GENERAL ASSEMBLY

TEXMUN 2022

Background Guide

GA Plenary

HOUSTON, FEBRUARY 4-6, 2022

Committee Overview

The United Nations (UN) General Assembly (GA) has existed since the creation of the UN and is one of the six principal organs of the UN established by the Charter of the United Nations (1945). The GA is divided into six Main Committees, and each has a specific purpose:

1st Committee—the Disarmament and International Security Committee;

2nd Committee—the Economic and Financial Committee;

3rd Committee—the Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee;

4th Committee—the Special Political and Decolonization Committee;

5th Committee—the Administrative and Budgetary Committee;

And finally, 6th Committee—the Legal Committee.
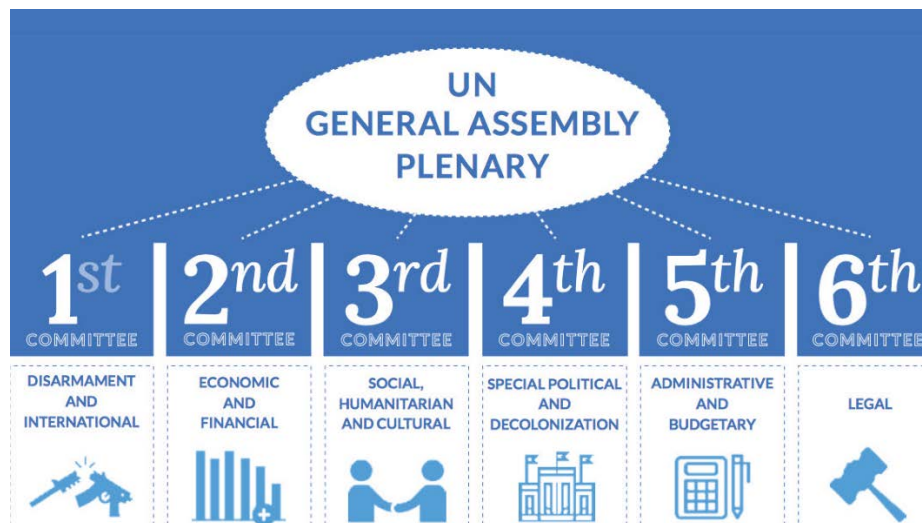
All Member States of the UN are represented in all of the six Main Committees. The Main Committees each submit a separate report to the GA plenary on the issues considered by them and containing the draft resolutions and decisions which are being recommended. The GA Plenary, as a principal UN organ, does not report to any other organ but requests and receives reports, including from the Secretary-General. Only matters adopted by the Plenary are considered official resolutions by the UN General Assembly. While not a frequent occurrence, the General Assembly Plenary may also decide to deal with an issue without prior reference to a committee.

As the only main body with universal membership, the GA is a unique forum for discussion within the UN System. As such, it represents the normative center of the UN and its roles in the

political, economic, humanitarian, social, and legal spheres can be summarized in three principal aspects: a generator of ideas, a place of international debate, and the nucleus of new concepts and practices. All these points will be further developed in the following sections of this overview.

Governance, Structure and Membership

As outlined in the Charter, the GA is comprised of all 193 UN Member States. However, observer status can also be granted to intergovernmental organizations such as the African Union and states without full UN membership; currently the Holy See and the State of Palestine are the only two non-Member States with permanent Observer status.

In the GA, each Member State has one equal vote. Since its 44th session in 1989, the GA is considered in session the entire year, but the most important time is the General Debate, which takes place from mid-September to the end of December and is called the "main part of the GA." The remainder of the year is called the "resumed part of the GA;" during this time working group meetings take place and thematic debates are held. Except for decisions on important matters, votes in the GA require a simple majority and the majority of resolutions are adopted without a vote, illustrating the consensual nature of the GA.

The six Main Committees receive substantive and organizational support from two important entities: the General Committee and the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management. The General Committee is comprised of the President of the General Assembly and the 21 Vice-Presidents of the GA as well as the Chairpersons of all the six GA Main Committees; all positions are elected every session on a non-renewable basis.

The General Committee's main duty, besides making recommendations on organizational issues, is to deal with the agenda of the GA Plenary and its six Main Committees. After receiving a preliminary list of agenda items from the UN Secretariat, the General Committee allocates the different items to each Main Committee. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management acts as the intersection between the GA and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and also provides valuable technical secretariat support—mainly through its General Assembly and ECOSOC Affairs Division.

Within the UN Secretariat, various departments and offices offer both substantive and technical support to each of the six Main Committees, as well.

Mandate, Functions and Powers

The mandate of the GA is set in Chapter IV of the Charter of the United Nations; Article 11 requires the GA to address questions of international peace and security, and Article 13

mandates undertaking and studies and issues recommendations for the purpose of promoting international cooperation.

This mandate has evolved over time as the First Committee was formerly the Political and Security Committee, and the Fourth Committee previously dealt mainly with issues of trusteeship. The growing range of issues facing the international community, however, led to a restructuring of the roles of the six Main Committees; this ultimately gave the First Committee its focus on disarmament and international security, and the Fourth Committee on special political and decolonization. The mandate of the GA allows it to be a conduit for ideas that can become the driver of new policies and shared norms through discussion and debate. This can be regarded as one of the main differences with the Security Council (SC).

The SC is more concerned with concrete threats to security such as ongoing conflicts, whereas the GA aims to create peace by forming habits of cooperation. In other words, while the SC can allow the use of force in the fight against terrorism and freeze assets to prevent illicit arms trade, the First Committee will work towards the development of international conventions to prevent terrorists from acquiring nuclear weapons and other WMDs. It is important to note, however, that the GA considers matters of international security only when the issue is not under the consideration of the SC.

