

# The Rohingya Refugee Crisis

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## “Canada as a Human Rights Leader: The Consequences of Inaction”

Although Myanmar has been enacting a series of democratic reforms over the last few years, the country’s harsh treatment of its Muslim minority population, the Rohingya, and the international community’s response to the crisis is deeply concerning. The Rohingya in Myanmar have been described by the United Nations as one of the world’s most persecuted groups of people, with many seeking refuge in Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries. Unfortunately, the Rohingya are subjected to harsh living conditions within resettlement camps while many others are denied entry into neighbouring and other developed countries. In addition to being denied citizenship within Myanmar, few Rohingya have received the assistance they desperately need and have been subjected to harsh living conditions with little or no basic amenities, including food, water, and medical assistance.



“Abul Boshier was a Member of Parliament and Parliamentary Secretary in Burma from 1901 – 1991. He is a symbol of the Rohingya and proof of our history in Burma.” Photo: Colin Boyd Shafer

## Canada’s Commitment to Myanmar

In response to Myanmar’s shift towards democratic reforms in 2011, Canada has reduced its sanctions against Myanmar and strengthened its diplomatic relations with the state through increased trade and development support. Canada’s commitment to developing strong ties with Myanmar is demonstrated in a recent announcement of a [\\$44 million investment program](#) that is aimed towards supporting Myanmar in developing an inclusive government while also providing opportunities for the most vulnerable. However, the Rohingya have received minimal benefits from Canada’s aid. With Canada’s shift towards focusing on Myanmar’s political reform rather than its human rights abuses, the Rohingya crisis has



“On the one hand I am happy to be here in Canada, and happy to see my four kids alive and getting a good education, but on the other I am so concerned for the people dying...” Photo: Colin Boyd Shafer

arguably been overshadowed. Although Canada's support of reform initiatives in Myanmar help to provide long term support to Myanmar's democratic movement, this aid does not directly help the Rohingya. As violence against the Rohingya has recently escalated within the past few months, immediate alleviation, particularly in the form of resettlement is needed. Since early October 2016, the Myanmar army launched a crackdown after unidentified men, who are claimed to be Rohingya, killed 9 border officers on the Bangladesh-Myanmar border. According to Al Jazeera, since then, [dozens of Rohingya](#) have been killed and the UN estimates that 30,000 Rohingya have fled the violence, with some refugees accusing the Myanmar army of committing human rights atrocities, including torture, rape, and murder. Also in response to the recent violence, a UN official recently claimed that the Rohingya in Myanmar are being [ethnically cleansed](#). Systematic human rights abuses have occurred in Myanmar towards the Rohingya for a long time, and the recent uptake of violence since October is deeply troubling.

## Canada's Commitment to Rohingya

In 2007, when Canada became the first country to resettle Rohingya from refugee camps in Bangladesh, it also became an international leader in the resettlement of Rohingya refugees. Shortly after, several other developed nations followed Canada's lead. Between [2006 and 2010](#), Canada began resettling over 300 Rohingya refugees in British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec.

Canada's great capacity to take in refugees has recently been demonstrated as over [39,000 Syrian refugees](#) have been resettled in Canada since November 2015. However, the resettlement of Rohingya refugees to Canada remains in the hundreds, despite being one of the most persecuted groups of people in the world. In comparison, under President Barack Obama, the United States' commitment to resettling Rohingya has arguably been more

resolute with the US resettling [over 650 Rohingya in 2014 to over 2,500 in 2015, and over 2,100 in 2016](#). With recent emphasis in the media about a possible genocide unfolding in Myanmar, the international community must act quickly. In particular, Canada's strong reputation in the international community as a leader and advocate for human rights, and its strong commitment towards aiding refugees puts it in a central position to respond to the crisis.



*Trudeau welcomes refugees to Canada. Photo: Nathan Denette/The Canadian Press*

## Next Steps

The lack of response from the Myanmar government means other governments need to react. As informed citizens, we need to speak up for the Rohingya.

Support students helping the Rohingya by signing our petition that will be presented to the Trudeau Government. The link can be found on our Instagram page @WithRohingya. Secondly, follow our awareness campaign through #WithRohingya on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram and please share and start the conversation at home.

By Laura Galiyeva  
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# The Rohingya Refugee Crisis “An Issue Around the Globe”

## Origins of the Issue

The Rohingya are a religious ethnic minority group living in Myanmar. During World War II, Myanmar had to choose between Great Britain and Japan to pledge their loyalty to in return for protection and cooperation. While the majority of the Myanmar population chose to ally with the Japanese, the Rohingya chose to side with British. Some argue that due to this divisive decision, the Rohingya [became the most persecuted group](#) in the



Photo by Tomas Munita for The New York Times

world. As a Muslim minority group living in the Buddhist majority nation of Myanmar, the Rohingya are often persecuted by the state, along with other Buddhists. In addition to the violence that they face, the Rohingya are denied basic human rights including access to medical care, work, education and housing.

