

August 25, 2021

Secretary Antony Blinken
United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20011

Dear Secretary Blinken:

August 25, 2021 marks four years since the Burmese military's genocidal attacks on the Rohingya people. That same military carried out a violent coup nearly seven months ago, undoubtedly emboldened by the lack of consequences they faced for their crimes against the Rohingya. This date is a moment to step up international support for the Rohingya and all the Burmese people suffering under the military junta, as well as to signal that mass atrocities will not go unpunished. We urge the administration to call the attacks on the Rohingya what they clearly are: crimes against humanity and genocide.

The evidence of genocide against the Rohingya is overwhelming as documented by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Refugees International, and the Public International Law and Policy Group, which the State Department relied on in its own report on the matter. Starting on August 25, 2017, the Burmese military carried out a brutal campaign marked by targeted killings, mass rape, and destruction of hundreds of villages. A majority of the Rohingya population was forced to flee to Bangladesh, where some one million remain today in increasingly dire conditions in the world's largest refugee settlement.

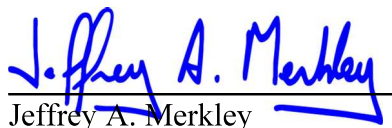
A genocide determination is important not only for the Rohingya, but also for sending a clear message to the military junta and other would-be genocidaires around the world that perpetrators of such crimes will be held accountable. The February 1st coup makes this determination all the more urgent. Since overthrowing the civilian government, the Burmese military has extended its brutality to all segments of the civilian population. Nearly 1,000 innocent civilians have been killed since the February 1st coup, including nearly 100 children, and thousands more imprisoned. The military has bombed and raided villages, displacing tens of thousands, as well as blocked aid amid a growing humanitarian crisis. Its actions have also contributed to the rampant spread of COVID-19 across the country.

We welcome the Biden administration's strong response to the coup, including levying targeted sanctions on the military leadership and military-owned enterprises and stepping up aid efforts. But more can and must be done. The administration should push global allies to step up and coordinate sanctions and further diplomatic pressure on the Burmese military. China and Russia must be pressed to stop preventing action or even discussions of the crisis in the UN Security Council. While the United States should continue to work closely with allies in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the people of Burma cannot afford continued deference to the group's stalled and ineffective approach. We must also lead our allies and partners in condemning the attacks on a free press, including the detention of foreign journalists like Danny

Fenster. The United States should continue to lead the world in providing humanitarian aid to the Burmese people while ensuring that aid actually reaches the people who need it most. Underpinning all of these efforts should be the laser-sharp focus on accountability, both for the unequivocal case of the Rohingya and for the continuing abuses against other ethnic groups in Burma, which may very well amount to crimes against humanity.

The time to recognize the crime of genocide against the Rohingya is long overdue. Failure to do so will only further embolden the perpetrators of ongoing abuses against the Burmese people. It will also undermine the administration's principled recognition of genocide in other parts of the world if such determinations are not applied consistently. As we tragically commemorate the fourth year since the attacks on the Rohingya, the United States must take this important step towards truth-telling, accountability, and solidarity. Such a move will reinforce the Biden administration's laudable efforts to make human rights and democracy a key pillar of its foreign policy.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



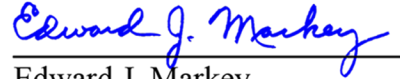
Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



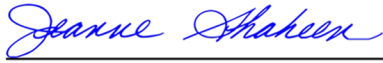
Thom Tillis
United States Senator



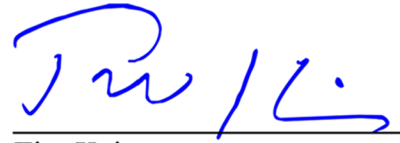
Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



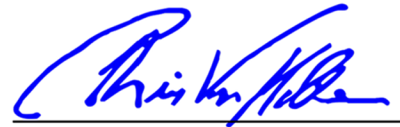
Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Todd Young
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



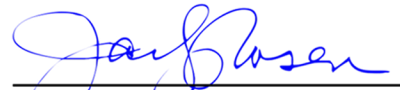
Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



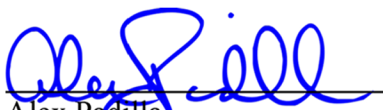
Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



Marco Rubio
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
United States Senator