venezuelan opposition says it has proof of election win over Maduro," Associated Press and Spectrum News Staff, last updated July 30, 2024, <https://ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/news/2024/07/30/venezuelan-opposition-says-it-has-proof-of-election-win>

201 Associated Press and Spectrum News Staff, "Venezuelan opposition says it has proof of election win over Maduro."

202 Associated Press and Spectrum News Staff, "Venezuelan opposition says it has proof of election win over Maduro."

203 Virginia Pietromarchi, "Venezuela election results updates: Maduro declared winner in disputed vote," Aljazeera, last updated July 29, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/7/29/venezuela-election-results-live-maduro-gonzalez-presidential-race>

204 Pietromarchi, "Venezuela election results updates: Maduro declared winner in disputed vote."

205 Associated Press and Spectrum News Staff, "Venezuelan opposition says it has proof of election win over Maduro."

206 Rueda, "Venezuela election, as it happened: Maduro declared winner, González claims victory."

207 Samantha Schmidt and Ana Vanessa Herrero, "At least 16 reported dead as Maduro meets Venezuelan protests with force," The Washington Post, last updated July 31, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/07/30/venezuela-election-protests-maduro-gonzalez/>.

208 Schmidt and Herrero, "At least 16 reported dead as Maduro meets Venezuelan protests with force."

209 Deisy Buitrago and Mayela Armas, "Venezuelans protest as observers say presidential vote undemocratic," Reuters, last updated July 31, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/venezuela-ruling-party-opposition-rally-supporters-election-dispute-2024-07-30/>.

210 "¿Qué países reconocieron al opositor Edmundo González Urrutia como ganador en Venezuela?" Clarin, August 7, 2024, https://www.clarin.com/mundo/paises-reconocieron-opositor-edmundo-gonzalez-urrutia-ganador-venezuela_0_vfSSRUpFBj.html?srsltid=AfmBOoo0C



Maria Corina Machado and Edmundo González

Credit: Confidencial

Independent observers agree that this election was never going to be fair and free, since it was plagued by irregularities, like blocking candidates from running and making it impossible for millions of Venezuelans living abroad to vote. Additionally, dozens of opposition members were arrested during the campaign and international observers were either blocked or disinvited from monitoring the vote. On election day, some voters found that polling stations had been moved without warning, sometimes to far away states.²¹¹

Currently, volunteers managed to collect over 80 percent of the voting tallies, which showed González won with 67 percent of the votes. Additionally, they built a website to publish the tallies online. Moreover, the Carter Center, an NGO that acts as an observer in electoral processes, was invited by the National Electoral Council (CNE) to observe the elections. After leaving Venezuela, the Carter Center with other organizations and universities, confirmed Edmundo González as the winner with more than 60 percent of the vote.²¹² Now, the Venezuelan elections are considered the largest fraud that Latin America has ever seen. Maduro keeps claiming he won the elections

but refuses to show the evidence. In support, Venezuela's top prosecutor, Tarek William Saab, announced a criminal investigation against González and Machado, claiming that they "falsely announced a winner of the presidential election other than the one proclaimed by the national electoral council, the only body qualified to do so."²¹³

Additionally, on August 30, 2024, at approximately 4:50 A.M., there was a major power fluctuation followed by a power outage affecting all of Venezuela. Unfortunately, this is not the first time the country has gone through a statewide blackout. In 2019, during political protests led by the opposition, the country did not have power for a week. While the electrical system lacks maintenance, many consider this was a government scheme, as 11 people from the opposition were arrested that day.²¹⁴

The situation worsened on September 2, 2024, when a Venezuelan judge, after a request by the public prosecutor's office, which is loyal to Nicolás Maduro, issued an arrest warrant for González. He is falsely accused of several crimes

NHQa7Q1iyR0zleUI5TFpXfvKHTIEsDe9Fd5YkNF-VZeebeq,
211 Tiago Rogero, "Evidence shows Venezuela's election was stolen – but will Maduro budge?" *The Guardian*, August 6, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/aug/06/venezuela-election-maduro-analysis>.

212 Javier Tovar, "El Centro Carter confirmó que Edmundo González Urrutia ganó las elecciones en Venezuela con más del 60% de los votos," *Infobae*, August 8, 2024, <https://www.infobae.com/venezuela/2024/08/08/la-jefa-de-la-mision-del-centro-carter-desestimo-la-teoria-del-chavismo-sobre-un-jaqueo-electoral-no-hay-evidencia/>.

213 Rogero, "Evidence shows Venezuela's election was stolen – but will Maduro budge?"

214 "Sin precisar detalles: el gobierno asegura que hay 11 detenidos por el apagón nacional," *El Nacional*, September 5, 2024, <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/sin-precisar-detalles-el-gobierno-asegura-que-hay-11-detenidos-por-el-apagon-nacional/>.

like the “usurpation” of public duties, document falsification, instigation of disobedience, and system sabotage. Several left-winged and right-winged countries, along with international organizations like the Organization of American States (OAS), have condemned the arbitrary persecution of Venezuela’s elected President, Edmundo González.²¹⁵

The situation in Venezuela remains uncertain and critical. Two rival leaders claim victory, one with electoral evidence and the other with military support. Maduro has detained more than 2,400 people since the election, creating what the UN has called a climate of fear. The detained have suffered countless human rights attacks including torture, sexual abuse, and more. Additionally, over 100 underage children and teenagers have been imprisoned and charged with terrorism. Parents of a minor tried visiting their son in a Caracas prison, but guards told them they would have to pay USD 3 for his food or USD 5 to visit for an hour. “We had to choose,” the boy’s father said, “it was either a hug or his food, and we got him some food. We cannot afford more.”²¹⁶ In light of these grave developments, delegates are urged to advocate for the protection of human rights for all Venezuelans, prioritizing peace and justice, as essential steps towards resolving this crisis.

Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals are a set of interconnected goals set by the United Nations in 2015 that call for action to end poverty and reduce inequalities.²¹⁷ The main goal is to ensure that by

2030, all people will be able to enjoy a prosperous and peaceful world. They are the way to achieve a sustainable future. There are 17 goals, all interconnected to address all global challenges, leaving no one behind.²¹⁸ They encompass multiple issues, from climate change and environmental degradation to poverty, inequalities, and social justice.²¹⁹

SDG 1: no poverty, promotes the eradication of poverty in all its manifestations.²²⁰ It calls for a standard way of living that includes social protection for all, including the most vulnerable. Nearly half of the world’s population lives in poverty. The lack of necessities such as food and clean water is killing thousands daily.²²¹ Since 2017, 90 percent of the households in Venezuela are living under the poverty line.²²² Delegates in SOCHUM must take into consideration the specific needs of each region in Venezuela to address this problem. By reducing the poverty rate, people will have access to a better quality of life. This aims to ensure that their human rights are being respected and promoted.

SDG 2: Zero hunger, aims to guarantee access to safe and nutritious food while decreasing hunger and malnutrition.²²³ To achieve this goal, it is important to invest in rural infrastructure and agricultural development, activities that could easily be upheld in Venezuela to promote agricultural sustainability.²²⁴ In 2019, the World Food Program (WFP) reported that 7.9 percent of the Venezuelan population, which adds up to 2.3 million people, were severely food insecure.²²⁵ An additional 24.4 percent, equivalent to seven million people,

215 Will Grant and Ali Abbas Ahmadi, “Arrest warrant issued for Venezuela opposition candidate,” *BBC*, September 2, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn47pn0jjnxx>.

216 Maria Luisa Paul, “Scores of detainees in Maduro’s post-election roundup are children,” *Washington Post*, August 26, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/08/26/children-detained-maduro-venezuela-election/>.

217 “What are the Sustainable Development Goals?,” United Nations Agency on International Development, accessed August 1, 2024, <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals>.

218 “Take Action for the Sustainable Development Goals,” Sustainable Development Goals, accessed August 1, 2024, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>.

219 United Nations Agency on International Development. “What are the Sustainable Development Goals?”

220 “SDG 1 - No poverty,” Eurostat, last updated April 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=SDG_1_-_No_poverty.

221 “Venezuela - Percentage of households in poverty and extreme poverty in from 2002 to 2021,” United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, accessed August 1, 2024, <https://data.humdata.org/dataset/percentage-of-households-in-poverty-and-extreme-poverty-in-venezuela-from-2002-to-2021?>

222 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Venezuela - Percentage of households in poverty and extreme poverty in from 2002 to 2021.”

223 “SDG 2 - Zero hunger,” Eurostat, last updated April 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/SDG_2_-_Zero_hunger.

224 “Venezuela, RB,” Sustainable Development Report, accessed August 2, 2024, <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/profiles/venezuela-rb>.

225 “Assessment of Malnutrition and Intestinal Parasitoses in the Context of Crisis-Hit Venezuela: A Policy Case Study,” *Frontiers*, last updated 05 March 2021, <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/sustainable-food-systems/articles/10.3389/fsufs.2021.634801/full#B37>.

was moderately food insecure, having child malnutrition rates increase to 26 percent in 2020.²²⁶ By addressing hunger, people are protecting their health, their academic performance, and their cognitive development.²²⁷

SDG 3: good health and well-being, aims to ensure healthy lives.²²⁸ It addresses maternal and child health, promotes the ending of epidemics, and calls for the reduction of non-communicable and mental diseases.²²⁹ When doing their research, delegates must consider that in Venezuela, access to healthcare facilities and medical resources is limited. Around 38 percent of Venezuelan families face daily challenges to access these services.²³⁰ Additionally, it is also important to aim for universal health coverage, which includes the access and distribution of safe and effective medicines and vaccines for all.²³¹

SDG 8. Decent work and economic growth aims to ensure job opportunities for all, including people with disabilities.²³² It also recognizes the importance of economic productivity to create well-paid quality jobs.²³³ The ongoing economic crisis in Venezuela affects the labor market in the country. The monthly minimum wage in Venezuela for 2024 is around USD four.²³⁴ Promoting decent work and economic growth allows citizens to access their basic needs and break the cycle of poverty.²³⁵

226 Frontiers, ‘Assessment of Malnutrition and Intestinal Parasitoses in the Context of Crisis-Hit Venezuela: A Policy Case Study.’
 227 “Why you should care about the hunger crisis,” Giving Compass, accessed August 2, 2024, <https://givingcompass.org/article/why-you-should-care-about-the-hunger-crisis>.
 228 “SDG 3 - Good Health and well-being,” Eurostat, last updated April 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=SDG_3_-_Good_Health_and_well-being&oldid=566842.
 229 Eurostat, “SDG 3 - Good Health and well-being.”
 230 “Access to health care remains a challenge for Venezuelans in host countries: IRC warns,” International Rescue Committee, last updated April 6, 2022, <https://www.rescue.org/press-release/access-health-care-remains-challenge-venezuelans-host-countries-irc-warns>
 231 “GOAL 3: GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING,” Joints SDG Fund, accessed August 2, 2024, <https://jointsdgfund.org/sustainable-development-goals/goal-3-good-health-and-well-being>
 232 “SDG 8 - Decent work and economic growth,” Eurostat, last updated April 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=SDG_8_-_Decent_work_and_economic_growth.
 233 Eurostat, “SDG 8 - Decent work and economic growth.”
 234 “Maduro mantiene salario mínimo congelado en Venezuela, pero sube ingreso básico vía bono,” France 24, last updated May 2, 2024, <https://www.france24.com/es/minuto-a-minuto/20240502-maduro-mantiene-salario-m%C3%ADnimo-congelado-en-venezuela-pero-sube-ingreso-b%C3%A1sico-v%C3%ADa-bono>
 235 “Decent Work and Economic Growth,” Close the Gap, accessed August 2, 2024, <https://www.closesthegapfoundation.org/glossary/decent-work-and-economic-growth>.
 236 Iberdrola, “What are the largest humanitarian crises in the planet today?”
 237 “Allies,” Vocabulary, accessed August 2, 2024, <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/allies>.

Bloc Analysis

Points of Division

Inside a humanitarian crisis, multiple factors and situations affect the people nationally and internationally.²³⁶ This is why countries worldwide tend to take a stance on international dilemmas. As a result of these positions, each country has a set of allies, which are considered states that can trust each other and that have their support in case of an international dispute.²³⁷ With these allies, delegates must create different blocs in committee to address the topic following each bloc’s priorities and beliefs.

To determine to which bloc a country belongs, delegates must research their country’s relation with Venezuela. If a country has made a public statement supporting or rejecting Venezuela’s government, determining the bloc is easy. However, those countries that have not emitted an opinion would need to do further research. Researching economic, military, political, or social ties with Venezuela, is a very important factor to consider. For example, countries that have important economic ties with the government would be in favor of them staying in power even though there is not a public statement declaring those facts. The same applies to those countries that have shown support for military services for Venezuela since they would be supporting the government.

It is also important to research if the country in question has signed any treaties or agreements with Venezuela. Any signed document must be considered when determining the blocs

and allies. By saying this, it is also important to research if a country is part of any organization or committee along with Venezuela since that information will help get to know how both countries work together. Taking these factors into consideration, the dais recommends dividing the committee into three blocs: countries that support Nicolás Maduro's regime, countries that do not support Nicolás Maduro's regime, and countries that have not shown a stance for or against Nicolás Maduro's regime.

Countries that Support Nicolás Maduro's Regime

Maduro's regime comes from the legacy of the former president Hugo Chávez. In 1999, Chávez inaugurated his presidency, which was characterized for being a socialist revolution, which believed that social revolution was necessary to generate structural changes in society.²³⁸ After 14 years in power, he made Venezuela resemble an authoritarian state.²³⁹ Since the 2018 elections, where Maduro's victory was declared fraudulent by several states. Nevertheless, many countries have expressed their position towards Venezuela's government.²⁴⁰ A way to determine if a country belongs to this bloc would be by researching any political or military ties with the Venezuelan government. Also, countries that have businesses with the government, whether it is related to trade or commerce could be part of this bloc.

