

# STUDY GUIDE

UNITED NATIONS  
SECURITY COUNCIL (UNSC)

TOPIC A: CONFLICTS IN SOUTHEAST  
ASIA AND COVID-19 CONSEQUENCES

TOPIC B: THE SITUATION  
IN THE PHILIPPINES



CENTRO DE PESQUISA E SIMULAÇÃO

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OLGA BENÁRIO

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*April 2021*

**CENTRO DE PESQUISA E SIMULAÇÃO OLGA BENARIO**

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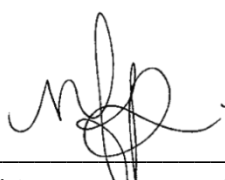
## APRESENTAÇÃO

Senhoras(os) delegadas(os),

É com muita honra que a lhes apresento os Guias da **Terceira Edição do Goiás Model United Nations (GOMUN)**. O trabalho aqui desenvolvido deve ser creditado aos membros do Centro de Pesquisa e Simulação Olga Benário (CPSOB), instituição a qual surgiu do propósito de democratizar o conhecimento e promover o aprendizado através da realização de modelos de negociações internacionais.

Desde sua fundação, o CPSOB sempre visou incentivar debates sobre temas periféricos e grupos minoritários. Da mesma forma, buscamos impulsionar o debate crítico e consciente de todas as pessoas envolvidas em suas atividades. Esta não é uma exceção: o III GOMUN possui o propósito de fazer todas(os) as(os) inscritas(os) refletirem sobre o papel do Sul Global no mundo atual. Especialmente em um momento pandêmico, as pautas e demandas de países considerados periféricos no sistema mundial podem ser desconsideradas. Por isso, é de extrema relevância que, nós, como estudantes e futuros profissionais, tentemos procurar soluções diferentes para a realidade tão brutal que vivemos. Assim, quando for nosso momento de tomar as decisões, teremos uma visão mais crítica e humana sobre aquilo que podemos fazer de diferente no mundo.

Esta é uma oportunidade para que todas(os) delegadas(os) demonstrem comprometimento para com a discussão a nível internacional, trazendo seriedade e responsabilidade durante as sessões da simulação que acontecerá nos próximos dias. Ademais, aproveito este momento para reforçar um dos valores dentro dos quais o CPSOB e o GOMUN foram criados: a diversidade e tolerância. Visto que teremos nosso primeiro comitê em língua inglesa, urjo que todas as delegações ajam com respeito durante nosso evento. Afinal, quaisquer tipos de preconceito ou discriminação, seja por questões de raça, religião, deficiência, gênero, orientação sexual ou linguagem, será repudiada. Finalmente, espero que tenham uma ótima simulação e que o III GOMUN inspire a todas(os) a lutar por um novo futuro, através de gentileza e justiça. Boa simulação!



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**Nathália Fernandes Pimentel**

*Secretária-Geral da 3ª Edição do GOMUN*

<b>PREFACE ....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1. ABOUT THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>2. CONFLICTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND COVID-19 CONSEQUENCES .....</b>	<b>11</b>
2.1. SOUTHEAST ASIA CONFLICTS .....	12
2.1.1. Indonesia and the Papua Conflict .....	12
2.1.2. Political Crisis in Malaysia .....	15
2.1.3. Myanmar and the Ethnic-religious Conflict .....	17
2.2. RESOLUTIONS .....	20
<b>3. THE SITUATION ON THE PHILIPPINES .....</b>	<b>24</b>
3.1. DEVELOPMENTS AMIDST THE COVID-19 CRISIS .....	29
3.2. THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS .....	33
3.2.1. United Nations' Framework on Human Rights .....	35
3.2.2. Violations in the Philippines .....	36
<b>4. BLOC POSITIONS .....</b>	<b>38</b>
4.1. FRENCH REPUBLIC .....	38
4.2. KINGDOM OF NORWAY .....	39
4.3. PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA .....	40
4.4. REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA .....	40
4.5. REPUBLIC OF INDIA .....	41
4.6. REPUBLIC OF IRELAND .....	41
4.7. REPUBLIC OF KENYA .....	42
4.8. REPUBLIC OF NIGER .....	42
4.9. REPUBLIC OF TUNISIA .....	43
4.10. RUSSIAN FEDERATION .....	43
4.11. SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES .....	44

4.12. SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM .....	44
4.13. UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND.....	45
4.14. UNITED MEXICAN STATES .....	45
4.15. UNITED STATES OF AMERICA .....	46
4.16. FEDERATION OF MALAYSIA* .....	46
4.17. KINGDOM OF THAILAND* .....	47
4.18. REPUBLIC OF INDONESIA* .....	48
4.19. REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES* .....	48
4.20. REPUBLIC OF THE UNION OF MYANMAR* .....	49
<b>5. REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>49</b>



## PREFACE

Pedro V. P. Brites<sup>1</sup>

The creation of the United Nations Security Council in 1945 was a historical landmark in the aftermath of post-World War II. The process of dismantling colonial hierarchical structures, which began before that period and extended throughout the Cold War, implied the need to rearrange governance mechanisms at the global level. The UNSC, for this reason, appears as a reflection of the world power configuration led by the hegemony of the United States.

More than seven decades after its creation, UNSC faces a vastly different scenario from that of its creation. International relations have been profoundly shifted. The political, security, and material conditions that gave rise to its creation and justified its formatting (asymmetric and based on veto power) underwent a continuous process of erosion. Three levels of change marked this scenario: (i) the global geopolitical reconfiguration - a process that derives from the fragmentation of colonial empires and the Soviet bloc; (ii) the change in the global productive matrix, with the (re) emergence of Asia as a dynamic center of the global economy - a change that is accompanied by the digital revolution (third and fourth industrial revolutions) and the global energy transition, with the loss of relative importance of oil over the period; and (iii) the process of hegemonic recomposition, in which the global hierarchy of power was changed, and the US lost relative power vis-à-vis the competing powers.

The UNSC is the most powerful agency in the United Nations system. The fact that their decisions are binding lends great weight to what the board does. For this reason, the incongruity between its institutional configuration formed in 1945 (15 members, P5 with veto power) and the current geopolitical, economic, and hegemonic context generates a series of debates about the legitimacy of UNSC and about the need to rethink how the committee should operate. After all, the concentration of power in the hands of a few states has become a brake on the collective resolution of global crises. For that reason, the decisions of the Council are frequently considered biased. Besides the decisions reflects the interests of a State or a group of States

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only. Even if we consider a more pragmatic and realistic worldview, the fact is that UNSC does not reflect the current distribution of power.

For the Global South, this context is dramatic. The countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America are the ones that contribute most to the UN Peace Operations in terms of military and police personnel and are the ones that are most targeted by these operations. Despite this, the Global South does not have proportional decision-making power at UNSC. The conception and definition of which crises will be dealt with by UNSC, what measures will be adopted, are left to the Great Powers (USA, United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China). Even if China is considered a representative of the Global South, a perspective that is far from being consensual, we would still have an imbalance of representation. Thus, the agenda for international security issues ends up reflecting the interests of these powers. Besides, the interventions are based on the historical patterns of conflict and cooperation of the P5 with the Global South States.

The new coronavirus pandemic highlighted this crisis in global governance mechanisms. As the United States adopted a critical stance towards multilateral organizations and helped to undermine the legitimacy of international institutions, the construction of a coordinated collective response to Covid-19's challenges was hampered. The Security Council, due to its importance, could have played a more central role in this context. Thinking from the UNSC, the committee simulated here, how can the pandemic be understood as an international security problem? Why was global health not considered a security issue in this context? These issues can be incorporated into the UNSC assessment during our time. Although they are not unique, the answers include reflecting on whether the Security Council is still functional given the changes that have shaped international relations in the past 75 years. We live in an era of insecurity.

Southeast Asia, the region that will be discussed in this committee, faces the challenges of this era of insecurity as well. Like the other regions of the Global South, Southeast Asia is part of the dispute between the Great Powers and is one of the stages of the competition that mark this period of hegemonic recomposition. From Myanmar to the South China Sea, political and security instabilities are mixed with an economic dynamism scenario. If during the Cold War, Southeast Asia is remembered from the perspective of the confrontation between the two superpowers (only as a theater of indirect confrontation), in the post-Cold War, the region grew economically and strengthened the mechanisms of regional governance through ASEAN. Despite this, political and security crises are still present in the region.

The pandemic, in some cases, has reinforced these conflicting trends. On the one hand, we are observing an increase in repressive and authoritarian measures. In the Philippines, for



example, murders by police and paramilitary forces grew profoundly during the Covid-19 lockdown. On the other hand, the pandemic strengthened divergences between the countries of the region, reinforced regional rivalries from some countries, such as Vietnam, with China, and repositioned the South China Sea as an axis of the disputes between Washington and Beijing.

Therefore, both topics ((The Conflicts in Southeast Asia and the consequences of COVID-19, and the situation in the Philippines) are profoundly valuable. Despite the significant growth in the last two decades, studies and debates on Asia are still few in Brazil. Studies on Asia, a region that is the global geopolitical axis, are crucial for Brazil to be aligned with the state of the art of international relations. So, I congratulate the Olga Benario Research and Simulation Center (CPSOB), the Goiás Model United Nations (GOMUN), and the IR students at the Federal University of Goiás (UFG) for conducting this initiative. Also, as a researcher who graduated from a federal university, I feel fulfilled in seeing the role of the public university being reinforced in the building of these debates so important for the understanding of contemporary international relations.

## 1. ABOUT THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is a United Nations' committee, majorly responsible for the establishment and the maintenance of peace and security among nations. Beyond the paramount issue of peace preservation, the UNSC has also been directly acting on several topics related to the promotion of Human Rights, and the development of healthier international relations. Although the Council's deliberative body has shown its effectiveness on further matters, it is only summoned whenever peace is somehow threatened. Likewise, it detains the exclusive power to compel all member states of the United Nations to implement the decisions made at the meeting (UNITED NATIONS, [2021]d).

Albeit when its first session was held, on January 17th 1946, the Council's deliberative body consisted of 11 members, since 1965, it is composed of 15 States. As it was originally, its structure involves five permanent members: People's Republic of China, French Republic, Russian Federation, United Kingdom of Great Britain, and United States of America. However, instead of six non-permanent members, currently, it is composed of 10, which are elected for two-year terms, through the UN General Assembly. These members are chosen to achieve the purpose of reaching all — or most of — the regions of the world, seeking egalitarian representation (BUTHIA *et al*, 2020; UNITED NATIONS, [2021]d).

When a threat to peace is brought to the UNSC, its first and main recommendation is to seek a resolution driven by peaceful means. To reconcile the parties of the conflict, the Security Council's strategies are based on an impartial, pacific, and mediatorial construction of an agreement, which aims to avoid a confrontation between those partakers. Notwithstanding the efforts of the council, sometimes a direct conflict cannot be avoided. In these cases, the recommendations are turned to the central concerns of putting an end to the conflict, reducing the negative impacts of it on the civil population and the international community and preventing a possible escalation of the situation. Besides, to end the conflict, the members of the Council may form peacekeeping forces where the confrontation takes place, as well as send military missions over the aggressor nation (UNITED NATIONS, [2021]d).

Moreover, the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) often provides staff support to the Security Council, monitoring and detecting potential crises throughout the world (UNITED NATIONS, [2021]b). Through the Security Council Affairs Division (SCAD), the DPPA bestows substantive, and secretariat assists on the UNSC and its member-states, upholding their seek for maintaining international peace and security.

Other branches of the Division, such as the Security Council Secretariat Branch, can also work as advisory and research arms of the UNSC on procedure matters, and as logistical sustain for the Council's subsidiary bodies, as the Counter Terrorism Committee (UNITED NATIONS, [2021]b).

