



## **Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Briefing**

### **Human Rights in Southeast Asia and Burma: An exchange with ASEAN Parliamentarians**

**Wednesday, September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2015  
4:00 – 5:00 PM  
441 Cannon House Office Building**

#### **Opening Remarks**

Good afternoon and welcome to today's briefing on the human rights situation in Southeast Asia, with a particular focus on Burma.

I want to extend a special welcome to the Members of Parliament who are with us today, all of whom belong to ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR), a membership organization working to strengthen human rights and democracy in Southeast Asia. They have just returned from a fact-finding mission to Burma, and are here to share their findings with us.

I also want to recognize my friend and former colleague, Tom Andrews, and the great work he and his organization are doing on behalf of threatened peoples around the world. Thank you to United to End Genocide.

Many of us in the U.S. Congress have been following the situation in Southeast Asia and Burma closely. We are worried that there could be another mass exodus of people taking to the seas in the coming weeks. We've all seen the UN estimates that over 1,100 people have died at sea in Southeast Asia since 2014 – and we've heard the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' recent call for urgent action before the end of the monsoon season unleashes a new wave of people leaving on boats from the Bay of Bengal.

In Burma, we know that the conflict in Kachin state is ongoing and the peace process precarious. And we are especially concerned about the situation of the Rohingya people, who some say are at risk of genocide. The recent passage of the four so-called "Protection of Race and Religion Laws" which regulate interfaith marriage, religious conversion and birthrates, and

the mass disenfranchisement of the Rohingya population, reinforce that fear. One of our guests today, U Shwe Maung is a Rohingya member of the governing party elected in 2010, and is himself a victim of disenfranchisement: he has just been ruled a non-citizen and thus ineligible to run for re-election.

Given this very troubling context, we very much look forward to hearing your recommendations for United States policy toward the region.

[Read Mr. Pitts' statement]

With that, I turn the microphone over to my former colleague and good friend, Tom Andrews who will moderate the discussion.