Recent Sessions and Current Priorities

The GA is now entering their 75th session, the first meeting is set to take place September 9, 2021. The priorities for this meeting are vast as they cover the wide range of all six GA Committees. Given the historical nature of the last year coordination is a large theme with effective coordination of humanitarian assistance efforts, promotion of justice and international law, and maintenance of international peace and security being on the listed meeting agenda. The theme of human rights and development is ever present with promotion of sustained economic growth and sustainable development in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and recent United Nations conferences, development of Africa and promotion of human rights also being items for the GA agenda.

The 75th United Nations General Assembly opens in unprecedented conditions

Topic I: Ethnic & Religious Discrimination

"By acting together to end discrimination, we can lift humanity as a whole. As societies become multi-ethnic, multireligious and multi-cultural, we will need greater political, cultural and economic investments in inclusivity and cohesion in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. We can build communities that recognize that diversity is not a source of weakness, it is a source of strength and richness. Let us stand up against intolerance and eliminate discrimination." - UN Secretary-General Guterres, Remarks at the Commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Introduction

Typically within the UN system, minority groups are considered to be groups that have a different ethnicity, religion, and language from the predominant group of a Member State. While many Member States recognize some of its minority groups, there are others that do not recognize ethnic and/or minority groups. The Minority Rights Group International (MRG), a non-governmental organization (NGO) with consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), states that these minority groups, especially the ones that suffer exclusion and discrimination, should be able to self-identify as they wish and still participate in political, social, and economic life. There are some Member States that still hesitate to recognize the collective rights of their minority ethnic population, withholding their rights to participate fully and without persecution in political activities.

As well, religious intolerance and social hostilities are on the rise, particularly against religious minorities. The number of countries with incidents of religious intolerance towards minorities increased from 24% to 47% from 2007 to 2012, while those with instances of terrorist activities related to religious intolerance have suffered a sharp increase since 2007. Additionally, the number of governments that have exerted force against different religious groups has also increased, from 31% in 2007 to 48% in 2012. Many issues remain in mainstreaming the right to freedom of religion or belief. There is a general lack of empirical data and understanding that the right to religion or belief is intertwined with other human rights issues, including linguistic and religious minority, and refugee issues.

Growing religious intolerance and mistrust of multiculturalism, along with the increased trend in the securitization of human rights (limiting human rights in the name of state security), pose serious threats to the international system. Promoting religious tolerance, understanding, and peace, are important methods of eliminating all forms of religious intolerance and fostering sustainable peace.

Religious Discrimination

Understanding the root causes of religious intolerance is paramount to creating better policy to eliminate it. Root causes for religious intolerance by governments can be summarized into different categories: intolerance on the basis of religious interpretation; using religion (or secularism) to distinguish national heritage or privilege certain religions; the exercise of control

of public and private life; government failure; and an imbalance of power. Members of religious minorities are more vulnerable than religious majorities, as they may lack representation or protection and access to decision makers, and may experience discriminatory government policies. The most pervasive form of state-induced religious intolerance is harassment and hostility of government employees towards certain religious minorities. These include overly burdensome government processes such as requiring special permits for establishing places of worship or requiring registration or legal authority for religious communities in order for them to operate.

Additionally, blasphemy laws, which exist in over 70 countries, serve to penalize the expression of religion or belief when considered blasphemous in nature. Many blasphemy laws contradict international law regarding freedom of religion, belief, or expression, and have been deemed by the Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of religion or belief to be unlawful and unjustifiable in the context of human rights, particularly the right to freedom of religion or

belief. The securitization of human rights is an ongoing problem for maintaining religious freedom, as it undermines certain human rights, particularly the right to freedom of religion or belief, through state laws. Some states make declarations that rights must be limited in the name of security, when, in reality, the limitation of those rights does not lessen a security risk, or when the relationship between restricting rights and security is weak or unfounded. General, vague statements made by governments about the restriction of religious freedom in the name of security or order may be in some cases a cover for wanting to halt religious criticism, to maintain control over public and private life, or to discriminate against minority groups. Judiciaries and legislative frameworks within Member States play an important role in the realization of the right to freedom of religion or belief.

Defense of secularism in human rights cases has become ubiquitous in countries that have secular laws. While the right to freedom of religion or belief is codified in international and human rights laws, the expression of such beliefs is often subject to limitations at the national level. For instance, in the case of Leyla Şahin v. Turkey, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that a university in Istanbul had the right to ban headscarves from campus to protect individuals from attacks from extremist groups trying to undo Turkey's laws protecting secularism. In the case of Lautsi and Others v. Italy, crucifixes were allowed in classrooms in Italy by the European Court of Human Rights, while the House of Lords in the United Kingdom in Begum v. Headteacher came to the conclusion in 2006 that it was permissible to ban young

women from wearing headscarves in a predominantly Muslim school, to ensure that the girls who did not wear headscarves were not threatened. In France, a country-wide ban on veils has been upheld in human rights courts, in order to promote France's religious neutrality. The cumulative impact of these cases may have serious effects for religious

minorities and societies, where principles of secularism may be implemented differently in each secular country. In these cases and others, an analysis of the reasons for bans on religious symbols, national law, gender equality, security, human rights law, and other factors may be considered before a decision is made by a court.

One of the biggest issues facing the international community is a general lack of quality data on religious intolerance that could be used to establish better policies in the future. The OHCHR published a guide in 2012 to help measure human rights indicators to assist the international community, NGOs, and Member States so that data can be disaggregated and used to develop better policy to address human rights issues. This includes the disaggregation of data by religion, supporting SDG 17 and policy capacity for governments.

Ethnic Discrimination

International and Regional Framework

The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) protects persons from discrimination on the grounds of religion, acknowledges individuals of age should be allowed to marry regardless of religion or creed, and endorses the right to education that promotes harmony. Article 18 enshrines the right of an individual to freedom of expression or belief, their right to change their beliefs, and "to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

Following the UDHR, the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR), adopted by the General Assembly in 1966, states that Member States party to the covenant undertake the duty to respect and protect the rights of their citizens, without distinguishing on the basis of religion. The ICCPR enshrines the "right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion," including the right to choose and convert to a religion, children's religious rights, religious rights of parents, and freedom from coercion that would affect an individual's right to freedom of religion.