The members of the Security Council can apply diplomatic and economic sanctions against offending nations when necessary, supported by Sanctions Committees for every state under sanction (BUTHIA *et al*, 2020). If the parties of a conflict are sent to a trial in an International Court, the severance of the penalties can be much worse, including financial restrictions, arms embargoes, blockade, and travel bans. On these matters, the decisions are made through a voting system that requires nine affirmative votes, including those concurring votes of the permanent members, and under the abstention of the vote coming from a party to a dispute (BUTHIA *et al*, 2020).

The five permanent members of the Security Council share a mighty decision-making feature, known as the “right to veto”. This peculiarity guarantees that, even when the nine votes required to conclude a decision are achieved, if one of the permanent members of the Council opposes this conclusion, the resolution cannot be approved. The right to veto has been repeatedly criticized by those directly affected with the disapproval of suitable and positive resolutions, majorly vetoed by reasons of self-interests coming from the permanent members (UNITED NATIONS, [2021]c). However, over time, these cases became quite less common, and sometimes the opposing members choose to abstain from voting instead of vetoing the entire agreement (BUTHIA *et al*, 2020).

Even though the Security Council was not able to achieve effective changes in its first meetings, most likely because of the disagreements between the United States and the Soviet Union, the prestige of the organ grew substantially after the 1980s, when a series of interventions in the Balkans region and the African continent were successful. While victorious operations in Angola, Haiti, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Somalia yielded the awarding of the 1988 Nobel Prize for Peace to UN Peacekeeping Forces, the failures in Rwanda and Bosnia also affected the history of the Security Council and led the world to query its effectiveness. In the 21st century, albeit the Council has achieved a more prominent force to act, it has become a much less operative body. The genocide that took place in Darfur, which started in 2003, despite the presence of the peacekeeping force known as United Nations and African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), showed the lack of capacity of the Council in solving certain issues (BUTHIA *et al*, 2020).

For instance, the defeat of the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) through the bloodshed of 10 Belgian troops by Hutu extremists demonstrated not only the UNSC incapability to contain the escalation of the conflict, but also to protect and guarantee the safety of its forces (BUTHIA *et al*, 2020). In 2003, the ineffectiveness of the UNSC deliberative body, amidst the failure of Resolution 1441 and after almost a year of negotiations, led the Council to an internal separation concerning Iraq's issue and prompted the United States of America to take part in a military invasion disregarding the Council's deliberations (GLENNON, 2003).

Regarding the composing of the Security Council, many critics highlight the fact that such a reduced number of countries has participated in the UNSC's deliberations when a large part of nations has never been chosen by the UN General Assembly to be a nonpermanent member, even if the matter of discussion is related to them. Over 50 United Nations countries have never been members of this Council. For instance, there have been requests coming from the G-4 countries (composed of Federative Republic of Brazil, Federal Republic of Germany, Republic of India, and Japan) to obtain permanent membership or special status in the Security Council, justified by their great influence in several of the subjects approached by the deliberative body. Besides that, the G-4 members also proposed the increase of the Council's membership to 25 and the addition of six new permanent members, including two from the African continent. Nevertheless, reforms attempts have remained unattainable in the history of the committee (BUTHIA *et al*, 2020).

Another important demand for the Council's reformulation is to include a representation of African countries. The African Union Committee of Ten Heads of State and Government (C-10) demonstrates an organization of the African Union to advocate on this regard. African Common Position intends to fight the injustice perpetrated against the continent and claims two additional non-permanent seats and another two for permanent members to countries from the African continent. C-10 is represented by two countries from each region in Africa: Argelia, Equatorial Guinee, Libya, Namibia, Kenya, Congo-Brazzaville, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Zambia (APAUNR, 2021; BRASIL, 2021)

Currently, beyond the original five permanent members, the Security Council is integrated by the nations Republic of Estonia, Republic of India, Republic of Ireland, Republic of Kenya, United Mexican States, Republic of the Niger, Kingdom of Norway, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Republic of Tunisia, and Socialist Republic of Vietnam. If a country is a member of the United Nations but not of the Security Council, and there has been an issue in its territory concerning the Security Council's deliberation, or if it considers that its interests are affected by the decisions of the resolution, it has the right to participate in the discussions

without the right to vote. Furthermore, the Council itself sets the conditions for non-member states to take part in its discussions (UNITED NATIONS, [2021]a).

## 2. CONFLICTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND COVID-19 CONSEQUENCES

The impacts of Covid-19 on Southeast Asia security will be the first issue to be discussed with a focus on Indonesia, Malaysia and Myanmar. Then, a complete analysis will be made on the Resolutions that were established by the Council regarding Southeast Asia.

As it can be noticed from countries around the world, the Covid-19 crisis has had great impact over economic, security and, especially, health policies. In some countries, such as Australia and Mauritania, the consequences are mostly positive, with the increase of political liberties and a clear improvement of the democratic process. Meanwhile, for some of the Southeast Asian countries, the consequences were not as positive (REPUCCI, 2020).

With conflicts dating back to the 1940s, these countries have experienced few periods of peace. In most cases the conflicts are majorly begotten by ethnicity and/or religion and are driven by poorly developed policies (SCHONVELD *et al*, 2020). As noted by the recent United Nations Development Program (UNDP) study *Entry and Exit Points: Violent Extremism in South-East Asia*, whenever countries are faced with a threat to their political stability, the governments tend to overreact, often worsening the situation rather than amending it (SCHONVELD *et al*, 2020).

These ethnonationalist conflicts and how they are handled are cause for concern because of the historical relation between civil strife and the rising of extremist groups. These groups take advantage of the fragile relationship between government and minority groups to recruit fighters and to breed their extremist ideologies amongst the population (SCHONVELD *et al*, 2020). The aforementioned study by UNDP remarks that “[...] Protracted insurgencies lead to cycles of victimization and revenge, which in turn deepen grievances and may motivate individuals to embrace extremist thinking and violence.” (SCHONVELD *et al*, 2020). Thus, this sentence highlights the importance of debating in order to find an effective resolution to these conflicts.

However, amidst the Covid-19 crisis, as mentioned before, the situation of the Southeast Asian countries that deal with any sort of conflict has only gotten worse. Along with all the travel restrictions imposed by governments to contain the spread of the disease, came the lack of public interest for subjects not related to Coronavirus and the decrease of international will

to intervene. Combined, these reactions caused a hindrance for the non-governmental organizations responsible for the conflict reports (HOWE, 2020).

For instance, in the beginning of the pandemic crisis, Southeast Asian governments and insurgent groups enrolled in conflicts. This is the case of the Myanmar's military, the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) and the national army in Thailand, which declared ceasefires in response to the United Nations Secretary-General's global appeal. But, because the international efforts were focused in finding a solution to the virus crisis, initiatives to maintain the cease fire were fainted. To summarize, few or none of them involved controlling the conflicts in Southeast Asia and to secure the ceasefire, resulting in a short period of peace. These restrictions and actions have also affected the peace talks between the government of Thailand and the BRN, thus, postponing the peacebuilding process (HOWE, 2020).

To provide a better understanding of these conflicts and their impact on the local population, this section is divided to explain the situations of three countries: Indonesia, Malaysia and Myanmar.

## **2.1. SOUTHEAST ASIA CONFLICTS**

### **2.1.1. INDONESIA AND THE PAPUA CONFLICT**

Starting in August of 1945, the Indonesian National Revolution, also known as Indonesian War of Independence, was an armed conflict that lasted until December of 1949 and involved the Republic of Indonesia and the Dutch Empire (LEGGE *et al*, 2021). Even though the Republic of Indonesia was granted independence from the Netherlands in 1949, it was only around 1962 that the Papuan regions were integrated to Indonesia and considered an official part of the Indonesian territory (CHAUVEL; BHAKTI, 2004).

During the Indonesian National Revolution and while Indonesia and the Netherlands had talks to define the future of the archipelago, the Papuan population restructured their society. They have developed a political culture distinctly different from that of the rest of Indonesia since it had been under a separate administration for around twenty years (CHAUVEL; BHAKTI, 2004). Therefore, when Indonesia conquered the right to rule over Papua, the population, who had been living under completely different legislation and culture, decided not to abide by the Indonesian rules and to fight for the right to be an independent land (CHAUVEL; BHAKTI, 2004). The trigger for the armed revolution was a ballot held in 1969



by the Indonesian government, called the Act of Free Choice, when only a few more than one thousand Papuans were selected to vote for the right of Indonesia to rule over Papua. Indonesia declared a unanimous victory and the majority of Papuans were left out of the voting. This part of the population claimed that the election was rigged, and, in this moment, the independence movement emerged (MAMBOR; SARA; WORTHINGTON, 2020).

However, if they were always so different, why was Indonesia so set in conquering the Papuan territory? According to Richard Chauvel and Ikrar Nusa Bhakti (2004), there are two main reasons. First, the Indonesian administration saw Papua as an important territory to integrate, considering its natural resources and strategic position. Second, other than being a part of the Dutch Empire, Papua also went through the struggle of fighting against their colonizers to become a free land, and this, to Indonesia, is seen as more than enough of a reason to consider Papua an Indonesian territory, since they “fought the same fight”. Therefore, for Indonesian, the racial and cultural differences are not as important as the battle against the Dutch’s grip (CHAUVEL; BHAKTI, 2004).

As mentioned above, ever since the ballot held in 1969, the conflict between Indonesia and the Free Papua Movement (*Organisasi Papua Merdeka* [OPM], in Indonesian) has been smoldering, with leaders and civilians from both sides being killed. In 2018 the conflict escalated again after 19 laborers, who worked on the Trans-Papua Highway, were murdered in an ambush, in Nduga, by Papuan’s separatists. In this circumstance, the Indonesian administration decided to send thousands of soldiers to search for the responsible for the deaths (PADDOCK, 2020).

Nevertheless, Amnesty International has developed a report about the human rights violations that are happening in the Papuan territory, promoted mostly by the Indonesian military forces. The main focus of the report were extra-judicial killings and arbitrary arrests, but other types of human rights violations are also mentioned, such as racial discrimination, restrictions on media freedom and the right to humane prison conditions (AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, 2020).

In 2018, Amnesty International analyzed 69 cases of suspected extra-judicial killings that happened between 2010 and 2018. The report states that 41 deaths, the majority of the total disclosed, occurred in a context that had no relation to calls for independence (AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, 2018 *apud* 2020). According to the text, this type of killing.

[...] often happens when security forces use excessive force to handle peaceful protests, incidents of public disorder, and attempts to arrest criminal suspects, or as a

form of misconduct by individual members of the security forces (AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, 2020, p. 1).

The other 28 killings cases were related to the matter of independence or a referendum for the Papuans. The organization brings these deaths in order to highlight that since 2018, not one case was subjected to a criminal investigation, with only six perpetrators being charged for the killings. In addition, the report mentions that other 26 cases of suspected unlawful killings happened between 2018 and 2020, with all of them being of the first mentioned type, not related to the issue of independence or a referendum (AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, 2020).

There are also indications of other human rights violations, the main ones being the inability of peaceful assembly, discrimination based on race and incapability to self-determination (AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, 2020). Even if these rights are secured by the Indonesia Constitution, security forces seem to prefer the use of articles related to crimes of treason (*Art. 106 and Art. 110 of the Indonesian Criminal Code*) when handling peaceful protests promoted by Papuans (AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, 2020).

