

ROHINGYA CRISIS: ASEAN'S RESPONSES ANALYSIS IN THE LIBERALISM THEORY

¹Alderin Joisafita Tangdialla, ²Andi Anugrah Saputra, ³Oilinia Miyanda Maruhawa, ⁴Syarifah Dinda Nuraini Alkadrie

¹²³⁴International Relations, President University, Cikarang, Indonesia

¹alderin.tangdialla@student.president.ac.id, ²anugrahs2806@gmail.com, ³oilinia.maruhawa@student.president.ac.id, ⁴syarifah.alkadrie@student.president.ac.id

Abstract

The Rohingya ethnicity in Myanmar abused in 2016 reflected an act of violence against Rohingya Muslims by the Myanmar armed forces and police. To manage conflicts that extend the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar, the role of governments is important. Because of the abuse and the complex types of human rights abuses of the Rohingya ethnicity, researchers took Rohingya ethnicity into our case study in this paper. Researchers also use the theory of Liberalism and focus on the response and the actions of ASEAN countries that are a place for these Rohingya refugees. On the actions, ASEAN has taken in the context of Liberalism. These researches use the qualitative method of analysis. Due to the data analysis, security policies consider the domestic interests of each country, which Rohingya refugees are supposed to be able to get help.

Keywords: ASEAN, Rohingya, Myanmar, Refugees, Liberalism

DOI: 10.33541/sp.v20i2.2413

Sociae Polites : Majalah Ilmiah Sosial Politik

Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Kristen Indonesia

ISSN 1410-3745 print/ ISSN 2620-4975 online Volume 20, Number 2 (July – December 2019)

Pages 192-204

1. Introduction

Internal conflict involving ethnicities in the international world is something that has always appeared until now. The conflict that was an internal problem of a nation at that time develops into an international problem. This is the impact of the conflict, which forced some people to leave the country. In general, they leave their country because of the unfair treatment of a certain ethnicity, which is usually an ethnic minority in that country. One of them is experienced by the Rohingya ethnic group whose citizenship is not recognized by the Myanmar Government.

The persecution of the Rohingya ethnicity in Myanmar in 2016 was an act of violence by the Myanmar armed forces and police against Rohingya Muslims. The Rohingya Muslim ethnic group is one of a total of 135 ethnic minorities in Burma-Myanmar. As for the number of ethnic minorities, the Rohingya Muslim group ethnic is considered the most persecuted ethnic group, according to the United Nations. Rohingya Muslims have been discriminated against since 1948, when there was ethnic separation by Britain. The separation was carried out in the Rakhine region separated ethnic Myanmar Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims. Violence against Rohingya resulted in poverty, misery, and violations of Human Rights. The Rohingya ethnic minorities have lived with severely restricted rights, including freedom of movement, marriage, and work. Under the military government that controlled Burma-Myanmar, in 1982, a new policy emerged called the Burma Citizenship Law of 1982 is not recognized as part of the 135 official ethnic groups in Myanmar. The government considers Rohingya to be illegal migrants from Bangladesh, and Rohingya people did not receive citizenship, land rights, and decent and adequate education land work. The absence of citizenship makes the Rohingya the largest population without citizenship. Without citizenship status, Rohingya ethnicity is particularly vulnerable to exploitation, detention, and abuse.

Conflicts that continue to inflict victims from time to time need a solution so that victims do not continue to fall. The government's role is then needed in handling conflicts, which further prolongs the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar. The Rohingya, who suffered more losses, need more attention from the relevant government. However, in reality, the Rohingya Refugees did not get the Myanmar government's attention and instead received discrimination and added to the suffering of the Rohingya ethnic group.

After a long period of suffering physically and mentally from inappropriate treatment by the Myanmar military, at the end of 2008, Rohingya ethnicity fled Myanmar hoping that they could receive more humane treatment. Several ASEAN countries became destinations for Rohingya Refugees to get a more decent life. Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia are close to Myanmar because of the Rohingya Refugees' destination who leave their former homes. The Rohingya ethnic issue, which was originally a domestic problem for Myanmar, eventually became an international issue when the Rohingya were stranded and fled to other countries. This can disrupt regional security and disturb countries near or bordering Myanmar, such as Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Rohingya refugees' issue is a common problem because the Rohingya refugees are a burden and become a new problem in their stranded country. Not only that, but Rohingya refugees also burden other ASEAN member countries.