On 25 November 1981, the UN General Assembly adopted the *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief*, which established a human rights framework for addressing the freedom of religion. The declaration expanded on the ICCPR and reassured the right to freedom of religion or belief by calling upon Member States to rescind discriminatory legislation in order to protect the freedom of religion and belief. The General Assembly also adopted the *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities* in 1992, which focuses on protecting the rights of minorities, advocating that this protection be rooted in national legislation of Member States. Indigenous and tribal peoples are also included as ethnic minorities, and the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (No. 169) (1989) is an important document that promotes the protection and preservation of the cultural and social life of indigenous peoples; unfortunately, only a few Member States have ratified the Convention. Furthermore, the cultural rights of indigenous people have been refined through treaty bodies, regional courts, and opinions of regional

commissions, where many national courts have added cultural rights for indigenous people to their domestic law system.

More recently, General Assembly resolutions 71/195 and 71/196, both adopted on 19 December 2016, address intolerance related to religion and freedom of religion or belief, which are inextricably linked to one another. General Assembly resolution 71/195 on "Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief," notes the recent increase in hate crimes motivated by religious intolerance, and encourages constructive conversation and interfaith dialogue as a strong proactive measure to eliminate the root causes of religious intolerance. Connected to eliminating religious intolerance is the right to freedom of religion or belief, addressed in General Assembly resolution 71/196, which strongly condemns all acts of terrorism and violence, discrimination and intolerance, and instances where state laws do not protect the freedom of religion.

Moreover, the *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court* (1988) acknowledges that attacks directed towards religious buildings constitute a war crime. The *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015) provides a roadmap for the international community to develop and enhance human rights, ensure greater and equal access to basic services, and build capacity for the development of inclusive societies. While none of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) explicitly address religious intolerance, some of their targets note that progress should be made to advance the right to freedom of religion, such as the targets in SDGs 4, 10, 16, and 17. These goals, aimed at promoting inclusive education, social cohesion and inclusivity; reducing discriminatory laws and protecting fundamental freedoms, and enhancing state policy capacity by increasing access to high quality data, all play a role in eliminating all forms of religious intolerance.

From 28-29 March 2017, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) held an expert workshop on "Faith for Rights" (F4R), which resulted in the *Beirut Declaration*, outlining five principles for advancing human rights and the right to freedom of religion or belief. The principles aim to translate international dialogue to local settings in order to combat religious intolerance, avoid the manipulation of faith, and promote F4R partnerships. *The Beirut Declaration* recognizes the importance of religious institutions in protecting human dignity and human rights. It also references the 2012 *Rabat Plan of Action* on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, which focuses on the role of political and religious leaders in denouncing intolerance and violence. The *Rabat Plan of Action*

provides a concrete set of recommendations that cover legislative approaches to combat incitement to "discrimination, hostility, or violence."

Likewise, UN Human Rights Council (HRC) resolution 16/18 of 12 April 2011 titled "Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against, persons based on religion or belief" established the Istanbul Process, which allowed the international system to address religious intolerance through positive policy measures rather than the previous "defamation of religion" approach to eliminating blasphemy laws.198 Blasphemy laws indicate religious intolerance in a state's judiciary system and can be described as "the act of insulting or showing contempt or lack of reverence for God."

Role of the International System

Within the UN system, the cultural rights of minorities have also been discussed in several different committees and documents. The General Assembly (GA) is a main organ of the UN and makes important decisions that influence the cultural rights of minorities. Specifically, the GA Third Committee is assigned to address social, humanitarian, and cultural issues. One of the main efforts of Third Committee regarding economic and socio-cultural rights is the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities* (UNDM) (1992). This declaration recognizes that minority groups have the right to enjoy their culture, practice any religion, and speak their own language. The declaration also defends the idea that Member States should create favorable conditions that ensure the freedom to exercise the cultural identity of a minority group.

The Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief is mandated to help protect the right to freedom of religion or belief at the national, regional, and international level, to identify all

obstacles to the freedom of religion or belief, to review instances where Member States do not uphold the *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief*, and to inform the UN of all abuses of the freedom of religion or belief from a gender perspective. The Special Rapporteur's recent report on the implementation plan for the Istanbul Process notes that many violations of the right to religion or belief are carried out by non-state actors, by terrorist organizations, and by those inspired to commit acts of hatred and religious intolerance.

In 2017, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) published the guide *Making textbook content inclusive: A focus on religion, gender, and culture, which contains a special section on religion*. The guide acknowledges that education and textbooks can assist in promoting dialogue between faiths, contributing to a learning environment that fosters inclusivity. UNESCO has worked on improving textbook content since 1945, and has seen significant development since then. The UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging Faith-

Based Actors for Sustainable Development works with faith-based organizations (FBOs) and different UN organizations to advance development and human rights.

Additionally, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) published a report titled *Realizing the Faith Dividend: Religion, Gender, Peace and Security in Agenda 2030*, which links the importance of FBOs within sustainable development, as actors that contribute to social and economic development. The UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, which reports directly to the UN Secretary-General in an advisory capacity, has recently published the *Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that could lead to Atrocity Crimes*, a document that is the result of two years of engagement with religious groups. The document addresses the critical role religious leaders play in curbing the incitement to violence through hateful speech and provides a blueprint for building inclusive societies. Similarly, the UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) brings together faith leaders for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, and maintains that respecting diversity is essential to building peace.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and FBOs have a substantial role to play in promoting the right to freedom of religion or belief, as they are uniquely positioned within society to build networks of trust and promote intercultural dialogue. The International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD), established in 2016, unites NGOs, governmental organizations, FBOs, voluntary organizations, as well as secular and non-secular actors, to further SDGs 3, 5, and 16 on health, gender equality, and peace and strong institutions.