For instance, China views the socialist regime in Venezuela as a geopolitical ally and an important trading partner. Over the past decade, Beijing has lent around USD 70 billion, mostly for development projects, in exchange for future oil shipments. Similarly, Russia has been one of Venezuela's closest allies since 2006, when President Hugo Chavez, signed a USD 2.9 billion arms deal in exchange for Russian fighter aircraft. The

relationship allowed Russia access to Venezuelan oil assets at below-market prices.²⁴¹ Other countries that fall within this bloc include Bolivia, Nicaragua, the Republic of Cuba, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the Republic of Türkiye.²⁴²

Countries that do not Support Nicolás Maduro's Regime

One way to determine if a country does not support the Venezuelan regime is to research any existing sanctions or limitations regarding trade, economic negotiations or even traveling to said country. The United States is a clear example of a state that does not recognize Maduro's government.²⁴³ For instance, the US government has applied numerous sanctions to Maduro's regime, which go from the prohibition of weapon sales to the suspension of direct flights from Venezuela to the US.²⁴⁴

Likewise, countries within this bloc are going to vote in favor of resolutions that will put pressure on Maduro in different international organizations. For instance, in August of this year, the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States (OAS) approved a resolution demanding that the Venezuelan authorities "expeditiously" publish the minutes of the July 28 elections in that country. The non-binding text was presented on behalf of Argentina, Canada, Chile, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Paraguay, Suriname, the United States, and Uruguay as co-sponsors.²⁴⁵

Countries that have not shown a stance for or against Nicolás Maduro's regime

Although the ongoing crisis in Venezuela has opened the opportunity for the creation of two opposite blocs, some states have not shown a strong stance on the topic. A way to understand if a country belongs to this bloc is by researching

²³⁸ "Venezuela's Chavez Era," Code of Federal Regulations, accessed August 2, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/venezuelas-chavez-era>.

²³⁹ Code of Federal Regulations, "Venezuela's Chavez Era."

²⁴⁰ "Venezuelans vote in highly charged election amid fraud worries," Voa News, last updated July 28, 2024, <https://www.voanews.com/a/venezuelans-vote-in-highly-charged-election-amid-fraud-worries/7715932.html>.

²⁴¹ Rocio Cara Labrador, "Maduro's Allies: Who Backs the Venezuelan Regime?" Council on Foreign Relations, February 5, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/maduros-allies-who-backs-venezuelan-regime>.

²⁴² Moises Rendon and Claudia Fernandez, "The Fabulous Five: How Foreign Actors Prop up the Maduro Regime in Venezuela," Center for Strategic and International Studies, last updated October 19, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/fabulous-five-how-foreign-actors-prop-maduro-regime-venezuela>.

²⁴³ "Venezuela: Overview of U.S. Sanctions Policy," Congressional Research Service, last updated April 24, 2024, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10715>.

²⁴⁴ Congressional Research Service, "Venezuela: Overview of U.S. Sanctions Policy."

²⁴⁵ "La OEA aprueba una resolución que pide publicar las actas electorales de Venezuela," Swiss Info, last updated August 16, 2024, <https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/la-oea-aprueba-una-resoluci%C3%B3n-que-pide-publicar-las-actas-electorales-de-venezuela/87008723>.

which countries usually abstain from motions that address the Venezuelan crisis. These countries might have commercial relations with Venezuela; however, they have not shown a political opinion. They might remain in a neutral position to avoid any further disagreements.²⁴⁶ Countries that fall within this bloc usually advocate for a diplomatic approach through dialogue instead of direct intervention. Some examples include Albania, Brazil, Colombia, Dominica, Mexico, Montenegro, Norway, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Slovenia.²⁴⁷

Committee Mission

The Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee is in charge of discussing human rights issues that affect people all over the world.²⁴⁸ As it is mentioned within its mandate, SOCHUM aims to protect vulnerable groups such as women, children, and refugees - all three affected by the crisis in Venezuela.²⁴⁹ This humanitarian crisis has multiple branches with different issues to address. It is within SOCHUM's scope and mandate to ensure that among all circumstances, Venezuelan's human rights are prioritized.

The 2022-2023 UN Humanitarian Response Plan for Venezuela estimated that there are around 5.2 million people in need of basic human rights such as health, food security, water, sanitation, and hygiene.²⁵⁰ Even though these statistics call for immediate intervention, SOCHUM cannot enact policies on its own. Delegates must remember that as part of the United Nations General Assembly, they can only recommend solutions for countries to implement.²⁵¹ Delegates can ask for support from other countries or organizations through SOCHUM's resolutions to address the humanitarian emergency that Venezuela is facing. Above all, the committee should aim to ensure life, freedom, and security in the country by proposing strategies that build support for humanitarian

action.

To address this humanitarian crisis it is important to propose solutions that tackle not only the roots of the problems but also the severe consequences that are affecting Venezuelans every day. Powerful debate is highly encouraged since it is essential to know all the different points of view from each country to write an effective resolution to address the issue at its best. Primarily, delegates must seek solutions to address the country's human rights violations, the ongoing refugee crisis, and the management of Venezuela's several interrelated difficulties.

²⁴⁶ "International Day of Neutrality 12 December," United Nations, accessed August 2, 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/observances/neutralty-day>.

²⁴⁷ Rajko Petrovic and Ivan Dujic, "THE ATTITUDE OF LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES TOWARDS VENEZUELA'S DUAL POWER SITUATION FROM 2019 TO 2022," last updated January 19, 2024, <https://thereviewofinternationalaffairs.rs/wp-content/uploads/RI/2024/1190/RI-2024-1190-article-2.pdf>

²⁴⁸ "Social, Humanitarian & Cultural Issues (Third Committee)," United Nations, accessed August 2, 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/ga/third/>.

²⁴⁹ United Nations, "Social, Humanitarian & Cultural Issues (Third Committee)."

²⁵⁰ Human rights watch, "Venezuela, events of 2022."

²⁵¹ "SOCHUM: Social, Humanitarian & Cultural Committee," IMUNA, accessed August 2, 2024, <https://imuna.org/nhsmun/nyc/committees/sochum-social-humanitarian-cultural-committee/>.



SOCHUM

NHSMUN 2025



TOPIC B:

PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN MYANMAR

Introduction

Since its independence in 1948, Myanmar has been plagued by a series of socio-political issues. The country has suffered from genocide and ethnic cleansing to mass poverty, disease, military coups, and power struggles. In the early 1970s, the country experienced the unlawful persecution of Rohingya Muslims by government officials and nationalist Buddhists. In 1987, they suffered some of the most deadly protests in the world. While people protested for democracy across the country, some parts witnessed violent civil unrest, resulting in the death of a student. Because of this, the people in Myanmar went to war with the government. This is known as the 8-8-88 protests for democracy.¹ After thousands dead, many injured, tortured, and arrested, the country finally achieved democracy. However, today's situation only seems to have reverted.

Over fifty-four years later, they continue to suffer from some of the same issues. Over the last decade, the military commenced a violent campaign against the Rohingya, an ethnic minority in the region. The United Nations estimates that since 2017, over 10,000 Rohingya have been killed, around 300 villages burned, and over 700,000 forced to leave the country.² Furthermore, with the rise in technology, the situation has only gotten worse. Social media platforms like Facebook have allowed people to spread hate and call for violence.³ Government officials and extremist groups have been creating anti-Rohingya groups to spread false information across the country. These have gone viral and have resulted in additional violence in the region.

Furthermore, in 2021, the *Tatmadaw*, Myanmar's military, staged a coup, taking over the government and establishing a military state. The democratically elected Prime Minister, Aung San Suu Kyi, along with numerous other ministers and leaders, were arrested and detained.⁴ Since then, there have been reports of them being tortured and beaten. The *Tatmadaw* has also begun to arrest, detain, and torture

civilians.⁵ They hope to suppress anybody who opposes their rule in the country. Since October 2023, over 600 have been killed, 20,000 detained, and countless more injured.⁶

To help fight against the government, in 2024, foreign civilians joined the rebellion by enlisting themselves in militia groups. These individuals are volunteering to join the resistance. Moreover, given their extensive experience, they now host training camps and exercises to allow people to fight against the government and military.⁷ As a result, violence has increased, forcing more people to flee their homes. More individuals are requesting refugee help in neighboring countries and need more aid, adding pressure on non-governmental and donation agencies. Meanwhile, the Junta government has enforced new policies restricting aid from being delivered in the country. They require organizations to maintain strict protocols on who receives the aid, and failure to maintain the policies destroys all aid. Therefore, the delegation of Myanmar to the United Nations has urged all countries to impose strict sanctions, embargoes, and restrictions on the government and country.⁸

1 "Independence Day of Myanmar, 4 January," Assumption University of Thailand, accessed August 6, 2024, <https://www.au.edu/news-importantdates/myanmar-national-day.html>.

2 United Nations, "Six years on, still no justice for Myanmar's Rohingya," press release, August 24, 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/08/1140032>.

3 "Myanmar Rohingya: What you need to know about the crisis." BBC News, January 23, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41566561>.

4 Tirana Hassan, "World Report 2024: Myanmar," Human Rights Watch, accessed June 10, 2024. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/myanmar>.

5 "Myanmar: Aung San Suu Kyi Sentenced" Human Rights Watch, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/12/06/myanmar-aung-san-suu-kyi-sentenced>.

6 "Myanmar: Human rights situation worsens as military lashes out indiscriminately amid losses - Türk," Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/01/myanmar-human-rights-situation-worsens-military-lashes-out-indiscriminately>.

7 Imtiaz Ahmed, "Foreign fighters in Myanmar: Implications for the region," *The Daily Star*, May 29, 2024, <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/foreign-fighters-myanmar-implications-the-region-3621146>.

8 "Spotlight interview with Maung Maung (Federation of Trade Unions of Burma)," interview by Samuel Grumiau, International Trade Union Confederation, May 6, 2009, <https://www.ituc-csi.org/spotlight-interview-with-maung,3833>.

Amnesty International has described the ongoing crisis as one of the world's most significant humanitarian conflicts, with millions displaced, forced to flee their homes and seek refuge in bordering countries.⁹ The situation in Myanmar is not only characterized by violence but also the systemic denial of human rights, the pain of fleeing civilians, and relentless ethnic cleansing. Despite the persistent violence, the international community continues to fail to take decisive action. Multiple resolutions calling for international cooperation have been vetoed by the Security Council.

Even though the United Nations mandate is to prevent war and conflict and maintain peace, for 54 years the international community has failed to protect the people of Myanmar. Although the conflict is between the government and the resistance, the innocents are most affected.

History and Description of the Issue

State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) & The 8-8-88 Protests

Over the years, the people of Myanmar have faced many social and political conflicts, including coups, protests, military rules, unlawful killing, power struggles, and violence. Since its independence in 1948, the people of Myanmar have had to fight for peace and democracy.¹⁰

The central conflict began in September 1987 when the government withdrew multiple denominations of local currency.¹¹ Simply put, some coins and notes were now worth nothing and unacceptable as legal tender. Therefore, years of savings were wiped from banks. Students led small protests and uprisings throughout the country to challenge this new

policy. However, it eventually led to one of the world's largest protests that left thousands dead and even more injured.

On March 12, 1988, a small fight broke out between locals and the military and resulted in the death of a student.¹² This resulted in significant uprisings in the region to protest the use of force and violence by the military. The student became a symbol against the government. In response to the protests, the military government deployed anti-riot police and allowed them to use violence. Reports showcased the military using violence against any large assembly of people, even if they were protesting peacefully. As more people were killed, the country identified new symbols to continue their movement. One example can be seen with the 'white bridge' that was renamed the 'red bridge'. It previously was a symbol of peace and hope that now references the blood spilled because of the conflict.¹³ Eventually, protests spread throughout the country as the people fought against the military for a democratic government.

During this period, the government was led by the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSP), which held office and power in Myanmar from 1962 to 1988.¹⁴ Under their leadership, Myanmar continued to seclude itself from the world. The BSP discouraged tourism, trade, and foreign direct investment, resulting in significant economic repercussions.¹⁵

The people wanted a democratic leader, which led to the "8888 uprising" which was started by students in Yangon on August 8, 1988. Student protests spread throughout the country and thousands of people joined. They successfully pressured the government and President Ne Win, resulting in his resignation. President Ne Win wrote a message to all the protestors in his resignation. He said, "If the army shoots, it hits; it does not aim into the air."¹⁶ He hoped to suggest that

⁹ "Human rights in Myanmar Amnesty International." Amnesty International, accessed June 10, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/asia-and-the-pacific/south-east-asia-and-the-pacific/myanmar/report-myanmar/>

¹⁰ P. Jittree, "Independence Day of Myanmar, 4 January," Assumption University of Thailand, accessed September 15, 2024, <https://www.au.edu/news-importantdates/myanmar-national-day.html>.

¹¹ "Burma: Justice for 1988 Massacres (On 25th Anniversary of Crackdown, Accountability, Rule of Law Remain Elusive)," Human Rights Watch, August 6, 2013, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/08/06/burma-justice-1988-massacres>.

¹² "Timeline: Myanmar's '8/8/88' Uprising." NPR, August 8, 2013, <https://www.npr.org/2013/08/08/210233784/timeline-myanmars-8-8-88-uprising>.

¹³ "When a White Bridge Ran Red With Students' Blood." The Irrawaddy, March 16, 2019, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/specials/on-this-day/white-bridge-ran-red-students-blood.html>.

¹⁴ "Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), The," Harvard Divinity School, accessed September 15, 2024, <https://rpl.hds.harvard.edu/faq/burma-socialist-programme-party-bspp>.

¹⁵ "Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), The."

¹⁶ "The 26-year rule of General Ne Win's Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) came to an end on 18 September 1988," Amnesty

the military would continue to use violence to suppress people using violence. The BSP often used violence as a method to protect social order and peace in the region by hoping to scare protesters. President Sein Lewin then replaced President Ne Win. In the past, Sein Lewin, a member of BSP, ordered and instructed the military to arrest and kill people across the region. As a result, protests reached unprecedented levels. Subsequently, just 14 days after being appointed President, Sein Lewin resigned.¹⁷

With President Ne Win's and President Sein Lewin's resignations just 14 days apart, the Burma Social Party began losing regional power and was soon replaced. On September 18, 1988, Chief of Staff Saw Maung of the Armed Forces unexpectedly led a military coup, overthrowing the government and establishing a military regime. After taking over the government, Saw Maung immediately established a military State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and the Law and Order Restoration Council (LORC) and declared martial law.¹⁸ Martial law is a that permits the military to have absolute authority and control over the country. This allowed him to make political decisions, create laws, and

enforce policies unilaterally.