Firstly, the researchers took the case study of Rohingya Refugees in this paper because of the violence and various forms of human rights violations that the Rohingya ethnic group had. According to John Locke - the central contributor of Liberalism - in

his book entitled *Two Treatises of Government (1690)*, everyone is born with natural rights, which cannot be taken away. The basic rights referred to by John Locke are the right to life, the right to own something, the freedom to form opinions, have religion and speech. John Locke stated that the government's main task is actually to guarantee the basic rights of the individual. If it does not protect those basic rights, then the people have the right to carry out a revolution. It means there should be a government role to deal with the problems that come to the Rohingya. However, the Rohingya ethnic groups who have been involved in the conflict have experienced a worsening condition due to discrimination from the Myanmar government. And basically, Human Rights are a basic right inherent in humans from birth. The basic rights owned by every human being include the right to life, the right to embrace religion, the right to get an education, and the right to get security. What happened to the Rohingya refugees, of course, violates their human rights.

Based on the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)*, the various acts of violence and discrimination Rohingya ethnicity received caused their basic rights not to be fulfilled. They find it difficult to fulfill their basic rights, but their safety is also not guaranteed. And based on a statement from John Locke that freedom, which is the basic value of Liberalism, is understood as the absence of external intervention in individual activities, that's why the researchers use liberalism theory, which is the reason the Rohingya refugees are displaced because their security and basic rights are not fulfilled.

In this paper, researchers focus on the response and actions of countries in ASEAN, which are a haven for these Rohingya Refugees, and what actions ASEAN has taken as a regional organization from the perspective of Liberalism. This is because the Rohingya humanitarian crisis had had a significant impact on ASEAN countries when Rohingya refugees decided to flee to several ASEAN countries, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia, need to issue policies related to the security of the countries.

2. Literature Review

This part of the paper will analyze the scholar's development as sufficient as possible to help the reader build the framework for this discussion. Mentioning the word 'refugee,' researchers tend to think about the displaced people and the State's failure to protect the citizens. It should perhaps be cleared, but refugees are not a homogenous group; they naturally come from different classes, economics, and other social networks. Yet, refugees' enduring image tends to be that of helpless victims languishing in refugee camps for years. Some scholars might tend to elaborate on the refugee and its position in the international system. Refugees in international law occupy a legal space that imports certain legal consequences for states to respect the principle of nonrefoulment (Sanyal, Planning for Refugees in Cities 2019). This legal status also enforced a concern to protect the refugee. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is the agency entrusted with this function, as the international community representative. Still, the State also has a protecting role, even though their interests are not engaged. The 'interest' of the international community is expanding. States now owe to the international community the duty to accord to their nationals a certain standard of treatment in the matter of human rights (Goodwin-Gill and McAdam 2007).

This thought brings us back to the eye of Liberalism. The basic idea of Liberalism is to exercise a peaceful world – say, fortunately, it is rare for war to exist –

although it is still a controversial statement. The way Liberalism promotes peace stands with these two principles. Firstly, it highlights individuals' nature to be free and prosperous, so it pursues the 'self-interest' — even evil notion understands how to promote their interests without asking in cooperation, moreover the rational one — just let people be what they want to be. It would automatically be accessible to explore the world more, which leads to open relationships. That would continue the second principle, which is democracy.

According to Dunne, Kukri, and Smith in their book of International Relations Theories stated that "democracies operate the peaceful means of resolving problems by negotiation and compromise which bear the utilization of international institutions" (Dunne, Kurki and Smith, International Relations Theories Discipline Diversity 2013). The involvement of international institutions increases the promotion of democracy. Effectively promotes peace resolution. Yet, they also added by saying that "Regional organizations much more do it. International Organization composed mostly of democracies especially effective in maintaining peace among their members - even with whatever non-democratic State might be" (Dunne, Kurki and Smith, International Relations Theories 2013, 101). However, the members have to be responsible for the costs and benefits of executing the war. According to Viotti and Kauppi; Moravcsik 1992, although in a realist's view, many liberals might be downplaying security threats irrespective of the national border. Further, they can overcome it through cooperation and collaboration with other State's interests.

