

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the fourth Metro Detroit Model United Nations Conference. Over the past four years we have worked tirelessly to develop an exciting and innovative Model United Nations format that challenges our delegates in a competitive and inclusive environment. We work year-round to ensure that our staff members are as prepared as possible to ensure that all of our delegates can participate in our debates. Moreover, the topics that you will discuss have been carefully selected for their global importance and the larger questions that they ask. When reading through the following background guide, be sure to analyze and evaluate what larger questions are being provoked by the topic and what commentary these larger questions make about the current international system. Finally, if you have any questions, be sure to reach out to your chairs on the email address provided on their committee page.

We look forward to welcoming you in January,

Mitchell Dennis

Secretary General of the Metro Detroit Model United Nations IV

THE SITUATION IN MYANMAR

History

Early History

Burma, similar to its neighboring Asian nations, went through a series of different dynastic reigns over the course of history. The land was divided into different regions and run autonomously, up until 1599, when the Taungoo Dynasty unified the majority of the nation and reinstated central authority. Decline and uprisings led to the fall of this dynasty and the rise of the Konbaung in 1752.¹ This militant rule was able to gain the territory to the west, Manipur, and created the second largest Burmese empire in history. Qing China launched a series of invasions in 1765-69, simultaneously, the Siamese Ayutthaya Kingdom was gaining territory in the southeastern region of the kingdom.² British rebellions in Manipur and Assam in the 1820s instigated a full on war in 1824-26 (First Anglo-Burmese War). A British victory annexed Arakan, Manipur, and Assam to Britain and Burma paid 1 million pounds (5 million USD) to Britain. During the Second Anglo-Burmese War, in 1852, Britain easily seized the southern Pegu province. The British took the remainder of Burma in the Third Anglo-Burmese War in 1885. Britain launched many of these acquisitions motivated by the fear of the Burmese working with French Indochina. The British feared that if France continued to gain land and influence in the region, it could endanger their hold on India, which was a vital part of the British Empire. Pictured above: Burma, Taungoo dynasty c. 1650



Colonization as Burma

Britain made Burma a province of India in 1886. One of the largest cultural shifts that happened was the dissolution of the monarchy and creating a secular government. Guerrilla attacks from the Burmese against the British continued for many years after the war officially ended. After the Suez Canal was opened in 1869, the British demanded more rice to be produced in order to meet the increased demand around the world. In order to increase cultivation, the Burmese had to borrow

¹ "Political and Economic History of Burma." *San Jose State University*.
<http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/watkins/burma2.htm#BURMANS>.

² "Changing Nature of Conflict between Burma and Siam." *Asia Research Institute*.
https://web.archive.org/web/20150702013935/http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/docs/wps/wps06_064.pdf.

from Indian creditors, but after being unable to repay the money, many were forced to foreclose their farm and sell their livestock. Jobs and land then went to the British colonist and Indian indentured laborers, so even as the economy rose, the actual Burmese were not receiving any of that money.³ Under British supervision, the Burmese were allowed to form the Young Men's Buddhist Association, a religious organization formed in the model of the YMCA. From this, the General Council of Burmese Associations (GCBA) was formed as well. One of the advantages the British Burmese had was that some were able to study at universities in London. These students brought progressive



constitutional reform in the 1920s. Burma gained a legislature, increased self-governance, and established a university. While these changes were positive, reformers believed that they were not happening fast enough. University protests broke out across the nation, rebelling against the British. After continued student strikes, in 1937 India and Burma were separated. They were granted a constitution and an assembly, but again, the protests were not quelled.⁴ A number of different political parties and political movements sprang up between 1939 and 1942 in response to the hot political atmosphere during World War II. Aung San founded the Communist Party of Burma (CPB), the People's Revolutionary Party (later renamed the Socialist Party), and the Burmese Independence Army (BIA). In 1942, Japan invaded Burma and established the State of Burma, while still maintaining occupation. Japan reorganized the

chaotic BIA, and named the new organization the Burma Defence Army (BDA), with Aung San heading the BDA.⁵ A prominent political figure, Ba Maw, was declared head of state and Japan declared Burma free in 1943. When it was discovered that Japan had no intention of leaving Burma, and that the declaration of liberation was just a ploy, Aung San formed yet another political party. The Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League gathered political leaders from all parties to ally with British forces to remove the Japanese by May 1945. The British Governor, Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith returned to Burma to establish stability and a British rule, once more delaying talks of independence.⁶ Aung San was able to negotiate with the British, finally granting Burmese independence in January 1947. Aung San gathered leaders of ethnic minorities during the Panglong Conference in February 1947, dubbing this day Union Day.⁷

