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Opening Statement of the Honorable **Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman**
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee Hearing:
Burma's Challenge: Democracy, Human Rights, Peace, and the Plight of
the Rohingya
October 21, 2015

(As prepared for delivery)

I appreciate Chairman Salmon working with me to hold this important hearing. Many are looking at Burma's upcoming elections to gauge that troubled country's progress.

But a better yardstick is the country's abhorrent treatment of the minority Rohingya Muslims, probably the most persecuted minority group 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 the Rohingya Burmese citizenship, even though most of them have lived in the country for generations.

In the past five years – since the Obama Administration's outreach to the Burmese regime - at least 140,000 Rohingya and other Muslims have been displaced by violence and hundreds have been killed. As one 12 year-old Rohingya boy recounted during the 2012 violence, Burmese men broke into his house and beat his father's head in with a brick before slaughtering him with a knife. For the mass killings that broke out in 2012, exceptionally few have been prosecuted, let alone jailed.

In fact, a nongovernmental organization based in Southeast Asia disclosed credible documents detailing state involvement in persecuting Rohingyas. They outline state policies on population control, restrictions on movement, and empower security forces to use abusive measures to control Rohingya.

No wonder Rohingyas by the thousands are packing themselves into boats to flee, risking their lives. They end up in Malaysia and Bangladesh, facing the hardships of destitute refugees. Others perish in the Indian Ocean, or fall prey to human traffickers. There must be a way to protect these individuals through "safe-zones" or other arrangements.

This tragedy is what happens when a government refuses to recognize its own people. While the Thein Sein government maintains that Rohingyas are merely Bengali migrant workers, their roots go back centuries. Muslims trace their roots back to Rakhine state to as long ago as the 8th century. These deep, historic ties of the Rohingya to Burma must be recognized, and of course, protected.

The Government of Burma cannot claim progress toward meeting its reform goals if it so blatantly and cruelly mistreats Rohingya Muslims and other minority groups. The United States

must prioritize the protection of human rights in its relations with Burma, using the tools we have at our disposal. In August, Ranking Member Engel and I wrote to the Treasury Department, expressing our concern that only one individual had been added to the Specially Designated Nationals list for violations of human rights since violence erupted in 2012. That is the list for enforcing economic sanctions, blocking assets and trade to accomplish our foreign policy goals. With a people on the verge of genocide, it's inexcusable that we aren't aggressively targeting abusers. I plan on working with the Administration, providing additional names of Burmese human rights abusers to be added to the SDN list.

Again, thank you Chairman Salmon. I look forward to hearing from the Administration.