This strong peace provides a solid foundation. The establishment of the foundation, as seen in ASEAN (Association for Southeast Asian Nations). For Liberalism, the pillar is to keep holding hands in every aspect, including in the frame of humanitarianism, which incorporates the human rights-based notions of freedom of movement and refugee protection. One of the strong guarantee documents in ASEAN to ensure human rights mentioned, "Strengthen democracy, good governance, and improve the rule of law ... (and) promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms" "and to improve the welfare and livelihoods of the ASEAN people by providing them with equitable access to opportunities for human development, social welfare and justice." (Pudjibudojo 2019, 5)

In order to assist the vision, ASEAN has an existing ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR). AICHR is rightly mandated to develop a regional strategy for the member state, arrange a cooperation plan of action to protect the refugees, and guarantee to respect the rights of humans more than as the asylum seeker (Adeline 2019, 5). As reported from Indonesian NGOs Coalition for International Human Rights Advocacy in 2019, ASEAN's repatriation efforts have been spearheaded by the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre), who coordinates the equitable distribution of aid and relief to Myanmar. However, ASEAN's concern for humanity has been debated for a long time. ASEAN members do not show the urgency to the issue of humanitarian. Only two ASEAN countries signed the UN Refugee Convention, which is the standard commitment to refugee treatment in the Philippines and Cambodia. Again, Southeast Asia refugee crises are taken attention by the international system.

Substantially articles discuss the Rohingya case from different perspectives, particularly ASEAN's involvement and questioning the Myanmar government in protecting the citizens. Finally, this paper will elaborate on Malaysia, Thailand, and

Indonesia's evaluation to respond to Rohingya asylum seekers. Yet, to complete the analysis, the discussion will illustrate the role of ASEAN at a regional level. However, each subtopic would be laid on the Liberalism principle.

Liberal pioneers such as Isaiah Berlin, John Rawls, and Robert Nozick explained that humans are autonomous beings who can determine for themselves the direction and purpose of the truth of their life. The concept of positive and negative freedom by Isaiah Berlin is one of the most important topics in individual rights. Isaiah Berlin, in his essay Two Concepts of Liberty, negative definition of freedom as a condition in which humans can make their own choices without any restrictions and interference from outside parties, including the government or ruling groups (Berlin 2004). Meanwhile, the positive definition of freedom is humans' ability to determine their destiny because humans are rational beings who are autonomous and can choose the best decisions for themselves. The human ratio's ability is an important thing that distinguishes it from other creatures, and only with freedom can humans fully implement these advantages. Humans should not be forced to accept a generalized moral truth during society because every human being has desires and goals that cannot be compared. Thus, Berlin places more emphasis on the importance of individual freedom and recognition of social pluralism.

In John Rawls's theory of Liberalism, Rawls explains that the principle of Liberalism includes equal freedom for all people, which can only be sacrificed if it is believed to be beneficial for the good of all people and will improve the quality of freedom itself, such as reducing poverty and increasing national welfare. Robert Nozick's view also proposes a hypothetical form of State to explain how it is the choice of freedom most likely to be taken by all individuals. Nozick underlines very strict rules on individual rights. It describes rights as lines in the moral surrounding the individual, which is not to be touched under any circumstances without the consent of the individual concerned (Shapiro 2006)

In the developing classical theory of Liberalism, there is cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitan argue about universalism and individualism. Some scholars that develop this are John Rawls, Thomas Pogge, Charles Beitz, and Onora O'Neill ask what a moral obligation to treat all other human beings as free or as ends in themselves, rather than as a means to our ends (which is one of the ways Kant describes his vision of the moral law) obliges us to do about issues such as world poverty and famine or the rights of stateless persons such as refugees, and the nature and scope of universal human rights (Sutch and Elias 2007).

These various liberalism views show that absolute individual freedom is something that must be guarded and protected. This also applies to the determination of truth, where the individual has the right to determine what is best. The judgment must be free from coercion by other parties and the doctrines circulating in the surrounding circle. Individual assessments must be objective and neutral, and free from group values, especially coercive ones.