Pictured above: Political leader, Aung San

Free Myanmar

³ "History of Burma." *Canadian Friends of Burma*. <http://www.cfob.org/HistoryofBurma/historyOfBurma.shtml>.

⁴ "Burmese Wars." *British Empire Co*. <http://www.britishempire.co.uk/maproom/burma.htm>.

⁵ "British Rule of Burma." *Facts and Details*. http://factsanddetails.com/southeast-asia/Myanmar/sub5_5a/entry-3007.html.

⁶ "Burma and World War Two." *The History Learning Site*. <http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/world-war-two/the-pacific-war-1941-to-1945/burma-and-world-war-two/>.

⁷ "Burma/Myanmar: Its Conflicts, Western Advocacy, and Country Impact." *Tufts University*.

<https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2013/03/25/burmayanmar-its-conflicts-western-advocacy-and-country-impact/>.

As the new nation was trying to stabilize and constitutions were being drafted, Aung San and his cabinet were assassinated on July 19, 1947. Thankin Nu formed a new cabinet to preside over the newly independent country in January 4, 1948. In the chaotic years following, a series of communist insurgencies prevented Burma from finding stability. The country initially accepted foreign aid, but after the United States continued support of the Chinese Nationalists, Burma rejected all aid. While the political atmosphere in Burma was continuing to become more and more dangerous and unstable, Army General Ne Win coup d'état took over the government on March 2, 1962. 153 communist sympathizers were arrested and deported.⁸ Ne Win's Socialist regime drained the country economically. This caused an uprising in August 1988 that began with the people of Rangoon, then spread to citizens all throughout the nation. The military killed thousands of protesters, quelling the uprising in September 1988. Due to international pressure after these significant protests, Myanmar (renamed after the uprisings,) held their first elections in 1990. Aung San Suu Kyi's organization, the National League for Democracy ran and won 80 percent of the seats in Parliament.⁹ The military; however, decided that they didn't want to give up that much power yet and invalidated the election. Aung San Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest, and she remained there until 2010.

The military regime remained in power, and in 2003, the Myanmar Banking Crisis occurred. In this crisis dozens of private banks collapsed due to over-loaning without proper capital to back it up.¹⁰ In August 2007, with the increase in fuel prices, the economy plummeted even more, with a 30% inflation rate. Following this down turn, the Saffron Revolution rose against the regime, but was again viciously crushed, with 138 deaths.¹¹ However, the revolution was a catalyst for the creation of a constitution, allowing civilians to be able to vote for parliament seats once again. The government reserved 25 percent of the seat for members of the military, and the constitution itself was not open for the public to read and discuss, and if an individual opposed the constitution they could face up to 3 years in jail.¹²

Current Situation

The 2015 elections, the National League of Democracy won the majority of house seats. This is a powerful step in moving on from the military government that ruled Burma. While this may be a step in the right direction, there are still gross human rights violations, such as the government overlooking crimes against the Rohingya peoples. And as with any government, there are many activist groups against the new government that are causing friction.

Groups active in unrest

⁸ "Independence & General Aung San." *Oxford Burma Alliance*.

<http://www.oxfordburmaalliance.org/independence--general-aung-san.html>.

⁹ "Myanmar Timeline." *BBC News*. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-12992883>.

¹⁰ "Burma's Private Banking Crisis." *The Irrawaddy*. http://www2.irrawaddy.com/article.php?art_id=7687.

¹¹ "The Saffron Revolution" *The Economist*. <http://www.economist.com/node/9867036>.

¹² "Independence & General Aung San." *Oxford Burma Alliance*.

<http://www.oxfordburmaalliance.org/independence--general-aung-san.html>.

