

## Twenty years of UN resolutions – and the Rohingya still wait

The international community has grown more effective at pursuing justice and worse at sustaining protection.

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The Human Rights Council in session at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland (Pierre Albouy/OHCHR)

## Twenty years of UN resolutions – and the Rohingya still wait

The UN Human Rights Council this week adopted another [resolution\(Opens in new window\)](#) on the human rights situation of the Rohingya in Myanmar. It reiterates demands for accountability, the restoration of citizenship, and the voluntary, safe and dignified return of more than one million Rohingya refugees.

But this latest resolution also reflects how the crisis has evolved. It expresses alarm that violence against the Rohingya continues despite provisional measures ordered by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), while highlighting escalating conflict in Rakhine State, cross-border instability and worsening humanitarian [funding shortages\(Opens in new window\)](#).

The Council has now adopted more than [40 resolutions\(Opens in new window\)](#) on Myanmar since 2006, around half of them specifically focused on the Rohingya and other minorities. More importantly, it has moved beyond condemnation to institution-building. The Council established the [Independent International Fact-Finding Mission\(Opens in new window\)](#) on Myanmar in 2017 to investigate atrocity crimes and, a year later, the [Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar\(Opens in new window\)](#) to collect and preserve evidence for future criminal proceedings. These mechanisms have transformed the Rohingya crises from an overlooked humanitarian emergency into one of the world's most thoroughly documented atrocity situations.

The Council's efforts have unfolded alongside an expanding – though institutionally distinct – international accountability landscape. In 2019, the [Gambia\(Opens in new window\)](#) instituted proceedings before the ICJ, seeking to establish Myanmar's state responsibility under the Genocide Convention, while the International Criminal Court (ICC) opened a [full investigation\(Opens in new window\)](#) into the alleged deportation and persecution of the Rohingya.

Accountability for crimes against the Rohingya has evolved beyond the diplomatic chambers of Geneva into a multi-layered system of international and domestic judicial accountability. This is illustrated by the ICC's subsequent arrest warrant applications in [2024\(Opens in new window\)](#) and [2025\(Opens in new window\)](#), together with [Argentina\(Opens in new window\)](#)'s 2025 exercise of universal jurisdiction against Min Aung Hlaing and other senior Myanmar military officials for alleged genocide and crimes against humanity committed against the Rohingya.

Yet this growing architecture of accountability stands in stark contrast to the realities facing the Rohingya.

Nearly a decade after the 2017 atrocities, more than one million remain [displaced\(Opens in new window\)](#), conditions for safe and voluntary return do not exist, and political support for refugees is steadily eroding across the region.

Twenty years of Council engagement, therefore, reveal both the achievements and the limits of international human rights diplomacy. The international community has become more effective at pursuing justice, but far less successful at sustaining protection.



More than one million Rohingya remain displaced (K. M. Asad/UN Photo)

The explanation lies partly in how the crisis has evolved. For two decades, the Council resolutions have framed the Rohingya primarily as a problem of military atrocities, impunity, discriminatory citizenship laws and humanitarian protection. That framing has generated investigations, preserved evidence and laid the legal foundations for international justice.

But the centre of gravity of the crisis has transformed. Today, the greatest obstacles to protecting the Rohingya are no longer found only inside Myanmar. They now lie across the region.

Bangladesh illustrates how the crisis has shifted from one of emergency protection to one of political sustainability. Nearly a decade after receiving more than one million Rohingya refugees, shrinking aid, deteriorating camp conditions and [rising tensions\(Opens in new window\)](#) with host communities are intensifying pressure for repatriation. Yet continuing violence in Rakhine State – including recent junta air strikes near the Bangladesh border – means the conditions for safe return remain absent.

In Southeast Asia, support for the Rohingya is also eroding. In [Malaysia\(Opens in new window\)](#), economic pressures, misinformation and solidarity fatigue have fuelled a more hostile public discourse, prompting the country's human rights commission – [SUHAKAM\(Opens in new window\)](#) – to warn against the dehumanisation of refugees. [Indonesia\(Opens in new window\)](#) has witnessed a similar shift, with online disinformation and concerns over trafficking and scarce resources replacing the humanitarian solidarity that once characterised public responses in Aceh. In [Thailand\(Opens in new window\)](#), the Rohingya are viewed primarily through the lens of border security, irregular migration and trafficking, reinforcing policies of detention and maritime pushbacks rather than refugee protection.

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These developments reveal a gap in the Council's 20-year approach. The greatest obstacles to protecting the Rohingya no longer lie primarily in international law but in the politics of protection across the region. As public support hardens and domestic pressures grow, host governments are becoming less willing – and less able – to sustain long-term protection for Rohingya refugees.

The Council has become adept at documenting atrocities and building accountability mechanisms. It has been less successful at recognising that protection itself has become a regional political challenge. Rising xenophobia, donor fatigue, shrinking humanitarian budgets, misinformation and domestic political pressures now shape the Rohingya's future as much as events inside Myanmar.

None of this diminishes the Council's achievements. Its resolutions have ensured that crimes against the Rohingya cannot simply disappear into history. But 20 years of engagement also expose the limits of international human rights diplomacy: international justice can pursue accountability, but it cannot, on its own, generate the domestic and regional commitment needed to protect the Rohingya.

The next generation of the Council engagement should therefore expand its focus beyond documenting violations inside Myanmar. It must also address the politics of displacement across the region: supporting host communities, countering disinformation, responding to solidarity fatigue and strengthening regional responsibility-sharing.

#### **About the author**

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