Houston Area Model United Nations
Specialized Committee

ARF



Chair | Timothy Zhang
Topic B: The Rohingya Refugee Crisis: Repatriation & Regional Response
Houston Area Model United Nations 52
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Atilgan Ozdil/Anadolu Ag

Chair Letter

Delegates,

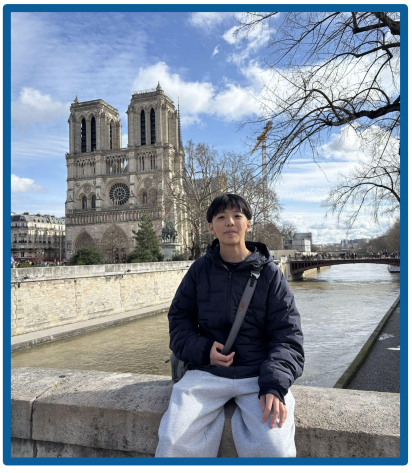
Welcome to HAMUN 52! My name is Timothy Zhang, and I will be your chair for this year's ASEAN Regional Forum!

I'm a 2nd-year student at the University of Texas at Austin double majoring in philosophy and humanities, with a minor in government. I competed in Speech and Debate throughout high school (LD was my main event!) and quickly joined MUN after learning of their similarities. Since then, I've participated in numerous conferences and staffed as vice-chair of UNSC at HAMUN 51.

I chose to chair ARF because of the regional focus it holds, allowing for more concentrated dialogue on political and security issues of concern. The Asia-Pacific region offers a breadth of topics, and as delegates, I hope you all explore its range.

Regardless of whether you're a veteran or if this will be your first time competing, above all, HAMUN is a place to learn and grow. Every member state offers a unique position to represent, and I believe the debate will reflect this. I hope the conference will bring memorable experiences, opportunities to meet new friends, and a passion for the event. If there are any questions y'all might have, please reach out!

Timothy Zhang
Chair of ARF
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Background Information

What is ARF?

Established in 1994, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Regional Forum (ARF) serves as a platform for open dialogue discussions on political and security issues in the Asia-Pacific region. It consists of 27 members: ASEAN member states, ASEAN dialogue partners, as well as Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea, Bangladesh, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Mongolia, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Talk processes are guided by the ARF Senior Officials Meeting (ARFSOM), which proposes activities and meetings alongside institutional matters. ARF promotes cooperation, confidence-building, and transparency among member states to work towards regional peace. Recent discussions include issues relating to the COVID-19 pandemic and counter-terrorism along the Korean Peninsula and South China Sea. However, since its establishment, the ARF has prohibited topics regarding the Taiwan Strait and does not include Taiwan in the forum.

A Brief History

International order remained tense in the years following the Cold War; the ARF was formed to fill these power vacuums in the Asia-Pacific. A key detail is that the ARF operates through preventive diplomacy and deinstitutionalization, rather through direct methods of deterrence. Notably, the ARF has been criticized for being a “talk shop,” that its format often leads to a lack of enforcement mechanisms. Many critics view that, without genuine reform, the value of the ARF may be overrun by the rapid pace of current events.

TOPIC ABSTRACT

In August 2017, Myanmar began a campaign of violence, crimes of apartheid, and deprivation of liberty against the Rohingya population, a Muslim ethnic minority, in northern Rakhine State that displaced over 742,000 individuals to seek refuge in Bangladesh. In November 2019, Gambia brought the case at the International Court of Justice alleging Myanmar's decades of persecution against the Rohingya constitute genocide and violate the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Since then, approximately 1.2 million Rohingya refugees remain in limbo, urgently rely on and require humanitarian assistance for protection, food, water, shelter, health, and other basic needs. The overcrowded and unsanitary conditions in camps place women and children at high risk of violence, exploitation, and human trafficking. In many settings, refugees are extremely susceptible to disease outbreaks and malnutrition, and experience severe psychological stress.

Due to ongoing conflict and insecurity in Myanmar, prospects for repatriation remain slim. In its current state, many children are exposed to risks related to neglect and exploitation, such as child labour, child marriage, and gender-based violence. Moreover, statelessness is a significant issue, as many Rohingya lack legal identity and citizenship. This leaves them without access to basic rights and without social safety nets. As chair, I encourage delegates to consider solutions that account for these intergenerational vulnerabilities and issues of environmental tensions. Approaches will need to address existing humanitarian operations and consistent political efforts for negotiation among host countries and support for the displaced.

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"Myanmar: Critical Hearings in the Rohingya Genocide Case" Human Rights Watch, 8 Jan 2026, https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/01/08/myanmar-critical-hearings-in-rohingya-genocide-case

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Rohingya are a predominantly Muslim ethnic minority from Myanmar; since the 1990s, more than 1.3 million Rohingya have been displaced fleeing conflict and persecution. Nine years after the largest exodus, in August 2017, conditions inside Myanmar still remain unsafe for return. Repatriation hinges on a Myanmar state, one that is consumed by civil war, that has not recognized the Rohingya as citizens.