With the arrests made to contain protesters, there are many political prisoners in Indonesian facilities. According to the 2020's report, there are around 50 Papuans who were arrested while exercising their rights to peaceful assembly and association, with all of them being charged under the Articles 106 and 110 of the Criminal Code. These occurrences are related to sentences accusing prisoners of having committed "*makar*", treason in Indonesian, and who ought to face prison. Besides being unlawfully arrested, the Papuan prisoners, whether men or women, still have to deal with prisons that promoted cruel, inhumane and degrading conditions (AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, 2020).

In order to try and reduce the chances of direct conflict happening, the Indonesian government granted Papua with "special autonomy" in 2001. However, because the measure was poorly implemented, it did not serve its purpose and the conflict has only escalated throughout these last two decades (HOWE, 2020). This is one of the reasons why, during the Covid-19 crisis, the conflict between Papuans and the Indonesian administration has worsened. According to the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC, 2020), many Papuans feel that the central government had little to no concern for their health and lives. The vast majority of them also have strong beliefs that the virus was brought to their territory by the military forces and non-Papuan migrants, after the central administration tried to overrule a local regulation that prohibited flights to the province. This decision brought out even more friction to a relation that was not stable to begin with (INSTITUTE FOR POLICY ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT, 2020).

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, the problem of human rights violations has also only worsened since the Coronavirus put the world under quarantine. With ports, airports, train and bus stations closed for health purposes, the access to the country by human rights activists and defenders, like Amnesty International, is even more precarious. Thus, providing the police force with an opportunity to suppress further the rights of Papuans (HOWE, 2020).

## 2.1.2. POLITICAL CRISIS IN MALAYSIA

Ever since Malaysia became independent, in 1957, there has been polarization either caused by race, religion or reforms. A big part of this polarization is played by ethnic differences between the ethnic Malay majority and the ethnic minorities, who are constitutionally given fewer rights, as if being less valuable citizens. However, most of the polarization is induced by religious differences and dissonant visions for political reform, that are often propelled by ethnic divergences (WELSH, 2020).

The polarization of Malaysia, as aforementioned, stands majorly on three different grounds: ethnicity, religion and political reforms, each of which has its own deep roots in the historical construction of the Federation of Malaya. The first one of these, the racial-ethnic division, has its roots in the struggle for independence from British colonialism, when the Malayan Union was created, in 1946, as an administrative unit for all the ethnically plural parts that would come to be Malaysia. Soon after, the Malay elites, unhappy with the move of the British administration, established, in that same year, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), to fight for special privileges for the Malays, that constitute 50,8% of the Malaysian population (WELSH, 2020).

In order to strengthen their opportunities, UMNO joined forces with political parties majorly formed by Chinese and Indian ethnic communities, succeeding in becoming the leading political force in a multiethnic coalition that was named Alliance, and later got its name changed to National Front (BN, *Barisan Nasional*). BN, led by UMNO, constituted the government of Malaysia from the day of its independence, in 1957, until 2018, when an opposition Prime Minister was elected. It was recognized as an example of interethnic political cooperation, while it also fulfilled its goal of institutionalizing the intrinsic role of ethnicity on Malaysian politics and granting Malays special rights and treatment (LEMIÈRE, 2020; WELSH, 2020).

The second divide mentioned above was also built in the independence period and occurred between Islamists and secularists<sup>2</sup>. It debates over the suitable role of Islam in government and public life, intensified among Malay elites in 1930. This resulted in different conceptions of Malay nationalism being shaped amid Malay elites and served as fuel for Muslim clerics to break off from UMNO and constitute a new political party called Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS, *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia*), in 1951. PAS was created with the intent to reduce the chances of secularists to assume the power of the country and, as an aftermath, the ethnic polarization in Malaysia was enhanced by this political division between Muslims and secularists (WELSH, 2020).

The political parties and alliances that defend special rights to Malays saw in their Muslim majority an opportunity to merge the religious appeals with the nationalist messages to try and fuse race, religion and politics in a way that is propitious for the Malay elite. As a result of this kind of policy, the Chinese, Indian and other minorities who are not Islamic, wind up being even more marginalized in the Malaysian society (WELSH, 2020). Hence the opposition's efforts to try and elect a political alliance consisted majorly by secularists or other ethnic minorities. In 2018, the opposition won the election led by the coalition called Pact of Hope (PH, *Pakatan Harapan*), created by Anwar, a historical democratic icon, and the Malaysian United Indigenous Party (Bersatu, *Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia*). Mahathir Mohamad was elected Prime Minister after 61 years of UMNO government in Malaysia (LEMIÈRE, 2020).

Even though this victory for the PH was an important step in Malaysia's political history, the success of the alliance did not last long. After less than two years in power, the alliance started to crumble from inside, with political, racial and religious disagreements between Mahathir and Anwar, the two main leaders of the PH union. This was enough reason to create instability and force Mohamad to step down from the role as Prime Minister (WELSH, 2020). Meanwhile, the Malay nationalists of UMNO saw this as an opportunity to join forces and fight for power in the next general elections to replace the interim government. Thereby, UMNO, their former political enemies of PAS and some of the unsatisfied factions within PH, named the National Alliance (PN, *Perikatan Nasional*), created an alliance and took power in March 2020, with Muhyiddin as a Prime Minister (WELSH, 2020).

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<sup>2</sup> According to the National Secular Society (2017), the principles of secularism are: I. separation of religion from state; II. Religious Freedom; and III. equal access to public services (NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY, 2017).

Although the pandemic crisis of Coronavirus was well handled in the beginning of his administration, the policies implemented did nothing to mitigate the historical polarization within Malaysia's population, that has only worsened since the crisis was originated. Xenophobia and other race-based discriminations have increased, with foreign workers and refugees being the main targets of physical and verbal aggression, along with religious gatherings (WELSH, 2020). Besides this racial discrimination issue, Muhyiddin is expected to be giving racial preferences and patronage, in addition to adopting Islamist policies, to please the Malay elite that hoisted him to the position of PM. These policies, in a pandemic scenario are not seen as beneficial for the remainder of the society who are not included in the Malay elite group and who need social solidarity and unity in order to survive this public health crisis (WELSH, 2020).

Additionally, to the preferences and patronage matter, the on-going administration is being accused by foreign political observers of using the national emergency to pass laws and ordinances neglecting the original normative legislative process, as well as diminishing governance reforms and dismissing charges against those indicted for corruption (SUNDARARAMAN, 2021). This national emergency has also been viewed by the population as “a last-ditch effort by the incumbent government to retain its hold and delay the call for the next general elections.” (SUNDARARAMAN, 2021).

These political decisions that favor the Malay elite over the other groups of the society deepen the polarization of the society seen since the independence. This polarization is seen as positive for the elites who aim to achieve and maintain power, since it serves the purpose of securing their political bases. However, as stated by Bridget Welsh (2020),

When elites reach accommodation on these issues to win broader public support, enduring divisions hamper cooperation in office, foster public anger and distrust among their core supporters, and ultimately contribute to political instability (WELSH, 2020, p. 47).

Thus, while the racial, religious and political polarization is seen as positive for the elites, it does nothing in favor of those less privileged, whereas it fosters the social inequities and disparities, and makes it difficult to face crisis such as the one caused by the Sars-CoV-2 virus (WELSH, 2020).

### 2.1.3. MYANMAR AND THE ETHNIC-RELIGIOUS CONFLICT

Myanmar gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1948, after World War II and the conflict between the Burma Defense Army (BDA) and the Japanese and British governments. Amidst the talks for liberation of Burma, the original name of the country, the Panglong agreement (PA) was signed between the post-colonial rulers and the minorities of the nation, in 1947. The Panglong agreement was created to guarantee the basic rights for the minorities, such as the recognition of their people, their autonomy and their right to be included in the democratic process (DURAND, 2013).

However, after only a little more than ten years of independence, those minorities, specially the Muslim one, saw their rights be stolen from them, even though these rights were assured by the Panglong agreement. After Aung San, one of the main defenders of the PA was killed and the military took overpower, the agreement was forgotten and, in 1961, there was a threat to make Buddhism the state religion of Burma (DURAND, 2013).

Discriminatory military decisions, such as the one from 1961, developed a strong sentiment of nationalism among the minorities, as they felt excluded from the rest of the country and as if the government was trying to force them into the major community. This caused the minorities to organize into insurgent groups and fight for the rights that were assured to them in the Panglong agreement and, over the next couple of decades, a conflict between these armed groups and the military government was established (DURAND, 2013).

The original name of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar was Union of Burma, that made reference to the multiethnic, cultural and religious country. The change happened during the conflict of the rebels against the government, precisely in 1989, when the ruling party, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), had the peak of its assimilation policy by changing the original name and excluding the national plurality of the country name (DURAND, 2013).

During the late 1980s through the early 1990s, there were a series of popular protests to demand the restoration of democracy and the protection of minorities' rights, those were severely repressed by the government. Although there was a considerable number of ceasefires signed between the Burmese military and the insurgent groups, no efforts were made to actually stop the conflict, with no disarmament nor progress on ethnic issues being made. Nevertheless, national elections were held in 1990 and the National League of Democracy (NLD) was elected (DURAND, 2013). The military, however, refused to give up power and governed for many more years, causing discontentment amongst society, even after the announcement, in 1992, of the "intention to reform the country through a national convention." (DURAND, 2013, p.7).



The promise of reform was maintained for more than a decade, during which there were multiple deliberations made to decide which way to restore democracy in Myanmar. The decision, made fourteen years after the SLORC announced its intentions to reform the country, was that a National Referendum would be held to vote the country's new Constitution. In 2008, the new Constitution was adopted. Consequently, it led to the election of the NLD, a party composed by majorly Buddhist members, that took power in 2011 (DURAND, 2013).

The conflict arose again around 2016 after the 2015 elections that once again elected the NLD, and the military continued to implement violent offences in the country's minority states, majorly the states of Rakhine, Chin and Karen. In 2016, insurgent groups attacked and killed nine border guards in Rakhine and the Burmese military responded with the destruction of many Rohingya settlements, aside from the violation of several human rights. The response of the government was seen by a United Nations official as a clear example of ethnic cleansing. The conflicts between the Burmese military and the Arakan Army (AA) were also the cause of hundreds of thousands of forced displacements since 2018 (HOWE, 2020).

As the Coronavirus' health emergency arose, the government of Myanmar made a commitment to stop the attacks for the duration of three months. However, the ceasefire proposed by the Burmese military excluded areas where insurgent groups, considered terrorists by the administration, were present. So, regions like Rakhine and Chin were still under attack even with the ceasefire (HOWE, 2020). Aside from the failed truce, these communities of ethnic and religious minorities also suffered with the negligence of the health system towards their necessities throughout the pandemic. Many times, the government's public health rhetoric is directed mainly to Bamar Buddhists while excluding the other minorities that are present in the country. This forces the people from these regions to seek help from those insurgent groups and many end up joining them for the sake of the fight against the government that is neglecting their people (PARKS, 2020).

The major difficulty for the control of the Covid-19 crisis in Myanmar is the management of the displaced people, who amount to more than 164.000 people. Because they live in conflict areas, such as Karen and Chin, their villages are constantly under threat and people are frequently killed as if they are worth nothing. Naw Wakhushee declared in the statement from Karen Peace Support Network (KPSN), the minority communities in Myanmar are more afraid of the military attacks than of Coronavirus, with the guerilla reality more present and immediate in their lives (CARTER, 2020).

To add up to the local peacebuilding process of Myanmar, on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, the military forces decided to promote a coup and declared a state of emergency in the country for the entirety of the following year. This happened after the general election that elected the National League for Democracy once again, with Aung San Suu Kyi winning with the immense majority of votes. The opposition then claimed that the election was defrauded and gained support from the military, who, in response, took over the parliament and arrested Suu Kyi along with many other NLD officials (CUDDY, 2021).