3. Research Methods

The main explosion of this prolonged war has induced various factors, including violation, discrimination against minority people, and ethnic issues. The discrimination against Rohingya is mostly due to its separate status. The Rohingya are regarded not by

the Myanmar government as locals but as illegal immigrants; unlike other ethnic groups, the Government of Myanmar doesn't accept Rohingya ethnicity.

This writing used a qualitative type of research method. Qualitative research aims to build and understand reality. Through quality research, procedures, activities, and authenticity are typically closely involved. Therefore, what is sometimes done is to analyze the topic(Somantri 2005). Qualitative researchers usually interact with the fact they study. And the data collected and used are primary data and secondary data, where preliminary data researchers take from the official ASEAN website because this topic is related to ASEAN countries and impacts these countries. Secondary data are taken from journals and news that have relevance to the issues that have been discussed, and researchers use document study or document analysis as data collection methods. Document analysis is an organized method for the review or analysis of both written and electronic content (computer and online) records(Bowen 2009).

As with other qualitative research analytical approaches, document analysis involves data to be analyzed and interpreted to produce significance, understanding, and scientific expertise. This type of research is descriptive and explains data based on the evidence gathered. The most fundamental study is descriptive research. They are seen to define or describe current phenomena, whether scientific or technological. The results obtained from using this research will be very useful to be then used to analyze the behavior of actors for the actions they take. Also, the data obtained will be in the form of descriptive.

4. Results and Discussions

Liberalism emphasizes individual freedom, where society rejects any restrictions either by religion or by government. The existence of individual freedom in Liberalism helps society in developing. Everyone is free to do anything without interference from anyone, including the State, but the State must protect and guarantee this freedom from anyone who tries to destroy it. Therefore, Liberalism attaches great importance to freedom with all people. The freedom to create, argue, and act, even freedom of belief, is the purpose they want to realize in this life.

In this section, we'd like to discuss; is the response from ASEAN countries right in the term of Liberalism theory. When talking about liberalism theory, something that never is separated from human rights. once the scholar said that "...States now owes the international community the duty to accord to their nationals a certain standard of treatment in the matter of human rights." (Goodwin-Gill and McAdam 2007, 1-2). In our opinion, the certain standard that Goodwin-Gill and McAdam mention is the Declaration of Human Rights; also, this is the implementation of liberalism theory. Almost all the members of the United Nations have ratified it. Exactly mentioned in the *Declaration of Human Rights* about how to treat refugees and their rights. It's written in the article 13&14:

Article 13

- 1. Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State.
- 2. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and return to his country.

Article 14

- 1. Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.
- 2. This right may not be invoked in the case of persecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or acts contrary to the United Nations' purpose and principle.

Rohingya had entered some ASEAN countries, such as Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia, by the sea route. The table below shows the differences between the countries' responses.

Indonesian people are friendly, welcoming, and accepting the Rohingya refugees in Aceh. The sense of the humanity of the Aceh people deserves praise. They are tolerant of receiving refugees from Rohingya because the feeling of brotherhood is built because of one belief, Islam. Even when the world is being hit by a pandemic, where many people have died due to corona attacks, this does not make Aceh reject it. On the other hand, Malaysia and Thailand refuse them. Theoretically speaking, these two countries' response is inappropriate. As the declaration had already mentioned about refugees' rights, Malaysia and Thailand's response is a violation of human rights. Regarding the article's statements above, a Rohingya refugee who is also the asylum seeker has the right to enjoy the other state asylum. The asylum state has to accommodate the Rohingya several times until they get the resident status.