The Kachin Independence Army is from the northernmost territory of Myanmar and beyond the border. This ethnic group has been reported to attack border patrol officers. The goal of this group is to gain their own legal nation, although no progress has been made. As a distinct ethnic group in a large area of land, they have gained some degree of autonomy, but are not an independent country.

Effect on Environment and Surrounding Nations

Myanmar is abundant in oil, natural gas and precious stones. In any other circumstance, investment and interest from western nations would be heavy. Due to the tyrannical dictatorship of the nation, up until 2012 there were trade sanctions on Myanmar from the United States and the United Kingdom. Asian countries such as China and Thailand have always had a hand in Myanmar's economic market, due to the large natural gas reserves and abundant precious stones, but have only recently began investing in the natural resources that Myanmar is abundant in, primarily natural gas and gemstones.¹³ While relations between Myanmar and Thailand have been shaky at best, violent at worst (Burmese- Siamese Wars in the 1500s and 1700s,) they maintain a strong economic alliance, Thailand receiving near all of Myanmar's natural gas resources. This makes Thailand and Myanmar very dependent on each-other as trade partners; with both interested in the stability of the other nation.

Economic Challenges

Growth and Poverty

Economic growth since 2012 has been large, mainly due to the trade sanctions that were lifted that year. GDP growth rate was 8.4%, one of the highest in the nation's history.¹⁴ Tourism is on the rise in the country, which is an industry that generates a lot of revenue for the nation. 37.5% of the nation is living in poverty as of 2014. Much of this economic rise is due to construction projects and other temporary work, so this is not a long term solution. Poor distribution of work has much to do with the economic issue, with some people overworking themselves, lowering their life expectancy and quality of life, and others are not working enough to make a livable amount of money.¹⁵ While in the past, agricultural practices relied on factors out of farmer's' control, such as the monsoons, advanced practices have left only about 8% of the agricultural output affected by unexpected monsoon conditions.

Ethnic Groups

Genocide of the Rohingya

Myanmar's leading religion is Buddhism, with 90% of the population practicing this religion. The Rohingya are Myanmar Muslims that can either trace ancestry to Bangladesh or China where they were able to practice Islam. Due to this religious difference, the Rohingya people have been persecuted in Burma significantly since the 1970s. Myanmar does not recognize the citizenship of the

¹³ "Myanmar's Natural Resources: Blessing or Curse?" *The Green Political Foundation*. <https://www.boell.de/en/2013/12/11/myanmars-natural-resources-blessing-or-curse>.

¹⁴ "GDP" *Trading Economics*. <https://tradingeconomics.com/myanmar/gdp-growth-annual>.

¹⁵ "Poverty." *Borgen Project*. <https://borgenproject.org/poverty-myanmar/>.

Rohingya people unless they are able to trace their ancestry in Myanmar back before the British colonized Burma (1982 Citizenship Act). Significant anti-Muslim riots started in 1997 and have continued to occur in the years following. Buddhist leaders, such as Sayadaw U Wirathu have only perpetuated the cycle of lashing out against Muslims. He has been nicknamed the Buddhist Bin Laden for his atrocious actions against the Muslim people, initiating attacks against them and starting riots in their towns. Rape, theft, and muggings against Muslims are common place in Myanmar. In 2014, a post about a Buddhist women raped by a Muslim man went viral. In protest, mobs of people in Mandalay started destroying Muslims residential areas and places of business; injuring dozens of people.¹⁶ In 2016, there were cases of unidentified attacks on the military bases on the western border. Myanmar military forces then blamed the Rohingya Muslims and attacked. The atrocities included mass murder, gang rapes, and arson. This crackdown caught the attention of the international community. After the 2010 elections, countries believed that this was a positive turning point for Myanmar, and so nations like United States and the United Kingdom lifted trade sanctions on the nation. However, as the humanitarian crisis grew more serious, the United States began opening more communication between the two nations, lifting all sanctions except the gemstone ban and appointed an ambassador to Myanmar. Little progress has yet to be made on having the country even admit to having a humanitarian problem.

