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This summer, I interned with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), also known as the UN Refugee Agency, in Yangon, Myanmar. The UNHCR provides protection, assistance, and durable solutions for refugees and stateless persons. In 125 countries around the world, the UNHCR cooperates with governments, civil society, nongovernmental organizations, and academic institutions in order to assist their populations of concern through protection monitoring, advocacy, and capacity-building. With regards to stateless peoples, the UNHCR operates within four key categories: identification, prevention, reduction, and protection.

In Myanmar, the UNHCR works with communities displaced by conflict in the Kachin State, the South-East, and the Rakhine State. Activities include coordinating and managing camps, providing services such as education, vocational training, livelihood support, and assessing documentation needs, advocating with authorities, providing legal intervention for

child protection cases and incidences of sexual and gender-based violence, distributing non-food items, developing infrastructure, and so on. They have also identified and provide assistance to the most vulnerable among an estimated 800,000 individuals living without citizenship in the northern part of the Rakhine State, the majority of whom belong to a Muslim ethnic minority known as the Rohingya. Currently, the UNHCR is working to expand its awareness and understanding of other populations who may be affected by statelessness.

For my internship with the Protection Unit, I assisted in a preliminary mapping and outreach initiative with people of Indian and Chinese descent in Yangon. The objectives were as follows:

- a) To provide an overview of the historical migration trajectories of peoples of Indian and of Chinese descent in Myanmar
- b) To conduct an informal assessment of their current needs, and the degrees to which they have become politically, socially, economically, culturally, and legally integrated into contemporary Myanmar society
- c) To build a network of key leaders and organizations among the Indian and Chinese communities through holding bilateral meetings, in the interest of fostering positive

relationships and identifying possible stakeholders to be involved in the implementation of future studies

d) To raise awareness among the Indian and Chinese communities about the UNHCR and its mandate

To carry out this project, a Senior Protection Associate and I established connections with a total of 7 Indian organizations and 6 Chinese organizations. Through semi-formally-structured discussions, we learned about these organizations and the ways in which they serve their communities. Key findings and recommendations were compiled into a final report, and will provide a foundation for future studies on the civil documentation status of these groups.

My Liman Fellowship-supported internship with the UN Refugee Agency in Myanmar has been one of the most challenging yet formative experiences of my academic career thus far. It also happened to take place at a very particular moment in history in Myanmar—in which liberalization has given rise to critical questions of national identity and belonging, which in turn has stoked mass violence and displacement (both internally and to other parts of the Southeast Asian region). This internship allowed me become involved in coordinated humanitarian efforts by local and international actors to protect and advocate on behalf of stateless peoples, a cause

that has both professional as well as personal significance for me. It also allowed me to put into practice my sociological research skills within a policy practice framework.

Statelessness is a grave—and in many places such as Myanmar, worsening—humanitarian crisis, and much work still needs to be done to both understand the issue and to provide emergency assistance and durable solutions to the millions of people whose lives have been negatively impacted by the lack of citizenship. As an aspiring sociologist committed to working alongside stateless communities as well as government and civil society stakeholders to produce policy-relevant research, I hope to continue the work made possible by the Liman fellowship in my future engagement with the issue of statelessness.