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Opening Statement of the Honorable **Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman**
Committee on Foreign Affairs Hearing:
“Genocide Against the Burmese Rohingya”
September 26, 2018

(As prepared for delivery)

“For more than three decades, the government of Burma has systematically denied the Rohingya people even the most basic of human rights. Add to that no access to education or healthcare. Last year, this persecution reached new, horrific levels, as the Burmese military drove 700,000 Rohingya from their homes, burning villages and killing scores during so-called ‘terrorist clearance operations.’

One Rohingya survivor recalled the attacks on his village, saying ‘the whole village was under random fire like rain.’

Just this week, the State Department released a report detailing stomach-turning, systematic and widespread acts of violence against the Rohingya in Northern Rakhine State. The report includes gruesome accounts of burning elderly alive in their homes, gang raping women and slaughtering fleeing refugees.

The Burmese military made no distinction between men, women and children, either – one woman recalls watching as ‘newborns and [children] who could barely walk, they threw them in the river...’ while she desperately hid in bushes across the river.

It is hard to hear these accounts without feeling queasy. But we must catalogue these atrocities so that we can one day hold the perpetrators accountable.

I want to commend the administration for speaking out against these atrocities. Ambassador Nikki Haley, in particular, has repeatedly demanded that the international community not ignore the plight of the Rohingya. And the U.S. is providing desperately needed humanitarian assistance to the survivors, many who are now refugees in Bangladesh.

But I encourage the administration to go further – this is more than just a ‘textbook example of ethnic cleansing.’ To all who have met with Rohingya refugees, who have heard these accounts, it is clear that these crimes amount to **genocide**.

The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, signed and ratified by the United States, defines genocide as certain acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.

Those acts include, among others:

- Killing members of the ethnicity or religion;
- Causing serious bodily or mental harm to that ethnicity;
- Deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- And imposing measures intended to prevent births.

I believe that a realistic accounting of the deliberate campaign of murder, intimidation and displacement against the Rohingya clearly meets this legal standard for genocide.

Making a formal determination of genocide must be the next step for the U.S. Defining these atrocities for what they are is critical to building international public awareness – and support – to stop them.

The protection of human rights has long been our nation's top priority in Burma – dating back to freeing Aung San Suu Kyi – and today, that must include the Rohingya.

The Burmese government and its military must ensure the protection of all the people of Burma, regardless of their ethnic background or religious beliefs. Those military leaders and security forces responsible for these atrocities must face justice. The U.S. must push the civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi to rise to this challenge.

Confronting genocide of the Rohingya is a moral issue. And a national security issue. No one is more secure when fanaticism and unchecked violence are growing in this part of the world. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on these issues today.”