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Opening Statement of the Honorable **Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman**  
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific Hearing:  
“Burma’s Brutal Campaign Against the Rohingya”  
September 27, 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

“I appreciate Chairman Yoho working with me to hold this important hearing. 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.

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

And today, this persecution has reached new, horrific levels. Fleeing government retaliation for attacks carried out by ARSA, a fringe militant group, at least 420,000 Rohingyas have been driven from their homes, forced to cross the border into Bangladesh. Hundreds have been killed, but with journalists denied access to large areas of Rakhine State, I suspect that number is far higher. At least 200 villages have been burned to the ground. Landmines have reportedly been placed inside Burma’s border with Bangladesh, maiming a handful of those 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.

In the face of these atrocities, Burma’s response has been appalling. I have no illusion that with a young, democratically-elected government, the challenges facing Aung San Suu Kyi are immense. She must bring together widely diverse ethnic groups and work to improve an economy that suffered for decades under the military junta’s mismanagement. But nothing is more important than providing for the safety of the people within her borders. Aung San Suu Kyi’s recent statement questioning why the Rohingya were fleeing, and denying that the military had conducted ‘clearance operations,’ is wildly off the mark. The perpetrators of this ethnic cleansing must be condemned in the strongest terms. And held accountable.

The Government of Burma cannot be allowed to blatantly and cruelly mistreat Rohingya Muslims and other minority groups. The United States must prioritize the Rohingya and the protection of human rights in its relations with Burma. And we should use the tools at our disposal to help put a stop to the violence.

Lastly, Bangladesh deserves credit for opening its borders to this influx of refugees. It is my sincere hope that the government honors its promise to build shelter for new arrivals and provide needed medical services.

Again, I thank Chairman Yoho for calling this important hearing, and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.”