On a regional level, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has issued guidelines for reviewing legislation to protect the freedom of religion or belief as a measure to reduce religious intolerance. In 2015, the European Commission held a forum on "Tolerance and respect: preventing and combating anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim hatred in Europe." The outcomes of the forum comprised a variety of policy suggestions from participants, including a call for national action plans, increased public awareness, education on human rights and religious diversity, and quality disaggregated data on religion and discrimination on the basis of religion. Furthermore, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has issued a Programme of Action until 2025 focusing on promoting intercultural dialogue and tolerance in an effort to eliminate discrimination against and misconceptions about Muslims.

Case Study: *Myanmar*

In the 19th century, Britain colonized large territories in south Asia including modern day Myanmar, then known as Burma. Migration from India and Bangladesh into Burma was common and seen as internal population movement, considering the British held all three territories. After Burma's independence in 1948, these migrants remained in the Rakhine State of Burma and became known as the Rohingya. Later that year, the state government passed the Union Citizenship Act defining which ethnicities were authorized to obtain citizenship, excluding the Rohingya people. Individuals whose families had resided in Myanmar for at least two generations were originally given special identification cards allowing the Rohingya to reside in the state, mostly as non-citizens.

Myanmar: Major ethnic groups

Myanmar officially recognises 135 ethnic groups but Rohingya Muslims have been rendered stateless and stripped of their citizenship.

ETHNIC GROUPS

- Bamar
- Shan
- Karen
- Rakhine*
- Rohingya
- Kachin
- Chin
- Karenni
- Mon
- Wa
- Kokang Chinese

Ethnic minority states
* Includes other Rakhine Muslim minorities

- ⬤ Rakhine-Rohingya inter-ethnic conflict
- ◼ Conflict area
- ◼ Capital

INDIA
CHINA
BANGLADESH
MYANMAR
ROHINGYA
Naypyidaw
THAILAND

Source: Al Jazeera, agencies, freeburmarangers, Burma - Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity (Martin Smith)

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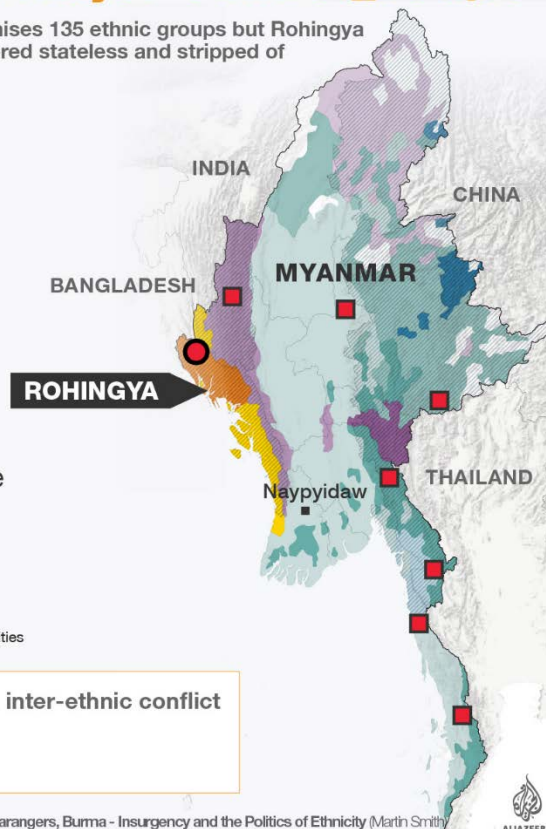
After a military coup in 1962, Myanmar citizens were required to carry national registration cards; the Rohingya, however, were given foreign identity cards that came with several academic and career limitations. This discrimination was followed by widespread destruction and assault on the Rohingya people. The first wave of extreme violence began in 1978 from the Myanmar military. In an effort to expel the Rohingya from the state, so-called "illegal immigrants," including the Rohingya, were identified and encouraged to leave the region. This resulted in rape, arbitrary arrests, destruction of mosques and villages, and land confiscation leading to over 200,000 Rohingya refugees fleeing to Bangladesh. New laws in 1982 further limited the rights of the Rohingya to study, work, travel, marry, practice religion, vote, and access health care.

Since then, there was another wave of violence in 1992 leading to another influx of refugees to Bangladesh; although the United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) assisted in the repatriation of many refugees in the early 2000s, it is reported that they returned to Myanmar to continued violence and discrimination. Today, the government of Myanmar recognizes 135 official ethnic groups in its state. However, the Rohingya people, who primarily inhabit the Rakhine State of Myanmar and total over one million individuals, have been denied status as an official ethnic group and denied citizenship since 1982. In the past several

decades, the Rohingya people have faced persecution as well as political and social discrimination with state laws and policies that deny them fundamental human rights.

Tensions between the Rohingya, the state military, and other actors have led to ethnic and religious-related violence since the beginning of the discriminatory laws which has escalated in the past few years. A new political party was voted into Myanmar government office in 2015 led by Aung San Suu Kyi, Nobel Peace Prize Laurate and now the Myanmar State Counsellor, with hopes of ending the refugee crisis. The government has not played an active role in the violence against the Rohingya, as under the current constitution the Myanmar military acts independently of the governing party. Despite the new developments in the Myanmar political leadership, the military retains control over all defense and border operations without opportunity for the government to intervene.

New violence in the past half-decade has worsened conditions for the Rohingya as their villages were raided and soldiers have committed violence that has been compared to an "ethnic cleansing campaign." This has threatened the safety and security of Rakhine State, leaving many stateless and relying on UN aid for survival. In August 2017, new violence incited significant amounts of Rohingya to seek refuge in nearby states. Due to the ongoing persecution, nearly one million Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh, Malaysia, and other Southeast Asian states.

