

Mapping UNSW Impact Global Development

Primary SDG	16: PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS
Broad theme	International support for peace, democracy and human rights
Research	Measuring the effectiveness of sanctions versus engagement, and the impact of UN mediation
Impact region	Myanmar
Faculty	UNSW Canberra
School/Institute	School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Academic	Dr Morten Pedersen
Project partners	Ms. Sofia Busch (independent peace and conflict analyst), DANIDA - \$80,000
Related SDGs	10: Reduced Inequalities

Elevator pitch

With over 20 years of experience in Myanmar, Morten is researching the effectiveness of international sanctions versus engagement in dealing with the country's recurring human rights crises. He is also reviewing the impact of UN mediation and advising the recently appointed UN special envoy to the country.

The Challenge: The road to peace and democracy in Myanmar is long and bumpy

Seven years ago military rule in Myanmar ended. Since then a wide-ranging reform process has been underway, which has seen international sanctions lifted and greater engagement between the country and the international community. The ongoing refugee crisis of the Rohingya Muslim minority group (one of the three worst refugees crises in the world) has brought up the old question: should the international community seek to force the government to address the situation through sanctions, or should they seek to work more cooperatively with domestic actors on the ground?

Through his "Good Offices", the UN Secretary General has played a key role in the international community's response to Myanmar over the past 25 years. In April 2018 the UN appointed its fifth special envoy to the country. Because the country's problems are deeply rooted and complex, the UN has so far had limited success in its efforts to promote peace, democracy and human rights. But could more be achieved with a more proactive or different approach?

UNSW's solution: Sustained international engagement and mediation

Morten's research seeks to understand the role of the international community in promoting and supporting the values of peace, democracy and human rights. He is particularly interested in the effect of sanctions versus principled engagement on promoting these values. Both sanctions and engagement attempt to impact domestic politics in a positive direction by changing the mindset of political leaders, shifting the balance of power between political groups, and/or directly improving conditions of the general population. But which approach is better? For the past twenty years Morten has conducted qualitative field research on the ground in Myanmar interviewing key actors, including the country's ruling generals and other political leaders,

members of civil society and business, as well as top officials at the UN, foreign embassies and international NGOs. In his view, principled engagement has consistently proven to be the more effective approach, but the current Rohingya crises poses new and urgent questions that escape easy answers.

More recently Morten has also started researching the role of the UN in mediating the peace process in Myanmar. In 2012, he published a book with a Swedish colleague (Sofia Busch) that considered the role of four successive UN special envoys since 1993 and the lessons learned. Now, with funding from a bilateral donor, they are looking at the most recent phase of UN mediation in Myanmar from 2012-17 and considering options for the next special envoy who has been mandated to address the Rohingya refugee crisis and the broader peace and reform process. Morten and Sofia will conduct extensive interviews with different sides of Myanmar's internal conflicts to try to determine the perceived role of outside actors and the UN.

The Impact: Influencing international approaches to sanctions, shaping strategy of new UN envoy

In the past, Morten's work has helped both foreign governments and international organisations, like the UN and the World Bank, to rethink their approach to human rights sanctions on Myanmar. Now the country is in the midst of major reform but at the same time experiencing an extremely serious human rights and refugee crisis, Morten's research will guide international organisations on what the most effective measures are to respond. This work will hopefully contribute to more effective measures taken to provide humanitarian relief for the Rohingya refugees while also addressing the underlying causes of the crisis and supporting longer-term sustainable solutions.

As the UN prepares to send another envoy to Myanmar, Morten's research on the past 25 years of UN mediation in the country will help inform the new mission. He will provide specific advice to the envoy on what her priorities and approach should be. A stronger and more effective envoy, in turn, will enhance the likelihood of peace, democracy and human rights in the country and thus benefit the Myanmar people.

Researcher

Dr Morten Pedersen is Senior Lecturer in International Politics at UNSW Canberra and a former senior analyst for the International Crisis Group in Myanmar. In addition to teaching and research, he has worked as a policy advisor on Myanmar politics and development affairs for the United Nations, the World Bank, the European Commission, the Australian Government, and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Martti Ahtisaari, among others.

Ben Falkenmire 09.05.18