## The World Response to the Rohingya Refugee

### Regionally

In the Southeast Asia region, the closest countries to Myanmar are Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. Due to the close geographical proximity of these states, Rohingyas often attempt to escape to these states by boats. According to the European Commission, today Bangladesh hosts over 32 000 Rohingya refugee. However, this may not be an accurate number. Bangladesh has a lot more undocumented refugee coming from Myanmar but because of its [poor economy and political administrative issues](#), Bangladesh is unable to accept more refugees. [Thailand, in its turn, is more like a transit point](#) where Rohingyas arrive to take a break and continue their way to either Malaysia or Australia. One of the biggest reasons why Rohingyas are afraid to stay in Thailand is because [some of them can be turned into a subject of exploitation, human trafficking and human smuggling](#) there. In recent years, Thai authorities were found engaging in the human exploitation of Rohingyas. While the closest



neighboring countries to Myanmar are more economically poor and dangerous, countries like Australia and Malaysia are safer. However, in 2015 Malaysia could only provide [1000 places for refugees](#) if they would promise to return back to where they came from. In a turn of events, by December 2016, Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak stated that Malaysia hosts [56,000](#) Rohingya refugees and that he country is concerned about Myanmar's behavior towards Rohingyas. Razak also is calling for the support of the UN and neighboring Asian countries to prevent a possible genocide of the Rohingyas from occurring in Myanmar. Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott did not want to be open towards the refugees and as a result, Rohingyas were left without help there and were forced to leave the shore of Australia to find a new place of refuge.



### Internationally

Among Western countries, Canada and the U.S. do not hesitate to help the Rohingyas. By 2015, the U.S. accepted 70,000 Rohingyas and Canada was one of the first countries to resettle Rohingyas in 2007.

## Ways for a Better World: What Is to Be Done

Rohingya face problems both regionally and internationally, but the situation could have been handled better if political authorities acted justly and responsibly by acknowledging the plight of the Rohingya. For instance, Bangladesh and Thailand could accept refugees for a short period of time and provide safety and security for the Rohingyas. Although there has



Photo taken by AFP/Manan Vatsyayana

been a lack of action, the authorities of both of these countries can still make a difference as the flow of Rohingya refugees is escalating. Moreover, there are a lot of people to be helped. The other two countries that are interesting in their relationship towards Rohingyas are Australia and Malaysia. In Malaysia, the government did not speak about the Rohingya and did not want to accept the refugees before November 2016. However, after the November the news flow from Malaysia was changed positively towards the Rohingya. The question is why did it happen? The big possibility here is that Malaysian Prime Minister is attempting to gain favorability from the Muslim majority in Malaysia before the elections, who have protested against the mistreatment of the Rohingya. Australia in its turn does not want to do anything with Rohingya. In this case, the Malaysian Prime Minister calls the world to act to save the Rohingya has the potential to start influencing Australia to aid the Rohingya, who have largely avoided the issue.

## Next Steps

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# Myanmar's Perspective – The Rohingya Muslims

## The Effect of Silent Suu Kyi

By Vic Herr

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As the Rohingya in Myanmar suffer violence, they turn to, as any citizen would, to the leader of their country for help. However, Suu Kyi's government has remained mostly silent on the Rohingya issue and non-present in the Rakhine state in which the Rohingya have resided since the 7<sup>th</sup> Century.

Human Rights activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Elie Wiesel rightly states, "Silence encourages the tormentor, not the tormented". His statement rings true to what is happening in Myanmar today. Myanmar activists openly disavow the legitimacy of the Rohingya community. The government has not countered such propaganda and instead has remained largely silent. When voice was provided, Suu Kyi decided to side with protestors and requested that the international community stop using the "[emotive](#)" term, Rohingya, to identify Muslims from the Rakhine state.



Chaiwat Subprasom/Reuters via <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk>  
Bangkok, Thailand: Myanmar Buddhists living in Thailand allude to the Rohingya as Bengali terrorists during protest.

## Myanmar Government Statements

Myanmar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs [website](#) has one hit when searching for the term, Rohingya. It is a single press release that alludes to the "Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO)" as a terrorist group. If there are any connections with the RSO and that of terrorism it is sensible to not paint an entire community as such. However, Myanmar has not spoken out against such inferences.

A search under "Rakhine State" results in only a handful of press releases, three of them recently in December 2016. They declare Myanmar's work towards justice and humanitarian access. In January of 2014 the government [states](#) that the press has been irresponsible with their journalism and that journalists must verify their information with government officials. Any journalist releasing unverified information would be "interfering [with the] internal affairs of the host country [Myanmar]". Myanmar is not only remaining silent but are also silencing their visitors.



Bangkok Chaiwat Subprasom/Reuters via <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk>

Amnesty International has posted recent [footage](#) of police beating Rohingya villagers on their website. Myanmar's response is to launch an investigation into the matter but there does not appear to

be forthright condemnation. Rounding up of villagers and not knowing what will happen to them next is terrifying to watch. The one video clip pits directly against Myanmar's claim of conducting peace and justice in the region. Amnesty has also released a full [report](#) that documents the burning of villages and interviews with women who claim they were raped by Myanmar police and soldiers.

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*Soe Zeya Tun—Reuters via [www.time.com](http://www.time.com)*