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Myanmar

Muslims Minority Issue

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Introduction:

Conflict is inevitable and normal thing. Also the existence of the conflict is not a problem but the problem is how to handle it.¹ When the conflict causes death of thousands and migrate a lot that means the conflict reaches a high level and it needs for immediate solution. In addition the very notion of ethnicity is a struggle topic in the social sciences for years.² The Muslims minority in Myanmar (Rohingya) is suffered from violence in their home country and as result many of them fled to the neighbor country such as Bangladesh. They are one of the most marginalized refugee communities in south and Southeast Asia. In general the problem in Myanmar is a humanitarian and moral issue due to racial differences and governance problem. The Rohingya people are victims of the discriminatory policies of the government.³

If we look to the political and military conflicts in the world map, we found that the most areas of tension are concentrated in places where there are Muslim minorities. This paper will focus in the Muslims minority in Myanmar. Firstly this paper will explain the historical background of the Muslim minority and the political system in the country. Then the conflict in Myanmar and how it escalates until it becomes hard to solve it. Moreover this paper will discuss the political interest and its related with violence. After that it will discuss the response of the international community. Then it will discuss the solutions alternative for this conflict. The current Burmese government's will not provide a solution to the ethnic conflict in Myanmar. In addition Burma's ethnic problems could be solved by negotiation between the groups with a powerful mediator. This will happen through the establishment of a real federal political system that guarantees the autonomy for all ethnic groups in Myanmar or gives the independence for the Muslims minority in Myanmar.

¹ Bernard Mayer. *The Dynamics Of Conflict: A guide to Engagement and Intervention*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2nd. (2012): 1

² Matthew J. Walton. *Ethnicity, Conflict, and History in Burma: The Myths of Panglong*. *Asian Survey*, Vol. 48, Issue 6, (2008): 889–910

³ Syeda Naushin Parnini *The Crisis of the Rohingya as a Muslim Minority in Myanmar and Bilateral Relations with Bangladesh*, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol, 33, No, 3 (2013): 281-297.

I. Historical Background:

The conflict in Burma is ethnic conflict and it is one of the longest conflicts in the world. The conflict was found since 1948 after Burma independent from Britain.⁴ Myanmar is a multi-religion country and the Rohingya is the Muslim ethnic group. They are from the northern Rakhine State or Arakan in the western Myanmar. Their history backed to the early seventh century, when the trader of Arab Muslims settles down in the area. Moreover they have a lot of similarities with south Asians countries especially Bangladesh like; language and culture. Since 1968 and the Rohingya in Myanmar suffered from human rights violence under the regime of military junta. Around 200,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh in 1978 and around 250,000 in 1991. Military rule in Myanmar is backed to 1962 and the Rohingya were under persecution, there were without legal nationality and many of them forced to migrate to Bangladesh, Thailand, India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Malaysia and even they travelled to these countries their suffered were not ended caused of irony of poverty, escape and deportation.⁵ When a military strongman called Ne Win order a successful coup. Ne Win made a lot of changes such as: banned all political opposition, change the system to socialism ideology, increase the role of military in economic and daily life, isolated the country from foreign trade and used the military power to quash dissent. After two decades there was a protest against Ne Win and because Ne Win's disastrous economic management he leave the party chairman and there were an actual change in the government.⁶ The violence in Myanmar is build from the past. In the ninetieth century the British Empire was expand from India eastward. The Muslims, Hindus and others took the same direction and moving to the cities and towns cross Myanmar. The ethnic classification do not distinguish between Muslims or Hindus or even between the people who livd in the country for a lot of generation or the recent immigrations. After this takeover led in 1962 around 300000 indians escaped from the country and in 1982 there was restrict law for citizenship to the people those who lived in Myanmar before 1823 and that is effect the disenfranchising of the remained indians. In addition the Muslims in Rakhine State have limited travel from their home town because of the national and local travel regulations. In the subnational policies the ethnic identity is central thing. More than seventy years there were a resistance against the government by the armed ethnic group, so the ethnicities represented by these groups as the

⁴ Pon Nya Mon. Identity, Image and Ethnic Conflict in Burma a Case Study of Mon People. Washington State University, (2010):150-266

⁵ Syeda Naushin Parnini. *ibid.* (2013): 281-297.

