

Follow/Mention
@HouseForeign

Opening Statement of the Honorable **Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman**
House Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing:
“The Rohingya Crisis: U.S. Response to the Tragedy in Burma”
October 4, 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

“There are few pressing issues that demand our attention more than the plight of the Rohingya, an ethnic group many have called the most persecuted in the world.

Last week, we heard testimony from two witnesses who had just returned from refugee camps in Bangladesh. They told horrific stories. A young mother was torn from her burning home and separated from her husband and three daughters, only to find her husband brutally killed. Her story is the story of countless Rohingya refugees torn from their homes, forced to flee in horrible conditions.

For decades, the Burmese government has systematically oppressed the Rohingya. A 1982 citizenship law denies Rohingya Burmese citizenship, even though most have lived in the country for generations. They have been denied freedom of movement, access to healthcare and education. Rohingya have been marginalized by every level of the Burmese government, from top to bottom.

Recently, we have seen the horrors of this decades-old persecution. Fleeing government retaliation for attacks carried out by ARSA, a fringe militant group, an estimated 507,000 Rohingyas have been driven from their homes, forced to cross the border into Bangladesh. Hundreds have been killed, though with journalists denied access to large areas of Rakhine State, that number is surely higher. At least 200 villages have been burned to the ground. Landmines have reportedly been placed inside Burma’s border with Bangladesh, maiming some seeking safe haven. It is little wonder that the UN’s human rights chief called this a “textbook example of ethnic cleansing.” That’s a strong but warranted condemnation.

Bangladesh deserves credit for opening its borders to this influx of refugees, but the government must honor its promise to build shelter for new arrivals and provide medical services. In response to this crisis, the Trump administration announced that it would provide nearly \$32 million in humanitarian assistance, \$28 million going to Bangladesh and the remainder to Burma. That’s most welcomed.

State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, must make it a top priority to provide for the safety of those in Burma, including the Rohingya.

However, her recent statement questioning why the Rohingya were fleeing, and denying that the military had conducted ‘clearance operations,’ is wildly off the mark. As I made clear when I

wrote her a month ago, her government and the military have a responsibility to protect all of the people of Burma, regardless of their ethnic background or religious beliefs. Those responsible for these atrocities must face justice. She and the military generals must rise to this challenge.

This is ethnic cleansing. The protection of human rights has long been our nation's top priority in Burma, including freeing Aung San Suu Kyi, and today, that must include the Rohingya. This is a moral issue. And a national security issue. No one is more secure when extremism and instability is growing in this part of the world. I look forward to hearing from the administration on how it's using the tools we have to end this humanitarian and human rights crisis."