In June 2020, Rohingya refugees were refused entry to Malaysia because the country is in a difficult economic position, and resources are running low due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Previously, Malaysia also rejected the presence of the Rohingya. From the statement of the Deputy Minister of Home Affairs of Malaysia, Malaysia can do good to refugees but cannot receive them there. In Thailand, Rohingya Refugees also experience a fate that is not much different from the treatment they received in their home country. Thai military arbitrarily released them back in Thailand by providing whatever they were. There is no diplomatic treatment. But, Thailand, although refusing to give entry to Rohingya refugees, they are still providing supplies for these refugees so that they can continue their journey to another country. Theoretically speaking, these two countries' response is inappropriate. As the theory said, Everyone is free to do anything without interference from anyone, including the State. Still, the State must protect and guarantee this freedom from anyone who tries to destroy it. Therefore, Liberalism attaches great importance to freedom with all people. Technically, Rohingya People are also free to choose their path, where they want to go, and what they want to do. They can go anywhere and in any country to get a better life or protection because it includes human rights. They need a temporary shelter to stay, and they need edible food because it's the nature of human-being. Perhaps it won't be long-lasting because they will solve their problems with the Myanmar Government, but it seems heartless if they refuse them immediately after their arrival.

The Rohingya crisis has been a regional shared issue for ASEAN. The Rohingya issue is currently the most highlighted humanitarian issue in ASEAN. This Rohingya refugees issue requires ASEAN to take a stand and do something because this is contrary to the original purpose of ASEAN being established and also to carry out the objectives stated in the ASEAN Charter where all ASEAN country members should maintain and improve peace, security, and stability and further strengthen peace-oriented values in the ASEAN region entitled to a harmonious life. One of ASEAN's efforts in dealing with refugees in the ASEAN region is to form the ASEAN Special

Institute for Handling Refugees in the Southeast Asia Region, a special ASEAN institution dedicated to introducing and enforcing human rights in the Southeast Asian region. These institutions are the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) and the ASEAN Declaration of Human Rights (AHRD). ASEAN's commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights and basic freedoms and the goals and principles set out in the ASEAN Charter, including the principles of democracy, the rule of law, and good governance. ASEAN members recognize the importance of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) as the main institution responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights in ASEAN, which contributes to the formation of a community-oriented ASEAN Community and as a tool for progressive social development and justice, the achievement of a better quality of life for the people of ASEAN and the fulfillment of human dignity.

ASEAN's credibility to deal with this crisis is on the hard-line. In its general response, ASEAN - especially Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Myanmar - conduct diplomatic ways to resolve this crisis. Unfortunately, ASEAN has not formally led any officials meeting to consult on the Rohingya issue in the early case. In the head ASEAN members meeting 2012 when the crisis began, the high level of Rohingya proposition was raised from Myanmar and Bangladesh. There was no single ASEAN member who dared challenge Myanmar. The same thing in 2015 when ASEAN ignored the bad luck of the Rohingya. Even though the former ASEAN Secretary-General asserted his interest in the issue, this came out with no further preventive action - the issue only recognized as an irregular movement of persons in Southeast Asia. Eventually, since 2017, ASEAN has discussed the crisis in multiple forums officially.

Continued in 2018 on ASEAN Summit, it addressed the Rohingya issue particularly, but a point of concern is on the repatriation, treating humanity in Myanmar. The Heads of State of ASEAN Members expressed their readiness to support Myanmar in its repatriation process. The ASEAN Leaders also welcomed the invitation to come in a room together by Myanmar to the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre) to relegate an assessment team to identify possible areas of cooperation to facilitate the repatriation and developed jointly by the Department of Disaster Management of Myanmar.

Next, in 2019, the Summit's result was conducting a "Preliminary Needs Assessment" on repatriation for the Rohingya refugees by the Emergency Response and Action Team (ERAT). Nevertheless, the assessment reaps some slant responses. As stated in Human Rights Watch (HRW), this 56 pages report was developed without input on Rohingya's behalf and almost neglecting Myanmar's brutality. It is more to record Myanmar's readiness for repatriation, which disregards the situation on the ground as clearly stated in the Preliminary Needs Assessment that, "... The ASEAN Member States expressed their readiness to support Myanmar in its repatriation process...The objective of the Preliminary Needs Assessment is to assess the readiness of Reception and Transit Centres, including potential relocations sites that have been identified by the Government of Myanmar". Another controversial response of ASEAN to the Rohingya is in the closing statement of the Summit 2018 that it would find a comprehensive and durable solution to the root causes of conflict. The fact is it is too obvious to say, Myanmar government primarily has taken responsibility for the situation as directly mentioned by Brad Adams who is the Asia director, "...The

Myanmar military's ethnic cleansing campaign against them (Human Rights Watch, n.d.,)".

