

JOINT OPEN LETTER TO U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE ANTONY BLINKEN

90+ ORGANIZATIONS URGE A ROHINGYA CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY AND GENOCIDE DETERMINATION

August 10, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken

U.S. Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

We, the undersigned organizations, write to urge you to publicly determine that the state of Myanmar has committed genocide and crimes against humanity against the Rohingya people. We welcomed your launch of a process earlier this year to make such an official determination. Now, several months later, as the fourth anniversary of the brutal campaign against the Rohingya approaches - and with the ongoing risk of further atrocities - we urge you to publicly announce your determination and to refer to the crimes by their proper name: crimes against humanity and genocide.

The February 1st coup by the same military that perpetrated abuses against the Rohingya, and the ongoing abuses by the Myanmar military against the Rohingya, other ethnic groups, and the Burmese population in general, only underscore the importance of recognizing the military's past crimes against the Rohingya for what they are. We have welcomed your attention to the coup and the sanctions measures you have imposed on those responsible. While the coup does not impact the factual and legal basis for a possible genocide determination, it does underscore the importance of the United States speaking forthrightly about gross abuses of human rights when they occur. Such action is critical in sending signals to governments and the Myanmar military, that abusers will be held accountable. Such signals also play a critical role in deterring further abuses.

In the case of the Rohingya, the evidence of genocide and crimes against humanity is clear and convincing and has been amply documented. As prominent legal and human rights experts, including former high-level State Department and White House officials (two of whom are now serving in senior positions in the Biden administration), concluded in a letter in August 2020 [attached]:

"[We] believe the information and assessments produced so far compels the United States, in its capacity as a government and not as a court, to publicly express its view that genocide has been committed and may be continuing against the Rohingya of Myanmar."

The military coup places an increased urgency on this request as the last trappings of democratic restraints on the military are pulled away. The military's actions are already greatly exacerbating the COVID pandemic and a growing humanitarian crisis. A U.S. government determination of genocide and crimes against humanity would subject Myanmar and its military to much needed international scrutiny at a time of increased risk of atrocities against the Rohingya and other ethnic minority groups including the Chin, Karen, Kachin, Rakhine, and Shan, as well as against the population of Myanmar as a whole, who have been targeted for opposing the coup. Such a determination would also be useful in exposing atrocities and preserving the truth ahead of any future transitional justice actions. A Rohingya genocide determination would in no way preclude further atrocity determinations regarding abuses committed by the military against other ethnic groups or others. Rather, it would demonstrate a commitment to evidence-based accountability as the struggle for a truly inclusive and representative democratic Myanmar continues.

A determination would also help to ensure continued international attention on the plight of the Rohingya, while enabling the United States to mobilize additional diplomatic and economic pressure on Myanmar to shift its behavior. This attention could offer a measure of protection for the Rohingya and others in Myanmar. It would also represent an expression of solidarity with the governments of Bangladesh and other refugee hosting countries, signaling the United States is committed both to accountability and supporting conditions for safe and voluntary return when conditions so permit.

Such a determination would be wholly consistent with [findings](#) of the Department of State, which concluded that the attacks on the Rohingya were "well-planned and coordinated" and that they were "extreme, large-scale, widespread, and seemingly geared toward both terrorizing the population and driving out the Rohingya residents." The law group engaged by the State Department to investigate atrocities against the Rohingya conducted its own legal analysis and found reasonable grounds to believe that genocide was committed. Several other independent groups have reached similar conclusions including [Refugees International](#), the [International State Crime Initiative](#), the [U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum](#), and [Fortify Rights in collaboration with Covington & Burling LLP](#). The U.S. House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly to recognize that "atrocities committed against the Rohingya by the Burmese military and security forces since August 2017 constitute crimes against humanity and genocide." A UN Independent Fact-Finding Mission similarly found "a pattern of conduct that infers genocidal intent on the part of the State to destroy the Rohingya, in whole or in part, as a group." The Fact-Finding Mission has further warned, "The State of Myanmar continues to harbour genocidal intent and the Rohingya remain under serious risk of genocide."

Now is the time to use the words that fit the crimes. U.S. leadership matters. We call upon you to demonstrate the moral leadership and courage necessary to push global action in the face of genocide.

Again, we welcome your review and urge you to finalize it quickly. Should you have any questions, please feel free to be in touch with Daniel Sullivan (daniel@refugeesinternational.org).

Sincerely,

1. 21Wilberforce
2. Action Corps
3. ALTSEAN-Burma
4. American Baptist Churches USA
5. Americans for Rohingya
6. Arakan Institute for Peace and Human Rights
7. Arakan Rohingya National Organisation
8. Arakan Rohingya Society for Peace and Human Rights
9. Arakan Rohingya Union
10. Baptist World Alliance
11. Bethany Christian Service
12. British Rohingya Community in UK
13. Burma Campaign UK
14. Burma Human Rights Network
15. Burma Rohingya Organization UK
16. Burma Task Force
17. Burmese Rohingya Association in Japan
18. Burmese Rohingya Community in Denmark
19. Campaign for a New Myanmar
20. Canadian Burmese Rohingya Organization
21. Canadian Rohingya Development Initiative
22. Cantors' Assembly
23. Christian Solidarity Worldwide
24. Coalition for Genocide Response
25. Crane Center for Mass Atrocity Prevention
26. Dallas Karen Baptist Church
27. Darfur and Beyond
28. Darfur Women Action Group
29. DFW Karen Baptist Church
30. European Rohingya Council
31. Fortify Rights
32. Genocide Watch
33. Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
34. Global Movement for Myanmar Democracy (GM4MD)
35. Global Witness
36. HIAS
37. Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART)
38. Human Rights Development for Myanmar
39. Indianapolis Jewish Community Relations Council
40. Institute for Asian Democracy
 41. Institute for Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention (I-GMAP) at Binghamton University
42. International Campaign for the Rohingya

43. International Interfaith Peace Corps
44. International State Crime Initiative (ISCI), Queen Mary University of London
45. Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights
46. Jewish Rohingya Justice Network
47. Jewish World Watch
48. Justice for All
49. Justice4Rohingya UK
50. Kachin Alliance
51. Karen American Association of Wisconsin
52. Karen Association of Huron, South Dakota
53. Karen Organization of America
54. Karenni-American Association
55. Karen Community of Iowa
56. Karen Community of Kansas City (KS & MO)
57. Karen Community of Minnesota
58. Karen Organization of Minnesota
59. L'chaim! Jews Against the Death Penalty
60. Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
61. Never Again Coalition
62. No Business With Genocide
63. Partners Relief and Development
64. Progressive Voice
65. Pusat KOMAS, Malaysia
66. Queensland Rohingya Community Inc
67. Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association
68. Refugee Congress
69. Refugees International
70. Rhode Island Board of Rabbis
71. Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights
72. Rock Island Karen Community
73. Rohingya Action Ireland
74. Rohingya American Society
75. Rohingya Human Rights Monitoring Network
76. Rohingya Initiative Canada
77. Rohingya Post
78. Rohingya Refugee Network
79. Rohingya Society in Malaysia
80. Rohingya Student Union
81. Rohingya Women's Empowerment and Advocacy Network
82. Rohingya Youth for Legal Action
83. RohingyaKhorbor
84. Society for Humanistic Judaism
85. STAND: The student-led movement to end mass atrocities
86. The Burmese Rohingya Association of North America
87. The Sound of Hope
88. Union for Reform Judaism
89. Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
90. United States Campaign for Burma

91. Voice of Rohingya
92. Win Without War
93. WITNESS
94. Women Peace Network
95. World Rohingya Organization