



The Role of Indonesian House of Representatives in Parliamentary Diplomacy to Resolve the Myanmar Humanitarian Crisis in 2017-2019

Muhammad Alif Ridwan**, Muhammad Farid, Ilmi Dwiastuti

Department of International Relations, President University, Indonesia

Article Info

Article history:

Received February 26, 2022

Revised November 8, 2022

Accepted December 5, 2022

Available online December 14, 2022

Cite:

Ridwan, Muh. Alif, et al. (2022). The Role of Indonesian House of Representatives in Parliamentary Diplomacy to Resolve the Myanmar Humanitarian Crisis in 2017-2019. *Global-Local Interactions: Journal of International Relations*, 2(2).

** Corresponding author.

Corresponding Author

E-mail address:

aliefriidwans13@gmail.com

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the role of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia (DPR RI) during the humanitarian crisis in the Myanmar state of Rakhine. This paper will examine how the DPR RI employs the concept of parliamentary diplomacy during humanitarian crises and how this concept influences the decision-making process regarding the foreign policy of the government of the Republic of Indonesia on the national, regional, and global levels. In addition, this paper discusses the policies adopted by the government of the Republic of Indonesia as a result of the legislative influence of the DPR RI on the implementation of power. This paper employs the liberal paradigm and the notion of parliamentary diplomacy. Additionally, this paper employs a qualitative research approach.

Keywords: Indonesia House of Representative, House Committee for Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation, Parliamentary Diplomacy, Myanmar Humanitarian Crisis

Introduction

The House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Republik Indonesia or DPR RI) is one of the highest institutions of the Indonesian government with legislative, budgetary, and oversight responsibilities (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Republik Indonesia, 2016). DPR RI has eleven committees to perform legislative duties. These committees have many diverse responsibilities. Foreign relations, armed forces, communications, and intelligence are House Commission I (Komisi I)'s responsibility (Sekretariat Jenderal DPR RI, 2022). House Commission II oversees domestic government, regional autonomy, state apparatus and bureaucracy reform, elections, and land and agrarian reform. Law, human rights, and homeland security are overseen by House Commission III. House Commission IV oversees agriculture, maritime, forestry, and environment. House Commission V oversees infrastructure, transportation, underdeveloped regions, transmigration, meteorology, climatology, geophysics, and search and rescue. House Commission VI oversees trade, cooperatives, state-owned enterprises, investment, and standardization. House Commission VII oversees energy, R&D, and industrial affairs. House Commission VIII oversees religion, social, disaster, women's empowerment, and child protection. Health, labor, and population are overseen by House Commission IX. House Commission X oversees education, research, sports, and tourism. House Commission XI oversees finance, banking, and national development planning (Sekretariat Jenderal DPR RI, 2022).

DPR RI has several dedicated committees, including the House Committee for Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation (Badan Kerja Sama Antar Parlemen or BKSAP). This committee's responsibilities and functions include, but are not limited to: (1) developing, fostering, and improving friendly and cooperative relationships between DPR RI and the parliaments of other countries, both in a bilateral and multilateral context, including internal organizations of parliaments and/or Members of Parliament; (2) making all preparations related to the visit of delegations of other countries' parliaments as DPR RI guests; (3) evaluating and following up on DPR; and (4) Make inter-parliamentary cooperation recommendations to the DPR RI leadership (Sekretariat Jenderal DPR RI, 2016). This paper will focus on BKSAP's function number 1, which is to develop, foster, and improve relations between DPR RI in international relations.

BKSAP examines how Indonesia uses parliamentary diplomacy to advance its national interests and/or regional and global interests. Indonesia brought its national interests concerns to the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA). AIPA is a regional organization within ASEAN that corresponded to all Southeast Asian parliaments except Brunei Darussalam and Cambodia (it is worth noting that both countries do not have a parliamentary body within each respective government) (Starvidis & Irrera, 2014). AIPA's statutes list its purposes and work scope. Article 1 of Part III of the AIPA Statute states that "this organization promotes solidarity, understanding, cooperation, and close relations among ASEAN parliaments." Article 4 of Part III of the AIPA Statute states that this organization aims to "study, discuss, and suggest solutions to problems of common interest and express its views on such issues" This organization promotes human rights, democracy, peace, security, and prosperity among members (ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, 1977). On the international stage, DPR brought its concerns to the Inter-Parliamentary Union or IPU, an international parliamentary organization (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021).