Other human rights agreements adopted by the international community are useful in the context of the situation in Myanmar, including the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR) (1966) and the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (ICERD) (1965). The ICCPR states that no state shall restrict one's fundamental human rights including liberty, security of person, freedom to leave any country, religion, right to opportunity, and equal rights without discrimination of national origin. While Myanmar is not currently party to the ICCPR, the agreement is considered part of customary international law and can be universally applied. Meanwhile, the ICERD condemns and prohibits all forms of racial discrimination, calling for the complete removal of all racial barriers.
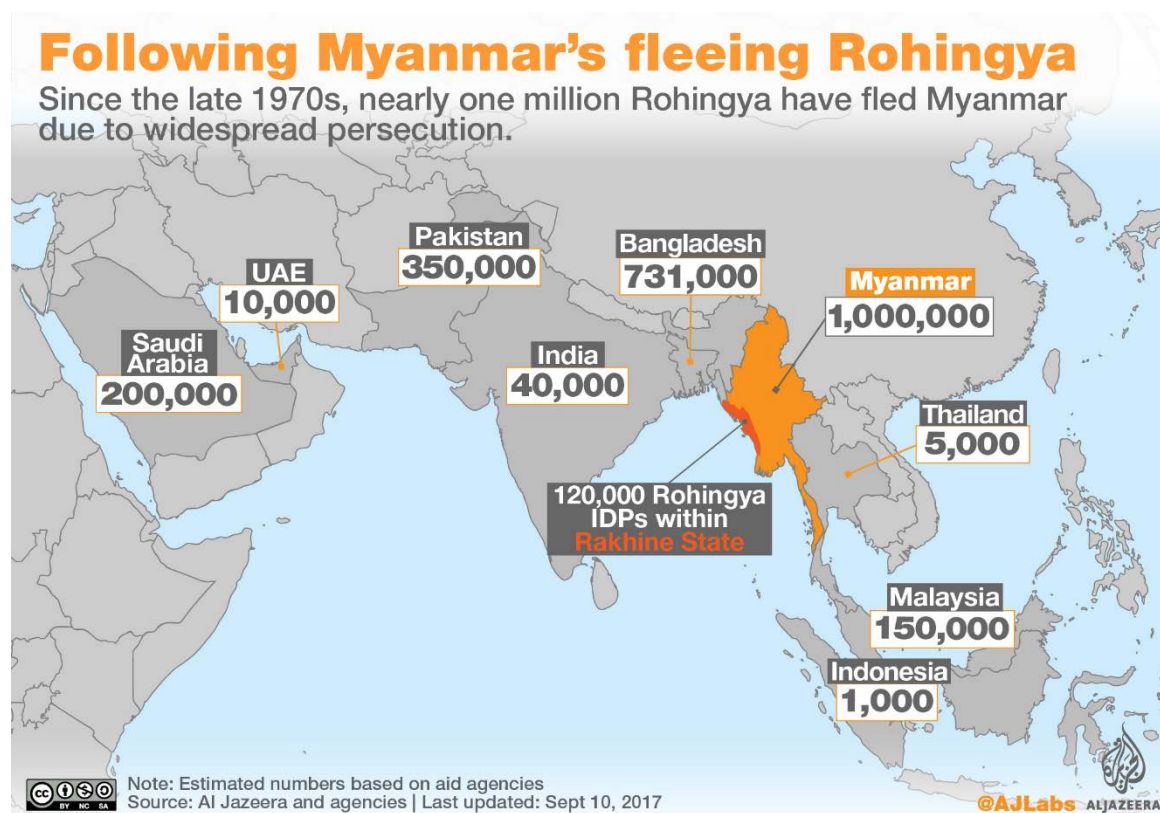
The General Assembly first discussed the situation in Myanmar in General Assembly resolution 46/132, adopted on 17 December 1991. This resolution focuses on promoting the creation of a democratic state and addressing the 'human rights situation' in Myanmar. In recent years, the General Assembly has continued considering topics on the situation in Myanmar, focusing on the human rights issues and the continued persecution of the Rohingya people. In General Assembly resolution 72/248 adopted 24 December 2017, the body calls upon the government of Myanmar to end the violence and allow for the peaceful delivery of aid to those in need, along with several other provisions to address the needs of the Rohingya and create a peaceful state.

This recent resolution adopts measures to support refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) by increasing efforts for humanitarian access and fact-finding missions, supporting the return and relocation of Rohingya refugees and IDPs, and encouraging assistance from the international community through diplomatic measures to uphold the rights and security of the Rohingya. The UN Human Rights Council (HRC) has also addressed the crisis and the need to protect the human rights of the Rohingya. HRC resolution 37/32 adopted on 23 March 2018 addresses the violence in the Rakhine State and calls upon the government to resolve the mistreatment of the Rohingya, including addressing all human rights abuses, the lack of rule of law, and mistreatment of women and children, and to work toward a lasting peace. The Special

Rapporteur, nominated by the HRC in resolution 1992/58, published a report on 8 September 2017 describing an improved human rights situation within the Myanmar national parliament, while also noting room for improvement in enhancing state accountability and an apparent climate of impunity.

The Security Council has taken a limited role in addressing the situation in Myanmar. Thus far, the Council has released several presidential statements acknowledging the security threat posed by the violence in Rakhine State including statement 2008/13 in 2008 and statement 2017/22 in 2017. These statements highlight the worsening humanitarian crisis and the increasing number of Rohingya refugees and IDPs. The statements call upon the Myanmar government to take responsibility for and resolve the violence occurring within the state to halt the crisis. On request from the Security Council, the Secretary-General has written a report on the "Situation of children and armed conflict in Myanmar," recommending greater state accountability and efficiency in verifying soldier recruitment cases. The Secretary-General also appointed Christine Schraner Burgener, former Swedish ambassador to Germany, as special envoy to report on the state of Myanmar and communicate with local officials about the progress of UN programs. In May 2018, the Security Council sent a delegation to visit Rakhine State and deliberate with local representatives on measures to improve safety to build trust, establish positive relations with local governments, and promote UN principles. However, the meetings were unsuccessful in making tangible progress due to disagreements over how to resolve the violence in the region.

