

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 25, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo,

On the third anniversary of the brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing conducted by the Burmese military against the Rohingya, we urge the administration to take additional action to support the Rohingya community, to hold accountable those responsible for the atrocities, and to refer to these crimes by their proper term: genocide.


As you know, since August 25, 2017, close to 800,000 Rohingya have fled violence in Burma by escaping into neighboring Bangladesh. Most of them are living in refugee camps in horrific conditions, joining hundreds of thousands of other Rohingya forced to flee from Burma due to decades of government-sanctioned violence. Throughout this time, the systemic campaign of violence against the Rohingya has been well-documented by the State Department and many others. The Burmese military has murdered thousands of Rohingya, committed widespread rape and sexual violence, destroyed hundreds of villages, thrown children and babies into fires, and used mass graves to attempt to conceal their reprehensible crimes.

We believe strongly in a democratic, inclusive, and prosperous Burma. We are proud that the United States has been the largest contributor to the humanitarian response to this crisis, a reflection of the generosity of the American people and our historic leadership in defending human rights. However, the situation remains grave as abuses continue, Bangladesh tires of the strain on its own resources, and COVID-19 fuels new suffering within the displaced communities. Three years of this horror is three years too many.

We urge you and President Trump to speak out forcefully and publicly about these atrocities, acknowledging the gravity of the crimes with a determination of crimes against humanity and genocide. A genocide determination would properly recognize the scale and severity of atrocities committed against the Rohingya, open the door to additional actions to hold Burmese leadership responsible for their inexcusable behavior, help to prevent further atrocities in an environment of ongoing high risk, and galvanize international aid and attention at a time of donor fatigue. This determination would demonstrate U.S. leadership and moral authority in a region where China's reach continues to expand.

The atrocities in Burma constitute genocide by any reasonable definition of the word, including the United Nations [1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide](#) and U.S. law, which defines genocide in [18 U.S.C. 1091](#) as “violent attacks with the specific intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group.” This view is widely shared in the international community, as well as by important voices like the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Refugees International, and the Public International Law and Policy Group, which the State Department relied on in documenting the horrors committed against the Rohingya. The Rohingya people continue to face real and imminent risk and the United States should act today to demonstrate global leadership and stand boldly against these genocidal tactics that have no place in civilized society.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Marco Rubio
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Todd Young
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

Ron Wyden

Ron Wyden
United States Senator