Over the years, the SLORC implemented and enforced controversial policies that concerned the world. One of the many included targeting and cracking down on any political opponents.¹⁹ Anybody who challenged their control and power was arrested and met with violence and torture. The most evident was when, in 1990, the National League of Democracy (NLD) and Aung San Suu Kyi won the election. However, to remain in power, the military suppressed members of the party and its supporters. At least three officials of the NLD were reportedly killed after torture and inhumane conditions.²⁰ Moreover, civil servants who voiced their political views against the SLORC and Saw Maung were punished. During this period, the government even legalized the death penalty and sentenced hundreds of political prisoners to it. About 24 percent of the prisoners were sentenced to the death penalty by military courts and the remaining from regular judicial courts.²¹ Over time, clear evidence of torture was brought before the world.

Overall, the world witnessed a concerning violation of human

International, accessed July 11, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/asa160101990en.pdf>.

17 Amnesty International, "The 26-Year Rule of General Ne Win's Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) Came to an End."

18 Amnesty International, "The 26-Year Rule of General Ne Win's Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) Came to an End."

19 Amnesty International, "The 26-Year Rule of General Ne Win's Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) Came to an End."

20 "Human Rights Watch World Report 1992 - Burma (Myanmar)," Refworld, January 1, 1992, <https://www.refworld.org/reference/annualreport/hrw/1992/en/91375>.

21 Amnesty International, "The 26-Year Rule of General Ne Win's Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) Came to an End."

An activist with a message commemorating the anniversary of the 8888 uprising

Credit: Alisdare Hickson



rights, including the right to free speech, political views, and more. This blatant violation showed how powerful the government and military were. Moreover, with tourism and foreign investment being limited, Myanmar and its people were cut out from the world, leaving them to fight the battle by themselves. Over the next two years, Myanmar's people demanded a democratically elected government. They picked arms, began nationwide protests and riots, and advocated against the LORC and SLORC. Despite hundreds being killed, thousands injured, and millions forced to flee the country, the people of Myanmar were finally successful. Through aggressive measures, the public could finally overthrow the government and establish its first democratic election.²²

The military government and the NLD led by Aung San Suu Kyi mainly contested the election. Aung San, a Burmese citizen who lived abroad, only returned to the country to support her sick mother. Upon her return, she witnessed the impact of the military rule and unlawful killing.²³ Although she planned on staying in Myanmar for only a short while, she was so impacted by the situation of her country that she decided to remain and bring peace back to Myanmar. Over time, she began peaceful pro-democracy movements spreading across the country.²⁴ Her movement shocked the government, which feared her. As a result, in July 1989, she was detained and placed under house arrest.²⁵ The military government offered her an opportunity to flee to exile and attempted to persuade her multiple times but failed.²⁶ She wanted to stay back in her country but remained incommunicado until 1995.²⁷ While she was under house arrest, the SLORC agreed to declare an election for head of state. The 1990 election saw a landslide win for Aung San's National League for Democracy. The NLD gained over 80 percent of the votes.²⁸ However, the SLORC

claimed that the election was not legitimate, voided the results, and remained in power under multiple different names for the next 20 years.²⁹ Eventually, the country successfully hosted its first democratic election in 2008.³⁰ The journey to democracy was long and bloody for the people of Myanmar.

Overall, the 1988 Protests saw many human rights violated as the conflict reached alarming levels. Both sides resorted to violent measures and over a million people had to flee to neighboring countries, including Bangladesh, China, India, Laos, and Thailand.³¹ Meanwhile, owing to disagreements at international forums and the use of veto powers, the international community remained unable to take any definitive action against the government. They merely condemned actions, urged for peace, and requested ceasefire agreements. The world continued to debate whether or not to accept the NLD as a legitimate government and how to tackle the present military government and remain trapped in its bureaucratic requirements.³² While the world debated, innocents continued to be killed as international bodies failed to reach a consensus. While each member state is responsible for protecting people and enforcing global policy, neither was achieved during this period.

Myanmar's current socio-political scenario is incredibly similar to the situation during the 8888 protests. Similar circumstances occurred both times. The small protests and uprisings, eventually, led to a coup by the military to take over the government. The military then implemented martial law and declared the previous elections void and illegitimate.

The 2021 Coup In Myanmar

On February 1, 2021, the government was en route to

22 Amnesty International, "The 26-Year Rule of General Ne Win's Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) Came to an End."

23 Kenneth Pletcher, "Aung San Suu Kyi | Biography, Nobel Prize, & Facts," Encyclopedia Britannica, June 19, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Aung-San-Suu-Kyi>.

24 Pletcher, "Aung San Suu Kyi | Biography, Nobel Prize, & Facts."

25 Pletcher, "Aung San Suu Kyi | Biography, Nobel Prize, & Facts."

26 Pletcher, "Aung San Suu Kyi | Biography, Nobel Prize, & Facts."

27 Pletcher, "Aung San Suu Kyi | Biography, Nobel Prize, & Facts."

28 "Myanmar junta annuls election held 20 years ago." Reuters, March 11, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE62A15L/>.

29 Reuters, "Myanmar Junta Annuls Election Held 20 Years Ago."

30 Raisina Debates and Sreeparna Banerjee. "The democracy conundrum in Myanmar," Observer Research Foundation, September 15, 2022, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-democracy-conundrum-in-myanmar>.

31 "Key issues for refugees from Myanmar (Burma) - Refugee Council," Refugee Council of Australia, March 1, 2021, <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/myanmar-burma/>.

32 David I. Steinberg, "Burma/Myanmar and the Dilemmas of U.S. Foreign Policy," *Www.Jstor.Org* 21, no. 2 (August 1999) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25798457?seq=7>.



Protest against military coup
 Credit: Ninjastrikers

announce and endorse the results of the November 2020 elections. The elections saw Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD take an overwhelming 83 percent majority.³³ Meanwhile, near the parliament, a fitness instructor recording a lesson witnessed something that would impact the whole country.³⁴ The *Tatmadaw* proceeded to arrest Aung San Suu Kyi, President U Win Myint, Cabinet, and other Chief ministers and eventually took over the parliament and the country. Subsequently, Min Aung Hlaing became the leader of Myanmar. Min Aung had previously led the *Tatmadaw* and ordered the coup; he now serves as the head of state. This subtopic provides detailed context into the timeline of events, the interests of the stakeholders, and the relevant social and humanitarian impacts.

Upon arresting Aung San and President U Win Myint, the military established themselves as the new government and declared martial law. Days after Aung San's arrest, the military announced a series of charges against her that would result

in her being sentenced to prison for over 100 years. On February 3, 2021, the police announced the first set of charges that included the possession of walkie-talkies without proper paperwork.³⁵ A few days later, they also announced that she breached COVID-19 regulations and incited public unrest.³⁶ Eventually, Aung San was charged with over a dozen crimes. In 2022, she was found guilty and sentenced to four years of military prison for the possession of walkie-talkies and breaching COVID-19 protocol.³⁷ Since then, the military has shared limited information regarding legal procedures and the well-being of Aung San while also preventing her lawyers from talking to the public.

While the democratically elected government was being prosecuted and put behind bars, the country witnessed significant uprisings against the military. On February 6, 2021, to help deal with the uprisings, the Junta military limited internet access for the state.³⁸ They hoped to limit information sharing and communication to prevent

33 "Myanmar: Aung San Suu Kyi's party wins majority in election," BBC News, November 13, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-54899170>.

34 "Myanmar coup: Fitness instructor unwittingly films video as takeover unfolds," BBC News, February 2, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-55901774>.

35 "Aung San Suu Kyi found guilty over walkie-talkie charges," Al Jazeera, January 10, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/10/aung-san-suu-kyi-found-guilty-over-walkie-talkie-charges-reports>.

36 Al Jazeera, "Aung San Suu Kyi Found Guilty over Walkie-Talkie Charges."

37 Rebecca Ratcliffe, "Aung San Suu Kyi handed four-year jail term in military 'courtroom circus,'" The Guardian, January 11, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/10/aun-san-suu-kyi-sentenced-to-four-years-in-prison-for-walkie-talkie-and-covid-rule-breaches>.

38 Minami Funakoshi and Andrea Januta, "Myanmar's internet suppression," Reuters, April 6, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/graphics/MYANMAR-POLITICS/INTERNET-RESTRICTION/rlgpdbreepo/>.

coordinated protests and uprisings nationwide.³⁹ The rationale was that in the past, social media platforms such as Facebook were used as breeding groups for insurgencies and spreading hate throughout the region.⁴⁰ In the meanwhile, many reports were emerging that suggested the military using unlawful and violent methods to suppress any protests. During that period, the world also witnessed the *Tatmadaw* use airstrikes against civilian populations, destroying villages and killing dozens.⁴¹ The severe and unparalleled use of force against its people has become a trend for the government. They continued to target any gatherings, known locations, or points of activity of the People's Defence Forces (PDF). The PDF is a resistance group that claims to protect the people of Myanmar against the tyranny of the government through armed resistance. The presence of such groups has added to the additional violence in the region. Therefore, as violence grew in the region and internet access was limited, many activists and global human rights agencies called it a violation of freedom of speech. In addition, they also suggest that the military is limiting access to prevent information sharing with the international community regarding the unlawful killings and violence in the region.⁴² Felicia Anthonio of Access Now claimed that “the government is cracking down on protesters to ensure they do not let the rest of the world know what is happening.”⁴³

Soon after the coup, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) held an emergency meeting to discuss the situation in Myanmar. Strong remarks were made by world leaders regarding the atrocities committed by the Junta government. Delegations also requested and urged the government to release Aung San Suu Kyi and other ministers and officials.⁴⁴

President Joe Biden of the United States said, “The military must relinquish the power it seized and demonstrate respect for the will of the people of Burma as expressed in their November 8th election (...) Moreover, finally, as protests grow, violence against those asserting their democratic rights is unacceptable, and we’re going to keep calling it out. The people of Burma are making their voices heard. Moreover, the world is watching.”⁴⁵ Despite the calls to end violence in the region, the UNSC failed to make a collective decision regarding actions that need to be taken to protect the people of Myanmar. The People's Republic of China vetoed the council's statement against the coup and the *Tatmadaw*. China and its ally, the Russian Federation, have continued to veto any UNSC resolution that substantially restricts the Junta government, preventing coordinated worldwide sanctions, embargoes, and trade restrictions.⁴⁶ Thus, the power of the veto and its ability to limit the UNSC's actions in times of conflict are questioned.

As a result, many countries, such as the US, EU Member states, and the UK, were forced to make independent decisions and actions to restrict the power of the Burmese government.⁴⁷ Collectively, they implemented arms and other embargoes, including but not limited to travel, materials used for weapon creation, and fuel, on the country to hopefully prevent the sale of weapons and further violence in the region.⁴⁸ Despite the strong condemnation of member states and the UNSC, Russia, and China, over time, continue to be some of the largest exporters of weapons to Myanmar. They supply sophisticated drones, planes, tracking devices, air defense, surveillance systems, and more.⁴⁹ The impact of it has been catastrophic in increasing the violence in the region. The situation at one

39 Funakoshi and Januta, “Myanmar's Internet Suppression.”

40 Funakoshi and Januta, “Myanmar's Internet Suppression.”

41 Tommy Walker, “Myanmar: Why is the junta ramping up airstrikes?,” Dw.Com, April 14, 2023, <https://www.dw.com/en/myanmar-why-is-the-junta-ramping-up-airstrikes/a-65318804>.

42 “We cannot accept the coup: Myanmar protests despite internet blackout,” The Guardian, February 7, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/06/myanmar-military-shuts-down-internet-as-thousands-protest-against-coup>.

43 Funakoshi and Januta, “Myanmar's Internet Suppression.”

44 United Nations, “Security Council Press Statement on Situation in Myanmar,” press release, February 4, 2021, <https://press.un.org/en/2021/sc14430.doc.htm>.

45 “Remarks by President Biden on the Administration's Response to the Coup in Burma,” The White House, February 11, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/10/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-administrations-response-to-the-coup-in-burma/>.

46 “Myanmar coup: China blocks UN condemnation as protest grows,” BBC News, February 3, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-55913947>.

47 John Curtis, “Myanmar: Military takeover and international response,” UK Parliament: House of Commons Library, February 16, 2021, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/myanmar-military-takeover-and-international-response/>.

48 Curtis, “Myanmar: Military Takeover and International Response.”

49 “Russia's new wave of arms sales to Myanmar implicate international businesses,” Justice For Myanmar, accessed September 15, 2024, <https://www.justiceformyanmar.org/stories/russias-new-wave-of-arms-sales-to-myanmar-implicate-international-businesses>.

point was so dire that even the delegation of Myanmar to the UN called for additional sanctions to be placed. Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun of Myanmar to the UN claimed, “We thought that the member states of ASEAN could take strong and unified actions against the military (...) but it just hasn’t happened yet.”⁵⁰ He publicly pleaded for member states to enforce strict sanctions against the country, limiting the power of the military and hopefully allowing the country to return to its democratic state.⁵¹ He continues to ask the international community to take decisive action against his country to help promote peace and protect the innocent.

Overall, the military continues to be incredibly powerful in the region. Since its independence, Myanmar has served as the home to dozens of ethnic and religious minorities. Unfortunately, they have experienced decades of internal conflict, resulting in minor internal uprisings. As a result, the military continued to strengthen itself to maintain and preserve peace in the region if a major uprising occurred.⁵² In addition to possessing relevant arms and weapons, the military also possessed significant institutional power. In 2007, when democratic parties and the military came to a power-sharing agreement, they agreed to give the *Tatmadaw* a minimum of 25 percent of the parliamentary seats.⁵³ The remaining 75 percent was allocated through general democratic elections. Therefore, the military often also firmly controlled the parliament and judicial matters. Thus, they could effectively order a coup, take control, and withstand any armed pressure from the people.

Although the military only retook control of the government in 2021, critics believed that Aung San followed direct orders from the military and Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, leader

of the *Tatmadaw*. While the Burma Socialist Party remained in power after winning landslide elections in 2015, by 80 percent, and in 2020, by 83 percent, theories suggest that they were only figureheads.⁵⁴ Critics argue several sources that help suggest this. For example, Aung San was never the country’s leader but instead was called the State Counsellor. The Burmese Constitution requires an election candidate’s entire family to be citizens.⁵⁵ However, Aung San’s children were not citizens of Myanmar, and hence, she was outlawed from running for President or Prime Minister. In addition, the BSP constantly ignored any actions undertaken by the military regardless of their impact or legitimacy. Specifically, the military conducted a brutal campaign against the Rohingya, forcing them to flee the country or be killed.⁵⁶ As a result, many claimed that the de facto Head of State was Min Aung Hlaing all along, while Aung San was merely a “puppet head.”

