



# UNHCR's Political Role in Addressing Ethnic Rohingya in Medan

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## ABSTRACT

This study tries to explain how the political role of UNHCR in addressing the Rohingya refugees. UNHCR is one of the international organizations engaged in the evacuation. Researchers try to explain how an international organization UNHCR to play its role as a political actor in carrying out the mandate given by the UN (United Nations). UNHCR in Indonesia, especially in Medan in running their political role is not alone, but in collaboration with various stakeholders, including IOM (International Organization for Migration), Immigration, Government of Indonesia and other parties. This research is very interesting considering the issue of Rohingya refugees are talking about around the world. The problem in this research are researchers trying to see more detail how exactly the UNHCR as a political actor performing their duties. Does UNHCR has done its job well? How the processes undertaken by UNHCR in handling the Rohingya refugees? Already in accordance with the procedure or not the steps undertaken by UNHCR in its handling? This study is expected to answer questions about what role and how UNHCR's performance in handling the Rohingya refugees in Medan. In this research using descriptive qualitative method. Where the author will analyze the data obtained either from source books, magazines, legal documents, website pages and use the key informant interview techniques. The concept according to K.J Holsti in describing the role of politics and the use of methods of political analysis by Hudson used in this study.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

UNHCR is an organization under the auspices of the United Nations (Di Suriah & Patunru, nd) (Simbolon, 2004). UNHCR itself was founded on December 14, 1950 by the UN General Assembly. UNHCR is functioned to handle cases related to displacement (Nurika, 2012) (Hadi, 2007). Initially the UNHCR organization was formed with a mandate for only 3 years following the ongoing conflict at that time, namely World War II where UNHCR was formed to help European people who were scattered because of the ongoing conflict at that time. On 28 July 1951 the UN Convention on the Status of Refugees was established, a legal basis for assisting refugees and the basic statute that directs the work of UNHCR (Di Suriah & Patunru, nd) (Erdina, 2009) (Sinapa, nd) (Alidri et al., Nd). In the early 21st century, UNHCR has helped with the biggest refugee crises in Africa such as in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia, as well as in Asia, especially in the refugee problem in Afghanistan that has lasted for 30 years. At the same time, UNHCR was asked to use its expertise to solve the problem of internally displaced persons caused by the conflict (Triwibawa, 2014). In addition, UNHCR's role also extends to dealing with assistance to the invisible millions of people, while they face the danger of losing their basic rights due to statelessness (UNICEF., 2005). In some parts of the world such as Africa and Latin America, UNHCR's initial mandate adopted in 1951 was strengthened by an agreement on regional legal instruments in 1954, UNHCR won the Nobel Peace Prize for its great work helping refugees in Europe. His mandate was later extended to the end of the decade. More than 25 years later, UNHCR received an award in 1981 for its contribution of global assistance to refugees with quotes that highlight the political obstacles UNHCR has to face. The UNHCR, which was originally formed to help victims in World War 2 through a mandate of 3 years of service, turned out that over time this organization was considered important and had great benefits in handling and providing protection to people involved in state conflicts. So that the UNHCR organization is still standing today. The UN high commissioner engaged in refugee affairs as well as serving as the supreme leader of the UNHCR is António Guterres (Betts et al., 2008) (Grushka, 2011) (Long, 2010). António Guterres has served as the 10th UN High Commissioner for Refugee Affairs since 15 June 2005 for a period of 5 years. In April 2010, António Guterres was re-elected to serve as commissioner of the UNHCR organization (e Diplomatiche, 2007). Currently UNHCR works in 125 countries with a large staff amounting to 7685 people who are tasked with providing protection and assistance to millions of refugees, people returning to their countries, internally displaced persons and stateless people (Nachmias, 2014). One of the countries that joined UNHCR is Indonesia. In Indonesia, UNHCR's head office is located in Jakarta and has 8 regional offices throughout Indonesia (Damanik et al., 2010).

