

**Testimony of Mohamed Naeem to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission  
March 17, 2017**

**2255 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C.**

**“Ensuring the Human Rights of Muslim Rohingya in Myanmar”**

Chairman McGovern, Chairman Hultgren, distinguished members of the commission and Ladies and Gentlemen, on behalf of Rohingya people, I'd like to thank you for organizing this hearing on the human rights situation of Rohingya in Burma. We thank you for your continued attention to the situation in Burma and leadership on these and other grave human rights issues.

I'm a member of Rohingya ethnic group from Burma. I belong to a registered Rohingya political party and ran for office in the 2010 general election. Even though I technically won the election in 2010, I was not able to represent my people in parliament.

In the 2015 general election, all of our Rohingya candidates were disqualified and the entire Rohingya population of 1.3 million people were disenfranchised and denied the right to vote. This was the first time in history of voting in Burma that Rohingya were denied the right to vote.

Even though Rohingyas were recognized among the 144 ethnic groups of Burma and once allowed to broadcast over the airwaves as an ethnic language along with other nine other ethnic languages from 1961 to 1965, now Rohingyas are branded as illegal, undocumented immigrants from neighboring Bangladesh. Rohingyas have been facing systematic persecution from successive military regimes of Burma for the last four decades. The widespread and systematic human rights violations against Rohingya have been documented and recognized by well-known scholars, human rights organizations, UN Special Rapporteurs and others. The human rights violations have been referred to as crimes against humanity, “ethnic cleansing,” and even the crime of genocide.

In June 2012 hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas were forced to leave their homes by Rakhine extremists with the help of security forces. Their properties were burnt down and looted by extremists in front of security forces with impunity. So far no measures have been taken by authorities to hold perpetrators accountable. Displaced Rohingyas have been living in squalid conditions for almost five years. The previous Thein Sein government and now the government of Aung San Suu Kyi have done little to nothing to improve their living conditions despite repeated requests by the UN and international community. Adequate aid does not reach Rohingyas. My people are living in miserable conditions. UN Special Rapporteur Yanghee Lee has repeatedly stated that the situation of Rohingyas is deplorable.

In the northern part of Rakhine State Rohingyas are facing crimes against humanity committed by state security forces after an October 9<sup>th</sup> attack by an unknown militia. Aung San Suu Kyi's government is justifying those attacks and has been carrying out a “clearance operation” in those areas. Security forces are accused of extrajudicial killings, extortion, arbitrary arrests, and mass gang raping against unprotected, defenseless Rohingya civilians. After intense international criticism, State Counselor Suu Kyi and President Htin Kyaw formed a commission led by Vice President and former General Myint Swe. The government keeps denying any wrongdoing of security forces and also bluntly denies and rejects reports of OHCHR, Fortify Rights, Human Rights Watch and other rights groups.

We must work to end impunity and culprits should be brought to justice. The authorities appear principally concerned with whitewashing crimes they have been committing.

In order to verify the serious allegations that have been made, we urge the international community to establish a Commission of Inquiry or similar mechanism in Burma through the UN Human Rights Council. We hope that members of US Congress and the US Government as well as the international community will support the establishment of such an inquiry in Burma.

Rohingya people have been living in Burma for centuries and have been stripped of their very basic citizenship rights. The treatment of Rohingya is immoral, baseless, and unfair.

In order to solve the many issues in Rakhine State with regard to Rohingya, we humbly suggest that members of U.S. Congress help ensure Myanmar authorities:

- 1) Reinstate unconditional citizenship rights to Rohingyas according to existing laws so that Rohingya enjoy equal access to full citizenship in Burma, and also respect the self-identification of Rohingya identity.
- 2) Allow humanitarian actors safe, sustained, and unhindered access to all displaced persons and affected areas transparently and without any interruption by local extremist groups.
- 3) Lift restrictions on freedom of movement immediately and ensure the provision of basic health care, education, the right to return to place of origin; and ensure the right to livelihood so that Rohingya no longer have to rely on donations from INGOs and other organizations.
- 4) Ensure peaceful co-existence with Rakhine stakeholders in order to live side-by-side with Rohingyas. Specifically, grant Rohingya equal rights and equal protection under the law, regardless of race or religion.
- 5) Ensure accountability for perpetrators in order to prevent the ongoing mass exodus and forced displacement as well as ongoing arbitrary arrests, extortion, and gang raping. Criminals must be brought to justice regardless of their race, religion, and rank.
- 6) Last but not Least, Rohingyas are asking to simply be a part of Burmese society like before. We want to be treated with respect, dignity, and equality—no more, no less. Rohingya do not and will not promote any hidden agendas, such as a separate Rohingya State or Sharia State. Allegations to the contrary are baseless. We have been and will remain always loyal to our country and we will protect our country's sovereignty at any costs.

Thank You.