The coup caused an explosion of protests around the country, which are violently repressed most of the time and that have been the largest since the 2007 Saffron Revolution. However, the NLD was the party in power when the genocide that is considered an ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya happened. The Rohingya, who live mostly in the region of Rakhine, were labeled by the administration of NLD as illegal immigrants, even though Suu Kyi denied the allegations of genocide in 2019 before the International Court of Justice (CUDDY, 2021).

Thus, like the other countries here mentioned and differently from the developed countries of the world, Myanmar suffers with a constant struggle for peace in times when union and companionship are some of the most important things. With the increase of instability in conflict areas, Coronavirus ends up in second position in terms of importance and not out of a whim but only because the guerillas are more lethal, in the eyes of the people who live with them every day (CARTER, 2020).

In brief, the Sars-CoV-2 virus crisis had little to none positive impact in the communities who live surrounded by conflict every day. This impact was, most of the time, extremely negative, with the growth of dissatisfaction towards governments and their way of dealing with the health emergency, as it is the case for Myanmar and Indonesia. Also, in almost all of the Southeast Asian countries, what happened was an absurd increase of the instability areas, with the growth of the insurgent groups influenced by the negligence or mismanagement of the country during the Covid-19 emergency, especially towards the ethnic minorities who live in those countries (HOWE, 2020).

## **2.2. RESOLUTIONS**

The UNSC's resolutions on Southeast Asia matters firstly date from 1948 when the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic brought to the Council's attention the situation in Indonesia. Following the 1945 declaration of Independence of Indonesia, military operations

relating to British troops in Indonesian territory and hostilities between Indonesia and the Netherlands led the Security Council to draw the so-called Resolution 63, adopted at the 392nd meeting of the body (UNITED NATIONS, 1948). Deliberative meetings and documents that predated the Resolution called for democratic elections in the Southeast Asian country, enacting the conditions for its occurrence:

The establishment of the interim federal government which is to be granted the powers of internal government in Indonesia during the interim period before the transfer of sovereignty shall be the result of the above negotiations and shall take place not later than 15 March 1949 (UNITED NATIONS, 1948, p. 323).

In 1959, the UN Security Council issued Resolution 132, in which a letter from The Government of Laos requested the United Nations' assistance to cease a breakdown along its north-eastern frontier associated with Vietnamese corps (UNITED NATIONS, 1959). Particularly, the Royal Government solicited "that an emergency force should be dispatched at a very early date in order to halt the aggression and prevent it from spreading." (UNITED NATIONS, 1959, p. 3).

Later on, Cambodia called for the Council's aid to contain acts of aggression coming from the United States of America and South Vietnamese forces over the civilian population of Cambodia along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border (UNITED NATIONS, 1968a). On 4th June 1964, the Security Council adopted Resolution 189, requesting "that just and fair compensation should be offered to the Royal Government of Cambodia" (UNITED NATIONS, 1964, p. 1). Furthermore, the United Nations body dispatched a Mission to the Kingdom of Cambodia and the Republic of Vietnam, in order to contain the escalation of the conflict and to prevent its recurrence (UNITED NATIONS, 2003).

Commonly, the UNSC's attention was directed to regime-changing scenarios and political crises that required a democratic transition and free elections. For instance, in August 1989 the UN Secretary-General addressed a letter to the Security Council's President, in which he expressed his endeavors to achieve and maintain peace in the Cambodian territory. At the opening of the Conference on Peace in Cambodia, in the same year, the Secretary-General declared that Cambodia would only achieve peace if a comprehensive political arrangement could be reached (UNITED NATIONS, 2003). In this matter, the decision of 20th September 1990 delimited Resolution 668, which established a settlement composed of five sections:

(1) transitional arrangements regarding the administration of Cambodia during the pre-election period; (2) military arrangements during the transitional period; (3)

elections under United Nations auspices; (4) human rights protection; and (5) international guarantees (UNITED NATIONS, 2007, p. 415)

In 1992 and 1993, resolutions 745 and 810 brought further concerns on the aggressions of the Party of Democratic Kampuchea and the Party of the State of Cambodia and were unanimously adopted by the Security Council (UNITED NATIONS, 2007, 2009a). Likewise, their main endorsements were directed to the realization of free and democratic elections, besides the implementation of the Paris agreements (UNITED NATIONS, 2009a). The United Nations Advance Mission in Cambodia (UNAMIC) and the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) were the prime subsidiary organs in this process. Ultimately, in its 3799th meeting, the Council formally called upon immediate end to the fighting, asking the parties to

respect fully their commitments under the Paris agreements on Cambodia. It urges them to resolve their differences through peaceful means and political dialogue and in accordance with the spirit of national reconciliation (UNITED NATIONS, 2009b, p. 652).

Nevertheless, not all complaints made by Southeast Asian countries to the Security Council afterwards were attended. In many instances, the matter would enter the Council's agenda and even produce some sort of discussion, but no formal resolution was to be made. At other times, a consensus' absence among the deliberative body toward a draft resolution would postpone the subject to another meeting that had the possibility of never happening. In the 1950s, for example, Thailand requested the Council's assistance in containing the conflicts unfolding in its territory bordering Cambodia and Laos, supposedly by Viet-Minh forces (UNITED NATIONS, 1957). In 1954, the proposition of a document elaborated by the representative of Thailand was rejected and the question remained on the list of matters that the Council was seized (UNITED NATIONS, 1957, p. 119).

Particularly, the Council's lack of solutions would produce undesirable results considering the dissatisfaction of the parties involved. The Gulf of Tonkin Incident, which triggered the Vietnam War, motivated the United States of America to request a Council meeting to contemplate alleged attacks on US destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin in 1964. Due to the body's abstention, the American Senate approved the document that would give President Lyndon Johnson authorization "to increase U.S. involvement in the war between North and South Vietnam", issued under the name of Tonkin Gulf Resolution and first published on 7 August 1964 (UNITED NATIONS, 1968c; UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, 2021a).

Following the Tonkin Gulf Incident, an urgent meeting was requested to find a prompt solution to the Vietnam situation during the 1955-1975 Vietnam War (UNITED NATIONS, 1971). In response to the failures of peaceful settlements between the Government of North Vietnam and the United States of America, the UNSC addressed the conflict and declared it would direct its efforts towards a solution. Nonetheless, no further decisions were made (UNITED NATIONS, 1971).

Succeeding a period of tensions between the Republic of Indonesia and Malaysia, in 1964, Malaysia made a complaint to the Council regarding a large drop of heavily armed paratroopers coming from an Indonesian aircraft in South Malay (UNITED NATIONS, 1968b). Once again, the matter entered the Council's agenda, however a Norwegian draft resolution was vetoed by a USSR vote against it and no solution was accomplished. Mainly, the proposed document requested for the countries involved to make every effort to avoid the recurrence of the incidents, calling upon them to refrain from all use of force and to respect the territorial and political integrity and independence of each other. Also, a conciliation commission formed by their Heads of Government would be responsible to keep the Council informed on the development of the situation (UNITED NATIONS, 1968b).

The situation in Myanmar marked the beginning of the 21st century. Since its formal introduction on the Council's agenda in 2006, the deliberative body has been trying to cease the human rights violations in the territory and to deal with the political condition of the country (UNITED NATIONS, 2013). Thoroughly concerned about the use of force during peaceful protests and with consideration "to the unknown predicament of the large number of individuals who had been arrested without due process" (UNITED NATIONS, 2013, p. 541), the Secretary-General and the President of the Council made a formal statement on 11th October 2007, advocating that a peaceful solution should be reached through debates that include all parties (UNITED NATIONS, 2013).

During the 2008-2009 period, the Security Council held three meetings on the same subject, leading to another presidential statement (UNITED NATIONS, 2014b). Afterward, in December 2017, Council members

[...] called on the Government of Myanmar to create conducive conditions for the return of refugees and work towards reconciliation and addressing the root causes of the violence (UNITED NATIONS, 2019, p. 122).

More recently, a meeting under the title of "The Situation in Myanmar" was held in 2019 in the form of a briefing. Once more, no decision was reached under this item. Even after

over a decade of proposals and peace negotiations evolving Myanmar's context of democratic transition, "military and civilian tensions persisted ahead of the general elections in 2020 and the peace process remained fragile" (UNITED NATIONS, 2020a, p. 125).

### **3. THE SITUATION ON THE PHILIPPINES**

The second issue to be addressed by UN Security Council is related to the Situation in the Philippines. On this matter, this section will deal with the historical and current context of the Philippines and its main actors. Afterwards, the impacts of Covid-19 for peace in the region will be analyzed. Finally, Human Rights Violations in the region will be the focus, including the reason why this is an important issue to be addressed by the UN Security Council.

The history of the Philippines is highlighted by various conflicts over the centuries. Philippine Muslims today were once a dominant group in the early 15th century due to the migration of Muslim traders from Southern India. This process provoked the full Islamization of the west coast of Mindanao, hence the importance of the land once Mindanao and Sulu are the original homeland of the Muslim Philippines. Today, the Muslim population is concentrated in the western side of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago (CULLINANE, 2021).

Whilst the Muslim community was gaining strength along the Philippine territory, a Spanish expedition, led by Ferdinand Magellan, resumed a fight initiated over the dominion of Spain. After several years of progress, Spain gained control during the 16th and 17th centuries, spreading Christianity, building cathedrals, and establishing a military base, called "Presidios". Despite Spanish efforts to keep the Philippines under their control, after several rallies, the Filipinos took control of the Island and proclaimed the first Philippine Republic, with the collaboration of the United States (US). As a result of the Filipino-American partnership, despite domestic disagreement, the US decided to annex the Philippines to its territory. With the Paris Treaty in 1898, Spain was obligated to deliver the administration of the Philippines to the US, initiating the so-called American Rule (CULLINANE, 2021).

The US administration led to a diminished autonomy by locals, which per se developed into a conflict between US and Filipinos political leadership. By 1901, the US already ruled the Philippines and this situation persevered under the idea that the United States would deliver independence to Filipino territory as soon as stability was achieved. Even with a new Congress, elected by male literates, the Philippines' autonomy was belittled, with US dominance ranging from legislative to judicial sectors. Throughout the 19th century, US actions in the Philippines



were weakened, although social reforms were promoted, especially the literate percentage (CULLINANE, 2021).

Since the end of the American Rule, the Philippines have gone through many conflicts that influence the problems they are facing today. Manila, the Philippine's capital, became a self-governing commonwealth in 1935. Afterwards, in the period of World War II, the city fell under Japanese occupation (CULLINANE, 2021). Finally, it attained its independence in 1946, a civil movement which forced the former president Ferdinand Marcos into exile. With the aftermath of the independence war, the Philippines needed aid to rehabilitate itself, which was obtained through the US's Bell Act, allowing free trade of Filipino's products in the US for the next 8 years, but demanding several military conditions. Since its independence, Filipino's governmental institutions have been harshly criticized, especially by its inability to maintain order. At the same time, an anti-American sentiment flourished within the local populations, leading to the weakening of the US-Philippines ties (CULLINANE, 2021).

The 1960s and 1970s were accompanied by reelection of President Ferdinand E. Marcos, as well as demands from locals towards a more independent Philippines, including social, cultural and economic aspects. The countries' language was replaced by Filipino; a new representative Constitutional Convention was chosen within peaceful elections and student protests demanded more autonomy. By 1972, Marcos initiated martial law, claiming it as a defense to the disorder caused by student riots and by the actions of both the new Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the Muslim separatist movement of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). Marcos' orders included the repression and imprisonment of political opposition, suppression of insurgencies and opening towards international investments (CULLINANE, 2021).