Indonesia's main concern in Southeast Asia is the 2017 Rakhine State humanitarian crisis. European Institute for Asian Studies (2021) reported that hundreds to thousands of Rohingya were persecuted, tortured, and killed by state authorities between 2017 and 2019. This report is also corroborated by the initial report from UNOCHA (2017), which found many Rohingya are fleeing Myanmar. These acts caused waves of refugees to flee, therefore many Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh (British Broadcasting Company, 2020). This event has sparked critical responses among ASEAN countries, including from Indonesia. Deputy Speaker of the House Taufik Kurniawan stated that several party fractions have reacted strongly during the full session of the House (Retaduari, 2017). DPR RI began diplomatic efforts to deal with the crisis as one of Indonesia's responses.

By providing this brief explanation, the writer seeks to answer the question, "How did DPR RI influence Indonesia's foreign policy by promoting common agendas at regional and international levels to handle the Myanmar Humanitarian Crisis (2017-2019)?"

Analytical Framework

This paper uses liberalism and parliamentary diplomacy as frameworks for further discussion. Liberal framework is in line with the principle of cooperation between the Indonesian parliament and other countries' parliaments to strengthen ties between Indonesia and other countries. Shiraev & Zubok (2014) defined liberalism as how international institutions influence a state's cooperation. Liberals believe states can work together to

maximize prosperity and minimize conflict to achieve a common goal, with proper institutions and diplomacy. Liberals believe that can be an effective tool for any state if those states are honest, have clear visions, and support nonviolent solutions. The House Inter-Parliamentary Committee works closely with the International Committee of the Red Cross and its Indonesian branch, the UN High Commission for Refugees, and other institutions to resolve the humanitarian crisis.

This paper will also use the concept of parliamentary diplomacy to better understand how Indonesia's parliamentary diplomacy works with other nations' legislative branches. According to AGORA Portal for Parliamentary Development, parliamentary diplomacy is "a dialogue between two or more parliaments on international issues" (Hallunaj). Weiglas and de Boer (2007) defined parliamentary diplomacy as "the full range of international activities undertaken by parliamentarians to increase mutual understanding between countries, improve the control of governments and the representation of a people, and increase the democratic legitimacy of inter-governmental institutions." Multilateral activities and settings are the core of parliamentary diplomacy (even though some are done in bilateral settings), parliamentary diplomacy is more institutionalized, and the concept is mostly exercised within international parliamentary institutions. (International Parliamentary Union, 2005; Malamud & Stavridis, 2011; Šabič, 2008; Cofelice, 2012).

DPR RI has been working closely with its counterparts in Southeast Asia through the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly and on the global stage through the Inter-Parliamentary Union, as well as other relevant actors.

Research Method

To test the analytical frameworks, the author uses qualitative research. This paper obtains official data and documents issued and provided by DPR RI, especially from BKSAP, specifically by the Departments of Regional Cooperation (Bidang Kerja Sama Regional) and/or Bilateral Cooperation (Bidang Kerja Sama Bilateral), and uses the said data to understand the actions that DPR RI has taken from 2017 to 2019 which allow broadening the availability of data but will have specific information. The author may also use official documents from other governmental, nongovernmental, or intergovernmental institutions. This writing will use online and printed academic journals and articles to supplement and support the data. This writing will also source online news articles from Indonesian major news outlets like Antara News, The Jakarta Post, Kompas Media, and other relevant news sources. The writer will also obtain data from AIPA, IPU, and other international institutions.

Discussion

A Brief Explanation of the Myanmar Humanitarian Crisis

Rohingya is an ethnic group that lives in Rakhine state of Myanmar. Most Rohingya people believe in Islam. The fact that Myanmar's government has been unfair to Rohingya since the 1970s, when Myanmar was still called Burma, is a matter of public record. Policies like not recognizing the Rohingya minority ethnic group as part of Burmese society kept them from getting many services from the government, like education, health care, jobs, and so on (Blakemore, 2019). Since 1982, when the Burmese government passed a new law discriminating against the minority, they have been further marginalized (Head, 2009). The

