



stand

STAND Summary:

BURMA

Civil Wars with Ethnic Minorities

Burma is home to the world's longest-running civil war due to tense relations between ethnic armed organizations and conflict incited by the Burma Army (Myanmar military). The various states in Burma have their respective ethnic groups and ethnic armed organizations, each of which faces unique challenges regarding conflict with the Burma Army, land seizure, foreign development projects, and mass displacement of villagers.

In **Rakhine (Arakan) state**, the Arakan Army responds to the Burma Army's violent clashes that have displaced over 160,000 civilians as of January 2020 and have only exacerbated the Burma Army's genocide of the Rohingya, an ethnic Muslim minority.

In **Chin state**, where the majority of civilians are Christians, many have been discriminated against historically and continue to face violent crackdowns from the Burma Army. Conflict in Chin state has resulted in an estimated 200,000 ethnic Chin IDPs and refugees as of December 2019.

Myanmar: Major ethnic groups

Myanmar officially recognises 135 ethnic groups but Rohingya Muslims have been rendered stateless and stripped of their citizenship.

ETHNIC GROUPS

- Bamar
- Shan
- Karen
- Rakhine*
- Rohingya
- Kachin
- Chin
- Karenni
- Mon
- Wa
- Kokang Chinese

Ethnic minority states

* Includes other Rakhine Muslim minorities

- Rakhine-Rohingya inter-ethnic conflict
- Conflict area
- Capital

Source: Al Jazeera, agencies, freeburmarangers, Burma - Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity (Martin Smith)

ALJAZEERA

Kachin state's Kachin Independence Army was conceived to protect Kachin land and push back against the Burma Army, whose attacks have resulted in over 120,000 Kachin refugees. In **Shan state**, conflict has uprooted the lives of thousands of ethnic Shan and Ta'ang, causing an influx of refugees on the Thai-Burma border and an estimated 32 IDP camps with a total of 8,841 displaced individuals. **Karenni state** suffers from mass land confiscation as well as human rights abuses that have created an estimated 102,000 refugees as of 2018.

In **Mon state**, thousands of ethnic Mon have been forced into refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border with over 400,000 IDPs from southeastern Burma. In **Karen state**, fighting between the Karen National Union and the Burma Army has created over 97,000 predominantly ethnic Karen refugees residing in camps in Thailand. Encouraged by the Burmese government, the Burma Army has incited violence throughout the country's various states, ultimately displacing thousands of the nation's ethnic people.

Note: "Burma" was the name given to the country by the British; it was renamed "Myanmar" in 1989 by the military junta. Many Burmese diaspora and human rights organizations choose to use "Burma" in solidarity with the Burmese still suffering at the hands of the government.

The terms "Burma Army" and "Myanmar Military" refer to the same armed group, and are thus used interchangeably throughout this document.



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Context

The size of Burma was never originally what it is today. The original size of the country in pre-colonial and mid-colonial times was a much smaller landmass under direct British rule, extending to areas including Mandalay and the Rangoon seaport to facilitate commerce and trade. Burma was surrounded by multiple self-autonomous states of major ethnic groups such as the Chin, Kachin, Shan, Karen, Karenni, Mon, and Rakhine. After remaining under British rule for about a century, Burmese generals allied themselves with the Japanese during World War II in hopes of being liberated by them, while ethnic groups like the Rohingya and Kachin allied themselves with the British and American troops to fight against the partnered Japanese and Burmese forces. When the Burmese generals eventually became swallowed by Japanese occupation after the war, Burmese generals then called on their former British colonizers for help to overthrow the Japanese.

Upon release from Japanese rule with British aid, Britain then decided to leave the former colony to allow Burma to become its own country. This left a power vacuum within Burma, allowing the dominant Burmese to exert their newfound rule over the other ethnic groups in neighboring states after the death of General Aung San (the "George Washington" of Burma), who helped draft the Panglong Agreement and convened ethnic groups as signatories. This historic document detailed promises for the ethnic groups to remain self-autonomous states under a "Union of Burma" for a few years, and even gave them the option to break away from the Union afterward to form their own independent states. This independence has slowly become an unrealized dream for many of Burma's ethnic groups, however, as the Panglong Agreement ended up serving more so as a contract that dragged ethnic minorities under subordination to the dominant Burmese.