⁶ Cynthia Johnson. Worldmark Modern Conflict and Diplomacy, Engage Learning .Gale, Vol 1. (2014) :. 93-100.

political parties. These systems cause the conflict and the ethnic groups classified the populations. With democracy competitions the political tensions increase. The compilers of data for the 2014 national census decided that the information about ethnic and religion is sensitive to talk about it. In Myanmar there was limited political status on that people outside the 135 recognize ethnic groups. In this country the people from South Asian and the Muslims from all background considered as a threat for the country nation by hardliners and the general public, Buddhist monks, politicians and social activists. The violence against Muslims appears that the political leader encourage this violence for several decades. In addition the people in Myanmar thought that all Muslims has big families and they fear from poverty and see that as threat for the majority of Buddhist, but in fact Myanmar is overwhelmingly Buddhist and Muslims are only a few per cent of the population. The tensions across the country affect the violence against Muslims in Rakhine. In 2001, the Muslims were attacked in their town in Rakhine State such as: Sittwe and Maungdaw.⁷

There were Buddhist extremist movement in Myanmar and its known as 969. Its leader named Wrath and he called himself once the “Burmese bin laden”. He was jailed once by the former military junta for the anti-Muslim violence, he urges to boycott Muslims hopes and shun interfaith marriages. In addition he calls the mosques as an enemy bases. The senior government supported the 969 movement and established monks and some members for opposite National League for Democracy (NLD). The sectarian violence was spreading in Myanmar under junta that was run the country for half century but the worst fighting was when the quasi-civilian government took the role in March 2011. Reuters found that the attacks against Muslims on October 2012 encouraged by the monks and the local security forces. On March, 2013 during riots in Meikhtila (a city in Myanmar), there were 44 people killed and 13000 were displaced and there were mostly Muslims. In the same year On May, the Buddhist burned the Muslims neighborhoods in Lashio City. Officially no mean religion for the country but the rules put Buddhists first and its promoted by a special department created by the junta.⁸

The Muslims in Myanmar feel that they are persecuted minorities. They are complaining from long-standing discrimination by the central state and the military. There were human rights abuses in many ways such as: arbitrary land confiscation, restrictions on language and cultural expression,

⁷ Burke, A. “New Political Space, Old Tensions: History, Identity and Violence in Rakhine State, Myanmar”. *Contemporary Southeast Asia* Vol. 38, No. 2 (2016): 258–83

⁸ Andrew R.C. “The War on the Rohingyas: Myanmar Gives Official Blessing to Anti-Muslim Monks”. Reuters, International reporting, (2013): 1-8

economic marginalization, and lack of political control. In 2011 Rakhine State was one of the poorest regions in the country with 78 percent of poverty comparing with the national average that was 38 percent.⁹

The Muslims in Rakhine played an important role in fighting the colonial authorities. After the independence they challenge the leaders in the country and over time the conflict increase the concern on Muslims minority. The “siege mentality” appears because they thought that the higher birth rate and increasing the immigration will increase the population. On the other hand the Rakhines fear from being minority after the political reforms. The Muslims minority use the name “Rohingya” to describe themselves as a part of rights along ethnic line. The Rohingya attracted the international attention. In addition the term Rohingya is used globally in human rights campaigning and diplomacy. On the other hand the government insist in using the term Bengali instead of Rohingya to describe the Muslims in Rohingya and by using the word Bengali means these Muslims were from Indian or Bangladesh origins and they are immigrants. The territory is interlaced with the ethnic not only the identity and because of that the government refuse to recognize the Rohingya.¹⁰

II. The Roots of the Conflict:

The Myanmar military government was claimed that the Rohingya were not indigenous people but they were came from Bangladesh. Although the Rohingya were had identity cards and British-issued ration cards and that is evidence that they are citizens of Myanmar. Unfortunately these cards were taken by force to deny their legal identity. In 1978 junta launched a large scale program named the operation Dragon king and end with persecuted the indigenous Rohingyas via killed in cold blooded and over two hundred thousands of Muslims pushed to Bangladesh on the excuse that they are not indigenous and that was a lie because the Rohingyas were there for hundreds of years and the bones of their great grandparents are buried there. Interestingly after independence there were numbers of Muslims members of the parliament and they were ministers in the cabinet until 1962 military coup. During junta regime from 1962 until 1995 there weren't any Muslim appointed even as deputy minister and this is discrimination against the Muslims. The military bullied the Muslims and there weren't any Muslim appointed a judge in any court. In addition there were no schools and

⁹ Burke, A. “New Political Space, Old Tensions: History, Identity and Violence in Rakhine State, Myanmar”. *Contemporary Southeast Asia* Vol. 38, No. 2 (2016), pp. 258–83

¹⁰ Burke. *ibid.* 258–83

all Muslims teachers were replaced with Buddhist teachers. In other word the Muslims human rights was lost as well as political rights and the opportunity of government service. Even the Muslims concentrated on trade and cottage industry the army continuous to try to dislocate them from Arakan.¹¹