In our opinion, it fits for ASEAN to have a special institution or institutions for the handling of Rohingya Refugees or other refugees in the Southeast Asia region because ASEAN is considered to have no instruments to deal with the exodus of immigrants, most of the refugees come from one of the ASEAN member countries, Myanmar. Former Deputy Chairman of Commission I DPR RI, Tantowi Yahya, states that ASEAN countries did not make sufficient efforts to urge Myanmar to resolve the issue of discrimination against ethnic Rohingya, which is the cause of the departure of boat people to several countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Eventually, the ultimate way to help Rohingya is to solve their problem with Myanmar. ASEAN is necessary to take action as the bridge for Rohingya to solve their problem with the Myanmar Government. ASEAN has to be more urgent and take responsible action toward the Rohingya Refugees crisis. The basic idea of Liberalism is to exercise a peaceful world, but in our opinion, Rohingya People don't live peacefully yet. This basic idea will be implemented if ASEAN embraces all the members, and they try to solve Rohingya's problem with Myanmar. ASEAN must prevent the war between these two different societies in Myanmar; However, this problem is the task of the Myanmar Government, ASEAN roled as the bride to connect them. As an ASEAN member, we are supposed to support Myanmar and Rohingya People to talk in a good atmosphere. We can make a conference for Myanmar and Rohingya to give them a little space to share their opinion in such a good way.

In this incident that comes to the Rohingya ethnicity, researchers hope that ASEAN countries, which are destinations for Rohingya refugees, must improve the facilities provided to Rohingya refugees considering they desperately need help from neighboring countries due to various violence and oppression in Myanmar. Myanmar as a country where the Rohingya minority live must reconsider their Rohingya citizenship, which is a problem point to the humanitarian crisis for the Rohingya, considering that if they reconsider the historical record of the Rohingya ethnicity in Myanmar, they should be designated as one of the official ethnic groups in Myanmar. This is to create global security by achieving human security, which is the right of every individual. All ASEAN countries also must be actively involved in solving Rohingya refugees' issues about the humanitarian crisis considering that Rohingya are one of the communities in ASEAN. The latter are experiencing oppression and violence in their own country of residence.

5. Conclusion

Internal problems of the country normally should be done by the country itself with their governing role. However, in Rohingya's case, Myanmar can be said to have failed in solving their problems. Instead of solving the problem, Myanmar made quite serious violations. Seeing this too, the Rohingya ethnic groups who are already suffering from continued persecution and are in serious poverty must move from that place to a more suitable place, in other words, to move countries. And the ASEAN countries have faced a serious humanitarian crisis because Rohingya refugees have chosen to immigrate to several ASEAN countries, namely Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia, and make policies to reduce Rohingya refugees' burden.

However, the three countries have not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention nor the 1967 Refugee Protocol. Malaysia and Indonesia can only provide sufficient clothing, feed, and shelter for refugees in the form of temporary shelter. Meanwhile, Thailand can only help refugee ships stopping in the Thai region in the form of food, drink, and fuel. Liberalism's fundamental concept is to practice the world of peace, and different views of Liberalism indicate that absolute individual freedom must be protected and secured. This refers even to the determination of fact, in which the person is free from coercion by others and the doctrine circulating in the surrounding circle to decide the best. But we don't think the Rohingya people live in peace. The fundamental concept of Liberalism will be applied if all ASEAN members are involved, and Rohingya's issue is resolved with Myanmar. Myanmar needs to reconsider Rohingya citizenship as a problem for the humanitarian crisis in the Rohingya region, considering that they should be recognized as one of Myanmar's official ethnic groups if they reconsider the historical record of the Rohingya ethnicity of Myanmar. This is to establish global security by realizing human security that is the right of each individual. Also, ASEAN needs instruments to deal with refugees because ASEAN is considered to have no instruments to deal with immigrants' exodus. It is appropriate for ASEAN to have a special institution or institution for the treatment of Rohingya refugees or even other refugees in the South East Asian region.

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