

Opening Statement  
The Honorable Ami Bera  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and Nonproliferation  
House Foreign Affairs

An Update on the Rohingya Crisis  
Monday, August 3, 2020  
2:00 pm EDT, virtually

I want to thank Ranking Member Yoho, the members of this subcommittee, our witnesses, and members of the public for joining us at today's hearing. While COVID-19 has had many negative consequences, one positive benefit is we are now able to hold virtual hearings which allow us to address important and timely issues wherever we may be.

Later this month will mark three years since the Tatmadaw, the Burmese military, began what they called "clearance operations" against the Rohingya in Rakhine State. In reality, we witnessed ethnic cleansing and what may be considered genocide. According to the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, what took place was actually the "killing [of] thousands of Rohingya civilians, as well as forced disappearances, mass gang rape and the burning of hundreds of villages."

I decided to hold this hearing now, even as our nation is grappling with a pandemic and a massive economic recession, because the challenges confronting the rest of the world haven't stopped because of covid. There is more to be done. While the actions against the Rohingya are egregious and repulsive, they are not without precedent. We would like to say that these are inhuman acts, but these types of actions have shown themselves to be depressingly regular and familiar in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. They should not be. It is the role of this subcommittee to provide oversight of the region, and we need to get back to our regular duties when we are not engaged in covid responsiveness.

It is clear that three years later, Burma is still not respecting the basic human rights of the Rohingya. And three years later, the victims, Burma, Bangladesh, and the international community are still dealing with the ramifications of those actions. That is what this hearing will examine. What is the status of those who fled to Bangladesh and were placed in Cox's Bazar? How is COVID-19 shaping the situation on the ground? How have Burma's neighbors welcomed - or not welcomed - Rohingya refugees?

This hearing will also examine the role of the United States and the international community. What additional steps should the United States government or the international community take to help the Rohingya people and assist Bangladesh in caring for them? How should we ensure justice and accountability for the victims of this brutal campaign against the Rohingya perpetrated by the Burmese military?

Finally, this hearing will examine prospects for peace and the return of the Rohingya to Rakhine State.

I return to why we are holding this hearing. We are holding it because three years ago, the Burmese military enacted a campaign against the Rohingya people that left an entire people orphaned and stateless. We are holding this hearing because these actions cannot be forgotten or ignored. We are holding this hearing because there is more the world can yet do for the Rohingya, to right wrongs and set them upon a more just future. We are holding this hearing because we must.

America must continue to display international leadership, which includes a commitment to our values. Our historically strong global role brings foreign students to America to study and immigrants here to work, which help drive our economy. It enables alliances that protect our interests, persuades countries to cooperate with us even when it is against *their* interests, forms the basis for international rules and systems that help guarantee U.S. investment overseas. There is not a choice between our values and our interests. Our values *are* our interests. It is the key that unlocks American success at home *and* abroad.

If we are to have that moral leadership, we must care - and we must care everywhere. That does not mean we shouldn't be supportive about American investment - we must do so carefully. It does not mean we need to contribute assistance to every troubled corner of the globe - we must do so strategically. It doesn't mean that we shouldn't expect other countries to do their part - our partners and allies surely have roles to play.

But we must at least care and stand up for those whose voices are weaker than ours.

We should care and bear witness, regardless of where actions which violate human rights occur. It may mean calling out our adversaries like Russia's actions against their own LGBT community. But it may even mean criticizing our friends, like India. It means we need to uphold our values here at home, so that we don't criticize the actions of China against peaceful protesters in Hong Kong, and then arrest them and surveil them in Portland.

Moral leadership is the best ingredient America has to offer to the world. It differentiates us from the Chinese Communist Party, and as we seek to compete with China's dollars and investment, it will be what we offer to the world that the Chinese cannot: respect for values and rule of law. We must do so consistently and predictably, not based on who our friends or investment partners are, rather whether countries are respecting basic human rights and internationally agreed upon rules and standards. We will not be able to expect other countries to confront the Chinese for their actions in Xinjiang, Tibet, and their own interior, if we ourselves are not setting the example.

We have four outstanding expert witnesses who will be able to address all these questions and more. I look forward to their testimony. With that, I turn to my good friend, the Ranking Member, Mr. Yoho.