Muslim-predominated ethnic group was labeled "one of the world's most mistreated minority" by the UN (Dummett, 2010; Agence France Presse, 2012). The crisis began when Harakah al-Yaqin (now known as Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army or ARSA) attacked police officials in Rakhine State on the Bangladesh-Myanmar border (Reuters, 2016). The incident resulted in the deaths of nine police officers. Additionally, the group grabbed firearms and ammo. As a result of this attack, Myanmar's military deployed soldiers to crush the insurgent organization. However, the military's activities were not restricted to the insurgent group's crackdown effort; they also affected the civilian population. The Rohingya people have been subjected to various crimes against humanity committed by the military, including mass murder, arbitrary arrest, rape, and several other atrocities (Amnesty International, 2016). As a result of this precarious living environment, a large number of Rohingyas have fled to safer location. The majority of Rohingyas seek refuge in Bangladesh, which is adjacent to Myanmar's border (Iaccino, 2016). Some Rohingyas are taking refuge in some neighboring Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand (UNHCR, 2018; Agence France-Presse, 2018).

When Myanmar's military began to persecute the Rohingya population, the Myanmar central government facilitated (and remained largely silent) the violence. Myanmar State Councilor Aung San Suu Kyi continues to defend the military actions within the state, despite the fact that the central government has been subjected to enormous international criticism (Griffiths, 2016). During her testimony, Myanmar's de facto leader defended the military before the ICJ, claiming "there may have been failures to prevent civilians from looting or destroying property after fighting or in abandoned communities" (Sleth, 2019).

Response from the International Community to the Myanmar Humanitarian Crisis

Several governments have protested Rohingya military activities with diverse responses, for the example The Australian Senate called for a UN probe (Murdoch, 2017). Bangladesh passed a resolution demanding Myanmar provide Rohingya people citizenship and safe repatriation (The Daily Star, 2017). Parliament moves rapidly to pass a vote to designate the atrocities in Myanmar as genocide and another motion to revoke the honorary citizenship of Aung San Suu Kyi, the de facto leader of Myanmar (Aiello, 2018). Numerous nations and organizations, including the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Egypt, and the United Nations, condemned the atrocity (DW, 2017; Holmes, 2017; Nebhay & Lewis, 2018). Several countries have also offered to send Rohingya refugees humanitarian aid. These include Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Japan, and other sympathetic countries (Gulf News, 2019; Jones, 2017; Kotani, 2018).

Early Response from the Indonesia to the Humanitarian Crisis

Joko Widodo, the president of the Republic of Indonesia, condemned the atrocities. In addition, the President has dispatched humanitarian aid to Bangladesh in order to meet some of the refugees' fundamental needs in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh (Channel News Asia, 2017). In mid-September 2018, President Widodo and Vice President Jusuf Kalla led a ceremonial shipment of 34 tons of humanitarian aid to Bangladesh to demonstrate Indonesia's commitment to assisting Rohingya refugees (Prasetyo, 2017). President Widodo himself

visited the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh at the end of January 2018 (The Jakarta Post, 2018).

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, Retno L. P. Marsudi, traveled to Myanmar to establish connection with State Councilor Aung San Suu Kyi and Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Minister Marsudi stated that quick tangible measures are required to resolve the current problem (Reuters, 2017). In order to address this situation, Minister Marsudi and Aung San Suu Kyi met bilaterally in Myanmar on the margins of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Retreat. She was able to convince Myanmar at this meeting to hold a summit to demonstrate ASEAN unity and reduce tensions between member nations (Institute for Policy Analysis and Conflict, 2018). In addition, Minister Marsudi had a back-to-back journey to Myanmar on President Widodo's direct order to negotiate the matter with the Myanmar government, which gave Indonesia an advantage over other nations in resolving the issue (Institute for Policy Analysis and Conflict, 2018). In an effort to tackle the Rohingya refugee issue, Minister Marsudi suggested the "4+1 Formula" on September 4, 2018. This formula consists of the following elements: (1) Restoration of peace and security; (2) Maximum self-restraint and commitment not to use violence; (3) Protection of all persons in Rakhine State, regardless of race or religion; and (4) Immediate access to humanitarian aid. The +1 formula represents the execution of the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, which was led by former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan (Institute for Policy Analysis and Conflict, 2018; Sekretariat Kabinet RI, 2017).

The Initiatives of the DPR RI has Taken in Response to the Problem

There are several efforts that has been done by DPR RI in order to cope to the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar, whether at the national stage, regional stage, and the international stage. DPR RI also has been doing bilateral and multilateral approaches to several state and non-state actors.

