



## **Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing**

### **The Ongoing Humanitarian Crisis in Syria**

**Thursday, September 12, 2019**

**9:30 – 11:00 AM**

**2200 Rayburn House Office Building**

#### **Statement by Rep. Christopher H. Smith**

##### **As prepared for delivery**

I would like to thank our witnesses for joining us at today's hearing, and my colleague Congressman McGovern for convening this all important hearing on the humanitarian disaster that is unfolding in Syria, and has been for a number of years now.

While we are focusing as we should on the humanitarian aspect of this crisis today—and I do look forward to receiving your testimony on this—I also wish to point out the interrelationship with the security as well as justice and human rights problems, and that we cannot address one without the other.

In 2013, I introduced a resolution, H. Con. Res 51, calling for the establishment of a war crimes tribunal, in tandem with working towards a

settlement of the crisis. I held two hearings on what such a tribunal would look like, both of which featured David Crane, the chief prosecutor for the war crimes tribunal in Sierra Leone. While the International Criminal Court for a host of reasons is utterly inadequate, there were a number of options including a hybrid court, comprised of Syrian and international judges, which seemed more feasible and which, once the security situation stabilized, could be part of the reconstruction process in Syria in terms of rebuilding judicial institutions.

Concurrent with such an effort would be the collection and preservation of evidence. In the IDP camps of Syria are many victims and witnesses to unspeakable atrocities. While we address their immediate humanitarian needs, we also need to address the injustices that were done. Indeed, the need for justice is very much linked to their psychosocial well-being.

Moreover, the idea behind the resolution and a war crimes tribunal was to bring all perpetrators of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide to account, be they members of the Assad regime and its allies, or ISIS or al Nusra.

Of course one must begin with Bashar al-Assad, the barrel-bombing butcher whose crimes against his own people put him in the ranks of tyrants such as Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot. Yet it also includes members of groups such as al Nusra and ISIS.

And here I think the linkage between justice and the humanitarian crisis becomes clearer.

We will hear reference made to the al-Hol camp, which houses mostly women and children, and the squalor that exists. By all accounts it is horrible, a

hell on earth. It is also a camp that is dominated by ISIS – and in this case, the ISIS members controlling it are women.

I would refer all of you to a recent, September 3 article in the Washington Post which I ask be included as part of the record of this hearing entitled “At a Sprawling Camp in Syria, ISIS Women Impose a Brutal Rule.” The content of the article is hard to digest, telling how a fourteen year old Azerbaijani girl who had simply suggested not wearing the *niqab* was brutally slain, and how a pregnant Indonesian woman was murdered for simply talking to western journalists. That the camp houses people from countries so far afield shows how far the radical siren’s call of ISIS was heard – indeed, we have had American citizens who went to serve the caliphate and its murderous ideals.

Thus I would underscore that we cannot place humanitarian issues in a silo – addressing the humanitarian crisis at a camp like al-Hol requires addressing the security and justice issues as well.

Indeed, I am little concerned that the written statement of one of our witnesses, in discussing the situation at al-Hol, obfuscates the connection with ISIS. These are facts on the ground which one must deal with, not pretend that they do not exist, if we are going to adequately address the humanitarian situation.

Nor should we speak in terms of refugees at al-Hol *becoming* radicalized. Many are, in fact, already radicalized, and were when they arrived at the camp. Indeed they make life a living hell for those who are not so radicalized, or who are seeking to escape from radicalization, which is what contributes to the humanitarian crisis there.

With these issues put on the table, I look forward to your testimony and to hearing your solutions.