Following Myanmar's fleeing Rohingya
Since the late 1970s, nearly one million Rohingya have fled Myanmar due to widespread persecution.

UAE 10,000
Pakistan 350,000
Bangladesh 731,000
Myanmar 1,000,000
Saudi Arabia 200,000
India 40,000
Thailand 5,000
120,000 Rohingya IDPs within Rakhine State
Malaysia 150,000
Indonesia 1,000

Note: Estimated numbers based on aid agencies
Source: Al Jazeera and agencies | Last updated: Sept 10, 2017
@AJLabs ALJAZEERA

Next Steps

Delegates should consider the following questions while doing their research:

- How can Member States better engage with the Responsibility to Protect in their own borders when it comes to Religious and Ethnic Intolerance?
- What executive powers in the UN system need reform to protect the international population from religious and ethnic persecution?
- What steps need to be taken by the UN system and Member States to put an end to religious and minority violence?
- How do we protect and empower religious and ethnic minorities?
- What current religious and ethnic cleansing abuses need more exposure?

Topic 2: Transitioning to Sustainable Energy for All: Meeting Growing Energy Demands

"Greenhouse gases, just like viruses, do not respect national boundaries" - UN Secretary-General Guterres, Remarks at the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day Celebration

Introduction

The United Nations continues to focus on the impact and significance of the energy gap and the millions of people still without access to clean, affordable energy because of it. Goal 7 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlines the objective of providing all people with access to affordable and clean energy by the year 2030. The "energy gap" refers to the number of people who lack access to clean, affordable energy.

According to the Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020, there are still regional, social, and economic inequalities that limit progress to closing the energy gap. In 2018, 90% of the world's population had access to electricity compared to 83% in 2010. Despite this progress, there are 789 million people still living without electricity; of whom 85% are living in rural areas of the world. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic the problem of the energy gap becomes even more significant as health facilities in areas without stable access to energy are not electrified or experience outages, affecting their capacity for essential health services. The problem is particularly pronounced in sub-Saharan Africa having the lowest access rate to electricity.

CO₂ emissions per capita, 2017
Average carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions per capita measured in tonnes per year.
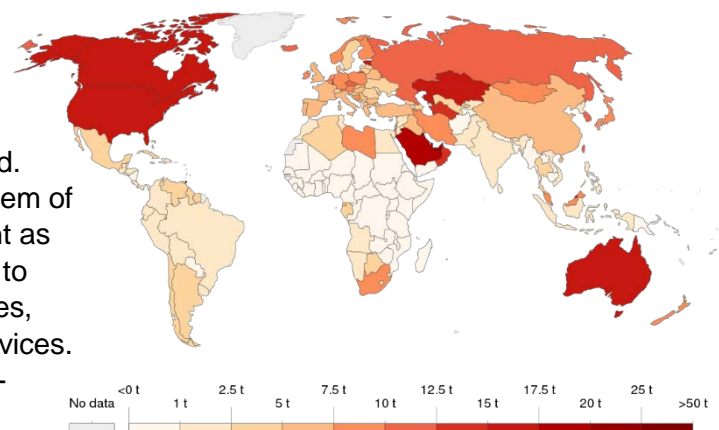
Source: OWID based on CDIAC; Global Carbon Project; Gapminder & UN

Further, the SDG report shows that if the rate of progress doesn't improve in 2030 around 620 million people would still lack access to electricity. These numbers do not consider the COVID-19 disruptions like the lack of growth in renewable energies due to decreasing oil prices, disruptions in supply chains, and reduced income. Without access, people face greater economic and social hardships such as poverty, exclusion, and lack of education. A lack of energy threatens economic growth, job creation, and access to education. Access to energy is just one of two primary objectives for SDG7 (affordable and clean energy).

It is estimated that by 2040, the world's energy requirements will increase by 70%, with two thirds of the global population living in urban cities. The energy sector alone accounts for over two thirds of global greenhouse gas emissions (GHG). Despite growing investments in renewable energies, sustainable electricity only accounts for 20% of the final energy usage. By closing the energy gap more people will have access to energy. To prevent an increase of pollution and GHG energy sources must be sustainable. Furthermore, ensuring clean energy prevents health issues arising with energy from fossil fuels, for example the use of solid fuels for indoor cooking.

International and Regional Framework

A number of international agreements have highlighted the need to close the energy gap. As part of the 1948 *Universal Declaration Of Human Rights* (UDHR), energy is declared as an important resource that should be provided and protected for all citizens regardless of social or economic status. Energy was also a factor in the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), which discussed the impact of development on the environment. Subsequently, UNCED adopted *Agenda 21*, wherein Chapter 7 focuses on promoting sustainable human settlement development. *Agenda 21* emphasizes promoting sustainable energy and transport systems in human settlements and provides policy guidelines to national governments and international organizations. The objective of the policy guides are to support the transition towards more energy efficient technologies and increase renewable energy access and usage.