Subsequently, international investigations questioned why the coup was planned for 2021. Unfortunately, there is yet to be an international consensus. Hence, there is a wide range of theories and ideas regarding the military’s motives behind the coup. The military has claimed and asserted its lack of faith in the November 2020 elections, which saw the BSP win again. Min Aung claims that the 2020 elections were fraudulent and rigged by the BSP.⁵⁷ In addition, votes were falsified, and all voters could not vote due to conflict and COVID-19.⁵⁸ Therefore, the results did not represent the country’s view. Very specifically, they claimed that Aung San, the Burma Socialist Party, and affiliates had been “involved in electoral processes, election fraud, and lawless actions in the 2020 multiparty democracy general election”, accusing them of “violating the

50 Eric Peters, “Myanmar envoy to U.N. calls for more pressure on homeland’s junta,” *Kyodo News+*, September 10, 2023, <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2023/09/08e6d30f1545-myanmar-envoy-to-un-calls-for-more-pressure-on-homelands-junta.html>.

51 Yen Nee Lee, “Coups must fail: Myanmar’s U.N. envoy pleads for tougher sanctions against the military,” *CNBC*, March 19, 2021, <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/03/19/myanmars-un-envoy-pleads-for-tougher-sanctions-against-military-junta.html>.

52 Jamie Tarabay, “Myanmar’s military: The power Aung San Suu Kyi can’t control,” *CNN*, December 6, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/09/21/asia/myanmar-military-the-real-power/index.html>.

53 “The struggle for democracy in Myanmar/Burma,” *Brookings*, July 14, 2015, <https://www.brookings.edu/events/the-struggle-for-democracy-in-myanmarburma/>.

54 “What’s happening in Myanmar? | Start Here,” *Al Jazeera*, February 14, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3plcc7bRLA>.

55 “Myanmar 2008 Constitution - Constitute,” *Constitute Project*, accessed September 15, 2024, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Myanmar_2008.

56 Helen Regan, “Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi says genocide claims are ‘misleading,’” *CNN*, December 11, 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/12/11/asia/aung-san-suu-kyi-genocide-defense-intl-hnk/index.html>.

57 Jack Goodman, “Myanmar coup: Does the army have evidence of voter fraud?,” *BBC News*, February 5, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/55918746>.

58 “Myanmar Coup Explained: Protests, Military, Min Aung Hlaing & Aung San Suu Kyi,” *Behind the News*, February 17, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhOV4fVJVAg>.

existing laws in assigning the election sub-commissions.”⁵⁹ In response, the Asian Network for Free Elections declared that the election “was, by and large, representative of the will of the people of Myanmar” and that minor irregularities would not have changed the election results.⁶⁰ Reports confirm that approximately 27.5 million voted out of the 37 million registered voters.⁶¹ This demonstrates a 70 percent voter turnout.⁶² The military instead disregarded the reports and claimed to host re-election after one year of martial law. This would allow them to ensure the safety of the people and create relevant measures to prevent election fraud. However, as of August 15, 2024, an election has yet to be hosted or announced.

On the other hand, other theories suggest that Min Aung Hlaing staged the coup for personal interests.⁶³ Min Aung has been on top of the UN’s and the world’s most-wanted list since he ordered a genocidal campaign against the Rohingya. He is wanted for ordering murder, destruction of property, torture, detention, and violation of human rights, amongst many other things.⁶⁴ Therefore, by taking over the country and declaring martial law, he has given himself the power to rule the country and protect himself from any foreign action against himself.⁶⁵ Overall, there are significant correlations between the 1988 coup and the 2021 coup. As a result, it remains the international community’s responsibility not to make similar mistakes again.

The Rohingya Crisis

The Rohingya are an ethnic minority that majorly resides in the state of Rakhine in Myanmar. They are frequently quoted as “[the] world’s most persecuted minority.”⁶⁶ The 2000 Human Rights Watch Report suggests that over 1.1 million Rohingya currently live in the region.⁶⁷ Although over a million live, they are denied citizenship by the government of Myanmar. The government alleges that they illegally immigrated to the region over many years, resulting in them not being eligible for Burmese citizenship.⁶⁸ Their alleged illegal immigration has resulted in a significant conflict between them and *Tatmadaw* over the years. Hence, for the vast majority, the Rohingya continued to be persecuted and targeted. Over time, they have also experienced a significant violation of fundamental human rights. Some of the many include the inability to vote, only being allowed to have two children, requiring permission to marry, moving to a new home, traveling outside their town, and more.⁶⁹ With the military attempting to force them out of the region, they have endured a decade-long massacre that has forced them to relocate and seek refuge in neighboring countries such as Bangladesh, India, Thailand, and China. This decade-long massacre has only increased with the presence of local militia, extremist groups, and further hate being spread through social media platforms such as Facebook.⁷⁰

While the conflict has remained aggressive throughout, it significantly escalated in 2017. On August 25, 2017, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) attacked about

59 Rebecca Ratcliffe, “Myanmar: Aung San Suu Kyi charged with election fraud and ‘lawless actions,’” *The Guardian*, November 16, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/16/myanmar-aung-san-suu-kyi-charged-with-election-and-lawless-actions>.

60 “Myanmar’s election reflected people’s will, monitoring group says,” *Reuters*, May 17, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/myanmars-election-reflected-peoples-will-monitoring-group-says-2021-05-17/>.

61 “Myanmar election: No evidence fraud in 2020 vote, observers say,” *BBC News*, May 17, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-57144397>.

62 “IFES Election Guide | Country Profile: Myanmar,” *Election Guide*, accessed September 15, 2024, <https://www.electionguide.org/countries/id/148/>.

63 Zabeena Rasheed, “Why Myanmar’s military seized power in a coup,” *Al Jazeera*, February 2, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/1/who-is-min-aung-hlaing>.

64 “UN: ‘Wanted for mass murder’ posters target Myanmar’s top general,” *Amnesty International*, August 13, 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/09/unwanted-for-mass-murder-posters-target-myanmars-top-general/>.

65 Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°170 and International Crisis Group, “The Deadly Stalemate in Post-coup Myanmar,” *Www.Jstor.Org*, October 20, 2021, 1–20. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep36475>.

66 “Who are the Rohingya?” *Al Jazeera*, April 18, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2018/4/18/who-are-the-rohingya>.

67 “Burma/Bangladesh: Burmese Refugees In Bangladesh - Historical Background,” *Human Rights Watch*, accessed September 15, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/burma/burm005-01.htm>.

68 Human Rights Watch, “Burma/Bangladesh: Burmese Refugees In Bangladesh - Historical Background.”

69 Eleanor Albert and Lindsay Maizland, “The Rohingya Crisis,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, January 23, 2020, accessed August 6, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/background/rohingya-crisis>.

70 Albert and Maizland, “The Rohingya Crisis.”



Rohingya People in Rakhine State Edit this at Structured Data on Commons

Credit: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

30 military outposts in the Rakhine state.⁷¹ The ARSA is an armed militia group that supports the Rohingya and uses various means to protect them against unlawful judicial policies. The attack on August 25 came as part of a campaign to protect the Rohingya and stand against the local military and authority through a series of coordinated attacks. After the attack, the military increased their attacks on the ARSA and the larger Rohingya population. The government even declared the ARSA and all other Rohingya-based militia groups as extremist organizations. They subsequently conducted a disproportionate and unlawful campaign, killing, sexually assaulting, and torturing people along with burning and destroying villages.⁷² Within the first few months, over 6,000 people were killed, and hundreds of villages were left destroyed. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres’ “call[ed] on Myanmar authorities to suspend military action, end the violence, uphold the rule of law and recognize the right of return of all those who had to leave the country.”⁷³ However,

despite this, there was little impact on the situation. The conflict continues to be incredibly prevalent, with more and more Rohingya being killed and forced to leave.

To document the atrocities, in 2018 the Human Rights Council during its 39th session released a report calling for alleged genocide being conducted by the Myanmar Government.⁷⁴ The United Nations suggests that genocide occurs when “a crime [is] committed with the intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, in whole or in part.”⁷⁵ Through the report, the Human Rights Council wanted to bring the world’s attention to the matter and hopefully alert the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC). The report alleged that the Burmese military intentionally attacked the Rohingya with the goal of either killing them or forcing them to leave the region.⁷⁶ Moreover, it provided extensive evidence, information, and details regarding the many human rights

71 Thu Aung, “Muslim Community Condemns Rakhine Violence,” *The Irrawaddy*, August 28, 2018, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/muslim-community-condemns-rakhine-violence.html>.

72 “Myanmar: Attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army on Hindus in northern Rakhine State - Amnesty International,” Amnesty International, June 1, 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa16/8454/2018/en/>.

73 Margaret Besheer, “UN Chief Assails ‘Ethnic Cleansing’ of Myanmar’s Rohingyas,” *Voice of America*, September 13, 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/a/united-nations-antonio-guterres-myanmar-rohingya-ethnic-cleansing/4027395.html>.

74 “Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on Myanmar.” Human Rights Council, September 12, 2018. Accessed July 18, 2024. https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/FFM-Myanmar/A_HRC_39_64.pdf.

75 “Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide,” United Nations, December 9, 1948, https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.1_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf.

76 Human Rights Council, “Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar.”

violations and how relevant government officials are directly ordering the military.⁷⁷ Lastly, it goes as far as naming generals and senior officials who should be investigated by the ICC for committing war crimes and crimes against humanity. This implies that they committed a violation of the laws of war that gives rise to individual criminal responsibility for actions by combatants in action. It also implies that crimes committed as part of a large-scale attack against civilians according to the Rome Statute.⁷⁸ This report provided clear and definitive evidence regarding the atrocities committed in the region.

In the following year, Gambia on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Corporation, filed a case against Myanmar in the ICJ. They argued that Myanmar violated Article 9 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention).⁷⁹ In 1956 Myanmar signed and ratified the Genocide Convention, making it liable if it was proven that it violated it.⁸⁰ Soon after, the ICJ issued a warning to Myanmar to take all required precautions and steps to end the genocide. They also required them to “take effective measures to prevent the destruction and ensure the preservation of evidence.”⁸¹ Proceeding, Myanmar submitted a series of preliminary objections to the matter. The first one stated that Gambia was acting as a proxy of the Organization of Islamic Corporation, which is not a member of the UN and hence not a member of the ICJ. The second one stated that Gambia lacked standing to bring the case. The third one implied the Court lacked jurisdiction. The fourth one stated that the application was “inadmissible because there was no dispute between the Parties under the Genocide Convention.”⁸²

Subsequently, the Court rejected all four objections, noting the

Convention’s goal to protect the global common interest. In addition, with the Gambia being a fellow signatory, the country was within its rights to hold other members accountable for their actions by the Genocide Convention. In 2019, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Netherlands, Denmark, and Canada signed a joint declaration of intervention.⁸³ The Maldives followed suit in November 2023.⁸⁴ Unfortunately, as of July 2024, the ICJ has not reached a consensus, as Myanmar has been given until December 16, 2024, to reply to Gambia’s arguments. A question the international community must consider is the impact of delays in decision-making. While the Court has been working to identify whether the *Tatmadaw* and the Burmese government can be held liable for genocide, innocents continue to be murdered. While the Court is accessing the evidence, millions are forced to flee their homes. Moreover, while countries issue objections and responses, millions are starving without access to food, water, clothing, and shelter. Over this period, forced individuals continued to seek refuge across neighboring states, predominantly Bangladesh. Most of them flee to the Kutupalong and Nayapara refugee camps near the Bangladesh-Myanmar.⁸⁵ Both these camps have now become the most densely populated camps in the world.

Lastly, while the Rohingya can flee the country and safely seek refuge in these camps, their lives are anything but easy, especially in heavy monsoon seasons. The region has tropical weather and experiences monsoons or rainy seasons from late May to early October yearly with heavy rain and strong winds. During this time, with waterlogging and poor sanitation systems, the region also experienced many water-borne

77 Human Rights Council, “Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar.”

78 Human Rights Council, “Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar.”

79 “The Republic of The Gambia institutes proceedings against the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and asks the Court to indicate provisional measures.” International Court Of Justice, November 11, 2019, <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/178/178-20191111-PRE-01-00-EN.pdf>.

80 United Nations, “Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.”

81 “ICJ – The Gambia v. Myanmar | IIMM,” United Nations, accessed September 15, 2024, <https://iimm.un.org/icj-the-gambia-v-myanmar/>.

82 “Reaction to the ruling by the International Court of Justice to reject Myanmar’s preliminary objections – Statement by Nicholas Koumjian, Head of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar | IIMM,” United Nations, accessed September 15, 2024, <https://iimm.un.org/reaction-to-the-ruling-by-the-international-court-of-justice-to-reject-myanmars-preliminary-objections-statement-by-nicholas-koumjian-head-of-the-independent-investigative-mechanism-for-my/>.

83 “Joint Declaration of Intervention of Canada, The Kingdom of Denmark, The French Republic, The Federal Republic of Germany, The Kingdom of The Netherlands, and The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland,” International Court of Justice, November 11, 2019, <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/178/178-20231115-wri-01-00-en.pdf>.

84 “Declaration of Intervention of The Republic of Maldives | Application of The Convention on The Prevention and Punishment of The Crime of Genocide,” International Court of Justice, November 10, 2023, <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/178/178-20231115-wri-02-00-en.pdf>.

85 “Rohingya Refugee Crisis Explained,” UNHCR, August 23, 2023, <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/rohingya-refugee-crisis-explained/>.

diseases and natural disasters. For example, mosquitos and poor water quality result in hepatitis, malaria, dengue, and chikungunya spreading in the region. Moreover, with loose soil, the region experiences floods and landslides, causing significant damage to the already weak camps. These flimsy shelters are often easily damaged; many flow away with the rain and water. Furthermore, it creates not just inconvenient but also unsanitary defecation facilities, which result in further illness. As a result, during those months, children and the elderly are the most at risk and often die from sickness. The last part of this subtopic hopes to depict the scope and level of critical problems experienced by the Rohingya in camps.

The main problem has been constant floods. Between July 27 and August 3, 2021, within one singular week, the area received over 700 mm of rainfall.⁸⁶ Out of which, 300mm were received within 24 hours.⁸⁷ Myanmar receives between 500mm to 1000mm in a year.⁸⁸ The excessive rain triggered severe flooding, landslides, and chaos. With rainwater reaching

⁸⁶ Iffath Yeasmine, “Flooding, fires and COVID bring fresh challenges for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh,” United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees, September 3, 2021, <https://www.unhcr.org/us/news/stories/flooding-fires-and-covid-bring-fresh-challenges-rohingya-refugees-bangladesh>.