In general, UNHCR's task is advocacy, assistance, asylum and migration, ensure the provision of sustainable solutions, protection of refugees and an alert response in an emergency (Hammerstad, 2014) (Milner, 2000). Therefore, in fact UNHCR was formed as a manifestation of human rights enforcement which has a special role in upholding human rights regarding the handling of refugees (Di Suriah & Patunru, nd) (Wilde, 1998). Based on the mandate given to UNHCR, the task carried out by this organization is a noble humanitarian task, namely providing international protection and finding solutions to the problems faced by refugees (Di Suriah & Patunru, Nd). One of the refugee handling cases currently handled by UNHCR is related to cases of human rights violations against the Rohingya ethnicity in Myanmar (Ramadhani, 2014) (Sulihyantoro & Putri, nd). The case that befell the Rohingya ethnicity is in the eyes of the world, where this case is an act of oppression and extermination of a certain group which causes the group to leave and leave its country of origin (Walton, 2013) (Zarni & Cowley, 2014). The case that befell this ethnic group is classified as genocide. Genocide is an act that does not honor human rights where it is done deliberately and intends to destroy, eliminate and destroy part or all of the group, both racial groups, ethnicity, religion, as well as the nation. This crime of genocide was committed by killing, cause physical and mental suffering, preventing births within group members and forcibly transferring group members (Turangan, 2011) (Kumendong, 2012) (Ashar, 2014). People who were oppressed as a result of the genocide fled to foreign countries as refugees. Human Rights Univesal reads: No one should be tortured or treated or punished in a cruel manner,

inhuman or degrading. The story of the Rohingya adds to the long dark history of human rights violations in the world in general and Myanmar in particular (Feigenbaum, 2013).

Myanmar applies strict regulations to the development of religions other than Buddhism, the official religion of the State of Myanmar. This makes the implementation of the right to freedom of religion for religious minorities in the country limited (Umam, 2014). People The Rohingya have experienced various forms of human rights oppression by the Myanmar Military Junta since 1978. The Rohingya ethnic group is a very concerned ethnic group that has even been named the saddest ethnicity in the world. The ethnic group is predominantly Muslim in the North Rakhine state of Western Myanmar. The Rohingya population is concentrated in the two northern cities of Rakhine state formerly called Arakan. The Rohingya are Muslim people who live stateless in Myanmar (Thontowi, 2013) (Mangku, 2013) (Waluyo, 2013) (Amritsjar, 2014). Myanmar Muslims make up only 4% of the total population of Myanmar and make up the Rohingya ethnic minority. The Rohingya have lived on the border of Myanmar and Bangladesh since the region was still a British colony. For generations there has been clashes between the Rohingya Muslim ethnic group and the local Buddhist Myanmar ethnic group (Smith, 2005). However, when the two countries became independent, Rohingya Muslims are badly treated. Even though both are Muslims, ethnic Bengalis as the majority in Bangladesh are reluctant to take care of them and consider them like brothers. This has led many Rohingya families to settle down in Myanmar even though since 1982 the Myanmar Citizenship Law was issued which states that the Myanmar government does not recognize Rohingya Muslims as citizens of Myanmar. The government in that country only considers them as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh or their descendants. Several series of incidents of expulsion and discrimination from Myanmar on an ongoing basis against ethnic Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar (Satria & Jamaan, 2013) (Yonesta et al., 2012), namely: (1). In 1962 Myanmar's fascist military expelled 300.000 people Arakan to the territory of Bangladesh, (2). In 1978 AD more than 500.000 Muslims were expelled and under very heavy pressure up to nearly 400.000 of them died. This includes the elderly, woman, and children. (3). In 1988 around 150 Buddhists wanted to build their village as a pilot site. (4). 1991 was nearly 500.0000 Muslims were expelled. This is due to the punishment for winning the opposition party in the election which gets the votes of the Muslims. The election results were canceled. (5). Canceling the citizenship rights of Muslims. (6). Doing forced labor without getting food, drink, and transportation. (7). Muslims are prohibited from getting a proper education. Moreover, sitting on my bench in college. For those who are trying to get an education abroad, then returned to Myanmar educated, then will be thrown into prison. (8). Generally, cannot be a civil servant. If there is any, then it will not get its full rights. 9. It is prohibited to travel abroad, although for the pilgrimage. They are only allowed to go to Bangladesh on a limited time basis. They are not allowed to travel to the capital Rangoon and other cities in Myanmar. If they want to move cities, must obtain a clear permit. (10). Burdened with high taxes on everything, subject to a lot of fines, make it difficult to do trade except trade with the military. Whatever is being traded is either sold at a price far below standard or is forced to sell something they do not want to sell. It is intended that they continue to be in a state of poverty. Rohingya, starting from not being recognized in their country, considered as an illegal society, oppression, and expelled from Myanmar. Many incidents of human rights violations have been experienced by people Rohingya occurred when in early June 2012, where at that time 10 Muslim youths were slaughtered to death while on the bus on the way. Furthermore, there have been many incidents that harm the Rohingya people, such as the revocation of the identity card known as a white card for the Rohingya ethnic group so that this ethnicity is no longer considered as citizenship. Because they cannot stand the continuous oppression and discrimination against the Rohingya ethnic group, so many of these ethnic groups are trying to flee from Myanmar (Walton, 2013). Even so, it is not easy for them to get out of Myanmar. It is not uncommon for them to experience violence by security forces, and if they have left Myanmar they will no longer be allowed to return to the country.