After attempts of remaining in power and claims of rigged elections, Marco left the presidential seat, though political pressure both from locals and from international actors. After his leave, the Philippines experienced a brief relief, followed by the emergence of several crisis, including an energy crisis and insurgency of both communist and Muslim groups. In 1996, the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) was established through a peace agreement between the Moro National Liberation Front (MNFL), a Muslim armed group in the Philippines, and the Filipino government. The tensions related to the Muslim community are historical and this would be a great step towards peacebuilding. However, difficulties in governance because of false autonomy, coupled with corruption and bad administration, led to mistrust and the emergence of other armed groups (APARECIDO *et al.*, 2020). In 2016,

Rodrigo Duterte was elected president through a campaign based on the execution of 100,000 criminals. In June the same year, after his inauguration, there was a significant increase of extrajudicial killings, as well as escalation of tensions (CULLINANE, 2021).

Presently, three armed insurgent groups operate in Philippine territory. Alongside them, other extremist groups and factions are active, including splinter groups of the aforementioned main groups. Subsequently, after considerable attempts to attain peace in the area, former members were enraged by the organizations' decisions to settle with the Philippine government. Hence, the arising of several strands of extremist groups was triggered, resulting in a complex web of groups and ideas (HERBERT, 2019).

The main non-state armed groups are the (i) Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF); the (ii) Moro National Liberation Front (MNFL); the (iii) New People's Army (NPA); the (iv) Maute Group; the (v) Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG); and the (iv) Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF). **MILF** is the largest armed group in the Philippines and one of the main ones. It emerged from MNFL in 1977 and has developed itself into a reliable negotiator. However, it also has factions with "potentially disruptive elements" (TSN *apud* HERBERT, 2019, p. 6) that seek a more aggressive approach for achieving an independent Islamic State for Muslim Filipinos (Moros) (HERBERT, 2019; CULLINANE, 2021).

In another sense, **MNFL** is the second most important armed group in the country and was eclipsed by MILF since the failure of MNFL's 1996 peace treaty, which established the BARMM. The group is divided in two factions: Sema, which supports the agreement and is composed by the Bangsamoro Transition Committee (BTC); and Misuari, which rejects the treaty (HERBERT, 2019).

The **NPA** was the first extremist group to strengthen itself and it was consolidated in the 1980s and "is the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP)" (HERBERT, 2019, p. 7). Even with the reduction of its influence, the NPA has been active for more than 40 years, demonstrating its roots on the Filipino political structure. Their representatives were involved in the peace negotiations, but since 2017, current president Duterte has categorized them as a terrorist group. The **Maute Group** supports the Islamic State (IS) and is composed of former MILF members. In 2017, this group led an attack in the city of Marawi, in coalition with IS and other extremist groups, such as ASG and Ansharul Khilafah Philippines (AKP) (APARECIDO *et al.*, 2020; HERBERT, 2019).

**ASG** is a splinter group from MNFL, was established in 1989 and is considered "one of the most violent extremist groups in Southeast Asia and has one of the most developed networks with foreign violent extremists." (HERBERT, 2019, p. 7). Although it aims to institute an

independent Islamic state in Philippines, it is also known for operations of kidnap for ransom. Also, it has founded two other groups: ASG-Basilan, grounded in 1990, which is considerably close to IS and intertwined in local criminal networks; and ASG-Sulu, composed of petty criminals. Both factions are suspected to have contributed to terrorism acts in the Philippines. Last but not least, **BIFF** is a MILF dissident group, established in 2008, which rejects the creation of BARMM and fights for complete independence (APARECIDO *et al.*, 2020; HERBERT, 2019).

It is recognized that there are several reasons for one to join a determined group. That could not be different in the southern Philippines since the drivers of conflict are many and may vary according to location and the local opinion. Thus, the paramount drivers of conflict in the region are related to poverty, lack of opportunities, land dispossession, and marginalization. Specifically, the poverty issue is way more complex than it is supposed once longstanding historical grievances against Manila attached to cultural alienation and economic marginalization are felt by the minority Muslim population against Christians. Hence, the fact that the Southwestern Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago are the poorest provinces in the Philippines, caused largely by weak governance, and high levels of migration (HERBERT, 2019).

Better comprehending the Philippines' history is the key factor to understand the current disputes in the southern region of the country. One clear example is that the land dispossession and loss of homelands of indigenous Muslims by Christian migrants in Mindanao still is a sorrow (HERBERT, 2019). This history of injustices, social disintegration, and economic marginalization breeds anger channeled directly to the national government. Also, looking at the rapid growth of social media, some revolutionary groups have contacted insurgents to recruit young people and promise benefits since this group is notably more vulnerable to radicalization (HERBERT, 2019, p. 8).

The state response to the demands has not been amicable at all, but predominantly military. Also, this heavy-handed position intensified grievance for insurgents once many mosques and schools were destroyed by the Armed Forces. For instance, the war declared on “insurgents who bombed the Jolo Cathedral in 2019, the armed forces’ displaced and unknown number of citizens” (HERBERT, 2019, p. 9). Consequently, the human rights abuse by the military triggers extremist groups in Mindanao. The abuses mentioned include “killings, bombings, and the enforcement of martial law by the military” (TSN *apud* HERBERT, 2019, p. 9).

Despite the considerable attempts to establish a deal, there is no trust between the radical groups and the government. Therefore, this sense of dishonesty coming from Manila during peace negotiations is a cause of riots. Also, one important fact is that “[...] the sense of different identity also emerges from many Muslims in Mindanao feeling they are Moro rather than Filipino” (BTI, 2018). Even though there is this trust issue against Manila, the local government units are usually trusted by the residents, resulting in the creation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (TSN, *apud* HERBERT, 2019).

One aggravating characteristic of the conflict is the location of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelagoes. The remoteness of the islands grants to their locations being the most vulnerable to violent extremism due to the weak rule of law in many ungoverned areas. Consequently, extortions of large commodity exporters and mining companies by insurgent groups are frequent and a driver of conflict once they are vulnerable as a result of the remote location and the under-governed spaces (HERBERT, 2019, p. 10).

Mindanao has a various number of religious communities such as Christians and Muslims. Today, the total population is composed of only 5-9% Muslims (TIMBERMAN *et al apud* HERBERT, 2019). Although the coexistence between them may seem peaceful, the religion does not position itself far away from political problems in the country. It is important to clarify that the great issue is not religion in itself, but the political ideologies that mobilize it in different ways: secularists and Islamism are both Muslims, but the relation between State and Islam generates a political opposition that can bring tension to the region. For instance, extremist religious leaders in the Philippines have an important role in recruiting fighters from Islamic education institutions and teaching extremist views (HERBERT, 2019). Some preachers have links to Middle Eastern-trained scholars, and these transnational linkages appear to aggravate violent extremism in Mindanao through this “movement and diffusion of ideas, funding, leadership, and tactical [...] knowledge” (TSN *apud* HERBERT, 2019).

The current peace process is a sensitive subject, especially because the groups’ trust in the government has been shaken before. The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) was introduced in 2019 - after the peace agreement of 2014 - and has the role of making the region semi-autonomous and deepen political and cultural autonomy (TSN *apud* HERBERT, 2019). Although BARMM brought some autonomy to Muslim groups in Mindanao, it was not the kind promised in the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) agreed with the government. Consequently, the sense of betrayal towards Manila is intensified by some alienated youth and splinter groups, and it “[...] will increase as the new administration attempts to deliver on the peace process (TSN *apud* HERBERT, 2019).

Therefore, there are still many challenges to face to establish a concrete and efficient peace treaty.

### 3.1. DEVELOPMENTS AMIDST THE COVID-19 CRISIS

The COVID-19 outbreak has exposed not only public health and economic significant issues, but also the maintenance and the increase of barriers to peacebuilding processes (CRISIS GROUP, 2020). At the beginning of the pandemic, there was an expectation that numerous armed conflicts would diminish or go on a hiatus due to the plea of the United Nations. Countries like Colombia, Yemen, Thailand and Afghanistan have decreased their hostilities because of humanitarian causes (SOMOS, 2020). The Taliban, for example, has reduced their strikes and has helped the authorities to control the spread of the disease in order to obtain even more popularity among the citizens of Afghanistan and at the same time, to engage new recruiters (IDE, 2020).

The United Nations request for ceasefires, however, was not granted everywhere and various clashes have gotten worse around the world. Countries such as India, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan and the Philippines have undergone an aggravation of the atrocities of their civil wars due to the lack of attention of international actors. This occurs because most of the countries in the international community are concerned with their own domestic situation and the respective opposing interests of dissident groups towards local governments (SOMOS, 2020). In this case, while the local authorities are struggling to contain the rapid advance of Covid-19 in their territories and to avoid their economic collapse, violent groups take advantage of the current scenario and try to expand their influence, as well as gain more capabilities to achieve their own objectives, such the independence of a dissident region (IDE, 2020).

As stated, the Philippines has increased their armed conflicts and in order to better comprehend this matter, it is essential to analyze how the pandemic is affecting the peacebuilding process. First, the Philippines gather the second highest number of coronavirus cases in Southeast Asia with more than 557,000 cases until February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2021, only behind Indonesia (CENTER FOR STRATEGIC & INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, 2021). Amidst this context President Rodrigo Duterte's actions have not been enough to decrease the spread of the virus. On March 16<sup>th</sup>, he announced the Proclamation nº 929, declaring "a state of calamity throughout the Philippines due to coronavirus disease 2019" (PHILIPPINES, 2020b), in which the government:

[...] (a) declared the whole Philippines under a State of Calamity for a period of six (6) months from 16 March 2020; and (b) imposed an Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) throughout the Island of Luzon (which includes Metro Manila) from 12:00 a.m., of March 2020 to 12:00 a.m. of 13 April 2020, both effective unless earlier lifted or extended as the circumstances may warrant (CALIMON; MASANGKAY, 2020).

One of the main purposes of the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) is to implement a total lockdown in the country and to forbid the movement of the population within the territory, affecting more than 57 million people. Although the government established the quarantine, it has not invested enough on public health, assistance and security, relying on a militaristic method to deal with the crisis, deploying the national army security forces to assure the lockdown but not providing essential services to the population (BELTRAN, 2020).

Consequently, after the adoption of the ECQ, millions of Filipinos have struggled with no source of remuneration due to the declining economy and the lack of the governments' assistance, which have aggravated the problem of hunger and social inequalities, mostly in peripheral regions and slums (BELTRAN, 2020). Thus, the most vulnerable population strives to survive in the enormous informal market. The case of the dumpster divers highlights this endeavor: they must work late at night due to your illegal status designated by the government. Because of this situation, this community needs to work out of sight of the authorities, otherwise, the national forces will punish them. In this case, the community itself aid these illegal workers with donations and food, otherwise they would starve and perish. Besides that, there are more than 13.8 million deprived people who are substantially dependent on the informal market and most of them are not receiving any assistance from the government, including food, which compels them to get their income in any way even with the involvement of illicit activities, such as theft, money laundering and drug trafficking (BRUNNERSUM, 2020).

Furthermore, the measures adopted by the government were not enough to contain the spread of the COVID-19. Hence, Duterte imposed Proclamation n° 1021 “extending the period of the state of calamity throughout the Philippines due to coronavirus disease 2019 declared under Proclamation n° 929, s.2020” in September 2020, which expanded ECQ for at least 1 year (PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OPERATIONS OFFICE, 2020). However, the President has used the pandemic for strengthening the militarization of his government, applying escalated repression and corruption and worsening the COVID-19 crisis (BELL; EPPLÉ; POSPISIL, 2020). Since the announcement of the ECQ measures, more than 10,000



Filipinos have been incarcerated, which contributes to increase health danger (PHILIPPINES..., 2020).