In 2002, the World Summit on Sustainable Development placed greater emphasis on access to energy as a means to promote sustainable development. *The Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development*, adopted in 2002, made efforts to help Member States diversify energy resources by developing cleaner and more cost effective sustainable energy technologies. *The Johannesburg Declaration* also emphasizes the exchange of these

technologies to developing countries to increase the global share of renewable energy sources and their relative affordability. The General Assembly *Resolution 67/215* from 2012 declared the Decade of Sustainable Energy for All from 2014 to 2024. The goal of the initiative is to promote "renewable energy and energy efficiency worldwide." The mid-point review from 2019 shows that improvements in electrification rates and energy efficiency enhance the potential for providing access to clean cooking and increasing deployment of renewables.
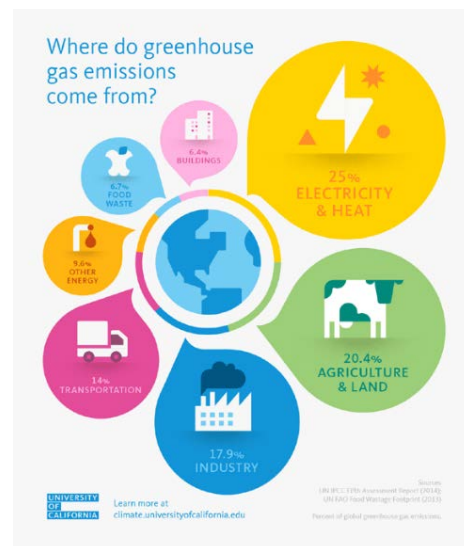
Furthermore, in 2017, the UN General Assembly adopted *Resolution 71/256*, the *New Urban Agenda*, which outlines the duty of Member States to provide clean, renewable, and affordable energy to support the growth of sustainable settlements.196 The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015) recognizes the eradication of extreme poverty as the greatest global challenge. Energy access and renewable energy transitions are the fundamental priorities of

SDG7 (affordable and clean energy) and are closely interlinked with other SDGs and the overarching goal of poverty eradication. Closing the energy gap for all reduces educational disparities, environmental threats, and enables the creation of new jobs and economic growth.

The *Addis Ababa Action Agenda* (AAAA) (2015) is the action plan designed to outline the requirements for financing the SDGs. Specific to energy, the AAAA specifies the development of a new forum to bridge the infrastructure gap present within both urban and rural developments in order to be able to provide clean affordable energy to all people. The AAAA also provides policy recommendations that incentivize public and private investment into energy infrastructure and renewable energy technology to increase the rate of global energy access.

Role of the International System

As the primary operational program in achieving the SDGs, the GA Plenary serves a fundamental role in providing leadership on and fostering collaboration between the variety of bodies, projects, and funds designed to increase energy access for all. In the 75th session of the GA it focuses on cooperation and implementing the SDGs through six solutions: poverty eradication, strengthening accountable governance, increasing crisis prevention and recovery, promoting nature based solutions, strengthening gender equality, and closing the energy gap.

Another leader in the UN system working to close the energy gap is the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The UNDP Annual Report from 2019 illustrates UNDP's work with development banks around the globe to create conditions for investors to invest in green energy to expand the share of renewable energy in the energy mix offering different choices of investments. UNDP's work in the energy sector is supported through bodies such as UN-Energy, which functions as the primary mechanism for interagency collaboration on energy projects. UNDP also collaborates frequently with the International Energy Agency, particularly on the release of information and statistics related to energy access.

In 2019, UNDP and the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), announced a new global partnership with to accelerate low carbon energy transitions and explore joint initiatives

aimed at accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The partnership seeks to aid developing countries to provide a more efficient transition to renewable energy and increased energy access. IRENA launched with its partners the *Great Investment Platform*. This platform aims to accelerate partnership, collaboration, and knowledge sharing between organizations, international financial institutions, and other entities interested in energy transformation.
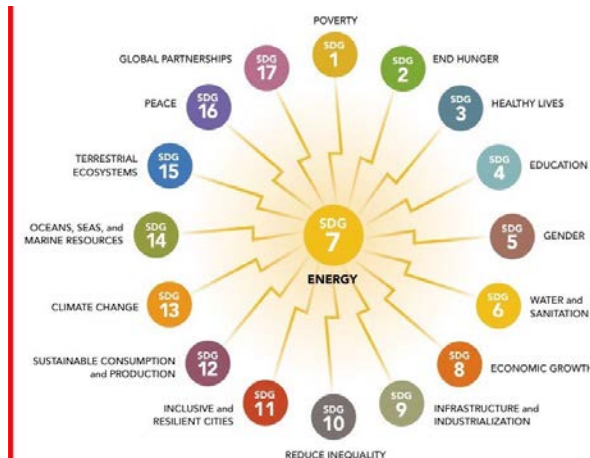
According to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) review of SDG7 in 2018, modern renewable power generation is expanding rapidly but greater efforts are required for it to have a significant impact on global usage. Furthermore, another area highlighted by the HLPF review is the need for more consistent, improved, and available data on energy access. The HLPF review of SDG 7 in 2019 highlights the need to expand "clean and safe cooking fuels and technologies for 3 billion people, to expand the use of renewable energy beyond the electricity sector, and to increase electrification in sub-Saharan Africa."

The 2020 Energy Progress report published by the International Energy Agency, IRENA, the UN Statistic Division, the World Bank, and the World Health Organization summarizes efforts made to provide "universal access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy by 2030." Produced in conjunction with several other organizations, the Regulatory Indicators for Sustainable Energy (RISE), using 27 indicators, aim to answer whether governments are upholding the targets of SDG 7 as well as identifying the most critical areas needing support. By using these measurements, RISE provides accurate information for organizations and project networks to prioritize the areas with the greatest needs. Similarly, Sustainable Energy for All (SEforALL) is an organization that focuses its efforts on achieving SDG 7 in areas with the highest needs. SEforALL works on achieving electricity for all in Africa through policy reform, investment promotion, and private sector engagement.

Energy Access in Rural Communities

Energy access is vital and necessary in order to ensure the progression of community development as well as the fulfillment of the SDGs. Access rates between communities differed, with 79% of people in rural areas having access as opposed to 97% of people living in urban communities. Some of the major obstacles that limit rural communities in gaining access to energy are funds and location. Within many rural communities in developing countries, there are infrastructural challenges in establishing complex energy grids or generators.

