

Opening Remarks for Congresswoman Ilhan Omar:
“Discrimination and Persecution Against Muslims Worldwide”
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
June 30, 2022

I want to begin by thanking the co-chairs, Congressman McGovern and Congressman Smith, for convening this important hearing today. I also want to thank them for inviting me to co-chair this hearing, it is an honor for me to do so.

I especially want to acknowledge their leadership on this issue – Representative McGovern has been a reliable champion of human rights for all people, and a consistent partner and friend as we work to combat the brutal repression of Muslims around the world. Representative Smith has shown crucial leadership, particularly on the plight of the Uyghurs in China and the Rohingya in Burma.

When the House passed my bill to create a Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia last December, I talked about the need to connect the dots between different violent expressions of Islamophobia in different parts of the world. At its worst, it’s atrocity crimes in China and Burma, and I am looking forward to discussing American responses during our first panel.

But there is also a growing level of violence and impunity for violence against Muslims in India, in Sri Lanka, and in Europe. There is serious repression of minority Muslim populations in Muslim-majority countries like Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. In Russia, Putin’s government is shutting down human rights organizations and using their support for Muslim refugees as the reason. And one thing I believe we need to acknowledge when we connect these dots is that the United States has played a role in this, especially over the last 20 years, both with our actions and our rhetoric.

When Xi Jinping says that the Chinese government needs to start using American War on Terror methods in Xinjiang, we should take notice. When the Burmese, or Egyptian, or Russian governments justify their treatment of Muslims based on a perceived threat of terrorism, we should reflect on how our own recent history of torture and arbitrary detention have contributed to those justifications.

As always, we must lead by example. And as always, no religious minority is free until all of us are free. This is something our panelists know well. It is something that Chairmen McGovern and Smith know well. I am looking forward to this discussion, and once again thank you for having me.