What happen in Rakhine the state that have 3,2 million Muslims or more is described by Human Rights Watch as "ethnic cleansing" . It appears that the main guilty in the conflict were affiliated with Rakhine Buddhist. What happen in 2012 was disaster for muslims and there were a lot of deaths and the numbers is unreliable and many of them went to isolated camps. Even the violent is desolating, their freedom is restricted. Many years and the tensions remained and in 2015 there were more than 14000 of Muslim fled to camps from their homes.¹²

The government of Myanmar has been accused of using "scorched earth" tactics against civilians, most notably in Kayin State. The accusations included burning down entire villages, planting land-mines, using civilians as slave labour, using civilians as minesweepers, and the rape and murder of Karen women. According to a report by legal firm DLA Piper, whose report was presented to the United Nations Security Council, these tactics against the Karen have been identified as ethnic cleansing.¹³

III. Political Interest and Violence:

The political network play an important role in the ethnic violence for example, the leaders try to manipulate to promote the affiliate with the ethnic support base. However the reforms give a little power to the local level, increase the freedom and animate the politics in Rakhine.¹⁴

After the escalated of the conflict in Burma in 2007 a lot of people escape from the country and they had access to the journalists and that bring a hope to the Burmese people that the international community will react and change the situation. On October after the uprising the UN Security Council issued a statement saying it "strongly" condemned the actions taken by the military gov-

¹¹ Parnini, S. *ibid.* (2013); 281-297

¹² Burke, A. *ibid.* (2016): 258–83

¹³ Gray Cary, Rudnick. "Threat to the Peace: A Call for the UN Security Council to Act in Burma" . *DLA Piper*. (2005).

¹⁴ Burke, A. *ibid.* (2016): 258–83

ernment, and called for the release of political prisoners. Unfortunately UN, US and EU did not change the role of junta.

In 2008 there was a referendum on a new constitution and the new one paved the way for multiparty elections in addition to give the military substantial seats in the government such as one quarter of all parliamentary seats and several ministry position also crucial emergency controls. In other word the new constitution was created mainly to perpetuate the junta's control. Tomas Quintana (the UN envoy to Burma) strongly condemned human rights abuse in the country and recommended that the UN begin an inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity at the UN human rights council in Geneva, in march 2010. Quintana stated that planned elections in Burma could not be credible until human rights abuse were addressed. Burma officials strongly protested against Quintana's recommendations. As reaction the government moved to limit the participation by voters. In 2010 exactly in September, the media announced that five states would not polling they were: Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon and Shan. Suu Kyi announced she would refuse to vote in the elections if her party the NLD was not allowed to participate. In 2010 the multiparty elections proceeded and the NLD did not participate in the elections because junta's refuse to make changes to the constitution and election laws. The result was that the union solidarity and development party won 882 out of a total of 1145 seats in all legislative bodies and that because the support of the country's ruling junta, the opposition parties and the UN announced that the election results were fraudulent. After 20 years under house arrest, Suu Kyi was freed on November 2010. she quickly filed a motion to have her NLD party reinstated, Suu Kyi had been either jailed or detained multiple times by the burmese government since the 1990 general elections, when the NLD won a substantial victory. signaling that her efforts to bring democracy to Burma were far from over, Suu Kyi pressed Burma's military rulers to release all remaining political prisoners.¹⁵ In 2013 Arakan League for democracy joint with RNDP to form the Arakan National Party (ANP). And this ethnic party has no Muslim support and the leader was interested in limiting the electoral rights of Muslims. The national parties could gain the support of Muslims if their voting rights were promoted. Put they increase the ethnic tensions to make it harder for Muslims to vote. The government was fear from lose the support of Buddhist if they extend the rights of voting for Muslims. ANP leaders declare that they will not give any political role to the Muslims in Rakhine and they hope Muslims to migrate from the country. The aim of the ANP is to gain the authority and

¹⁵ Cynthia Johnson. *ibid.* (2014): 93-100.

control the parliament of Rakhine then sharing the revenue. In 2015 the government withdraws the citizenship status of the Muslims and let around of 700000 of people destitute from nationality. Moreover it prevents Muslims from standing of the elections. These steps from the government help the ANP to success. Prohibit the Muslims from voting was before a short time from starting the election in 2015 in the same time they encourage the ostensibly law of protecting race and religion. On November 2015 the ANP was win with 12 seats from Rakhine State in the national parliament and ten seats in the upper house. The ANP leaders' have dominated on politics in Rakhine State and it seems to give them a strong basis to maintain ethnic Rakhine superiority over the Muslim population and to look further devolution of power.¹⁶