Currently these Rohingya refugees are signing foreign countries to get protection, one of them is Indonesia (Anggrainy, 2014). In Indonesia there are about 12.000 souls of Rohingya refugees whose existence is scattered in various regions, among them in Aceh, Manado, Jakarta, Field, etc. Currently in

Medan around 300 Rohingya refugees have been identified/registered for their refugee status at UNHCR. The refugees are accommodated and allocated in several temporary shelters. There are refugee shelters located in Belawan, in Padang Bulan and several small hotels on Jalan Djamin Ginting which were rented to serve as temporary shelters for the spiritual refugees. Until now, the refugees still live in the refugee camps. During their stay in Medan, the Rohingya refugees did not make much demands and did nothing, they can only wait for a decision on their fate from the government and UNHCR as the institution that manages them, whether they will remain in temporary shelters or they will be sent to a third country as the final destination country for the refugees. Rohingya refugees in Medan have taken several actions to fight for their lives. The refugees held a demonstration during the Tri Suci Waisak celebration held by the Medan Buddhist community at the Tiara Convention Center, Jalan Imam Bonjol, Medan Petisah District, Medan city. They rallied to ask the monks and Buddhists in Indonesia, especially in Medan, to strongly condemn murder, persecution and expulsion by Buddhist monks and followers in Myanmar against the Rohingya ethnicity. They have also held demonstrations at the Medan DPRD office to voice their grief. As an international organization that is expected to be able to handle Rohingya refugees, UNHCR carries out various stages and processes in dealing with these refugees. The process begins with the registration or registration of asylum seekers. After registration, UNHCR will conduct individual interviews with each asylum seeker, accompanied by a competent translator. This process engenders a reasoned decision that determines whether a person's request for defender status is accepted or rejected and gives each individual an opportunity to appeal if his application is rejected. If it has been declared a refugee, UNHCR will provide protection and care for the refugees who have been identified. UNHCR's main goal is to find long-term solutions for refugees that will give them the opportunity to rebuild their lives appropriately in peace. 7 The long-term solutions that UNHCR aims at in Indonesia consist of 3, namely: local integration, voluntary return and placement in a third country. (a). Local integration Local integration is currently not a viable option in most cases in Indonesia considering that Indonesia does not yet have local laws to regulate the rights and methods of integrating refugees. Refugees and asylum seekers are only granted permission to stay in Indonesia on a temporary basis. (b). Voluntary return to the country of origin. This solution is only a small part of the refugees who are willing to follow it. Here UNHCR carries out its duties to conduct counseling for each individual refugee to ensure that the refugee is willing to return to his country voluntarily without coercion (Tampubolon et al., 2013). All travel needs will be borne by UNHCR partners, namely IOM (International Organization for Migration) (Ashutosh & Mountz, 2011). (c). Resettlement to a third country. In this case the concept of a country is divided into 3, namely, the first country which is the country of origin of the refugees, the second country is the country that provides temporary shelter for refugees / asylum seekers until they get further action, and the third country is the final destination country of the trip. the refugees. It should be noted that placement in a third country is not a right for refugees and the State has no international obligation to accept refugees temporarily living in a host country. Thus, placement in a third country is a long-term solution that depends on the willingness of the recipient country (Simbolon, 2004).