⁸⁷ Hannah Macdonald, and Ehsanul Hoque, “Floods bring new misery for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh camps,” United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees US, July 30, 2021, <https://www.unhcr.org/us/news/stories/floods-bring-new-misery-rohingya-refugees-bangladesh-camps>.

⁸⁸ “World Bank Climate Change Knowledge Portal,” Climate Knowledge Portal, accessed September 15, 2024, <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/myanmar/climate-data-historica>.

⁸⁹ “Floods bring new misery for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh camps,” UNHCR US, December 12, 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/us/news/stories/floods-bring-new-misery-rohingya-refugees-bangladesh-camps>.

⁹⁰ Md. Ariful Anwar Khan, Richard James Maude, Sharmin Musa, and Hamida Khanum. “Epidemiology of malaria in Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh within 2017–2020,” *Malaria Journal* 22, no. 1 (September 28, 2023) <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12936-023-04688-y>.

as high as people’s necks, people were forced to relocate again. Most individuals fled with their stoves, gas cylinders, and solar panels as they were absolute necessities.⁸⁹ The rain resulted in the death of 6 refugees, while thousands had their homes washed away. Moreover, by leaving behind most of their belongings, much aid also gets lost and destroyed in the process.

Additionally, diseases like malaria remain one of the biggest killers in these camps. The National Library of Medicine estimates that over thirty thousand patients were detected with Malaria in the region in 2017-2022.⁹⁰ Additionally, over 60 percent of the patients were under 15. Malaria spreads from insect bites, mainly mosquito bites. When a malaria-infected mosquito bites you, it spreads the virus to you and bites all the others. The stagnant water in the region is the perfect breeding ground for these mosquitos.

Cholera is another water-borne disease that attacks one’s



Rohingya Camp in Cox’s Bazar

Credit: Voice of America

digestive system. It causes severe dehydration and diarrhea and can often even result in death. It spreads due to unsanitary defecation facilities, contaminated water and food. With all three being critical issues in the camps, the Rohingya are incredibly vulnerable to cholera. To address this issue, UNICEF funded one of the world's most significant cholera vaccination programs, which required high logistical planning and funding. The vaccine drive had 245 mobile stations providing over 900,000 doses within the first week that were administered between October and November of 2018.⁹¹ The second round of doses was then provided a few weeks later. This campaign suggests that although many of these issues are incredibly complicated, strong collaboration between organizations can result in surprising success. This was incredibly successful through the work done by UNICEF, relevant local organizations, and many volunteers. While this was a great success and can be replicated, it is essential not to forget that it requires an extensive investment that would require an international effort.

The situation worsened when in 2020, the entire world shut down as COVID-19 spread across the world. The pandemic saw hundreds of millions impacted and hundreds of thousands dead. With over 95 percent of the Rohingya refugees relying on humanitarian aid to survive, when COVID-19 hit and countries stopped being able to provide the same levels of aid, they struggled even more.⁹² As countries began investing more money in their healthcare, aid money was dramatically reduced. This resulted in lower funds for food, healthcare, sanitation, and more for the refugees.⁹³ In addition, supply chain shocks resulted in a food shortage as borders closed and restrictions were implemented. Through this process, it was clear how dependent the Rohingya were on the international community. This was also a telling sign of the need to provide them with self-independence so they could survive and thrive

as a community.

Role of Social Media in the Rohingya Crisis

Popular social media platforms, such as Facebook, Telegram, and Messenger, were found to be critical instigators of conflict in the region. Facebook is a platform that allows individuals to actively and easily share messages, images, and videos. Therefore, it quickly became the go-to platform for all forms of communication and sharing. While the platform seemed harmless and a revolutionary tool to help connect people from all over the world, it quickly became the central location for all discussion, hate, and propaganda in Myanmar. With no filter, sorting, or fake news detection, people could share their opinions hiding behind usernames and the anonymity of their cellphones. Moreover, with the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and sophisticated algorithms, the problem was only exacerbated.

Facebook's intricate algorithm in the region collects posts, videos, images, and stories active users publish and rates them based on the likelihood of the user interacting with them and using the platform.⁹⁴ Posts likely to attract more user attention and result in user engagement are distributed to more viewers, reaching larger audiences. An analysis conducted of over 50 million Facebook posts suggested that the more controversial the post, the wider audience it is likely to achieve.⁹⁵ The simple understanding is that users who view controversial posts are more likely to defend or retaliate against the idea by commenting and sharing, resulting in more time spent on the social media platform. Therefore, a platform that attempts to maximize user view time pushes algorithms to make such posts go viral. Furthermore, these viral posts have demonstrated a frightening ability to help shape people's opinions. Social media can influence a user's perspective and opinions. To maximize the number of users in Myanmar, Facebook made deals with

91 Faria Selim, "One million Rohingya refugees, host communities being vaccinated against cholera," UNICEF, May 6, 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/press-releases/one-million-rohingya-refugees-host-communities-being-vaccinated-against-cholera>.

92 "Two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, Rohingya refugees and their hosts in Bangladesh remain highly vulnerable" World Food Programme, March 13, 2022, <https://www.wfp.org/news/two-years-covid-19-pandemic-rohingya-refugees-and-their-hosts-bangladesh-remain-highly>.

93 Education Law Center, "Tracking State Aid Cuts In The Pandemic - Education Law Center," December 20, 2023, <https://edlawcenter.org/research/tracking-state-aid-cuts-in-the-pandemic/>.

94 "How Facebook Distributes Content | Meta Business Help Center." Facebook, accessed July 18, 2024. <https://www.facebook.com/business/help/718033381901819?id=208060977200861>.

95 "Controversy in Facebook posts linked to speed of spread among users," X, Science, June 28, 2023, https://phys.org/news/2023-06-controversy-facebook-linked-users.html#google_vignette.

local sellers to pre-download it on new mobile devices.⁹⁶ Additionally, with internet access growing slowly across the region, Facebook seemed to load and work better than any other form of media. Therefore, most people in Myanmar currently have a Facebook account and frequently use it for communication. Hence, the social media platform became a popular site to promote violence against the Rohingya and have a severe impact on the conflict in the region.⁹⁷

An independent United Nations fact-finding mission saw how accounts controlled by the military, extremist officials, and individuals helped provoke hate by calling them “outsiders,” “illegal immigrants,” and “terrorists.”⁹⁸ The report went ahead to suggest how these persuasive accounts and social media were resulting in killings, sexual violence, destruction of villages, and violence against children in the region.⁹⁹ Radhika Coomaraswamy, researcher and reporter of this mission, said, “[T]he scale, brutality and systematic nature of [sexual violence] indicate[s] that they are part of a deliberate strategy to intimidate, terrorize or punish a civilian population.”¹⁰⁰ This helped serve two different purposes. First, it convinced people to join and support the government in forcing Rohingya out of the region. Moreover, it scared the Rohingya population into leaving the country.¹⁰¹ The strategy has been successful in achieving both. Thousands have fled the country and hundreds have been killed. A key factor the report extensively mentioned was the criminal responsibility of Facebook and relevant government officers in the situation. Agnes Callamard, Secretary General of Amnesty Organization, stated, “Facebook’s algorithms were intensifying a storm of hatred against the Rohingya, which contributed to real-world

violence.”¹⁰² Moreover, the more significant concern is that Facebook officials have been accused of being aware of their impact but chose to ignore it in hopes of making higher profits. In a private investigation, Amnesty International concluded that Facebook was made fully aware but failed to take “adequate measures” to tackle and mitigate the situation.¹⁰³

During this period, Facebook users, civil and social societies, activities, politicians, and more had flagged multiple pieces of content. In addition, they also met with relevant leaders to discuss the misuse of the platform. Despite the constant pleas of these social leaders, Facebook failed to adequately address and communicate it with the government of Myanmar and the world, resulting in further crimes being committed. Even though the organization publicly apologized, critics argue the damage was already done, and even with the new measures, they did not do enough to prevent it from happening. Pat De Brun, Lead Researcher for Time, said, “Meta [Facebook] must pay for the harms that they have caused, and they have a responsibility under international human rights law and standards to do so.”¹⁰⁴

Studies have shown three major contextual factors that further promoted hate speech in the region. The first one is the rapid growth of digital literacy in the region. After years of virtually no free speech, spreading misinformation through social media was easy. For people in Myanmar, it was common to think that social media was a reliable source of information due to the lack thereof. The limited knowledge of how social media worked contributed to the belief that the hate speech content was factual.¹⁰⁵ The second factor is more technical,

96 “How activists are using Facebook in Myanmar for democratic ends, but Facebook itself also facilitated hate speech,” LSE Southeast Asia Blog, June 24, 2021, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/seac/2021/06/23/how-activists-are-using-facebook-in-myanmar-for-democratic-ends-but-facebook-itself-also-facilitated-hate-speech/>.

97 Anas Ansar and Julian Maitra, “Digital Diaspora Activism at the Margins: Unfolding Rohingya Diaspora Interactions on Facebook (2017–2022),” *Social Media + Society* 10, no. 1 (February 15, 2024) <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051241228603>.

98 United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, “Myanmar Fact Finding Mission: accounting for the gravest international crimes,” August 29, 2018, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2018/08/myanmar-fact-finding-mission-accounting-gravest-international-crimes>.

99 “Myanmar Fact Finding Mission: Accounting for the Gravest International Crimes.”

100 “Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on Myanmar.” Human Rights Council, September 12, 2018, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/FFM-Myanmar/A_HRC_39_64.pdf.

101 Shirin Ali, “Facebook’s formula prioritized anger and ended up spreading misinformation,” *Changing America*, October 27, 2021, <https://thehill.com/changing-america/enrichment/arts-culture/578724-5-points-for-anger-1-for-a-like-how-facebooks/>

102 “Myanmar: Facebook’s systems promoted violence against Rohingya; Meta owns reparations,” Amnesty International, September 29, 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/09/myanmar-facebooks-systems-promoted-violence-against-rohingya-meta-owes-reparations-new-report/>.

103 Chad De Guzman, “Meta’s Facebook Algorithms ‘Proactively’ Promoted Violence Against the Rohingya, New Amnesty International Report Asserts,” *TIME*, September 29, 2022, <https://time.com/6217730/myanmar-meta-rohingya-facebook/>.

104 “Case Law of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia: V) INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY (Article 7(1)).”

105 Daniel Zaleznik, “Facebook and Genocide: How Facebook contributed to genocide in Myanmar and why it will not be held accountable,”

as it refers to the lack of content moderation tools in the country. This made it hard to differentiate idioms from threats, which made it difficult to identify and address hate speech present on the platform.¹⁰⁶ The third factor is attributed to a systematically promoted hate towards Rohingyas. It is believed that preexisting narratives of hate already existed and Facebook was only the disseminating tool to promote it.¹⁰⁷

Children Forced to be Soldiers and Slaves in Myanmar

In 2001, reports estimated that over 70,000 children were part of the Myanmar army.¹⁰⁸ The Human Rights Watch (HRW) estimated that the army comprised 35 to 45 percent of children, and they were trained in the usage of weapons and other explosives.¹⁰⁹ Most children also took part in menial labor and were forced to do as captains and generals ordered. The analysis by the HRW suggests that the Burmese army preyed on children and used threats, intimidations, and often violence to force them into joining the army.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, mentioning that “to be a boy in Burma today means facing the constant risk of being picked up off the street, forced to commit atrocities against villagers, and never seeing your family again.”¹¹¹ However, in 2002, the Government issued a clear statement mentioning that “the Government prohibits the enlisting of recruits under the lawful age [of 18 years]. Underage people are not allowed to apply for recruitment. Action is taken on any Regulation infringement under the Defence Services Act,” minimal action was taken until

recently.¹¹² The Government continued making false promises, and the *Tatmadaw* continued active recruitment and enlisting. This subtopic will discuss the recruitment of child soldiers in the Burmese army, international laws, calls of concern, policies, and failures.

In 2004, the Government of Myanmar issued a statement to the United Nations Security Council stating, “The Myanmar Armed Forces is an all-volunteer force, and those entering military services do so of their own free will.”¹¹³ In addition, they declared that they had no intention of enforcing any formal regulation against underage enlisting in the army. However, they later amended their statement, suggesting that they have introduced a law prohibiting underage hiring, which extends to the army. However, interviewed child soldiers told a different story, one that was far from any form of volunteering to join. Children reported being abducted from schools and being forced to join the army.¹¹⁴ Some were lured in with the possibility of receiving food and money, while others were forcibly taken. They claimed to be tortured, beaten, and kept in isolation if they refused to join or refused anything they were ordered.¹¹⁵ In addition, any attempts to flee or run away resulted in further torture. While the military forced children into the army, the Government introduced a conscription law that required all Burmese civilians to enlist.¹¹⁶ Ironically, the Rohingya, who were denied citizenship based on the 1982 Citizenship Law, were forced to join.¹¹⁷

Overall, children were used as expendable pawns. Post-

Systemic Justice Journal 1, (2021), <https://systemicjustice.org/article/facebook-and-genocide-how-facebook-contributed-to-genocide-in-myanmar-and-why-it-will-not-be-held-accountable/>.

106 Zaleznik, “Facebook and Genocide: How Facebook contributed to genocide in Myanmar and why it will not be held accountable.”

107 Zaleznik, “Facebook and Genocide: How Facebook contributed to genocide in Myanmar and why it will not be held accountable”

108 Carolina Cadena, “History of Child Soldiers In Myanmar,” The Borgen Project, August 26, 2021, Accessed August 6, 2024. <https://borgenproject.org/child-soldiers-in-myanmar/>.

109 UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, “Adult wars, child soldiers: voices of children involved in armed conflict in the East Asia and Pacific Region,” E/ICEF(02)/W295, (Thailand: United Nations Digital Library, 2002) <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/490050?ln=en&v=pdf>.

110 Kevin Heppner, “My Gun was as Tall as Me,” Human Rights Watch, 2002, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/burma/>.

111 “Burma: World’s Highest Number of Child Soldiers (New Report Details Widespread Forced Recruitment),” Human Rights Watch, October 16, 2002, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2002/10/16/burma-worlds-highest-number-child-soldiers>.

112 “Letter to HRW from the Permanent Mission of the Union of Myanmar to the UN,” Human Rights Watch, May 8, 2002, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2004/childsoldiers0104/11.htm>.

