



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing

Victims' Rights in Burma

July 25, 2018
10:00 AM – 11:30 AM
2200 Rayburn House Office Building

Opening Remarks as prepared for delivery

Good morning. I would like to join my esteemed Co-Chair in welcoming you to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission's hearing on Victims' Rights in Burma. Over the last several years, and particularly beginning in October of 2016, the world has watched in horror as the Burmese government has committed crimes of ethnic cleansing against its Rohingya population in Rakhine state.

We are now all too familiar with the images of hundreds of thousands of people fleeing from their burned-out homes as they seek to escape the mass killings and systematic rape perpetrated by the Burmese security forces, known as the Tatmadaw.

Satellite footage shows that entire Rohingya villages and communities have been erased from the face of the earth. At least 690,000 Rohingya, half of whom are children, now dwell along the border of Bangladesh, homeless and living in very difficult conditions, and unable to safely return to their communities.

The Burmese government continues to deny that they have had any role in perpetrating these terrible crimes, and yet this kind of repression is in-line with the experience of Burma's other ethnic minorities across the country. In addition to Rakhine state, there are six other ethnic states in Burma whose minority communities have also experienced targeted human rights abuses by the Tatmadaw.

I and my staff have recently met with multiple survivors and refugees from Kachin, Kayin, and Shan states who have shared personal stories about how the Tatmadaw attacked their villages, destroyed their crops, mined their roads, and killed their unarmed family members.

The Burmese government shows no discretion in perpetrating these crimes. It does not matter if you are Christian or Muslim, Karen or Kachin. If violence begins to decrease in one state, it is because the military has shifted its focus and is increasing violence in another state.

Today's hearing is important because victims of serious human rights abuses have the right to pursue justice for the crimes committed against them. Violence by the Tatmadaw will only cease when impunity is no longer tolerated and when perpetrators are held accountable for their actions. This will serve not only the best interest of the Rohingya, but also every other ethnic minority that has been violently targeted in the country.

I look forward to hearing from our esteemed witnesses about how Congress can help to make this a reality for victims of human rights abuses in Burma. Thank you.

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