After a short period of unilateral ceasefire from March to April, national dissidents' groups have been striking against the national army (SOMOS, 2020). This suspension of conflict was declared in compliance with the United Nations' call for a worldwide truce, but it was not sustained. This situation involves mainly actions performed by the Communist New People's Army (NPA), as Asia's most prolonged communist uprising with more than 50 years active (IDE, 2020). Duterte declared this armed group is the prime enemy of the country ordering the national force to terminate it and he also claimed that the NPA is taking advantage of the pandemic to strike the army and stealing subsistence supplies (LALO, 2020). At the same time, there are allegations that Duterte is taking advantage of the pandemic to take more dictatorial measures and to attack the rebels disproportionately reaching even more the population (CHAVEZ, 2020).

Another situation that threatens the peacebuilding process in the Philippines (a catholic majority country) regards the region of Mindanao. Especially, the separatist group collectively named as Bangsamoro, which encompasses an enormous Muslim population. Because of the negligence and exclusion from the authorities, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), two rebellious groups, have been facing conflicts with the government since 1970s and, although the peace dialogues have been increasing in the last years, a new threat harms this process. The group Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) was created in 2010 and established an alliance in 2014 with the Islamic State (IS), which endangers the peacebuilding in the region (HOWE, 2020).

The COVID-19 has helped to rise extremism in Mindanao in which the economic breakdown caused by the pandemic has contributed to appeal new recruiters to BIFF from vulnerable areas, especially those located in the isolated countryside where the impact of the lockdown measures is enormous, and the authorities' aids are inferior or even insignificant. Due to the considerable decrease of the families' income, many inhabitants are joining these radicals in exchange of remuneration in order to survive. Besides that, BIFF has been also spreading the speech of us versus them through online message applications convincing this vulnerable population that the virus is a divine punishment and the lockdown (ECQ) aims to tear down the Islam (HOWE, 2020).

As a result of striving for survival due to the quarantine measures and the crossfire between the insurgent groups and the national army, many residents have been displaced from

their homes in Mindanao. In the first four months of 2020, more than 26, 300 inhabitants had to leave the region because of the conflict between the BIFF and the national forces (ABO; AYAO, 2020). In these circumstances, the families must seek refuge in camps under the surveillance of Non-Governmental organizations and national collective groups, which exposes them to various diseases, including COVID-19, due to the overcrowding of these spaces. In most cases, more than 70 families share the same bathroom, there are not enough supplies to assist them, such as potable water, food or even medical aid and individual protection equipment (HOWE, 2020).

The impact of the COVID-19 on women is even more massive due to the reinforcement of gender inequality, especially on the Filipino women who live in belligerent areas because the violence may not only provoke injuries resulting from battles, but also female healthcare, gender-based violence and unpaid labor force. Moreover, they cannot get a checkup due to the huge number of responsibilities to their families and the resistance of their male figures to head to a medical center, even inside the camps, which contributes to increase the maternal and infant mortality (HOWE, 2020).

In addition, before the pandemic, every ten minutes a woman or a child was abused in the Philippines because of the long-lasting practice of domestic abuse treated as a family matter, in which the strong religious influence and the difficulty to get divorced, still prevails in the local culture. Despite the laws regarding the protection of women and children, domestic violence and sexual abuse have increased significantly due to the ECQ when these endangered groups are unprotected inside their homes and, in countless cases, they are forced to produce sexual content to be sold to foreigners in exchange of payments (EUROPEAN COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION NETWORK, 2020). Furthermore, from March 17 to May 23, 2020 more than 602 women suffered domestic abuse in the country, but this number reflects a small number of reports, since there more than 16 million women who are not emancipated and being highly dependent on their male figures (CALLEJA, 2020).

Another substantial situation in the country relates to war on drugs. Since taking office in 2016, the president Rodrigo Duterte has been taking controversial measures, such as to authorize military forces to execute people who carry illicit substances and fighting conflicts to cease drug trafficking (HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 2020). As a result of this war, since 2016, there has been over 234,000 operations, more than 357,000 suspected arrested and plus 8,000 deaths, in which many have not had the opportunity to defend themselves legally (KHALIQ,

2020). With the COVID-19 pandemic, Duterte has reinforced these policies and has increased police brutality aiming not only to stop the elevated influence of organized crime across the country, but also to expand your authoritarian government (HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 2020).

From April to July of 2020, the killings in the Philippines advanced more than 50% compared to the prior four months and this mark was reached not only by the action of the national forces, but also by the performance of unofficial groups and individuals who were hired by the government itself to arrest and execute suspects of illicit activities. The target audience is vast, which includes the impoverished population from metropolitan regions to "left-wing political activists, environmental activists, community leaders, Indigenous peoples' leaders, journalists, lawyers, and others rose in the past year" (HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 2020). The media professionals as well as the corporations are being chased, arrested and intimidated by the authorities, just like the minorities groups, including the LGBTQIA+ people and children, whose impacts of these violent policies are even more devastating. The majority of them struggle along poverty or suffer the loss of parents due to the war on drugs and are abandoned by the public sphere and are often victims of it (HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 2020).

Therefore, the process of peacebuilding continues to face threats that existed before the pandemic, such as belligerent conflicts with insurgent groups, war on drugs, authoritarianism and human rights violations. The Covid-19 crisis reinforces these factors and also makes it possible to worsen the population situation, which struggles from the disease itself but also from the government's repressive measures and its negligence. Thus, the separatist group, such as the MILF and the BIFF, become appealing to those who are in a vulnerable situation and must survive in this unprecedented and urgent scenario. The international actors are mainly concerned with their domestic situations and their efforts are focused on mitigating the coronavirus spread meanwhile the human rights are being increasingly violated in the Philippines.

### **3.2. THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

Historically, the UN Security Council (UNSC) has invested its actions towards management of ongoing conflicts. However, along the years, the UN has focused its actions on peacebuilding and peacekeeping operations, some of which have also delivered unsatisfying

results. Furthermore, by managing conflicts instead of preventing them, the UNSC diminishes the efficiency of peace maintenance (CARVALHO; ABDENUR, 2017). Since the 2000s, several UNSC resolutions and statements from UN and government representatives have promoted the idea of conflict prevention (UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL REPORT, c2021). This can be highlighted by Antônio Guterres, current Secretary General of United Nations, address in the UNSC in which he declared the priority of conflict prevention for UN role in the world:

“Too many prevention opportunities have been lost because Member States mistrusted each other’s motives, and because of concerns over national sovereignty. [...] War is never inevitable. It is always a matter of choice: the choice to exclude, to discriminate, to marginalize, to resort to violence. By restoring trust between governments and their citizens and amongst Member States, we can prevent and avoid conflict. But peace, too, is never inevitable. It is the result of difficult decisions, hard work and compromise. We should never take it for granted; but should prize and nurture it in every country, at every time. Prevention is not merely a priority, but the priority. If we live up to our responsibilities, we will save lives, reduce suffering and give hope to millions.” (UNITED NATIONS, 2017)

On this matter, the UN General Assembly Resolution established in 2005 also declared States responsible for protecting the world population against crimes against humanity and human rights violations by preventing conflicts. In its 139th paragraph, the resolution invokes the VI and VIII Chapter of the UN Charter, directly referencing the UN Security Council role on conflict prevention (UNITED NATIONS, 2005b). Following this document, the UN Security Council also committed itself towards conflict prevention, referencing the 1994 Rwanda genocide (UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL, 2014).

Therefore, in order to understand the role of UNSC in the Filipino situation, there should be observed the violations of Human Rights, especially extra-judicial killings. Also, in the next section, we will explore the Human Rights Framework in order to clarify what can be considered violations of those rights.

### 3.2.1. UNITED NATIONS' FRAMEWORK ON HUMAN RIGHTS

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 1948, is considered a milestone in the history of Human Rights. This document encompasses a variety of fundamental rights inherent to every human being. Along with nine international treaties and their optional protocols, the UDHR forms the core of the Human Rights framework adopted by the United Nations (UNITED NATIONS, 2014a). The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, both approved by the UNGA in 1966 and entered into force a decade later, are among those documents crucial to the framework. These treaties provide further definitions and set basic standards to more than 100 international and regional Human Rights conventions, declarations, sets of rules, and principles (UNITED NATIONS, 2005a).

Both the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights refer to the right of self-determination of all peoples. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights covers the right to work and to the enjoyment of just and favorable labor conditions. It ensures the right to form and join trade unions, the right to social security, protection, and assistance for the family (UNITED NATIONS, 1996a). The paragraphs under Article 11 represent the right to an adequate standard of living, comprehending the distribution of food, clothing, and housing conditions.

The subsequent Article of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights urges the State Parties to recognize the right to the highest attainable standard of both physical and mental health. The improvement of environmental and industrial hygiene, for instance, is mentioned as a step to achieve positive health indicators. Besides, the Covenant demands the prevention, treatment, and control of epidemic and other diseases. Furthermore, it emphasizes that all countries shall guarantee medical service and medical attention for the population (UNITED NATIONS, 1966).

The Civil and Political Rights Covenant establishes the protection of the life and physical security of the individual. The document secures the right to privacy and freedom, while it also reaffirms the right to freedom of thought and religion. Moreover, it assures the freedom of opinion and expression, which are subject to Article 20 and its prohibitions of war propaganda and the advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred. The International Covenant

on Civil and Political Rights addresses the right to peaceful assembly and the freedom of association - including through trade unions. It recognizes the rights of the child and states that marriage shall be consensual, based on equal legal rights and responsibilities (UNITED NATIONS, 2005a).

Regarding political participation, the Covenant outlines the right to vote and to be elected at periodic elections. It acknowledges the right to universal suffrage and a secret ballot. Article 26 determines that all persons shall have “equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status” (UNITED NATIONS, 1966). In addition, the following Article provides that ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities shall be entitled to the right to enjoy their own culture, affirm and practice their religion and communicate in their language. Lastly, the Covenant designates the function of monitoring the States Parties to the Human Rights Committee.

Over the years, the United Nations system has channeled efforts into submitting more documents on Human Rights. The instruments range from core definitions to protocols to action. The UNGA and Security Council resolutions often recognize this framework as the basis for their decisions, thus enhancing its importance (UNITED NATIONS, 1996b). Despite the advancement of international law and the wide ratification of Human Rights bills, reports expose violations all around the globe.

### 3.2.2. VIOLATIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES

Concerning the violations perpetrated in Southeast Asia, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, have been under international scrutiny for continuously failing to comply with Human Rights policies. The governments across the region “deny basic liberties and fundamental freedoms to their citizens” and are hardly held accountable (HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 2018). To this day, the Philippines has ratified eight from the list of nine core Human Rights treaties and improved national mechanisms to protect fundamental rights. On the one hand, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has acknowledged the existence of Human Rights safeguards in Filipino legislation. On the other hand, reports identify difficulties in its implementation (UNITED NATIONS, 2020b).

In the Philippines, media organizations, journalists, activists, Human Rights defenders, and political oppositionists frequently face threats and attacks. On some occasions, the government presses arbitrary legal charges against those who publicly criticize its administration. Interferences have gone as far as forcing the shutdown of the ABS-CBN television and media network operations in 2020 (UNITED NATIONS, 2020b). As of September 2020, the death toll of journalists amounted to 189 since the restoration of democracy in the country in 1986 (HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 2020). This situation raises concerns about the freedom of the press and expression as a whole.