113 “Child Soldiers International, Child Soldiers Global Report 2004 - Myanmar, 2004,” Refworld, accessed August 6, 2024, <https://www.refworld.org/reference/annualreport/cscoal/2004/en/65598>.

114 Refworld, “Child Soldiers International, Child Soldiers Global Report 2004 - Myanmar, 2004.”

115 Refworld, “Child Soldiers International, Child Soldiers Global Report 2004 - Myanmar, 2004.”

116 “Myanmar: Military Forcibly Recruiting Rohingya (Over 1,000 Abducted in Violation of Conscription Law, Prohibition on Child Soldiers),” Human Rights Watch, April 9, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/04/10/myanmar-military-forcibly-recruiting-rohingya>.

117 “Myanmar: Military Forcibly Recruiting Rohingya (Over 1,000 Abducted in Violation of Conscription Law, Prohibition on Child Soldiers).”

recruitment, boys, and girls would often be split up into specific departments and served humiliating purposes.¹¹⁸ Young boys were often sent to war or forced into manual labor, while young girls were retained as sex slaves. These boys received, on average, four months of training wherein they were brainwashed, assaulted, and beaten before they received deployment information.¹¹⁹ Boys were made to fight against resistance forces across the country and were handed guns and grenades.¹²⁰ A 16-year-old child soldier recounted his experience, saying, “I was firing guns at the KIA [killed in action/ dead] soldiers [but] I just fired the gun pointing in the air because I was terrified.”¹²¹ On the other hand, young girls were held in captivity and made to serve generals and commanders as ordered.¹²² They reported being sexually assaulted, beaten, and forced into child pregnancies.¹²³ Over 60 percent of them have reportedly faced forms of sexual violence.¹²⁴

Years of exposure to violence have resulted in severe trauma. They are likely to face severe mental issues and disorders in addition to physical injuries that might be untreatable. For the majority of them, they suffered from alarming levels of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, self-harm tendencies, and alcohol and drug abuse.¹²⁵ Many of the girls now also have children through forced pregnancies, adding to their financial burden and social concerns. As a result of more significant harm and the birth of children, additional aid was required

from the international community. Requirements included significant provision of healthcare-related aid and necessities (such as food, clothing, shelter), pre & postnatal care, and education (for the children). From the perspective of locals, many lost their children to the war. Moreover, some of their children were forced to fight, resulting in greater violence in the region.

Given the atrocities, the international community did not take the situation lightly. International organizations and countries called for immediate action. For example, the International Criminal Court (ICC) approved investigations into the violation of Article 8 of the Rome Statute.¹²⁶ The eighth article discusses war crimes and explicitly prohibits the recruitment of children into the war.¹²⁷ Furthermore, in 2018, the UN Secretary-General called for Myanmar to immediately end its recruitment of children into the army while threatening international action and consequences.¹²⁸ Despite the hundreds of calls of urgency, the multitude of laws cited, and dozens of resolutions proposed, the international community failed to reach a consensus on the mitigating actions against Myanmar. As of 2022, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights still urges countries not to use veto powers and for members to impose additional comprehensive embargoes and provide specific aid to child soldiers.¹²⁹ The international community has neither been unable to come to a consensus nor successfully prevent the

118 Kaamil Ahmed, “These sisters escaped slaughter in Myanmar. Then they had to find each other. (It’s really difficult for Rohingya Muslim refugees to reunite with their families.)” Vox, January 23, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/world/2018/1/23/16865498/myanmar-rohingya-repatriate-muslim-genocide-bangladesh>.

119 Ahmed, “These Sisters Escaped Slaughter in Myanmar. Then They Had to Find Each Other. (It’s Really Difficult for Rohingya Muslim Refugees to Reunite with Their Families.)”

120 Hilary Whiteman, “The fight to free Myanmar’s child soldiers,” CNN, November 1, 2013, <https://edition.cnn.com/2013/10/15/world/asia/myanmar-burma-child-soldiers/index.html>.

121 Whiteman, “The Fight to Free Myanmar’s Child Soldiers.”

122 Ahmed, “These Sisters Escaped Slaughter in Myanmar. Then They Had to Find Each Other. (It’s Really Difficult for Rohingya Muslim Refugees to Reunite with Their Families.)”

123 Ahmed, “These Sisters Escaped Slaughter in Myanmar. Then They Had to Find Each Other. (It’s Really Difficult for Rohingya Muslim Refugees to Reunite with Their Families.)”

124 Shayna Bauchner, “Rape Puts Myanmar Army on UN ‘List of Shame,’” Human Rights Watch, October 28, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/04/16/rape-puts-myanmar-army-un-list-shame>.

125 Elisabeth Schauer and Thomas Elbert, “The Psychological Impact of Child Soldiering,” United States Institute of Peace, accessed August 6, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-5722-1_14.

126 “ICC approves probe into Myanmar’s alleged crimes against Rohingya (Judges approve request to investigate alleged crimes against humanity over Myanmar’s crackdown against ethnic group.)” Al Jazeera, November 15, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/15/icc-approves-probe-into-myanmars-alleged-crimes-against-rohingya>.

127 “Child soldiers |Online casebook, How Does Law Protect in War?, ICRC Law & Policy, accessed August 6, 2024, https://casebook.icrc.org/a_to_z/glossary/child-soldiers.

128 Stephanie Tremblay, and Fabienne Vinet, “Children of Myanmar Still Victims of Grave Violations Despite Measures to End Recruitment and Use,” The United Nations, January 26, 2018, <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/2018/01/children-myanmar-still-victims-grave-violations-despite-measures-end-recruitment-use/>.

129 “Losing a generation: how the military junta is devastating Myanmar’s children and undermining Myanmar’s future,” Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, June 13, 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/Myanmar-childrenreport.pdf>.

recruitment of child soldiers. The most significant failure in this situation lies in the implementation of policy. While there are hundreds of international laws, there is a lapse between introducing and enforcing the law.

Nevertheless, more recently, through the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi, the situation did seem to improve in Myanmar during the 2010s. In 2012, Myanmar signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.¹³⁰ The Optional Protocol prohibits governments from enlisting either voluntarily or forcefully any individual under 18 years of age in the army. Moreover, soldiers enlisted after 18 must be voluntarily enlisted only.¹³¹ Subsequently, the Government also started an extensive campaign to identify child soldiers in the army and release them from the armed forces across the country. Between 2012 and 2018, the Government was able to release over 800 child soldiers from the Tatmadaw.¹³² Yet, more significant advances are crucial, given that there are over 70,000 children enlisted in the army.¹³³

Overall, while under Aung San Suu Kyi, the Government undertook steps to protect child soldiers. However, the situation has worsened since the coup with the resumed recruitment of child soldiers. Previous actions have not sufficed, requiring further intervention from the international community to eliminate the atrocities within Myanmar.

Current Status

Rise of Foreign Volunteer Soldiers

Myanmar is currently seeing a rise in volunteer soldiers. Foreign volunteer soldiers willingly leave their country to join a conflict in another country. For example, US civilians left the

United States and joined the resistance fighters in Myanmar.¹³⁴ These individuals are motivated by financial opportunities, personal reasons, or the cause. Usually, individuals who enlist in foreign conflicts are retired military officers, generals, and soldiers. That said, many individuals with little or no military experience also enlist. Upon joining, volunteers either join a militia group and fight in the conflict or work as trainers for civilians and teach them how to defend themselves and fight. The nature of volunteering also ensures that all decisions are self-motivated and that the impact of repercussions remains on the individual. Most times, these individuals have no intention of returning home as they expect to either be killed in action (KIA), move to other conflicts in the world, or remain in the country itself post-conflict.¹³⁵ However, as discussed in this section, a few individuals also consider returning home. Overall, this section will discuss the presence of foreign volunteer soldiers in Myanmar and evaluate whether they should be encouraged or discouraged from joining the conflict.

Over the last few months, Myanmar has seen small groups of former American and British soldiers join militia groups in the war against the Junta government. They claim to be inspired by the people of Myanmar and want to lend a hand to help reclaim the land for the people of the country. Jason, one of the volunteer soldiers, claims, “We have knowledge from four different armies that we can use to teach them (...) my experience there (Ukraine) solidified, even more, my urge to help them.”¹³⁶ Unlike other conflicts, an official method has yet to be developed to allow foreign soldiers to enlist in local armies or militias. However, Jason and other soldiers hope to set up a recruitment process that allows individuals worldwide to enlist in the resistance force.¹³⁷ Jason claims he has already found ten more soldiers to join him in the war.

Although the numbers have been minimal since 2021, they

130 Thant Sin, “Signing of Core International Human Rights Instruments and Cooperation with Special Rapporteur,” November 5, 2015, https://uprmeetings.ohchr.org/Sessions/23session/Myanmar/Statements/48.4-Int.%204_Myanmar_Signing%20of%20Core%20Int.%20HR%20Instruments%20and%20Coop.%20with%20Special%20Rapporteur.pdf.

131 Sin, “Signing of Core International Human Rights Instruments and Cooperation with Special Rapporteur.”

132 “Seventy-five children and young people released by the Myanmar Armed Forces.” UNICEF East Asia and Pacific, press release, September 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/eap/press-releases/seventy-five-children-and-young-people-released-myanmar-armed-forces>.

133 UNICEF East Asia and Pacific, “Seventy-Five Children and Young People Released by the Myanmar Armed Forces.”

134 Lorcan Lovett, “Western volunteers join the battle against Myanmar’s military regime,” Al Jazeera, May 17, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/5/17/western-volunteers-join-the-battle-against-myanmars-military-regime>.

135 Lorcan Lovett, “Western volunteers join the battle against Myanmar’s military regime.”

136 Lorcan Lovett, “Western volunteers join the battle against Myanmar’s military regime.”

137 Lorcan Lovett, “Western volunteers join the battle against Myanmar’s military regime.”

have increased dramatically since mid-2024. As a result, it is essential to swiftly evaluate the impact foreign volunteer soldiers can have in Myanmar and the international community. To help evaluate the impact, one could analyze other conflicts, such as Syria and Ukraine, where foreign soldiers have been recruited extensively. Overall, it should be analyzed whether foreign soldiers should be encouraged. It also questions whether foreign volunteer soldiers would be an appropriate alternative for countries intervening in the conflict without breaching sovereignty and international guidelines.

Foreign volunteer soldiers enlist to increase the number of experienced soldiers in rebel groups, helping in both individual missions and required training. Since the coup, many combat-experienced civilians have been KIA or fled the country with their families. As a result, this left resistance groups with few combat-ready soldiers, and the influx of foreign soldiers has helped them maintain numbers and take the fight to the military.¹³⁸ Secondly, since the coup, thousands of civilians who “could not even kill an animal” decided to pick arms and help challenge the *Tatmadaw* to establish democracy in the country.¹³⁹ These individuals significantly benefit from the relevant training provided by the foreign volunteers, allowing them to fight against the powerfully armed military. For example, groups such as the PDF are among the most significant resistance groups concerning the number of volunteer recruits.¹⁴⁰ Most of the volunteers are local civilians but also include many international citizens. Estimates suggest that the PDF has recruited upwards of 20,000 soldiers into the resistance since 2021.¹⁴¹ This addition of these soldiers has prevented aggressors from simply ‘walking over’ the people of a country. Thereby successfully allowing the public to

hold up such a strong resistance over time.¹⁴² Lastly, if more foreign soldiers were encouraged into resistance groups, they might be able to turn the tide and bring the country back to democracy.¹⁴³

Contrastingly, while volunteer soldiers can help improve the resistance level, additional soldiers extend the conflict’s duration, resulting in more significant humanitarian and capital loss. More skilled soldiers joining the ranks and subsequently training recruits also increases the scale of the war, making it more violent and aggressive. For example, when Russia initially invaded Ukraine, the world expected them to gain control in a matter of days.¹⁴⁴ However, brave resistance has allowed the region to be still disputed.¹⁴⁵ A similar situation can be seen in Syria. Therefore, the question arises of balancing foreign soldiers’ ability to protect and empower resistance while limiting the length of the conflict to reduce the loss of life and infrastructure.

Moreover, soldiers who choose to return to their country after serving their time in a foreign conflict may be a security threat and be liable for persecution. The European Union believes that such individuals could be incredibly dangerous if they return to their home country “because they may have become further radicalized and acquired combat experience, and therefore be capable of carrying out deadly terrorist attacks once they return.”¹⁴⁶ For example, the world has witnessed how returning soldiers from Syria were perpetrators of the 2015 Paris attacks that left 130 dead.¹⁴⁷ As a result, a factor worth considering is how these individuals are integrated into society upon their return. Secondly, crimes committed by these individuals in foreign countries could make them liable for

138 Lawrence J. Korb, and Sean E. Duggan, “An All-Volunteer Army? Recruitment and Its Problems,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 40 (July 2007): 467–71. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S104909653>.

139 Emily Fishbein Vahpual, and Nu Nu Lusan. “Our only option’: Myanmar civilians take up arms for democracy,” Al Jazeera, June 15, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/15/our-only-option-myanmar-civilians-take-up-arms-for-democracy>.

140 Alastair McCready, “Myanmar’s Volunteer Soldiers Who Gave Up Everything to Fight the Junta,” February 1, 2022. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/n7ndpd/pdf-fighters-myanmar-coup>.

141 McCready, “Myanmar’s Volunteer Soldiers Who Gave Up Everything to Fight the Junta.”

142 Ted Snider, “How many Westerners are fighting in Ukraine?,” Responsible Statecraft, March 20, 2024. <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/foreign-fighters-ukraine/>.

143 Ellen Ioanes, “Ukraine’s resistance is built on the backs of volunteers,” Vox, February 26, 2022. <https://www.vox.com/2022/2/26/22952073/ukraine-civilian-volunteers-kyiv-war-effort>.

144 John Nagl, “Ukraine marks 10 months since Russia’s invasion,” December 28, 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/russia-ukraine-war-shocked-putin-military-vets-rcna63365>.

145 Nagl, “Ukraine Marks 10 Months since Russia’s Invasion.”

146 Piotr Bakowski and Laura Puccio, “Foreign fighters – Member State responses and EU action,” European Parliamentary Research Service, March 2016, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/EPRS-Briefing-579080-Foreign-fighters-rev-FINAL.pdf>.

