

Testimony before the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom
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Thank you for the opportunity to testify before your commission today.

My community, the Rohingya, has been one of the most persecuted communities on earth for so long. Our people have been facing the unspeakable crime of slow-burning genocide for generations to the point that our younger generation has never had a chance to experience what human dignity looks like or what it means to live with human rights.

They have stripped off our human dignity by erasing our ethnic identity, and denied our birth citizenship and subjected us to inhuman policies of deliberate deprivation of our basic human rights along with subjecting us to arbitrary detentions, torture, extrajudicial killings, rape as a culture, forced labour, to extortions, restricting our movement, limiting our ability to marry and give birth, restricting access to education, health care and nutrition and many other forms of inhumane treatment including SWE TIN SIT for three decades now. They made it sure that all the policy and practices were put in place so that we no longer survive or exist in our land.

Due to this life long dehumanisation, discrimination, disenfranchisement, it is heartbreaking to see how our people are forced to internalize persecution and inferiority for survival. The creation of "us and them" rhetoric, denial of our ethnic identity as Rohingya, our belonging to the land as native people, propaganda against us that we are a threat to national security has also allowed the military and governments to take advantage of their political interest. All of these reminded us of the experience of the Jews in Nazi, Germany.

The worse came in 2017 when they targeted our people with a well-organized clearance operation. Since the violence began in 2012, and before the 2017 clearance operation, the military trained paramilitary, deployed more soldiers, limited humanitarian access, expelled INGOs to prevent any third-party witnesses, removed fences from Rohingya houses, seized even kitchen knives from Rohingya families, in parallel with a massive social media propaganda hate campaign.

The systemic, deliberate killing of women, men, children and infants, mass rape and mutilations, torching of nearly 400 villages have led to the forcible deportation of two-third of our population from our land during the clearance operation. Within two months, more than 800,000 people had to flee barefoot crossing jungles and rivers for days to refuge in Bangladesh. Every one of us suffered so deeply at many levels and carries deep trauma as a group.

Instead of helping us bring justice for these survivors, the world has watched us die in the Andaman sea as we try to escape from persecution or let us suffer in destitute camps in Bangladesh or at subhuman standards in India, Malaysia and so on while the remaining

Rohingya in Rakhine State are living in apartheid-like conditions in the IDPs camps or in the villages.

Our experience is a classic example of genocide, but our suffering is longer than any other genocide. Yet, the world fails to fulfil its promise of never again, to recognize the crime as it is, **genocide**, and to hold perpetrators accountable for these heinous crimes.

The survivors and victims are utterly ignored. During the so-called democratic transition in Myanmar, Rohingya's lives were compromised for the so-called greater good, democracy. But we all knew that this democracy was designed by the military under the 2008 constitution and was only meant to serve them.

The military's decades-long impunity for their past crimes against Rohingya and other ethnic communities encouraged them to stage a coup on February 1st. We now continue to witness a similar attitude of the military, committing mass murder, systematic and widespread killing and detention of innocents, torture and inflicting suffering on millions of people. Within the past 100 days of the Military coup, the junta has killed at least 783 people, mostly youth and children, arrested over 4000 people, and continues to hunt young people and political activists in Myanmar.

Before, it was just Rohingya and other minorities. Now, no one is safe in Myanmar anymore. How many lives do we have to sacrifice before the United States takes actions against the military to hold the perpetrators accountable? How much more evidence do you need to recognize the crime against Rohingya as it is; genocide?

A genocide determination is the single most crucial step to end the suffering of our people, to feel supported, to heal our pain and restore our human dignity. It will help boost our accountability efforts and draw attention to the seriousness of the crimes. It also fulfills a critical part of justice- to name what is happening. It is not enough to say "atrocities", "human rights violations", even "crimes against humanity". What is happening and what has happened to the Rohingya must be named for what it is- genocide.

A genocide determination will also help governments to avoid hostile rhetoric and policies for the country which are hosting Rohingya. Most importantly, it will prevent further atrocities against Rohingya and all people in Myanmar.

If no action is taken against this very military junta, which committed the genocide, Rohingya are now at extreme risk of a recurrence of crimes. The country is on the brink of a failed state with ongoing violence against civilians, and at risk of starvation of over 20 million people.

I, therefore, urge the US government to take a further step, recognize the human suffering, call the crime as it is, Genocide to end the agony of Rohingya and many communities in Myanmar.