Throughout Rodrigo Duterte's ongoing presidential mandate in the Philippines, which started in 2016, the alleged 'war on drugs' has resulted in the arrest of approximately 357,000 suspects and the death of 8,000, according to the Philippines Information Agency (KHALIQ, 2020). The police frequently supervise unwarranted home inspections and arbitrary detention. The inclusion of a person on a drug watch list is enough to justify such operations. Reports indicate that homicides of "drug personalities" are also committed by unidentified "vigilantes" (UNITED NATIONS, 2020b). The government claims no involvement in those cases. However, in 2017, official statements mentioned these killings "under investigation" as accomplishments in the fight against drugs (PHILIPPINES, 2017).

Violations of the right to health can be considered crimes against humanity (AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, 2018). In this respect, the Philippines fail to observe international standards of public health. The national anti-illegal substances campaign, established in 2018, imposes mandatory drug testing in public facilities and drug rehabilitation (UNITED NATIONS, 2020b). Such procedures infringe the right to dignity, confidentiality, privacy, and consent. Access to appropriate health care in detention centers is also scarce. The country holds the highest jail occupancy in the world, aggravated by the current war on drugs (HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 2020). Inadequate infrastructure, poor hygiene, ventilation, sanitation conditions, and access to health lead to the spread of diseases among Filipino inmates (INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS, 2020).

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Filipino Constitution and other legal frameworks sustain Human Rights. Nevertheless, many laws grant authorities ample discretion to detain and prosecute citizens over national security accusations (UNITED NATIONS, 2020b). The Anti-Terrorism Law, signed by Duterte in July 2020, makes it possible to persecute critics (HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 2020). The criminalization of the Communist Party of the Philippines, Human Rights non-governmental organizations, and trade



unions is a direct offense to the right of freedom of association. The practice of “red-tagging” - which consists of labeling individuals and groups as terrorists - poses a menace to civil society, damaging the freedom of opinion and expression (UNITED NATIONS, 2020b).

The situation of vulnerable groups in the Philippines amounts to Human Rights negligence. The marginalization of indigenous communities, the effects of the fight against drugs on children and women, and the oppression towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people draw attention from local and international agencies. Due to the lack of access to humanitarian needs, these groups become reliant on civil society. At the same time, government policies hinder the support from non-governmental organizations. In 2018, the president signed Executive Order No. 70, which institutionalizes a national response to an insurgency in the Philippines (UNITED NATIONS, 2020b). Therefore, the national security approaches and the practice of red tagging hamper any efforts to assist the communities. The statement of Attorney Jacqueline Ann de Guia, the spokesperson of the Commission of Human Rights in the Philippines, is a testimony to that:

With the intensified implementation of Executive Order No. 70 to combat insurgency in the country, we petition the government to rescind the policy as it has been consistently used to justify threats and intimidation of individuals and organizations working for the improvement of the human rights and welfare of various marginalized, disadvantaged, and vulnerable sectors of society (PHILIPPINES, 2020).

In conclusion, the violations of Human Rights in the Philippines must be addressed, and consequences must be met. Although complaints were made to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in February 2018 and an investigation was opened, Duterte responded by withdrawing the court in 2019. Regarding demands for change made by Filipino and international human rights organizations, the president not only dismissed them, but also instructed the police to shoot activists. Since opposition is scarce in the Philippines, the situation will probably not change without international pressure (RAY, 2021)

## **4. BLOC POSITIONS<sup>3</sup>**

### **4.1. FRENCH REPUBLIC**

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<sup>3</sup> Due to their importance on this debate, countries from Southeast Asia were invited to the Security Council Session, with observer status. All countries in such position will be identified with an asterisk (\*).

The French Republic condemns the situation in Myanmar in order to restore democracy and it is concerned about the brutality applied by the military forces, including the use of armored automobiles, towards peaceful protestors (FRANCE..., 2021). Moreover, The French Republic states that it is inadmissible the transference of the powers of the legislative, judicial and executive to the military forces, which harms the democracy's principles and the population's freedom to choose their own government (ALIYEV, 2021). Therefore, the country is working along with its European Union members to formulate new restrictive actions towards the responsible for the current situation in Myanmar (FRANCE, 2021).

Regarding the situation in the Philippines, the French Republic aims to improve its relationship with the southeastern country in order to increase its presence in the region. The European country seeks to provide, among other resources, balance, free commerce and mediation in belligerent disputes in the area. Thus, the cooperation with the Philippines must include the defense and the strategic sphere, as well as the economic one (ROCAMORA, 2021). However, France also praises human rights and the rule of law and dismiss any violations of such principles, including Duterte's war on drugs (FRANCE..., 2017).

## **4.2. KINGDOM OF NORWAY**

The bilateral relation between the Kingdom of Norway and the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has become strained after the coup and the violent events in the Southeast Asian country. Norway declared the suspension of the aid budget of NOK 66.5 million that would be ordained to Myanmar's public institutions for scientific research in several areas, including the Oil for Development Program (NORWAY, 2021), though the aid for humanitarian causes will continue (LARSEN, 2021).

Concerning the belligerent situation in the Philippines, the Kingdom of Norway strives to collaborate with the process of peacebuilding in the region and to assist the populations, especially the vulnerable ones. The Nordic country and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) inaugurated a cooperation initiative in order to help mediate the conflict in the Bangsamoro area. Its focus is aimed at the participation of women, young people and indigenous leaders and in avoiding violence and extremism in their district. The Web Platform for Women's Rapid Action and Mobilization Platform as well as the Bangsamoro Youth Volunteer Program are one of the actions in the region (NORWEGIAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, 2020).

### **4.3. PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA**

The People's Republic of China aims in Southeast Asia are similar to the whole Asian continent. It seeks to improve their influence, as well as become a major actor in the region. Because of such objectives, Chinese relationship with India has brought difficulties, once both of them are constantly trying to grow as assertive regional players in Asia (DRISHTI, 2021). In this context, the fight for Myanmar's influence after the Coup D'état is increasing friction between both countries since they developed ports in Myanmar's Rakhine state. Furthermore, after strong reactions from the United States and the West related to the coup, there are indications of western sanctions. Such actions could force Myanmar closer to China, a political reaction that would aid the Chinese endeavor in the region (DRISHTI, 2021).

Since the beginning of Duterte's administration, although publicly defending a move towards a better China relationship, the strengthening of military relations with the United States showcase contradictions in such discourse (HEYDARIAN, 2019). Additionally, China's maritime dispute with the Philippines over the Whitsun Reef have escalated in the past months. The tensions developed belligerent threats and pressure from Filipino's internal actors (ROBLES, 2021).

### **4.4. REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA**

Regarding the situation in the Philippines, the Republic of Estonia has maintained a neutral positioning, not declaring itself in a public or official manner. Relations between Estonia and Southeast Asian countries, particularly under the governing of current president Kersti Kaljulaid, may be described as respectful and pacific. Overall, their most relevant ambitions are pointed to economic matters, such as the creation of Enterprise Estonia Singapore office, a startup aiming to reach the Southeast Asia market, besides facilitating their access within EU businesses (INVEST IN ESTONIA, 2016).

In 2012, Estonian Foreign Minister, Urmas Paet, highlighted the nation's aspiration towards an interregional free trade agreement between the EU and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Since then, bilateral meetings were held amidst the foreign ministers of Estonia and Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Singapore (VÄLISMINISTEERIUM, 2012).

Nevertheless, Estonian politics has not shown, in general terms, any formal position towards the conflicts within this region.

#### **4.5. REPUBLIC OF INDIA**

The relations between the Republic of India and the Republic of the Union of Myanmar are enduring due to their history, including heterogeneous interests and geostrategic location, given that both countries share land and maritime borders. India also considers Myanmar an important actor in the region since it is at the midpoint of India-Southeast Asia area and it is included in the "Neighborhood First" policy. Moreover, both have collaborated with national security interests, such as the military joint Operation Sunshine (DRISHTI THE VISION FOUNDATION, 2021). Concerning the Myanmar's coup, the Republic of India has been cautious regarding its actions towards its neighbor, adopting pragmatic steps and brief political statements (SHARMA, 2021) due to diplomatic and commercial purposes (MYANMAR..., 2021).

With respect to the relation between the Republic of India and the Philippines, in 2007 it was established the Joint Commission on Bilateral Cooperation aiming to extend their historical cooperation, mainly in order to increase military training, defense equipment' sales, transference of knowledge and education. Therefore, the Philippines are essential to develop India's geostrategic actions towards China's interests in the Southeast Asia region (GILL, 2020).

#### **4.6. REPUBLIC OF IRELAND**

The Republic of Ireland strategy in Asia is aimed at cooperation in several aspects. Specifically, in the Philippines, because of historical links between the nations and massive migration flows to Ireland, it has become the choice for an expansion of the Irish diplomatic mission abroad. In the Strategy for the Asia Pacific to 2025, the values defended by Ireland's Foreign Affairs Office are related to "support international peace and security, promote and protect human rights, address common challenges and attain Sustainable Development Goals" (IRELAND, 2020). Despite such definition and civilian demands against the several human rights violations (IRISH CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS, 2019), there has not been any declarations from the Irish government in opposition to Duterte's actions.

Regarding the Southeast Asian region, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland, Simon Coveney, pronounced his dissatisfaction with the military coup of Myanmar and condemned the occurrence as a step against the democratic transition the country was experiencing. In the statement published on February 2021, Coveney also called for the release of political leaders arrested during the coup: “I further condemn the detention of political leaders, including State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint, and call for their immediate release.” (IRELAND, 2021). Even though the Minister’s speech reflects Ireland’s position, the condemnation of the political switch in the Asian region was a conclusion endorsed by the European Union (IRELAND, 2021).

#### **4.7. REPUBLIC OF KENYA**

Regarding the Philippines, the Republic of Kenya has been strengthening their diplomatic relations since its first establishment, in 1967. The apex of this process is reflected through an agreement, signed in 2010, which both countries aimed to broaden political, economic, commercial, technical, industrial, and scientific cooperation between their governments. Mainly, their interests are pointed to the exchange of information in the above matters, and to the conduction of bilateral consultations concerning important international issues (NEWLY-SIGNED..., 2010).

Despite Kenya’s closer affiliation with the Philippines’ politics, further alliances between the Southeast Asian nations and the Republic of Kenya are known to be established with the Republic of Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. The ministry’s external affairs’ fundamental objectives are the implementation of joint commissions for cooperation among the states involved. Furthermore, the country also promotes the coordination of Kenya’s multilateral engagement with Asia countries, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (KENYA, 2018). Notwithstanding, no public statement was made by the Republic of Kenya towards the conflicts in the Southeast Asia region.

#### **4.8. REPUBLIC OF NIGER**

The Republic of Niger’s foreign affairs is known to be, in a general term, surrounded by most African Union states. As such, little to none initiatives are found regarding the Southeast Asian countries. For instance, Vietnam has been maintaining bilateral alliances with Niger’s

government in international matters (VIETNAM, 2010). However, in this particular case, the African nation has not shown any public regarding the situation in the Philippines' territory or even in the Southeast Asian region as a whole.

Nevertheless, Niger has experienced some of the challenges that are perpetrated in Southeast Asia. For example, in March this year, there was an attempted coup amidst the electoral process. Also, the country has been tackling jihadist terrorist attacks. Most recently, 141 members of the Tuareg community fell victim in the desert area of Taho. These incidents are related to spillovers from Islamist movements from Mali and Nigeria. Since the beginning of the year, 300 people have been killed in such attacks. (NIGER..., 2021)

#### **4.9. REPUBLIC OF TUNISIA**

The Republic of Tunisia's Foreign Affairs are marked by international solidarity, cooperation with "The European States not members of the European Union as well as American and Asian countries" (REPUBLIC OF TUNISIA, 20xx). For instance, in 2019 the Philippines and Tunisia cooperated in addressing the plight of overseas Filipino workers in order to repatriate those citizens affected by the escalating violence in Libya (GITA-CARLOS, 2019).