STATELESSNESS

Since the 1982 Citizenship law in Myanmar, the Rohingya have been denied citizenship and a proper legal identity. Myanmar's citizenship system was changed in two major ways by this law. It divided citizenship into three tiers: "citizens," "associate citizens," and "naturalized citizens." Under this, the government is permitted to restrict the rights of the latter two tiers, which additionally narrowed the different ways citizenship could be acquired.

The 1948 Union Citizenship Act previously allowed citizenship to be acquired through naturalization after five years residence; however, this was removed after 1982, rewriting so that a child born afterwards could only acquire citizenship by descent from parents that are citizens.

This gave further weight to ethnicity that purposely excludes the Rohingya: Article 3 of the 1982 Citizenship law defines individuals that settled in the area before 1823 as citizens by birth, which became a fixed list of 135 recognized "national races" that the Rohingya aren't included in.

Consequently, debates over the legal status of the Rohingya often turn to whether they can claim recognized status under Article 3 by proving they were citizens before 1982. For potential reforms, delegates should consider whether such policies are realistic under current political conditions in Myanmar.



"Myanmar: The Rohingya crisis" United Nations Regional Information Centre, 19 Aug 2026, https://unric.org/en/myanmar-the-rohingya-crisis/

THE 2017 GENOCIDE

Beginning August 2017, Myanmar's militant forces began a campaign in northern Rakhine State which carried out grave abuses against humanity, including massacres, sexual violence and abuse against Rohingya women and girls, and widespread arson. Entire villages were burned and many families were killed or separated. In the month afterwards, medical charity Médecins Sans Frontières reported at least 730 children under the age of five were killed during the violence.



Over 740,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh in months following, mainly on foot across dangerous land and sea voyages.

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN BANGLADESH

A significant number of refugees live in one of the 33 camps in Cox's Bazar, which is the largest refugee settlement in the world. By the start of 2026, the refugee population has increased to almost 1.2 million, making the already overcrowded conditions more challenging for women and children who face dangerous risks of violence, exploitation, and human trafficking.



"A vendor walks through one of the camps in Teknaf, Cox's Bazar," UNHCR/Amos Halder

Overcrowding and inadequate water and sanitation also raises the risk of disease outbreaks, namely hepatitis, acute diarrhoea, and dengue. Moreover, as the refugee crisis dragged, on sentiments began to shift in Bangladesh over their long-term presence; in particular, over the fear that refugees would be more easily recruited into extremist groups and increased radicalization within the country.

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Despite Bangladesh formerly calling for the repatriation of the Rohingya in 2018, and even signing a Memorandum of Understanding, there has been little progress due to Myanmar's reluctance.

Sheikh Hasina, the then prime-minister of Bangladesh, sought to bring regional aid from China and India; however, their geopolitical interests and strategic concerns limited their ability to involve in supporting Bangladesh. In late 2024, Hasina resignation from office signaled a drastic shift in the future of Rohingya refugees.

Pressure from local communities along with escalating cases of violence within the camps brings significant challenges for Muhammad Yunus, leader of the new interim government. The rising anti-Rohingya sentiments are fueled by years of general hostility towards refugees in addition to the fall of Hasina's administration. Diplomatic efforts from the U.S. has greatly helped alleviate the crisis, giving nearly $199mn in aid.

OBSTACLES TO REPATRIATION

UN agencies hold that repatriation requires conditions in Myanmar to guarantee safety from violence, citizenship, freedom of movement, health care, and education. Without genuine progress on these issues, a return to Myanmar would be involuntary and considered as refoulement.

Current short-term approaches and the growing securitization of refugee camps have undermined refugee rights and hindered aid delivery, leading to increased protection risks.

Some analysts advocate shifting towards an approach that assures self-reliance for refugees. These proposals discuss diplomatic approaches that apply coordinated diplomatic pressure in Myanmar and securing China's full participation in repatriation negotiations. In light of this, delegates should treat this as one perspective among several potential solutions.

TOPIC B: QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Should international efforts treat the 1982 Citizenship Law as a barrier that must be reformed, or as a starting point for negotiation?

2. What role should a law's intent play in shaping international pressure on Myanmar?

3. What steps can assure that stateless children are not excluded from citizenship?

4. What responsibilities do host states have toward stateless refugees?

5. What role should UN agencies play in monitoring documentation and verification processes inside Myanmar?

6. Can regional bodies, such as ASEAN, offer a neutral forum fo discussion and what limits do their principles of non-interference create?

7. Can digital identity and biometric registration help document the Rohingya?

TOPIC A APPENDIX & SOURCES

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