IV. Response of International Community:

Unfortunately the crises that uprising in Myanmar was not taken seriously in the international community. However the military was used force against ethnic group on the name of national security and because of that a lot of these minorities involved in armed insurgencies. UNHCR set aside US\$ 500,000 aid for the 200,000 Rohingya refugees those who fled to Bangladesh and that means each person US\$ 2.5. In addition in 1978 the World Muslim Congress brought the crises of Rohingya to the notice of the world. Organization of Islam Cooperation (OIC) issued a statement that the Muslims suffered. The military in 1992 improved their level of terror and refugee become more and keeping grows. In 1995 total of 192,467 refugees out of a total 250,877 registered who cross into Bangladesh. In 2005 the Security Council was prepared to take an action under Responsibility to Protect (R2P) if the government fails to protect their citizens but there were no date for taking this action. In 2007 both Russia and China draft a resolution that there is no threat for the international security and peace because of violent in Burma. The international community must act against the government and put red line to stop the violence against the minorities. SC, US, ASAIN , India and Thailand must determine a policy options to prevent the violence and put a pressure on the government with the R2P for international effort. ¹⁷

It seems that local, regional and international communities don't have any interest in Myanmar. The situation in Myanmar needs for powerful actor that care about freedom and human rights but unfor-

¹⁶ Burke, A. *ibid.* (2016): 258–83

¹⁷ Burke, A. *ibid.* (2016): 258–83

tunately no one act as it must. The interests move the actors more than the humanity effect in these days. In addition Muslims in all countries should react for their brothers.

The third committee of the 193 member UN General Assembly focuses on human rights. Its resolution argues the government of Myanmar to improve the conditions of lives for the Rohingyas and protect their human rights as well as citizenship. Myanmar government accepted the resolution principles with denying the existence of Rohingya as an ethnic group. ASEAN warned Myanmar because as they issued it threat the stability and peace in the region. In addition it argus the UN to found apolitical solution for conflict. The Human Rights Watch in its reports discusses the damage of the properties of the Muslims in Rakhine as well as argues the government to prevent the violence against the Muslim minority. The Myanmar government refuses the word “genocide “when the Minister of Border Affairs includes it in its speech.¹⁸

V. Current Situation:

The situations of the Muslims in Myanmar get worse by the time and there are attacks against them. And there are about one million Rohingya live in the region and there are Stateless Persons officially. And the Muslims who live there said that they are being in home and didn't leave it because of fearing from the security force.¹⁹ The international communities keeping taking about the situations without any real solution for the problem even the Islamic countries that should work hard in these issues they are keeping calm. As well as the conflict escalated the government used helicopters to attack the Muslims in the Ground. Over time human rights groups was received the reports of killings of unarmed Rohingya men by Myanmar soldiers, rapes of Rohingya women by soldiers in a number of villages, and beatings of Rohingya men held in detention in the town of Maungdaw and the death of 100 of the Rohingya civilians. In addition Mohammed Sultan he is a retired Rohingya teacher, he said that some students had told him that their villages had been set on fire. Moreover Human Rights Watch said that, High-definition satellite images taken in October this year showed widespread burning of Rohingya villages. Mohammed Saed one of leader of the community said that “The new violence north of Sittwe was worse than that four years ago and that is the new direct government repression.”²⁰

¹⁸ Kipgen, N. (2013). “ Conflict in Rakhine State in Myanmar: Rohingya Muslims’ Conundrum”, Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, Vol. 33, No. 2, 298-310.

¹⁹ Moe. W. (2016). “Dozens Believed Killed as Violence Erupts in Myanmar”. The New York Times.

²⁰ Perlez, G. (2016). “Violence Escalates Between Myanmar Forces and Rohingya”. The New York Times.

In addition Bangladesh refused the refugee that came from Burma and they take them again to Burma and Dipu Moni (foreign minister of Bangladesh) requested Burma to immediately begin the repatriation of Burma refugees and she hoped that Burma would take back its people who entered Bangladesh.²¹ Muslims in Burma suffering from violence in their country and they can't go out to neighboring country.