Such as the Philippines' endeavors to tackle terrorism activity in the last years, Tunisia has been dealing with this issue since the 2010s. Although the efforts seem less coordinated, the threat still is important (TORELLI, 2019). Also, alongside the French Republic, Tunisia lead the initiative to promote a ceasefire by the UN Security Council in order to tackle Covid-19's impacts (FRANCE..., 2020)

#### **4.10. RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

In 2016, the Russian Federation hosted the third Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-Russia Summit and sought closer political and economic ties with Southeast Asian countries. As a result, there was an expansion in arms sales, trade, and energy cooperation (RUMER; SOKOLSKY; VLADICIC, 2020). Despite listing relations with ASEAN members as a priority in its Foreign Policy Concept (RUSSIA, 2016), Moscow's presence in the region is relatively absent (MURRAY, 2020). Overall, the Russian approach to security in Southeast Asia is limited to the supply of advanced military equipment. The country has counterbalanced

China and the United States' movements towards the area by avoiding taking sides in the regional disputes (GORENBURG; SCHWARTZ, 2019).

Regarding the bilateral relations between Russia and the Philippines, defense and security cooperation are most advanced. In the last years, both countries conducted naval visits, transfers of equipment and expertise, and signed trade deals of arms and weapons (PARAMESWARAN, 2019). More recently, the Russian Ambassador to the Philippines Igor Khovaev emphasized Moscow's commitment towards a "long-term partnership" with Manila but emphasized that there are "no political linkages, and no political meddling" (ABEN, 2020).

#### **4.11. SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES**

Historically, despite the state's foreign multilateral policy, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines have kept a relatively distant relationship with the Southeast Asian countries. Its oldest bilateral relations with the region's nations date from 1986 when Sir James Fitz-Allen Mitchell, so elected prime minister, established diplomatic alliances with the Kingdom of Thailand. More recently, Vietnam, Singapore, and the Philippines also formed bilateral associations with Saint Vincent's government, although the nations' aspirations toward each other have not been declared (ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES, 2014). Generally, these connections are attending a far-reaching aim of cooperation and openness from both Saint Vincent and Southeast Asian states.

#### **4.12. SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM**

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam reportedly faces several human rights violations, which the COVID-19 crisis aggravated. According to Human Rights Watch (2021), the government has managed to combat the spread of the coronavirus. As of March 10, 2021, the total death toll amounted to 35, and the number of confirmed cases reached the mark of 2,668 by April 9 (SHIRA, 2021). However, the adoption of protective measures came at the expense of "restrictions on freedom of speech; failure to protect the right of privacy; and inequity in access to social services and government support." (HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 2021).

Concerning the situation in the Philippines, Vietnam has remained loyal to its longstanding strategic partnership. The pursuit of regional peace and stability is of utmost



importance for Filipino-Vietnamese relations. Nonetheless, Hanoi and Manila have engaged in defense and security cooperation to counterbalance Chinese attempts to rule over the South China Sea (GALANG, 2020). Currently, both countries have increased their military presence in the area (HEYDARIAN, 2021).

#### **4.13. UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND**

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) condemns the current situation in the Republic of Myanmar due to human rights violations, the transgression of the principles of democracy and for detention the elected Aung San Suu Kyi and other political actors. The UK has imposed sanctions against 16 members of the military forces along with 3 generals, which include asset freezes and travel bans to the European country (CUDDY, 2021). On February 25<sup>th</sup>, 6 more generals of Myanmar's State Administration Council were also sanctioned, and the UK government decided to review and suspend the promotion of economic trades with the military coup. Therefore, the British associations will not be allowed to negotiate with companies from those who support the coup (GALLARDO, 2021).

The Federation of Malaysia is one the 54 members of the Commonwealth, which provides meetings between their leaders every 2 years to discuss their policies and arrangements (THE COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT, 2021). Thus, the relationship between this nation and the UK is well-established and enduring and on April 9<sup>th</sup> there was a meeting with the British High Commissioner and the Prime Minister of Malaysia to debate the COVID-19 crisis in the Southeast Asian country, a bilateral effort to minimize the consequences of the pandemic and the perspective for the Joint Committee on Trade and Investment Cooperation to reinforce their economic affairs (MALAYSIA, 2020).

#### **4.14. UNITED MEXICAN STATES**

The United Mexican States' President, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, expressed three guidelines upon the election to Mexico's tenure in the Security Council in 2020. Those principles shape the Mexican conduct in the Council and are based on compliance with Human Rights and fundamental freedoms, cooperation for sustainable development, and peaceful settlement of disputes (ARROCHA, 2020). In a recent press release regarding the events in

Myanmar, the government of Mexico reinforced such protocols and condemned the arrest of political leaders in the Southeast Asian country (MEXICO, 2021).

As for the situation in the Philippines, Mexican authorities have not issued official statements. Current economic relations reshape the historical, commercial, and cultural bonds between Ciudad del México and Manila (MEXICO, 2016). Mexico has sought to explore the Southeast Asian export markets through the Filipino country (MASIGAN, 2019). Besides, the Latin American country is one of the leading foreign investors in the Philippines (MEXICO, 2016).

#### **4.15. UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

The Interim National Security Strategic Guidance, issued at the beginning of March 2021, addresses the United States of America (USA) priorities under new President Joe Biden's administration. The document mentions the intention to deepen American relations with Singapore, Vietnam, and other ASEAN members (UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, 2021b). Furthermore, the USA has expanded its military presence in the South China Sea, sending aircraft carriers and conducting other operations in a bid to back Vietnam and the Philippines. China, Malaysia, and Taiwan also reclaim the disputed waters (NEWDICK, 2021). Concerning the Myanmar situation, President Biden has issued orders to impose sanctions on the military coup's leaders (UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, 2021c) and the general's family (MANSON; REED, 2021).

Throughout 2020, the United States, under the rule of former President Donald Trump, provided humanitarian aid to Southeast Asian countries on at least two occasions, in April (WILLIAMS, 2020) and October (JENNINGS, 2020). The assistance came in the form of COVID-19 health aid and brought relief to the region (JENNINGS, 2020). The new Biden-led government has promised to engage in international cooperation to address the pandemic (LIZHONG, 2021). As a response to Chinese vaccine diplomacy, the USA has committed to supporting the World Health Organization-led COVAX facility in the distribution of vaccines to developing countries (POLING; HUDES, 2021).

#### **4.16. FEDERATION OF MALAYSIA\***

The Federation of Malaysia, most commonly known as Malaysia, is one of the eleven countries that make the region known as Southeast Asia and the third country in said region with the greatest number of cases of Covid-19, with 307,943 cases on 05<sup>th</sup> March 2021 (CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, 2021).

The political crisis caused by the dismissal of the elected Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, in February 2020, the king Al-Sultan Abdullah named Muhyiddin Yassin interim Prime Minister, and the historical race, religion and political reform-based polarization was aggravated (LEMIÈRE, 2020; WELSH, 2020). New elections were supposed to happen at the beginning of 2021. However, following a demand from Yassin, the King declared a state of emergency for the first time in 50 years, and the Parliament, state legislatures and elections were to be suspended until August 1<sup>st</sup>. This move was seen by the opposition parties as a strategy articulated by Muhyiddin Yassin to hold power, even being called a coup by some opposition leaders (PETER, 2021).

Regarding the situation of the Philippines, Malaysia does not have an official position, however, some tension has developed between the two countries over the last year due to the dispute for the region of Sabah. The diplomatic conflict began after a series of provocative tweets was made by Teodoro Locsin Junior, the Philippine Foreign Secretary, over the sensitive issue of the Sabah Region (HEYDARIAN, 2020).

#### **4.17. KINGDOM OF THAILAND\***

Thailand, even though one of the most dynamic countries in Southeast Asia, is facing economic problems such as “[...] slowing economic growth, declining foreign investment, and political instability” (PARKS, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic impact has been so severe that the country is predicted to face the largest contraction in Southeast Asia. Despite the Royal Thai Government’s problems, the country still plays a paramount role in regional cooperation and geopolitics within ASEAN, leading efforts connected to relevant matters such as sustainable development and Mekong cooperation (PARKS, 2020).

Regarding political proximity with the Philippines, the formal relations between the two countries started in 1949 upon the signing of the Treaty of Friendship and have strengthened since then. The cooperation expanded to other social areas such as defense, investment, agriculture, and telecommunications (REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES, 2019). Every year, the two states celebrate the anniversary of their harmonious diplomatic relations with a tribute,

that being renaming streets or commemorative missions (REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES, 2019).

#### **4.18. REPUBLIC OF INDONESIA\***

Even though the war has been raging for over 60 years and killed thousands of people, it is still far from the end and the Covid-19 health crisis has only deepened the issue. The Papuans have had special autonomy since 2001 and decided to close their borders to face the Coronavirus crisis, in order to better contain the spread of the virus (HOWE, 2020). Because the central government tried to intervene and nullify the local regulation, the feeling of dissatisfaction towards the central administration grew in the hearts of the Papuans, creating a new source of clash between both sides (INSTITUTE FOR POLICY ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT, 2020).

In the matter of the Philippines, Indonesia has a history of peaceful diplomatic relations. For over 70 years, the two countries have shared a relation of kinship and fraternity, with Indonesia helping the Philippines with the threats made against their unity and territorial integrity. This help includes sending troops to fight side by side with the Philippines against their enemies, especially during the wars of secession (LOCSIN JUNIOR, 2019).

#### **4.19. REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES\***

Ever since the establishment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), the Philippines have struggled more with the rebel groups connected to terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State (IS), and with the communist insurgent groups, that are also considered terrorists by the government (REGENCIA, 2021).

The Coronavirus health crisis made a new concern about the IS fighters taking advantage of the pandemic arise. The Philippines army along with the United States Defense Intelligence Agency (USDIA), began to worry that the IS may be using the Covid-19 crisis to strengthen their recruitment, taking advantage of the reduced USDIA support and of the people's displeasure with the crisis administration by the government (SELDIN, 2020). There is also the worry that the IS may get boosted with the recruitment of former members that were among the 10 thousand prisoners released by the government as a measure to contain the spread

of the virus. The boost could also come from the enrollment of people from neglected and poorer regions, that may not be getting the owing support to face the health crisis (SELDIN, 2020).

Another measure to reduce the spread of the virus and allow the government expenses to be mainly directed to the health departments, was the ceasefire adopted by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in the beginning of 2020. But this decision lasted only until mid-April, when, after accusing the communist rebels of violating the ceasefire, the armed forces resumed the attacks against the insurgent groups and the conflict is still raging (HOWE, 2020).

#### 4.20. REPUBLIC OF THE UNION OF MYANMAR\*

The Covid-19 crisis was not enough of a reason to cease the conflicts in Myanmar, with the three most attacked regions still suffering with the strife plus with the national health system negligence. This is the main reason why many people in Rakhine, Chin and Karen are seeking help from the insurgent groups in order to get the needed medical treatment (PARKS, 2020). Besides that, the country faces a huge problem with forced displacement of people in the conflict areas since the displaced people have no way of controlling their hygiene and many times have no money to follow the health protocols. Over 155 thousand people are suffering with displacement in Myanmar conflict zones (BARKLAMB, 2020).

No official position is made regarding the Philippines issue, however, the relations between both countries have been friendly for a long time, with both of them respecting the policies established by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This appreciation of the rules of ASEAN, followed by the support of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Myanmar, is what caused the Philippines to dissociate from voting the United Nations Human Rights Council resolution on the military coup (SANTOS, 2021).

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