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used in this research is descriptive research (Soendari, 2012). Descriptive research is a method used to solve problems that exist today based on existing facts and data (Gunawan, 2013). By using this descriptive research, later it can assist the author in answering a question or several questions about the state of a particular object or subject in detail. The research used is qualitative research. According to Bogdan and Taylor's definition, qualitative research is a research procedure that will produce descriptive data in the form of speech or writing and the behavior of the people being observed (Nugrahani & Hum, 2014). The qualitative approach is expected to be able to produce in-depth descriptions of speech, writings and/or observable behavior of an individual, group, community, and/or organization in a particular context setting that is studied from a comprehensive, comprehensive and holistic point of view. The data analysis technique used in this study is to use

qualitative descriptive data analysis techniques with the kick informant method (political actors who are considered to have information and knowledge related to research). Later interviews will be conducted directly with political actors who are considered to have related information. To support the analysis process, researchers will add data and process data from books, journals.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

#### **3.1. Ethnic Myanmar Rohingya**

The most persecuted ethnic groups in the world today are the Rohingya Muslims. The Rohingya are an ethnic group predominantly Muslim in North Rakhine State in Western Myanmar. The Rohingya population is concentrated in the two northern cities of Rakhine State formerly called Arakan. The Rohingya are a Muslim community who live stateless in Myanmar. Myanmar Muslims make up only 4% of the total population of Myanmar and make up the Rohingya ethnic minority. There was a massive massacre and oppression carried out by the Myanmar government against the Rohingya ethnicity. Not only that, the Rohingya ethnic group was also forced to leave Myanmar. For generations there has been a clash between the Rohingya ethnic group who is Muslim and the local ethnic group who is Buddhist. The Rohingya have not received recognition by the local government. Plus a different religion. Some reports say that until now there has been a tragedy of the massacre of more than 6,000 ethnic Rohingya people who are predominantly Muslim.

#### **3.2. Travel Bureau Broker (People Smuggler) For Rohingya Refugees**

In an effort to leave Myanmar, the Rohingya must find parties or people who can help them leave the country. Parties / people who help in the process are called people smugglers or travel agency brokers. However, this travel agency broker in Myanmar is also not a free service and does not charge a fee. The travel agency even charges fees that exceed the normal limit, especially for ethnic Rohingya who want to leave Myanmar. With dire circumstances, the Rohingya were forced to leave their homes in Myanmar to go to other countries. They took all their belongings with them. Usually these Rohingya people bring all their savings, food and clothes, gold coins and gold bullion they have. Armed with this, the travel agency brokers took the opportunity to take what the Rohingya had. Moreover, supported by the condition of the Rohingya people who do not have complete travel documents (passports, visas, etc.), the travel agent brokers have an excuse to drain all the assets owned by the Rohingya people in exchange for travel tickets out of Myanmar to the country. Other, Because they had no other choice, the Rohingya had to be willing to comply with the requests of the travel agents. They think it is better to give all their assets to the travel agent brokers so that they can be helped out of Myanmar than to remain in Myanmar where they will be tortured, forced to work without pay and various actions that violate their human rights and threaten their lives. If an agreement has been made between the Rohingya and the travel agency brokers by giving Rohingya assets (in the form of money, gold coins, gold bullion) to the travel agency brokers, the broker will send them out of Myanmar. With minimal provisions, the Rohingya can leave Myanmar. It is sad for the Rohingya people who do not have enough money or property to pay for their trip so that person will not be sent and will remain in Myanmar.

