



## U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Hearing

### **Ending Genocide: U.S. Government Genocide Determinations and Next Steps**

Opening Remarks as prepared for delivery

**Anurima Bhargava, USCIRF Chair**

Good morning and thank you for attending the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom's hearing today on *Ending Genocide: U.S. Government Genocide Determinations and Next Steps*. I would like to thank our distinguished experts for joining – and sharing learnings – with us.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, or USCIRF, is an independent, bipartisan U.S. government advisory body created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act, or IRFA. The Commission uses international standards to monitor the freedom of religion or belief abroad and makes policy

recommendations to the United States Government and Congress. Today, USCIRF exercises its statutory authority under IRFA to convene this virtual hearing.

Religious communities in countries around the world are targets of genocide and other mass atrocities, and have long been vulnerable to discrimination and violence from both governments and non-state actors. In 2014, in Iraq and Syria, ISIS waged a genocidal campaign of rape, torture and killings targeting Yazidis, Christians, and Shi'a Muslims. The Chinese government is committing genocide and crimes against humanity by imprisoning the predominately Muslim Uyghur people in concentration camps – considered the largest detention of an ethno-religious minority since the Holocaust - enacting measures to decrease the Uyghur population, and actively separating children from their parents. In 2017, the Burmese military perpetrated -- with what the U.N. described as genocidal intent - -mass killings, torture and rape against the mostly Muslim Rohingya in Rakhine State, forcing over 700,000 to flee to Bangladesh within days. Today, well over a million Rohingya remain displaced from their homeland in Burma or imprisoned in camps within Burma. The Burmese military seized power in a coup this February, and continue the brutal and violent assault and targeting of the Rohingya.

The 1948 Genocide Convention states that genocide occurs when specific acts are committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. The Convention confers obligations on states to prevent and punish the crime of genocide. Recognizing genocide when it occurs can be a first step to triggering these responsibilities.

Since the United States ratified the Genocide Convention in 1988, it has determined that genocides occurred in contexts including Bosnia, Rwanda, Iraq, Darfur, areas under the control of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and China. In April, President Biden took a long overdue step by also recognizing the Armenian genocide, during which countless Armenians—as well as Greeks, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syriacs, Arameans, Maronites, and other religious and ethnic minorities—were killed in the final years of the Ottoman Empire beginning in 1915.

The killings, torture and rape have not stopped: mass atrocities continue to be perpetrated against religious communities, including the Uyghurs and the Rohingya, worldwide. The U.S. government must both recognize act to prevent and stop these atrocities: to save lives and protect the dignity of communities,

families and children, to rebuild societies; and honor the faith – and the history and future - of religious communities.

I will now turn the floor over to Vice Chair Perkins to discuss previous determinations by the United States government -- to call, or not call, mass atrocities against religious communities genocide.