At the national level, a number of DPR RI members have denounced the persecution of the Rohingya minority in Myanmar. The Speaker of the People's Consultative Assembly (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat or MPR), Zulkifli Hasan of the National Mandate Party (Partai Amanat Nasional), should dismiss the Myanmar ambassador to Indonesia due to the military activities against Rohingya people (Novaria, 2017). Lukman Edy of the Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (PKB) encouraged the Indonesian government to denounce the military operations of Myanmar. In his written statement, Lukman advised the Indonesian government to summon the Myanmar ambassador to Indonesia to explain the situation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia. He added that Indonesia should support the Muslim ethnic minority by addressing this situation with international organizations such as ASEAN, OIC, and others. (Budilaksono, 2017). Furthermore, Teguh Juwarno of PAN issued a similar statement and argued that Indonesia should cease all trade with Myanmar and recall its ambassador to that country back to Jakarta. (Putra, 2017). This approach is expected to show that Indonesia has a clear stance on the humanitarian issue; thus, it should be addressed swiftly. Bobby Adhyanto Rizaldi, a lawmaker from the Partai Golongan Karya (Golkar), said on another occasion that the Myanmar ambassador should be declared persona non grata. Bobby additionally suggested that Myanmar's membership in ASEAN be terminated (Novaria, 2017).

The Indonesian government subsequently imposed punishment on the perpetrators of these war crimes after these congressmen argued that these measures were necessary.

Following the large migration of Rohingya people, DPR RI exerted pressure on the Indonesian government to offer a specialized refuge for Burmese refugees (Badan Kerja Sama Antar Parlemen, 2017). Moreover, BKSAP Chairwoman, Nurhayati Ali Assegaf of the Democratic Party met with former Vice President of the Republic of Indonesia Jusuf Kalla, who is also the head of the Indonesian Red Cross (Palang Merah Indonesia/PMI). During this discussion, Vice President Jusuf Kalla stated that PMI has committed to providing the Rohingya refugees with the necessary support (Badan Kerja Sama Antar Parlemen, 2017).

In order to respond to the situation that occurred in Myanmar on a regional level, the DPRK addressed this subject before the 38th AIPA session, which was held in the Philippines. In 2017, Nurhayati Ali Assegaf indicated that the DPR RI will address the concerns during the assembly and will propose the formation of an ad hoc team comprised of parliamentarians from each ASEAN member state. Then, she stated that this move is important to end the crimes against humanity that initially precipitated the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar. Nurhayati brought up the need for ASEAN member states to intervene in the crisis at the session. She stated that women and children's rights must be protected during humanitarian crises (Badan Kerja Sama Antar Parlemen, 2017).

Even though the resolution offered during the 2017 AIPA session failed to pass (and hence was not accepted), DPR RI's efforts did not end there. During the 41st AIPA session held online in 2020, the new Chairperson of BKSAP, Fadli Zon of the Great Indonesia Movement Party (Partai Gerakan Indonesia Raya or Gerindra), addressed the Rohingya humanitarian problem. During this session, Fadli Zon offered two resolutions, one of which is to address the humanitarian issue in Myanmar by sending humanitarian supplies (Badan Kerja Sama Antar Parlemen, 2020). The resolution involving Myanmar finally failed to pass due to opposition from Myanmar parliament delegates; hence, it is not enacted. It is important to note that in order to pass a proposed resolution within AIPA, the entire assembly must reach an agreement. In the absence of unanimity, the proposed resolution will not advance and will not be adopted.

At the international level, DPR RI addressed the humanitarian problem. In 2017, BKSAP Chairperson Nurhayati Ali Assegaf invited UNHCR representative Thomas Vargas to address the humanitarian issue in Myanmar. In the conference, they concluded that Myanmar's crisis is humanitarian, not religious or political. She also urged the Myanmar government to protect the Rohingya's dignity and grant them citizenship (Badan Kerja Sama Antar Parlemen, 2017). Through this, the conversation between the Indonesian lawmaker and the UNHCR representative shows that the House of Representatives is actively looking for ways to work together to address the humanitarian issue in Myanmar.