VI. Solution Alternatives:

Because the conflict escalation and the situation become more complex in Burma the government can't solve this issue. The two parties should set in the same table with third party to ensure the solution. In addition the third party should be more power for example the UN and it should mediate the conversation. It's the logical path to solve the ethnic conflicts in Myanmar. Firstly they must build the trust among those parties. After that they must rewrite the constitution of the country. Also the parties should discuss their opinion freely to write the new constitution. After the constitution is approved, they must held elections and it must be free and fair. The whole process of negotiation should control by time line to ensure the positive end and to ensure that the government will not transformative the process for its advantage. Moreover the power should be balance between the parties in the parliament. All ethnic groups should have equal rights. After these process there will be trust among the groups and they must started integration policies not similarities. The strategies of integration must include the distribution of power due to the institution, intra-group activities not inter-group activities, the alliance based on interest instead of identity and reduce the differences between the groups as they can. These strategies should be implement carefully and not as threat to the identity of the ethnic groups or the conflict will be escalate again. ²²

The above solution will take time and that is not good for the Muslims minority because they are suffered a lot. Moreover maybe the independence from Myanmar is the best solution, so they must have autonomy and started to control their land without any violence. In addition they will started to build a country with one religion and faith and that is successful thing in term of cooperation between each other. Firstly they must make election to choose a leader after that make a constitutions and started to build a good economy to ensure a good life for the citizens. Also the international community must give aids for that region and try to return the emigrated people.

²¹ (2012). Bangladesh asks Burma to begin repatriation of "undocumented" citizens. *BBC Monitoring South Asia*.

²² Pon, Mon . *ibid.* (2010): 194- 210.

In addition there must be strict laws to prevent violence against minority in the entire world. The Human rights didn't work as it appears in the situation of Myanmar. All countries announce what happen in Myanmar as a wrong thing but nobody move to stop what happen. Having laws will make pressure on the government and let others intervene with a legal ways when the country exceeds these laws.

In addition to solve this problem the tactic that will chose must be indirect management because the two parties cant solve it alone. Moreover it must be for short term due to the suffering and the difficult situation of Muslims. Because one party is the government and the other one is Muslims minority it is a symmetric relations. In addition there is no time they must solve it as fast as they can, but that is for one party (muslims minority) on the other hand the government want play more because they are the powerful party. The first bargaining tactics that must be implementing in this situation is agreement in principle. They must reach agreement until parties reach concrete agreements. And that is good because this is temporary. But in Myanmar situation maybe the government will not agree on agreements, so their must be a strong third party to force them. Moreover the most suitable bargaining tactics is the circle chart because it is indirect management and they need quick solution. In addition it used if they have time pressure. Circle chart needs for four steps. Firstly found the problem which is the violence against muslims and try for genocide them in addition there is no peace until now and the muslims suffering. Secondly diagnoses the problem which is ethane-religion and bad Myanmar policy or in other word racial discrimination. After that the possible cures for The problem which it can be invite third party and force the government to change it is policy. In addition distributes the power in the parliament equally to ensure that the minority have the power to protect them selves. Also respect all religions including Islam. At the end they should applying these solutions they must have law that give the citizens freedom of religions in addition to remake anew constitution and the new one should all minorities involve on it. After the solutions applying they need adjudication especially judicial settlement because it is compulsory, submission of parties and pre-defined conditions. After years from solving this problem they should have reconciliations to help in integration and started with one collective country with multi-religions. AT the end it is clear that negotiating peace in Myanmar is an extremely daunting task, but international community especially Islamic states must work hard in this issues.

Conclusion:

To conclude, Myanmar conflict is an ethnic conflict and the government contributed on it and encourages racism and a lot of studies were focus on Buddhist as the religion of the majority in the country. In addition the Muslims in Myanmar were there from thousands of years also before the independence they participate in politics there were members of the parliament and minsters and that is evidence that these people are native population. The situation of the Muslims in Myanmar gets worse by the time and the government attacks against them until now. In addition the political network play an important role in the ethnic violence, government withdraw the citizenship status of the Muslims and let around of 700000 of people destitute from nationality. Moreover it prevents Muslims from standing of the elections. These steps from the government help the ANP to success. Prohibit the Muslims from voting was before a short time from starting the election in 2015 in the same time they encourage the ostensibly law of protecting race and religion. The international community didn't act as it should, they didn't stop the violence against these Muslims. It seems that the international community act for their interest only as it appears in the Middle East. The solution for this conflict is to negotiate with the two parties, government and the Muslims minority and re-write anew institution with having the same power for the minority to ensure that they defend themselves after that started immigration principles to build trust among the population in the country. In addition having independence is not a bad idea due to the violence that Muslims suffered from. The conflict will not end expect if the international community act and put a pressure on the government of Myanmar because it's the guilty. Moreover we can't force citizens to change their home country because of religion they must a strict laws to prevent these happen to any minority in the world.

At the end, this paper discussed the existence of Muslims in Myanmar and argue that they are the origin populations. Moreover it explains the origin of the conflict and the political interest and violence. Also it discussed the response of international community and how they must to react to prevent violence and put pressure on the government to stopped violence. In addition it gives solutions alternative for the conflict.

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