For many developing countries, expanding the outreach of already existing electrical grids can be a very costly investment that governments cannot afford. The investment environment of developing countries can be high risk and can prove difficult for Member States to develop policies to create a safe investment environment for the private sector. Lack of access to energy can also exacerbate existing societal disparities in developing rural communities. For example, traditional cookstoves often double as a stove and source of heat for rural communities where electrical cooking equipment is not available. These methods can cause health issues to the people in the home. Every year 4.3 million people die from indoor air pollution, of which it is estimated women and children make up the majority.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic these disparities have an even wider impact with people being confined to their homes for extended periods of time. Moreover, energy access in poor, rural communities does not allow for reliable treatment of COVID-19 patients. Health centers in rural areas are often affected by poor connections and voltage fluctuations that damage medical equipment. The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020 highlights the need for accessible, affordable, reliable and sustainable energy to treat patients in hospitals, to provide accessible clean water, to disseminate important medical information, and to enable remote learning for students. Additionally, the pandemic affects the progress toward SDG7, because declining oil prices can hinder the promotion of clean and affordable energy while the pandemic caused economic consequences for many household and business, which limits their ability to pay for electricity.

Off-Grid Energy Solutions

In order to address the issue of energy access in rural communities, many UN development organizations have invested in off-grid energy solutions, which do not rely on or use public utility services or networks. The UN researches and promotes these development projects so that rural communities can have access to clean, reliable energy. One example of an off-grid solution is the 'Off-Grid Box' project by UNDP in Tanzania that provides electricity and clean water. The box is a retrofitted shipping container equipped with hardware needed to produce electricity and clean water. It is designed to allow rural communities to have access to a reliable source of off-grid electricity which, in turn, enables rural economic activities and reduce household financial or medical costs.

Additionally, solar mini grids now have the potential to provide increased levels of electricity that can be used for productive means such as watering crops, collecting water, and clean cooking and heating. The widespread deployment of solar mini grids, however, will require significant investment on the part of the private sector. Increased access to electricity allows communities to use technologies to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The placement of off-grid solutions in rural communities allows households and health clinics to develop and provide better services. A rapid expansion of the medical cold chain to deliver a vaccine is also needed and off-grid solutions could contribute to achieve this. Vaccines need to be stored cold between 2-8 degrees Celsius.

In order to reach inhabitants of rural areas with vaccines and medication a safe medical cold chain is necessary. However, due to the pandemic, off grid companies face difficulties to provide communities with off-grid power. Without off-grid power solutions, local industry faces economic problems while also impacting communities negatively. Other organizations, such as SEforALL, have begun their own Integrated Electrification Pathways (IEPs) that focus on inclusive planning and policy measures that help projects achieve the targets of SDG7. IEPs serve as implementation tactics that utilize new technological approaches and delivery models to provide energy access to areas with highest human needs. UNDP works with governments to increase the energy access rate of the country by expanding off-grid solutions. In Afghanistan the installation of micro hydropower systems provided electricity to 168,000 off-grid communities. Additionally, in Nepal, a similar project was able to provide electricity access to over 45,000 people.

Sustainable Urban Cities

Over 50% of the world's population lives in urban areas and accounts for 70% of global carbon dioxide emissions. Energy access still remains an issue in urban communities, as accessibility and stability of electricity can cause concern for many in poverty. Urban cities also experience blackouts, irregular supply, and low or fluctuating voltage output. Affordability is another key issue as many times energy costs can be very high causing people to survive for periods of time without
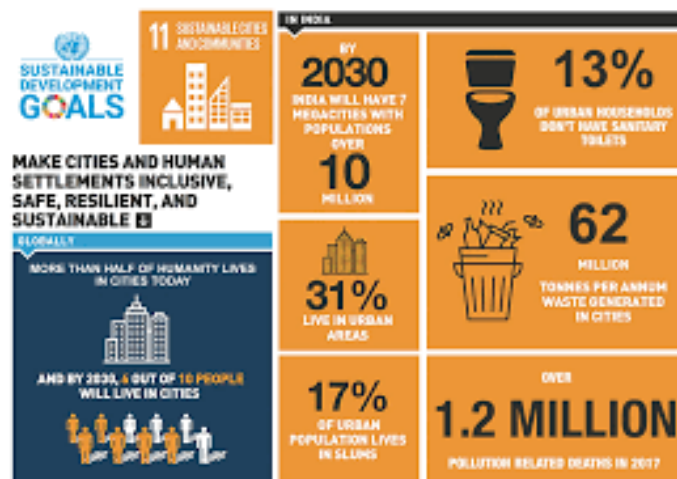
electricity. UNDP, in its Sustainable Urbanization Strategy, discusses benefits, such as cost savings and increased income, which an increase of energy efficiency in buildings, business, and industries can help provide. Sustainable energy solutions alongside energy efficiency methods can also contribute to resolving other urban issues such as air quality, waste management, and improved health.

Though oil prices declined, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it did not lead to a wider access to energy for people as reduced incomes limited their ability to pay for the oil. This highlights the need for sustainable off-grid energy solutions which could offer business models such as "pay-as-you go". Off grid solutions prevent large up-front installation costs for households and the risk of foreign exchange can be eliminated. Lastly, heat waves impact inhabitants of slums and informal urban settlements, as they are not able to stay indoors due to the lack of cooling systems for their homes. Ensuring a stable source of green energy is necessary for cities to have more inclusive policies that will aid the urban poor and marginalized communities and provide opportunities for further development.

Next Steps

Delegates should consider the following questions while doing their research:

- What information does the IPCC report *Climate Change 2021* offer to assist with closing the energy gap? Does it raise issues that maybe the background guide has not highlighted?
- What Member State cooperation's already exist in regards to sustainable energy? South-South Cooperation's? Triangular Cooperation's?
- What Member States are thriving with sustainable energy and which Member States are lacking? What can we learn from the states that are thriving?