147 “Europol Review 2015 | Islamic State going global,” Europol, 2015, https://www.europol.europa.eu/annual_review/2015/terrorism.html.

criminal action. The United Nations calls for any crimes such as “murder; mutilation, cruel treatment, and torture; taking of hostages” amongst many others as war crimes.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, many organizations they may choose to join could be deemed extremist organizations worldwide. Therefore, by joining them, they continue to support them directly and may be deemed extremists. Lastly, through exposure to violent conflict, they may suffer from additional physical injuries and mental conditions such as PTSD. As a result, even if these individuals choose to go voluntarily, it increases the pressure on the government and society to reintegrate them into society, persecute them for their actions, and provide them with relevant medical assistance upon their return.

While there can be an evaluation of the merits of their joining the conflict in Myanmar, in the past, the world has been firmly against the idea of volunteer soldiers. Over the years, international bodies have created and enforced multiple domestic and international policies to prevent foreign soldiers. In 2004, the UNSC adopted Resolution S/RES/2178, which called on all countries to criminalize their civilians migrating to other countries for “terrorist” purposes.¹⁴⁹ The resolution effectively required member states to monitor the travel of their citizens to prevent individuals from illegally migrating to join extremist organizations. In the proceeding sessions, the Security Council also adopted Resolution S/RES/2249 and S/RES/2253 to increase the scope of policies countries must adopt to restrict foreign soldiers.¹⁵⁰ While member states have effectively identified and returned over 7,000 volunteer soldiers to their home countries, not all policies have succeeded equally.¹⁵¹ Recently, with the rise of the dark web and artificial

intelligence over the last decade, member states have found it more challenging to identify potential suspects.¹⁵² From a humanitarian perspective, the goal of the above resolutions and policies has been to protect their citizens from joining radicalized groups. Therefore, as more soldiers result in more violent conflict, countries continue to emphasize the importance of limiting conflict to prevent more individuals from getting killed.

The Aid Crisis In Myanmar

Currently, the people of Myanmar are in desperate need of all forms of aid, including food, water, medicine, sanitary products, shelter, clothing, gas, natural disaster protection, and education. Over the last many years, global organizations, various countries, and individuals have provided the people hundreds of millions of dollars of aid. For example, in the last 30 years, the European Union has donated over Euro 400 million, and an additional 37 million in 2024.¹⁵³ Additionally, the United States provided over USD 100 million in 2024.¹⁵⁴ Some other countries include the UK, which provides USD 56 million, Japan, USD 27 million, and France, Euro 6.5 million.¹⁵⁵ However, despite the millions in aid, the country still needs more. The people of Myanmar currently require both additional quantity and higher quality of aid. This subtopic will analyze the requirements for additional help and the challenges that Myanmar’s people face in receiving the aid.

Firstly, although the people of Myanmar receive a large portion of global aid, they continue to ask for more. Before the military coup in 2021, the military had forced a little over

148 “United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect,” n.d. <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/war-crimes.shtml>.

149 United Nations, “Resolution 2178 (2014) Adopted by the Security Council at its 7272nd meeting, on 24 September 2014.” press release, September 24, 2014, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n14/547/98/pdf/n1454798.pdf?token=jQHDqLpVaK8WAmRVID&fe=true>.

150 Piotr Bąkowski and Laura Puccio, “Foreign fighters – Member State responses and EU action.”

151 United States Department of State, “Progress in Repatriations: How Foreign Assistance Is Addressing the Humanitarian and Security Crises in Northeast Syria: Part 1 of 2 - United States Department of State,” December 4, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/progress-in-repatriations-how-foreign-assistance-is-addressing-the-humanitarian-and-security-crises-in-northeast-syria-part-1-of-2/>.

152 Richard Barrett, Robert McFadden, Patrick M. Skinner, and Lila Ghosh. “FOREIGN FIGHTERS IN SYRIA,” The Soufan Center, June 2014, <https://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/TSG-Foreign-Fighters-in-Syria-Final-with-cover-rebrand-031317.pdf>.

153 European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations. “Myanmar/Burma,” accessed September 15, 2024, https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/asia-and-pacific/myanmarburma_en.

154 United States Department of State, “United States Announces \$116 Million in Humanitarian Assistance to People in Burma, Bangladesh, and the Region - United States Department of State,” September 21, 2023. <https://www.state.gov/united-states-announces-116-million-in-humanitarian-assistance-to-people-in-burma-bangladesh-and-the-region/>.

155 United Nations, “As Crisis in Myanmar Worsens, Security Council Must Take Resolute Action to End Violence by Country’s Military, Address Humanitarian Situation, Speakers Urge.” press release, April 4, 2024, <https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15652.doc.htm>.



Aid being unloaded in Myanmar

Credit: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

one million people into fleeing the country and seeking refuge in neighboring states.¹⁵⁶ The aid provided was almost enough to allow them to maintain a basic standard of living in refugee camps. However, since the coup, the number has increased to 18.6 million people. With an additional 17.6 million individuals relying on aid from the international community, the country needs more resources and funds to assist all. A third of people displaced since the coup are children and are being deprived of primary education. Moreover, most suffer from physical injuries and poor mental health. Unfortunately, most camps lack the doctors and equipment to treat all children.¹⁵⁷ In addition to poor healthcare, they receive limited food, resulting in severe malnutrition; malnutrition is the severe lack of food and can result in additional health issues and illness. Therefore, they need effective healthcare, medicines, quality food, schools, sanitation facilities, and more.

While they continued to suffer, in May 2023, a tropical cyclone called Hurricane Mocha hit the coast of Myanmar,

causing further damage to infrastructure and resulting in additional injuries and deaths. Reports suggest the hurricane caused over USD 2.2 million of infrastructure damage, killing 145 individuals and injuring many more.¹⁵⁸ Economically, this had a significant impact on the people of Myanmar. USD 2.2 million accounts for over 3 percent of the country's GDP.¹⁵⁹ The combination of already requiring more aid, the hurricane, and damage to present resources have left the people incredibly vulnerable. Therefore, the international community needs to evaluate how to increase and improve the quality of aid provided to the people of Myanmar.

Nevertheless, while the community evaluates methods to improve efforts, the aid already provided does not reach the affected individuals. Since the coup, the Junta government has significantly criticized the aid provided by foreign countries.¹⁶⁰ The government claimed that "the US is manipulating Myanmar to counter China's influence in the region. Despite the US presenting itself as a champion of democracy, the aid

¹⁵⁶ European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, "Myanmar/Burma," accessed September 15, 2024, https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/asia-and-pacific/myanmarburma_en.

¹⁵⁷ European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, "Myanmar/Burma."

¹⁵⁸ The World Bank, "Extremely severe cyclonic Storm Mocha, May 2023, Myanmar: Global Rapid Post-Disaster Damage Estimation (GRADE) report," January 22, 2024, <https://www.preventionweb.net/publication/extremely-severe-cyclonic-storm-mocha-may-2023-myanmar-global-rapid-post-disaster-0>.

¹⁵⁹ Grant Peck, "Myanmar says official death toll from Cyclone Mocha at least 145, says aid is being provided | AP News," AP News, May 19, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/myanmar-rohingya-cyclone-mocha-aid-91a3b33a94a12086c474400f9d0c1839>.

¹⁶⁰ Ingyin Naing, "Myanmar junta slams US aid plan." Voice of America, April 23, 2024, <https://www.voanews.com/a/myanmar-junta-slams-us-aid-plan/7581977.html>.

disproportionately benefits Myanmar's opposition groups."¹⁶¹ The government alleges that the aid provided to the people of Myanmar is being used to support extremism in the region.¹⁶² Hence, the donors must be careful about the impact their aid can have. The argument for supporting extremism in the region stems from recent conflicts that the resistance has fought against the military. On July 25, 2024, The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance (MNDA) Army captured a military base and worked on "clearing out the remaining enemy troops."¹⁶³ The MNDA is an armed resistance group deemed an extremist organization by the Burmese government. Moreover, as members of the MNDA are extensively supported by foreign aid, the Junta government has accused the US and its allies of supporting extremism in the region. However, the US and its allies have yet to deem the MNDA, amongst many other resistance groups, as extremists but rather just militia groups. Overall, while most militia groups survive due to foreign aid, they have resulted in higher violence and deaths in the region. In the last few months, resistance forces have killed over 300 soldiers and imprisoned 63.¹⁶⁴ Overall, the international community must be wary of who they provide aid to and whether they are individuals protecting democracy in the region or causing further violence.

The second criticism by the Junta government is that aid is provided for non-humanitarian reasons. They argue that the international community is providing aid for ulterior motives rather than simply assisting the people of Myanmar. Critics have claimed that the US and its allies are fighting a proxy war in Myanmar against supporters of the Junta government. A *proxy war* is a conflict fought between two countries in a foreign land by supporting opposing groups.¹⁶⁵ The argument is based on the extensive support provided to the National Unity Government of Myanmar, which was

ousted government in 2021 by the coup and the PDF.¹⁶⁶ Contrastingly, the People's Republic of China has been a critical supporter of the government and the *Tatmadaw*. Since the coup, the military has purchased over USD one billion of weapons from China and Russia.¹⁶⁷ Therefore, with the two groups tangled in violent conflict, the Junta government has accused the US and its allies of fighting a proxy war in Myanmar. Overall, if the conflict gets more violent and drags on for many years, foreign exporters will benefit significantly. More violence will require both parties to purchase additional weapons, resulting in more revenues for international groups. Therefore, they remain interested in providing more aid and selling more weapons. Thus, the international community must be careful about the impact their aid can have. Overall, aid and assistance provided in economic interests will result in economic profit but human losses. Violence has already reached a critical point, and misused aid will only result in further damage. The international community must ensure that aid is used correctly to help protect the innocent and provide them with the required resources.

Regardless of the quality or objective of the aid, Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are currently struggling to provide aid to those impacted by new regulations and policies introduced by the Junta government. International volunteers now question if their work has any value left. An international volunteer claimed, "As Western NGOs especially, we have been pushed further out of the appeals and the population we serve (...) to a point where we were almost wondering what our added value was, and if we had a role."¹⁶⁸ Since the coup, the military has imposed strict regulations that require NGOs to follow strict protocols when delivering aid. The new Organization Registration Law (ORL) requires all aid-providing organizations to record and share details of the

161 Naing, "Myanmar Junta Slams US Aid Plan."

162 Naing, "Myanmar Junta Slams US Aid Plan."

163 "Myanmar regional military HQ captured, rebels say, in blow to junta," Reuters.com, July 25, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/myanmar-regional-military-hq-captured-rebels-say-blow-junta-2024-07-25/>.

164 Rebecca Tan, Yan Naing, and Andrew Nachemson, "Rebel offensive taking toll on Myanmar military's cohesion, soldiers say," Washington Post, February 13, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/02/14/myanmar-war-military-rebels-surrenders/>.

165 L. Sue Baugh, "Proxy war | Definition, History, Examples, & Risks." Encyclopedia Britannica, August 31, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/proxy-war>.

166 DOMINIC TIERNEY, "THE FUTURE OF SINO-U.S. PROXY WAR," *Texas National Security Review*, 2021, accessed July 30, 2024, <https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/393cc386-3cb8-4de4-8309-b29abe08ce13/content>.

167 United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, "UN expert exposes \$1 billion 'death trade' to Myanmar military," May 17, 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/05/un-expert-exposes-1-billion-death-trade-myanmar-military>.

168 Rebecca L. Root, "Aid needs grow in Myanmar as resistance advances put more civilians at risk," *The New Humanitarian*, December 6, 2023, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2023/12/06/aid-needs-grow-myanmar-resistance-advances-put-more-civilians-risk>.

aid providers and details of specific individuals who receive and benefit from the aid.¹⁶⁹ Failure to provide and communicate the required details would result in immediate destruction of the valuable aid.¹⁷⁰ In other cases, it led to a monetary fine, and up to five years of imprisonment.¹⁷¹ The Human Rights Council has called the ORL a systemic denial of humanitarian relief.¹⁷² Many aid workers and NGOs argue that these policies would prevent individuals from requesting and receiving aid due to a systemic genocidal campaign by the government. The policy results in a privacy violation by providing the government with crucial details of civilians who chose to be anonymous because of the violence in the region. Specifically, the Rohingya, who are currently being targeted and killed, would be the most impacted by the new policy.¹⁷³ Individuals linked to resistance groups that have voiced an opinion against the government are also being persecuted.¹⁷⁴ These individuals would also be persecuted if the government found out about them. Therefore, it restricts them from choosing to receive much-required aid. Moreover, organizations worry that complying with government policies would legitimize the government.¹⁷⁵ Currently, most international organizations refuse the legitimacy of the Junta and urge them to give control back to the pre-coup government.¹⁷⁶ If NGOs begin following policies established by the *Tatmadaw*, they would indirectly acknowledge their legitimate authority.¹⁷⁷ On the other hand, failure to follow the policy has destroyed millions of dollars of aid, further preventing those who need it from receiving it.

Lastly, the biggest hindrance to aid provision is the violent campaign against foreign aid volunteers. Since the coup, the

government has killed over 40 volunteers and unlawfully detained and tortured over 200.¹⁷⁸ Therefore, many individuals now refrain from volunteering and helping the people of Myanmar, while many others resign and move to other conflicts worldwide. The international community must ensure that they protect volunteers and prevent them from being killed by the conflict.

Since the coup, 18.6 million people have been forced to flee their homes, resulting in a greater need for aid, which requires additional funding and international support. The motive of the aid provided is being questioned as the government suggests it is being used to support extremists while other critics suggest a proxy war. Furthermore, the new policy has resulted in NGOs being unable to provide aid to those who need it. Lastly, a violent campaign targeting aid workers is further limiting volunteers in the region. The provision of aid is a complex situation in Myanmar, and the international community will have to create unique policies to allow those affected to receive the aid without increasing further violence in the region.

Sustainable Development Goals

In 2015, all member states unilaterally adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) hoping to achieve them by 2030.¹⁷⁹ Today, every country is tasked with participating in the collective mission to achieve these goals worldwide. The current situation in Myanmar reflects the need for these sustainable development goals and allows one to evaluate the progress made.

169 Wesley Rahn, "New law in Myanmar puts Europe's humanitarian aid at risk," *Dw.Com*, November 25, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/new-law-in-myanmar-puts-europes-humanitarian-aid-at-risk/a-63887603>.

170 Tamas Wells, Anne Décobert, and Anonymous Author. "Aid localisation amidst revolution in Myanmar - Devpolicy Blog from the Development Policy Centre," *Devpolicy Blog From the Development Policy Centre*, September 20, 2023, Accessed August 6, 2024. <https://devpolicy.org/aid-localisation-amidst-revolution-in-myanmar-20230920/>.

