

SFOPS FY2024 Member Day Testimony
Representative Ilhan Omar (MN-05)

Chairman Diaz-Balart, Ranking Member Lee, and distinguished Members of the subcommittee, I want to begin by thanking you for giving me the opportunity to testify before you today.

Around the world, the people fighting for democracy, for human rights, and for basic human dignity, look to the international community to support. They look to the United States for support because we profess the values of upholding human rights and international law. It is our obligation to ensure that when we profess those values, they are not just nice-sounding words in a press release or a diplomatic speech. We must back up our words with actions. Quite simply, when we say we are the champions of human rights and democracy, we should mean it.

Part of this, in my view, has to do with our funding priorities. When I've travelled to Africa on CODELs, I have heard over and over again about the importance of balancing the "three d's" of development, diplomacy, and defense. I'm sure you have all had those same conversations, probably also with the same conclusion that we are frequently getting the balance wrong.

Conflict Prevention Accounts

This subcommittee is the front line in getting that balance back into order. Far too often, we are too reactive to crises and conflicts around the world, waiting until they have spiraled out of control before we begin paying attention to them. I want to urge you all, in this year's bill, to **significantly raise the budgets for the complex crises fund, the atrocities prevention fund, and the reconciliation programs fund.**

Investing in prevention, and actively working to stop conflicts before they spiral out of control, is both a moral and a strategic imperative. These three funds, while costing us comparatively little, support immensely important work. It should be clear that spending to prevent atrocities and conflicts is valuable on its own. But it also represents a wise investment of taxpayer dollars – money spent now to prevent conflicts, displacement, and instability represents much more money saved later in responding to those crises.

Human Rights Conditionality

I also want to urge the Members of this subcommittee to be much more aggressive with your use of human rights conditions on security assistance and arms sales around the world. In my first four years in Congress, I have led and co-led numerous letters to this subcommittee making the case for stricter human rights conditions on a number of countries, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. And you all can expect to receive similar letters from me and my colleagues this year.

The truth is, that list could be two or three times as long. I strongly believe that there should be strict human rights conditions attached to *every dollar* we send abroad in FMF, or any other security assistance and arms sales. This is back to the point about prevention – when we arm regimes that then go on to commit serious human rights violations, it is not just a betrayal of our stated values, it is also a national security risk.

Any Administration is going to fight Congressionally mandated human rights conditions, as we have all seen on many occasions. It is incumbent on this subcommittee to strongly assert our authority on this. We have made admirable progress on this in recent years, but there is still a lot more that can be done to close loopholes and tighten conditionality. As you all know, sometimes small changes in the text of an appropriations bill can have massive impacts on the ground. This is the moment to be much stricter in our appropriations language, and much more thorough in our oversight.

Again, Chairman Diaz-Balart, Ranking Member Lee, distinguished Members of the subcommittee, I am grateful for this opportunity. I look forward to our continued collaboration to ensure that the United States really does put human rights and civilian security at the center of our foreign policy. Thank you.