



December 3, 2013

The Honorable Edward Royce
Chairman
U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Eliot Engel
Ranking Member
U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee
B-360 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Request for the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee to Support the Adoption of House Resolution 418, a Resolution on Burma

Dear Chairman Royce and Ranking Member Engel:

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the nation's largest Muslim civil liberties and advocacy organization, respectfully recommends that the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee support the adoption of House Resolution 418, sponsored by Congressman James McGovern. Referred to the committee on November 18, the resolution urges the government of Burma (Republic of the Union of Myanmar) to end the persecution of its Rohingya minority and respect internationally recognized human rights for all ethnic and religious groups within Burma.

For the past year, the Burmese government has either allowed or directly supported attempted ethnic cleansing by Burmese national extremists of the minority Rohingya Muslim community. This campaign of violence has taken the lives of more than 1,000 Rohingya and other Muslims and left more than 140,000 displaced, living in makeshift camps both in Burma and in neighboring states. Due to government restrictions on the movements of the Rohingya, individuals residing in Burmese camps have been prevented by local police and military from traveling for outside medical treatment or food.

Representing four percent of the population of Burma, the Rohingya are classified as non-citizens by the Burmese government.¹ Since 1994, in the western state of Rakhine, the Rohingya have been prevented from marrying by local administrations that refuse marriage licenses and penalize unauthorized cohabitation and reproduction. It has been reported that the state of Rakhine has imposed a two-child limit on Rohingya Muslim families, a policy that does not apply to Buddhists in the same region. According to an *Associated Press* (AP) May 2013 investigative report titled "Two-child limit imposed on some Muslims in western Burma":

"Rakhine state spokesman Win Myaing said the new program was meant to stem rapid population growth in the Muslim community, which a government-appointed commission identified as one of the causes of the sectarian violence. Although Muslims

¹ While a number of Rohingya Muslims trace their ancestry in Burma for centuries, in the early 1800s under British colonial rule some of Burma's Rohingya population relocated to the region from what is now Bangladesh. When the 1962 Burmese military junta came to power, under General Ne Win a policy of "Burmanization" came into effect which culminated in the 1982 Burma Citizenship Law. The law not only denies citizenship rights for the Rohingya, it denies the right to own land or travel outside their villages without government permission, regardless of the length of time individuals and families have been resident in the country.

are the majority in the two townships in which the new policy applies, they account for only about 4 percent of Burma's roughly 60 million people."

Restrictions on marriage, cohabitation, reproduction and forced two-child limits on the Rohingya in the Burmese state of Rakhine meet the legal definition of genocide as outlined by Article 2, parts (b), (c), (d), of the United Nations 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide:

Article 2: In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Both the United States and Burma are parties to the 1948 convention on genocide. Ignoring the ongoing campaign of genocide further endangers its victims and emboldens its perpetrators to commit greater acts of violence.

During Burmese President Thein Sein's May 2013 visit to the White House, President Obama urged him to address "communal violence that has been directed at Muslim communities inside Myanmar [Burma]" and said that the "displacement of people, the violence directed towards them needs to stop."

While similar requests have also been made by the Dalai Lama and Pope Francis, President Sein refuses to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Rohingya or to allow them their rights. While Burma opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi is not in a strong position to advocate for Burma's minorities, she has suggested that more international pressure is required.

CAIR welcomes recent signs of political and economic liberalization in Burma, but notes that in the past two years alone over two million acres have been confiscated from Muslim minority villages by corrupt state officials and their patrons. Foreign nations and investors may be unaware that they are possibly supporting economic development projects on stolen land and properties.

CAIR supports the president's call for an end to violence in Burma and urges the U.S. Congress to take the necessary steps in order to secure the safety of the Rohingya minority in Burma. Moreover, CAIR asks Congress to formally recognize the campaign of ethnic cleansing that is being waged against the Rohingya community.

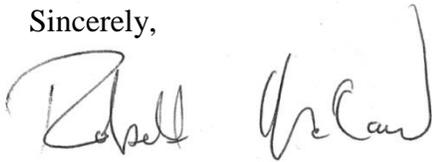
Separate from the resolution, CAIR encourages the House Foreign Affairs Committee to consider tying U.S. funds that go to support political and economic development projects in Burma to the government of Burma fully investigating civilian, religious, and state leaders connected to sectarian violence and prosecuting them to the fullest extent of the law.

For these reasons CAIR respectfully recommends that the House Foreign Affairs Committee support the adoption of House Resolution 418. The United States should urge the government of Burma to take actions to ensure the safety, security, and equal citizenship rights of the Rohingya and all other minorities. This includes the nation of Burma repealing restrictions on marriage, two-child limits on Rohingya families, stopping mass arrests of Rohingya, and providing care for displaced persons.

We hope to distribute your response to our constituencies in order to address concerns about the ongoing genocide in Burma.

CAIR is a member of The Burma Task Force USA. CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil liberties and advocacy organization. Its mission is to enhance the understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties, empower American Muslims, and build coalitions that promote justice and mutual understanding.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert McCaw". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Robert McCaw
CAIR Government Affairs Manager

CC: Members of the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee
Congressman James McGovern