Nurhayati also urged the IPU to address the humanitarian catastrophe caused by Myanmar's military persecution of the Rohingya ethnic minority (Badan Kerja Sama Antar Parlemen, 2017). The DPR RI delegation advocated addressing the humanitarian crisis at the 2017 IPU conference in Saint Petersburg. Morocco, Bangladesh, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Sudan, and the UAE support this project. This is a tremendous triumph for Indonesia's parliament at the international level in conducting parliamentary diplomacy, as Indonesian House representatives swayed many other delegates with wide-ranging urgencies. DPR RI and Myanmar Parliament created Bilateral Cooperation Group in 2018. (Grup Kerja Sama Bilateral/GKSB), which promotes friendship and collaboration between the two parliaments. (Sekretariat Jenderal DPR RI, 2018).

Results after Indonesian Parliament Statement on Myanmar Humanitarian Crisis

There have been substantial moves taken by the Indonesian government in response to DPR RI's conduct, such as President Joko Widodo summoned the ambassador of Myanmar to Indonesia, Mr. Ei Ei Khin Aye, to the Presidential Palace to explain what is happening in the Rakhine State, notably on the persecution of the Muslim minority, in response to calls for action by numerous members of the House. The Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Retno L. P. Marsudi, briefed the press on the meeting's outcome following its conclusion. Retno stated that Indonesia is concerned about the country's security and stability. In reaction to the present crisis, Indonesia would also send humanitarian supplies to Myanmar. President Widodo tasked the Burmese ambassador with supervising the aid sent by the Indonesian government (Halik, 2017).

Second, following a meeting between the BKSAP delegation and the Vice President of the Republic of Indonesia, the Vice President pledged to work with the Medical Emergency Rescue Committee or MER-C to construct a hospital in the Rakhine State of Myanmar that will provide medical care for the Rohingya people who have been affected by the mending the mending crisis. IPU Secretary-General Martin Chungong notified the Myanmar parliament in a letter that IPU is prepared to facilitate any conversations between contending parties (Badan Kerja Sama Antar Parlemen, 2017).

Third, IPU is finally participating in resolving the humanitarian issue in Myanmar due to the efforts of the DPR RI delegation. IPU Secretary-General Martin Chungong notified the Myanmar parliament in a letter that IPU is prepared to facilitate any conversations between contending parties. In response to the IPU Secretary-letter, General's Myanmar established an investigative commission to investigate the atrocities committed in the Rakhine State. The Vice President of Myanmar, Myint Swe, led this committee directly (Badan Kerja Sama Antar Parlemen, 2017)

Fourth, at the 2017 IPU session in Saint Petersburg, Russia, the assembly adopted a resolution titled "Ending the Grave Human Crisis, Persecution and Violent Attacks on the Rohingyas as a Threat to International Peace and Security and Ensuring Their Unconditional and Safe Return to Their Homeland in Myanmar" which demanded that Myanmar grant Rohingya people citizenship. This initiative was successful, as the majority of the assembly agreed to address the humanitarian catastrophe in Myanmar. Japanese and Mexican parliaments that recommended addressing North Korea's nuclearization supported the resolution. Indonesia's proposal got 1,027 to 478 votes (Asril, 2017).

As a result of the passage of the resolution, BKSAP Chairwoman Assegaf was able to invite the Myanmar parliament to appear in an International Humanitarian Law Hearing held from October 14-18, 2018 in Geneva, Switzerland. As the then-president of IHL, Mrs. Assegaf persuaded the Myanmar parliamentary leadership to explain the present status of the Rohingya repatriation program. (Sekretariat Jenderal DPR RI, 2018).

Conclusion

Even though the legislative branch of a country like DPR RI creates laws and supervises the executive branch, its duties are not restricted to those areas. DPR RI has used its power as a non-executive state actor that may impact the foreign policy of the Indonesian government, which represents parliamentary diplomacy and liberalism within the Indonesian

government and other foreign governments. They has shown that it has asserted its influence at the national level by pushing some policies for the Indonesian executive state actor (in this case, the President and the Foreign Minister), pushing certain measures and adopting resolutions at the regional level (in this case, in AIPA forum), and fighting this crisis at the global level (in this case IPU and UNHCR). Even if DPR RI's attempts fail, it shows that it can utilize its power as an instrument for diplomacy, in addition to the executive actors' power.

DPR RI's cooperation with numerous actors has been impressive, but it may be improved. DPR RI can take some steps to resolve this dilemma or others. More non-state cooperation may help the process. DPR RI still faces difficulty passing certain initiatives, such as adopting a draft resolution to address the Rohingya refugee issue in the AIPA forum. Even though this isn't DPR RI's responsibility, it may seek common ground to establish a consensus.

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