

Congressman Brad Sherman (CA-32) Testimony

Member Day Hearing for FY2024 Dept. of State, Foreign Operations, & related Programs
(SFOPS) Appropriations

I want to thank Chair Diaz-Balart, Ranking Member Lee, and my esteemed colleagues on the State, Foreign Operations, & related Programs Subcommittee for allowing me to testify before you today. As a senior member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, I look forward to discussing with you all priorities that will help us navigate the opportunities and challenges we face around the globe.

Voice of America Sindhi Language Programming

There is perhaps nowhere in the world more important for the United States to battle extremism with public diplomacy than in Pakistan, a nuclear-armed state with significant security challenges. However, until last year, Voice of America's outreach in Pakistan was only done in Urdu - the native language for only an estimated 8% of Pakistanis. I want to thank the members of this subcommittee for including my amendment to create Voice of America programming in the Sindhi language, which led to the launch of Voice of America's Sindhi language website this past summer. Opening up Voice of America to a Sindhi audience has allowed us to reach over 30 million Pakistanis whose native language is Sindhi. However, there is more work to be done, including increasing funding for improved translations of the site and the eventual transition of VOA Sindhi into its own standalone site instead of a subset of the Urdu site. That is why I urge my colleagues on this subcommittee to maintain and expand funding for this critical program which will significantly expand Voice of America's impact in Pakistan.

Peace and Tolerance in Palestinian Education Act

We've seen a worrying uptick in violence in the West Bank, much of which has been carried out by minors – including several attacks last month where Palestinians as young as 13 carried out deadly terror attacks. These children are not born hating – instead, they are tragically taught hatred, antisemitism, and incitement in Palestinian Authority and UNRWA schools.

For decades, the United States and the American people have been the top donor to the Palestinian people, including to the Palestinian Authority and UNRWA - but this is not a blank check. American dollars must be spent in a way that reflect American values of tolerance and peacebuilding. Unfortunately, the current Palestinian Authority curriculum, used by both Palestinian Authority and UNRWA schools, falls short of reflecting those values.

Instead of envisioning a Palestinian state alongside Israel, textbooks erase Israel from maps, refer to Israel only as “the enemy,” and ask children to sacrifice their lives to “liberate” all of the land between the Jordan River and Mediterranean Sea. One horrific example includes a 5th grade textbook which encourages students to emulate Dalal Mughrabi, a convicted terrorist who perpetrated the 1978 Coastal Road massacre which killed 38 Israeli civilians - including 13 children. This Saturday will mark the 45th anniversary of the Coastal Road massacre, and I will be reintroducing my bill, the *Peace and Tolerance in Palestinian Education Act*, this Friday in memory of these victims. The bill will create new State Department reporting to address the ongoing issue of incitement and antisemitic content in textbooks used by the Palestinian

Authority and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) – which is especially timely given that, despite UNRWA’s renewed commitments to address this issue in the 2021 Framework for Cooperation, problems with antisemitism and incitement continue to be well documented.

This legislation has passed through the Foreign Affairs Committee unanimously in both the 117th and 116th Congress, and has widespread bipartisan support – growing to 46 cosponsors in the last Congress. The reporting would create critical oversight that Congress needs to meaningfully address this issue, and I urge my colleagues to include my legislation in the FY2024 State, Foreign Operations, & related Programs appropriations bill.

Artsakh & Azerbaijan

For nearly 3 months, the human rights of the people of Artsakh have been continuously violated by Azerbaijan’s brutal blockade of the region. Food and critical medical supplies run dangerously low, and families have been separated – including children attending school in Armenia who have not seen their parents in Artsakh since the blockade began. This is only the latest in a long history of Azerbaijan’s aggression towards Artsakh’s ethnic Armenian population. It’s high time the United States ends all military aid to Azerbaijan and supports dire humanitarian needs in Artsakh through significant assistance, and I urge my colleagues on this subcommittee to support efforts to do so.

Rohingya

And of course we continue to see the devastating suffering of the Rohingya people, who rely almost entirely on humanitarian assistance to meet their essential needs due to limited employment opportunities in their refugee camps. Last month, UN experts warned about dire consequences for Rohingya refugees living in camps in Bangladesh if life-saving food aid is slashed, and they issued a plea for donations. Chronic malnutrition rates are already high among the Rohingya, meanwhile the World Food Program has announced it would be reducing rations for the Rohingya by 17% due to insufficient funding. I’m aware that USAID announced \$75 million in assistance in late January, which was on top of \$170 million in U.S. assistance announced in September. These contributions were certainly welcome and were made possible by the actions of this Subcommittee – but more must be done to avert further humanitarian catastrophe for this vulnerable population. I urge my colleagues on this subcommittee to significantly increase the U.S. contribution to the UN account for the Rohingya refugee crisis.

Ethiopia & Tigray

Ethiopia continues to struggle with conflict and severe humanitarian crisis. Just this month, the International Rescue Committee ranked Ethiopia as the country second most at risk of worsening humanitarian crisis in the world, second only to Somalia. The overlapping crises in Ethiopia affect numerous regions, but nowhere more than in Tigray. We need to ensure that any aid to Ethiopia, particularly disaster response aid, be spent to help the people of Tigray in proportion to the suffering that the people of Tigray have faced. It is critical that the U.S. works to ensure that anti-Tigrayan sentiment in Ethiopia does not prevent aid from getting to those in Tigray who so desperately need it.

I thank my colleagues for the opportunity to testify before the subcommittee here today, and for their commitment to these critical priorities. Thank you.