Abstract

Between the genocide and overall blatant human rights violations, Myanmar is a country to watch in Asia. With the nation's economic outputs such as natural gas and precious gems having such an effect on surrounding nations, Myanmar could act like a kingpin in the fall of Asian economies. The inner turmoil the country is facing, from the Kachin State, the Rohingya people, and active government reform groups, makes the newly minted democracy at risk of collapse. Quelling these groups and ending human rights violations are most likely the first step in this process. A close second issue is the economic state of the nation. With little to no labor laws and high poverty rate, general living conditions are poor. Bringing peace and prosperity to this nation is a multi-pronged process that will involve cooperation from all parties involved.

Case Studies

The following cases studies can serve as a guide for how other societies have successfully reformed military governments into democratic societies, all while maintaining economic growth.

Brazil

From 1964 to 1985 a military regime ruled Brazil. Guerilla warfare ran rampant across the nation and censorship, national debt, political massacres, and deportations were only some the unsavory themes of this time. Spurred by the economic crisis, in January of 1985, negotiations for democracy were

¹⁶ "Genocide" *End Genocide*. <http://endgenocide.org/conflict-areas/burma-background/>.

underway, the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party won and appointed the nation's first civilian president, Tancredo Neves. As it turns out, Neves vice president, Jose Sarney, was the first acting president, because Neves fell ill the night before the swearing in ceremony and soon after, passed away. This new age was dubbed "the New Republic." In February 1987, a Constitutional Assembly was formed and the drafting of a new Constitution began. The 1988 Constitution was finalized in October of the year, and the year following saw the first general population ballot elections. Fernando Collor was elected in, and since then there have been six presidential election cycles without disruption. This entire process went generally smoothly for the nation, for a number of reasons. Some of the largest being that the new administration actually did follow through with the promises they made. A constitution was swiftly drafted and approved, massive economic reforms that benefited the poor citizens were established, and social spending for health care and education for the young and underprivileged was increased. It is safe to say that the transition period is over for Brazil, and that they are in a very stable governmental position.¹⁷



Pictured above: Current President of Brazil, Michel Temer

Indonesia

Tensions in Indonesia had been building, and they came to a head in 1998, when the president at the time, Suharto of the New Order, fell. There was massive opposition to him, and the opposing party rallied around Megawati Sukarnoputri, the head of the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI). Between evident government corruption, human rights violations in East Timor, and the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, the New Order no longer had a leg to stand on. University student protests and demonstrations were common, and in 1997-1998, massive riots broke out across Indonesia, with rape, pillaging, and arson going unhalting by the army and police. Finally, moved by this violence, Suharto stood before Parliament, and was again reelected. Upon this decision and the continued riots and demonstrations, Suharto stepped down and named B. J Habibi his successor. Habibi made many large political reforms, such as removing the three- political party limit, and removed the law that each political party needed to follow Pancasila, the Indonesian state ideology. In response to these changes, during the first free election since 1955, 48 political parties contested for the presidency¹⁸. Habibi passed the Regional Autonomy Law, which decentralized the government and allowed provinces to have a larger hand in their own legislation. The Press was freed from the government as well. One of

¹⁷ "Transitions to Democracy." *Foreign Policy*. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/06/18/a-users-guide-to-democratic-transitions/>.

¹⁸ "Transition to Democracy." *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2014/jul/25/dictatorship-to-democracy-17-lessons-global-south-indonesia-joko-widodo-prabowo>.

Habibi's last moves as president was allowing East Timor to decide to break away from Indonesia and establish their own nation, a move that drastically lowered his approval rating. The General Elections Commission presided over the election in 1999, a group that was created to be completely separate from the government to lessen corruption.¹⁹

Questions to Ask

- In what ways can the UN utilize successful methods used in other nations to help transition Myanmar?
- What are some methods that should be avoided because they were unsuccessful in other nations?
- Is acknowledgement of the genocide by the UN the first step in solving the humanitarian crisis?
- Should Myanmar focus on the transition to democracy first, then focus on tackling the humanitarian crisis, or vice versa? Should they attempt to solve both simultaneously? Why?
- How should Myanmar deal with ethnic group turmoil within the nation? Is that an issue for the international community or Myanmar singularly?

¹⁹ "Indonesian History." *Asian Info*.
<http://www.asianinfo.org/asianinfo/indonesia/pro-history.htm>.