171 Rebecca Root, "Rule of law: Myanmar's junta uses legislation to quash civil society," *International Bar Association*, April 25, 2023, <https://www.ibanet.org/myanmar-junta-civil-society>.

172 "Myanmar military in 'systematic denial' of humanitarian aid: UN," *Al Jazeera*, July 7, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/7/7/myanmar-military-in-systematic-denial-of-humanitarian-aid-un>.

173 "Myanmar State Administration Council Organization Registration Law 2022: Legal Briefing," *International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)*, November 2022, <https://icj2.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Myanmar-ORL-final.pdf>.

174 *International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)*, "Myanmar State Administration Council Organization Registration Law 2022: Legal Briefing."

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176 United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, "NEWS RELEASE - Myanmar: UN Human Rights Office deeply concerned by new NGO law - OHCHR."

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178 *Al Jazeera*, "Myanmar Military in 'Systematic Denial' of Humanitarian Aid: UN."

179 "THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development," *United Nations*, accessed August 1, 2024, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

One of the most significant issues that the people of Myanmar face is access to food. SDG number two, zero hunger, best addresses this issue. Currently, people in Myanmar are severely deprived of adequate, good-quality food. The United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that over 800,000 people are severely underweight.¹⁸⁰ In addition, over 2.2 million women and children urgently need nutrition in high-conflict areas.¹⁸¹ The lack of access to quality food can be attributed to inflation and armed conflict. Firstly, since the coup in 2021, inflation has skyrocketed across the country. Locals claim that before the coup, a day's meal of protein and rice would cost around 5,000 Kyat, while since 2021, it is upwards of 8,000 Kyat. In addition, while prices have risen, wages have decreased.¹⁸² The same local who claimed to earn 10,000 Kyat a day now struggles to earn even 5,000.¹⁸³ The combination of high prices and low wages has created the perfect recipe for the people of Myanmar not to be able to afford food even if it is available. Secondly, in regions of armed conflict and violence, most people depend entirely on humanitarian aid. However, NGOs have struggled to aid those most affected due to the new Organization Registration Law (as discussed in the previous subtopic). Overall, the lack of access to nutritious meals has resulted in a negative cycle that has spread across the country. If individuals do not eat enough, they are more likely to fall ill and be unable to work. Subsequently, by not working enough, they would not have enough money to provide themselves with food. Overall, the international community must focus on breaking this cycle and enforcing a policy that allows individuals to receive adequate nutritious food.

In addition to needing nutritious food, the people of Myanmar

also require access to clean water and sanitation. SDG number six addresses this need. Overall, estimates suggest that over 10 million people in Myanmar do not have clean water, and 11 million do not have clean sanitation facilities.¹⁸⁴ The lack of access has resulted in over 3,000 children (under five years of age) dying every year from water and poor sanitation-related diseases.¹⁸⁵ To begin with, access to clean water is minimal for the people of Myanmar. Moreover, given that the summer of 2024 saw record heat levels, while water demand increased, water bodies quickly dried up. While major cities are relatively better off, rural villages and refugee camps have struggled. The need for access to clean water has forced people to travel long distances or consume contaminated water.¹⁸⁶ On the other hand, even in larger cities, the government has limited access to water due to national shortages, resulting in severe dehydration, and relevant medical complications.¹⁸⁷ That said, over the last few years, UNICEF has introduced a Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Program (WASH).¹⁸⁸ The WASH program aims to provide clean water and sanitation across the region by providing water, building bathrooms (to eliminate open defecation), and promoting good hygiene habits.¹⁸⁹ Although the program has mainly been successful, it has had a limited impact due to funding struggles and armed violence.¹⁹⁰ As a result, individuals continue to be affected by water-borne diseases such as cholera and typhoid.¹⁹¹ Hence, while the international community must address funding concerns and evaluate methods to improve the execution, they must also consider alternative measures to provide and support the people of Myanmar.

With the record number of children forced to flee the country, Myanmar has struggled to keep up with literacy rates. High

180 "Health and nutrition Working to improve access to child and maternal health and nutrition," United Nations Children's Fund, accessed August 1, 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/myanmar/health-and-nutrition>.

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dropout rates have limited the country's ability to achieve SDG four: quality education. Currently, students are being forced out of schools through armed conflict, illness, expense, and lack of facilities.¹⁹² Since the coup, reports suggest that over 170 schools have been bombed and destroyed.¹⁹³ The destruction of infrastructure impacts the country's well-being and children's ability to receive crucial education. Moreover, individuals who remain in the region are often forced into labor to support their families financially or are recruited by resistant forces or the army. Although since the coup, UNESCO has launched an online course to promote education, lack of technological resources and limited internet access have limited the program's effectiveness.¹⁹⁴ Overall, the international community may have to focus on providing education directly rather than virtually or consider implementing both measures.

Lastly, SDG 16 is a cornerstone of the conflict. This goal aims to maintain peace, justice, and strong institutions. Specifically, target 16.1, aims to "significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere."¹⁹⁵ As discussed over various subtopics, there is an urgent need for peace in the region and for justice to be delivered. The situation in Myanmar is dire, and it crucially needs a governmental institution that is publicly accepted to enforce policies and legal reforms that help maintain peace and deliver justice.

Broadly, the international community must remember that the 17 goals are perfectly intertwined. Therefore, to successfully achieve any of the 17, one must address and work on many other goals. Addressing any goal independently would only result in short-term fixes; hence, addressing them collectively

will allow for sustainable development and growth.

Bloc Positions

Points of Division

A bloc is a group of individuals that share similar perspectives on an issue. Broadly speaking, regarding the situation in Myanmar, there are three prominent bloc positions: supporters of the Junta government, supporters of the resistance movements, and non-aligned countries. The position each country takes will depend on the stance their policies allow them to have regarding the conflict.

Supporters of the Junta Government

Members of this bloc strongly believe that the Junta Government is the legitimate leader and has the relevant and required authority to govern the country. Examples of this include China, Russia, India, and Thailand. From the first UNSC session regarding the coup, China and Russia have actively vetoed any resolution against the military government.¹⁹⁶ Secondly, since the coup, the government has purchased over USD 1 billion worth of weapons from the two.¹⁹⁷ Even economically, China and Myanmar continue to work on various projects together. For example, China offered to assist and fund rebuilding the Myitsone Dam over the next decade.¹⁹⁸ Moreover, the two countries discussed creating an economic corridor resulting in more significant trade between Myanmar and China.¹⁹⁹ China and Russia have shown explicit ties and strong relations with the Junta government

192 Roy, Sutirtha Sinha, Roy Van Der Weide, Saurav Dev Bhatta, and Mar Mar Thwin, "A generation of children are at risk of learning losses in Myanmar," World Bank Blogs, March 16, 2024, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/eastasiapacific/generation-children-are-risk-learning-losses-myanmar>.

193 Kaamil Ahmed, "Myanmar junta 'bombing schools', with 170 sites hit in past three years – report," The Guardian, July 20, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/article/2024/jul/20/myanmar-junta-bombing-schools-with-170-sites-hit-in-past-three-years-report>.

194 "UNESCO Myanmar To Hold Education Online Lecture - Global New Light Of Myanmar," Global New Light of Myanmar, November 5, 2022, <https://www.gnlm.com.mm/unesco-myanmar-to-hold-education-online-lecture/>.

195 "Peace, justice and strong institutions - United Nations Sustainable Development," United Nations Sustainable Development, accessed August 13, 2024, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/peace-justice/>.

196 Sebastian Strangio, "China, Russia Again Veto UN Statement on Myanmar Conflict," The Diplomat, May 30, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/05/china-russia-again-veto-un-statement-on-myanmar-conflict/>.

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199 Joaquin Matamis, "Update on China-Myanmar Relations," Stimson Center, June 28, 2024, <https://www.stimson.org/2024/major-events-in-china-myanmar-relations/>.

on international platforms and through trade.

On the other hand, the relationship between Myanmar and India goes as far back as 1951, when the two countries signed a treaty of friendship.²⁰⁰ Since then, the two have shared strong military and economic ties. Over the last few years, India and Myanmar have hosted multiple joint military exercises and military operations, arms trade, and mutual senior official visits.²⁰¹ In addition, multiple Indian companies continue to bolster large-scale projects in the region. These include creating hydroelectric power plants, inter-city roads (connecting Myanmar's many cities), industrial training, business development, and more.²⁰² The two countries have also shared the world platform, as both are members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Lastly, Thailand has been Myanmar's key economic partner. The Junta government currently uses various Thai banks to conduct relevant trade and investment activities worldwide, resulting in critical economic dependency on Thailand to facilitate relevant payment and debit/credit facilities.²⁰³

Some other members of this bloc include Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, with Russia, China, India, and Thailand being the key supporters of the military government.²⁰⁴

Supporters of Resistance Movements

The countries in this bloc are strong supporters of the resistance movements in the country. They do not support the current military government and ask the *Tatmadaw* to step down. In addition, they are vital supporters of Aung San Su Kyi and

continue to urge the government to release her (and other members of the previous government) from prison. Some potential members of this bloc include the US, UK, France, Australia, Canada, and other members of the European Union. Overall, all these countries have provided assistance and aid to resistance forces while also placing economic sanctions and embargoes on the Myanmar government.

The United States, since the coup, has introduced the most number of sanctions targeting critical members of the *Tatmadaw*.²⁰⁵ In addition, they have imposed multiple sanctions on Burmese oil and gas companies, limiting the amount they can trade in the international market.²⁰⁶ In addition, the United States has also restricted Myanmar from making any trade through state and government-owned enterprises in the US Dollar.²⁰⁷ Furthermore, the European Union and several other countries have introduced arms embargoes and travel restrictions.²⁰⁸ This limits and restricts weapons from being sold to the government and prevents individuals from being able to travel to the country. Primarily by imposing these sanctions and embargoes, this bloc hopes to make it harder for the government to obtain monetary capital and access weapons. Therefore, the long-term objective is that the government will be forced to give up power as it weakens. Moreover, this bloc has also provided weapons and arms support to resistance groups. For example, the US and Germany currently sell and provide M4 Carbines and HK33 Rifles to rebel forces along with other firepower, allowing them to stand against the powerful military.²⁰⁹

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209 Anthony Davis, "Myanmar PDFs getting the guns to turn the war," Asia Times, May 26, 2023. <https://asiatimes.com/2023/05/>

The Non-Allied Bloc

This bloc comprises countries that do not technically have a stance. They primarily support the notion of peace and the end of violence in the region without directly supporting the government or resistance forces. Some countries in this bloc include Switzerland, Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Austria. These countries are most likely to urge the country to reach a cease-fire agreement and often volunteer to host the required discussions.

Moreover, these countries are also some of the largest aid donors to the people in the region. Simply put, it could be understood in a way that there is the government, the rebel forces, and the people impacted. This bloc supports the people impacted and maintains a neutral stance on the situation. However, not to be mistaken, these countries are incredibly relevant and essential to the committee because the non-allied bloc will be crucial in creating strategies and relevant solutions to ease the situation peacefully. However, they remain in the non-allied bloc as they have not expressed clear support towards the government or resistance forces.

Committee Mission

Delegates of the Social, Cultural, & Humanitarian Committee (SOCHUM) are tasked with an essential and crucial challenge that needs to be addressed immediately. And that is protecting the people of Myanmar.

Currently, the people of Myanmar are having to fight for the fulfillment of fundamental human rights. Most do not have access to food, clean water, a bathroom, a house, and clothes. These basic rights are established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Over the last 3 years, hundreds of families have been separated and displaced across the region. They all have a straightforward goal: to end the war and protect each other while doing it. While some people have been fortunate to escape and flee to the many refugee camps in the region, their livelihood is anything but good. Most refugee camps have limited access to most resources and are often destroyed by militia forces or natural disasters. Urgent need from the

international community is required to maintain progress.

SOCHUM has a comprehensive mandate allowing the committee and all delegates to focus on various issues. It must be noted that as a General Assembly committee, it does not have any binding powers. Delegates should focus on facilitating peace in the region and not enforcing their governance. This will only be possible with collaboration, assistance, and support.

Collaboration should be the utmost priority. There is a significant responsibility to the people of Myanmar that relies on the help of the international community to have access to basic human rights. Therefore, it will be essential for delegates to negotiate and compromise for the greater security and protection of the people in Myanmar.

Research and Preparation Questions

Your dais has prepared the following research and preparation questions as a means of providing guidance for your research process. These questions should be carefully considered, as they embody some of the main critical thought and learning objectives surrounding your topic.

Topic A

1. What are the key challenges and limitations of enforcing civil rights in Venezuela? What other countries have similar circumstances and how have they addressed them?
2. How can the international community advocate for greater respect for freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in Venezuela? What specific organizations could help address the current humanitarian crisis?
3. Has your country expressed any diplomatic opinions regarding Venezuela's current situation? If so, are there any ongoing projects or initiatives to support the rights of civilians in Venezuela?
4. What are the key domestic laws and institutions that protect human rights in your country? What are the differences and similarities between them and Venezuela's regulations?
5. What are the economic implications for your country in terms of improving civil rights of women and children? Are there any funding mechanisms or schemes that could be used to support civilians in Venezuela?
6. What specific resources, expertise, or support could your country offer to help improve civil rights conditions in Venezuela, such as diplomatic efforts, technical assistance, legal expertise, humanitarian aid or other alternatives?

Topic B

1. What is your country's official stance on the situation in Myanmar, and how has it influenced your country's foreign policy and diplomatic relations with Myanmar and other states involved in the crisis?
2. How does your country address the issue of human rights in its international agreements and treaties, and what mechanisms are in place to hold violators accountable, particularly in the context of Myanmar?
3. What policies has your country implemented to support human rights activists and refugees fleeing from Myanmar, and how effective have these measures been?
4. What are the main human rights violations within Myanmar, and how have they evolved since the military coup in February 2021?
5. How has the February 2021 military coup worsened ongoing refugee crises? What steps can the international community take to address the surge in internally displaced persons (IDPs) since the coup?
6. How has the conflict impacted civilian safety and living conditions? What strategies could be implemented to protect vulnerable populations with the ongoing violence and instability?
7. How can the international community effectively address human rights violations in Myanmar, while acknowledging the complex nature of the ongoing conflict and promoting a peaceful resolution?

Important Documents

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