As a result, the promises set forth by the Panglong Agreement continue to be broken to this day, as evidenced by a raging civil war between the Burma Army and ethnic rebel groups from around the country. The numerous human rights abuses, war crimes, and crimes against humanity that have amassed since the country's unstable foundation have only worsened over the years, contributing to the mass displacement of civilians in all states around the country (Chin, Kachin, Shan, Karen, Karenni, Mon, Rakhine). The Burma Army is also responsible for the onset of the largest refugee camp in the world by their violent crackdown and subsequent commitment of genocide against the Rohingya ethnic minority in Rakhine state.

TIMELINE

1824-26: First Anglo-Burmese War results in the Arakan coastal strip ceded to British India

1852: Britain annexes lower Burma after the Second Anglo-Burmese war

1885-86: Burma becomes a part of British India after a short battle where the British capture Mandalay

1937: Burma is separated from British India and dubbed a crown colony

1942: Japan invades Burma during World War II and occupies it with the aid of the Japanese trained Burma Independence Army, which later becomes the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL)

1945: Britain helps the General Aung San-led AFPFL drive out Japanese occupation from the country

1947: Aung San brings together the major ethnic groups of Burma under the Panglong Agreement. He and his six fellow cabinet members are assassinated by followers of U Nu, a rival nationalist, before they live to see a Union of Burma. Foreign minister of Ba Maw government, U Nu, is appointed to lead the AFPFL and government

1948: Burma receives independence from Britain as a former colony with U Nu as Prime Minister

1962: Military coup led by General Ne Win overthrows the democratic government. The "Burmese Way to Socialism" is launched, which bans independent newspapers and installs a one-party system featuring the Socialist Programme Party within the country

1982: Law banning "non-indigenous" people from running for office is put in effect, in addition to a law that denies Rohingya Burmese citizenship

1987: Currency devaluation incites anti-government riots and protests from the masses as their savings are wiped away

Source: BBC



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Recent Dynamics (as of 2021)

The internet shutdown in Rakhine state enters its second year while concern for the Rohingya refugees displaced in Bangladesh increases as unauthorized deportations to Bhasan Char occur. The Burmese government and Burma Army, which hold a quarter of the seats in the Burmese parliament, continue to suppress the rights of civilians as they impose exploitative development projects and dams in Kachin and Shan states without the consultation of local residents, putting them at risk of flooding and land confiscation.

Increased deals with the Chinese government have moved road construction projects into the country as well, making for a key aspect of China's Belt and Road Initiative that has also driven the Burma Army to clash with ethnic civilians in attempts to clear them from the land.

Aung San Suu Kyi, Burma's civilian leader, defended the Burma Army's genocide against the Rohingya during a December 2019 trial at the International Court of Justice. Aung San Suu Kyi continues to be a figure of contention due to her defense of war crimes--many ethnic groups who had once put their trust in her as a potential leader are no longer supporting her.

The country continues its battle with COVID-19 while the Burma Army continues to attack villages and engages in clashes with ethnic rebel groups in varying parts of the country. Burma's 2020 national elections in November resulted in a landslide victory for Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party.

NLD speaks of unity and restoration for the country while the Burmese government/military continue to take advantage of the pandemic as a distraction in the international community by committing escalated atrocities against their own civilians.

The situation in Burma calls for the international community to ensure that justice and accountability be served for good, once and for all.

TIMELINE

1988: Thousands of student demonstrators are killed by the military in the streets, which prompts the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) to come into formation. Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of General Aung San, who was in the country at the time to visit her sick mother, comes on the scene to give speeches and rises as a figure of hope for the nation

1990: National League for Democracy wins elections, results ignored by ruling junta

2007: Saffron Revolution led by Buddhist monks met with violent suppression

2010: Elections held, Thein Sein becomes President

2011: 17-year ceasefire breaks between the Burma Army and Kachin Independence Army, displacing more than 100,000
2015: First contested general election in 25 years with NLD winning majority

2016: Htin Kyaw elected as President, Aung San Suu Kyi appointed as State Counsellor

2017: Violent crackdown on the Rohingya in Rakhine state begins

2018: Two Reuters journalists are sentenced to prison for reporting on the crimes against the Rohingya

2019: Internet shutdown in Rakhine state begins; Burma is tried at the International Court of Justice for crimes against the Rohingya

2020: National elections are held

Source: BBC