



U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Hearing

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

Opening Remarks as prepared for delivery

Vice Chair Perkins

Thank you very much, Chair Bhargava. I would like to join in welcoming you all to today's hearing.

Today, we will explore the U.S. government's process of making genocide determinations, along with what happens afterwards. Since the U.S. government determined in 2017 that genocide occurred in areas under ISIS control, the U.S. government has spent over \$438 million to help with reconstruction efforts in Iraq. Despite this support, a substantial portion of displaced religious and ethnic minorities who survived the genocide still do not feel safe returning to or living in their homes, particularly in Sinjar, Mosul and the Nineveh Plains.

In January 2021, then Secretary of State Michael Pompeo designated China's treatment of Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang as genocide and crimes against humanity. The Biden Administration has affirmed the Uyghur genocide determination. USCIRF has applauded the current and previous Administrations for shining an essential light on China's horrific actions against Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims. Now that the United States government has called these crimes what they are—genocide and crimes against humanity—the U.S. government and international community must urgently do more to hold China to account and to end this genocide.

It is important to note that genocide designations are just a step, and more must be done to effectively halt and prevent ongoing mass atrocities against religious groups, regardless of what those atrocities are called. We cannot just focus on the label of “genocide”, as the longer governments deliberate on the terminology, the more perpetrators are emboldened to continue their genocidal process. Alongside these deliberations, governments must vigilantly look for early warning signs and stand up to prevent mass atrocities wherever they could occur. For this reason, we will also consider today broader strategies for the U.S. government to effectively

prevent and stop mass atrocities against religious groups, even in the absence of a genocide determination.

This holds particularly true in the context of the Rohingya crisis, where the U.S. government has yet to determine whether the crimes committed by the Burmese military against the Rohingya meet the legal definitions of genocide or crimes against humanity under international law, despite an intensive investigation into the crimes that occurred.

USCIRF has consistently recommended that the U.S. government refocus efforts to definitively and publicly conclude whether the ongoing and severe atrocities committed by the Burmese military meet the legal definition of crimes against humanity and/or genocide. The situation is dire, as the United Nations special envoy for Myanmar recently warned that “a blood bath is imminent.” Urgent action is needed to deter future atrocities, including a determination on whether the Burmese military’s previous crimes meet the standard of genocide or crimes against humanity.

I will now give the floor back to Chair Bhargava to introduce our witnesses.