#### **3.3. The route taken by the Rohingya ethnic group to Medan**

In the process of traveling out of Myanmar to another country to seek protection for their human rights, the Rohingya people take 2 routes of travel through the help of travel agency brokers. The two routes are air and sea routes. In the process, most of the Rohingya people departed by sea to other countries. Most of the countries visited by the Rohingya ethnicity are Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. Rohingya people who are forced to leave Myanmar by taking the sea route will usually enter countries such as Thailand and Malaysia. Basically, the Rohingya cannot choose which country they want to go to. They tend to surrender to travel agency brokers who will send them out of Myanmar. Most of the Rohingya people who left Myanmar by sea. They boarded cargo ships or boarded makeshift boats. They are in the sea for several days, even weeks or months in dire circumstances where they only have little food provisions. Not a few of them fell sick and even died at sea because they could not stand the heat and cold weather and the threat of starvation. The nickname boat people

(boat people) has stuck in them for what happened to them. While they were at sea, the ship or boat they were riding in was even overloaded so that their ship or boat sank in the middle of the sea. As for the Rohingya people who die while on the boat / boat, the carcass will be eaten

### **3.4. UNHCR's Political Role in Handling Ethnic Rohingya in Medan**

As a political actor who upholds human rights and humanity, UNHCR, which in fact is an international organization specially formed by the United Nations to deal with refugee problems around the world, has various mandates that must be carried out in the process of protecting people who are threatened with their human rights and seeking protection for its survival. The Rohingya ethnic group who came to Indonesia especially to Medan to evacuate since several years ago is no exception. In general, the political roles that this organization plays are: Currently, UNHCR in Medan is handling approximately 2000 asylum seekers and refugees from various countries including the Rohingya, totaling around 200 people scattered in various shelter locations in Medan. It should be noted that in the course of carrying out its duties, UNHCR does not charge any fees (free of charge) (a). Doing protection by not returning the Rohingya to their home countries. (b). Providing assistance in the form of clothing, food and shelter for temporary living in Indonesia. (c). Providing a sense of security for Rohingya refugees • Establishing good cooperation with the Indonesian government as a transit country for refugees • Establishing cooperation with several other institutions such as IOM, towards the refugees, as well as the UNHCR party also does not receive funds from the Indonesian government to carry out their duties. All funding comes from the UNHCR and IOM, which is under the auspices of the United Nations. The process carried out by UNHCR in dealing with Rohingya refugees in Medan is:

- a. Granting Status to Refugees
- b. Handling by UNHCR on Rohingya Refugees while in Medan
- c. Resettlement Process

### **3.5 Temporary Shelter for Rohingya Refugees in Medan**

In dealing with Rohingya refugees in Medan, UNHCR together with IOM and the Medan Immigration Office have collaborated to handle the affairs of these Rohingya refugees. Rohingya people who have just arrived in Medan and have not been identified for a while are placed in the Immigration Detention Center (which is in Belawan and the Medan Immigration Office) while those who have been identified are placed in Hotel Beraspati Medan and Hotel Pelangi Medan

### **3.6 Third Country (Receiving Country)**

Third countries or recipient countries are countries that have ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol. As described in chapter II, third countries have the obligation and responsibility to cooperate with UNHCR and various other institutions in handling refugee cases in the whole world. Before the refugees are sent to a third country, a resettlement process is held by UNHCR and the third country has the authority to determine the criteria for selecting Rohingya refugees who will later be placed in their country. The criteria imposed by third countries are made solely so that refugees who enter their country are truly good people and do not have a criminal record so that later they do not endanger their citizens.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

The case that is currently being discussed in the world is the oppression of the Rohingya ethnicity in Myanmar so that the ethnic group must leave their country and become refugees in other countries. One of the countries visited by the Rohingya ethnicity is Indonesia, especially the Medan region. UNHCR as an international organization engaged in the management of refugees is present as an answer to the question of where the refugees will complain and become a protective medium for international refugees, including to Rohingya ethnic group in Medan. There are 3 roles played by UNHCR towards the Rohingya ethnic group in Medan, namely: 1. Collecting data and registering Rohingya people who came to Indonesia, especially to Medan 2. Providing a decent life for Rohingya refugees in Medan, this includes providing assistance needed by Rohingya refugees in Medan 3. Carrying out the stages of resettlement (process placement) to a third country for Rohingya refugees.

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