

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

May 20, 2015

The Honorable John Kerry  
Secretary, U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry,

Like many around the world, we are horrified by the humanitarian crisis affecting the Rohingya Muslims in Southeast Asia, where thousands of men, women, and children have been put at grave risk as they flee systematic repression in Burma. We appreciate the State Department's recent efforts in what we know is a tense and multi-faceted situation, but believe more must be done.

In light of the recent announcement by the Foreign Ministers of Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand, we urge the United States government to proactively participate in ensuring that those thousands in imminent danger at sea and on land are brought to safety, including through search and rescue missions, and provided medical and other care without delay. In addition, we urge the State Department to work with ASEAN and ASEAN member states to address this crisis in a comprehensive manner, including a key root cause of people fleeing Burma: persecution enabled and incited by government officials.

The recent crisis at sea is the latest in a series of humanitarian crises originating in Burma. In addition to tens of thousands who have already fled, thousands more are currently in overcrowded, mostly unseaworthy boats. Until recently, many were not permitted safe haven or permission to land but were pushed back out to sea by Thai, Indonesian, and other militaries. Even now, the safe haven offered is only as a temporary measure.

Human trafficking in the Andaman Sea is a pressing regional challenge. The Thai Government's crackdown on human trafficking and human smuggling within its borders following the discovery of mass graves believed to hold the bodies of dozens of trafficked Rohingya is an important but incomplete step toward ending this pernicious trade. We urge the U.S. government to make every effort to prevent the Andaman Sea from becoming a graveyard for thousands more if further steps are not taken to address this crisis.

The Rohingya exodus from Burma is the result of years of targeted oppression and officially-sanctioned government discrimination based on their identity. President Thein Sein's administration has authored and pursued hate-filled legislation against minorities, especially the Rohingya, which would further institutionalize discrimination and marginalization of these communities. Most recently, his government revoked identification cards known as "white cards," effectively disenfranchising a large segment of the Rohingya population from voting.

With or without white cards, the Rohingya are barred from legal citizenship as a result of the Burma's discriminatory citizenship law.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum recently sent a delegation to Burma, and issued a report that should be a wake-up call that early warning signs of a Rohingya genocide are in place. It is important to note that these preconditions were in place before the current crisis, and the U.S. should play a leadership role in avoiding this potential tragedy.


We believe it is time for a decisive and public response from the United States and like-minded countries. Specifically, we strongly urge the U.S. to provide search and rescue support and humanitarian assistance in coordination with regional partners to ensure the safety of the thousands in danger at sea. The U.S. should also work to ensure that regional governments follow through on their commitment to provide safe harbor. We understand that some ASEAN members are meeting in Thailand on May 29, 2015 to discuss a solution to this issue. We ask that the U.S. Ambassadors to Burma, Thailand, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia lay out the U.S. concerns and request cooperation from the respective governments to address the underlying challenges causing this crisis. We also believe that targeted sanctions against those who incite violence against the Rohingya should be considered if the situation continues to deteriorate.

Further, on the eve of the release of the U.S. State Department's annual Trafficking in Persons report, the government of Burma should be reminded that continuing discriminatory policies aimed at the Rohingya, which are feeding a severe refugee and trafficking crisis across the region, will factor into the designation they receive. Implications of these designations may result in sanctions, suspension of non-humanitarian assistance, and blocking of Burmese officials' participation in key programs.

Courageous regional voices are already standing up for human rights. ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights has recently called on regional leaders to take a strong stand against Burmese government policies targeting the Rohingya, stating, "Without addressing its root causes, which stem from the humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in Rakhine State, the region cannot deal with the refugee crisis in a sustainable way." It is time for the United States to speak out further in support of these efforts, including expressing support for elected officials, civil society organizations and Rohingya leaders in Burma who oppose these discriminatory laws.


For too long, the international community has accepted limited, easily-reversed progress on human rights in Burma while the underlying persecution of the Rohingya continues. Action must be taken to address the immediate crisis, and comprehensive action needs to be taken to address the policies in Burma that are at the root of this crisis.

Sincerely,



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Joseph Crowley  
Member of Congress




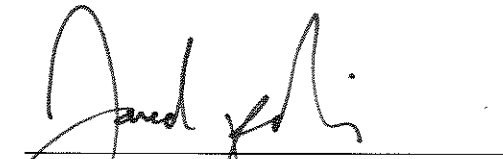
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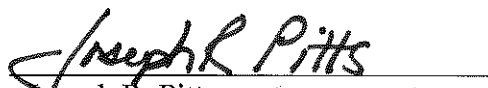
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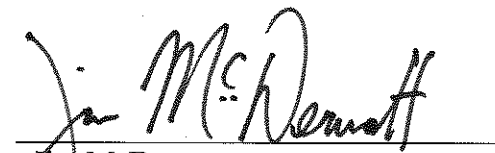
  
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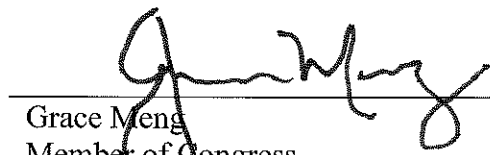
  
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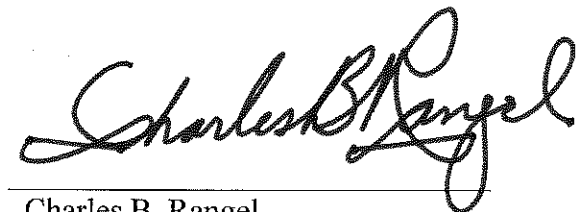
  
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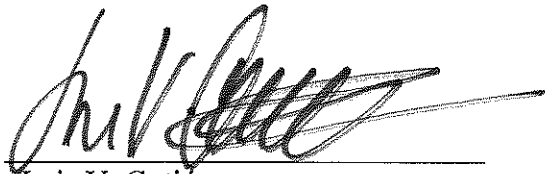
  
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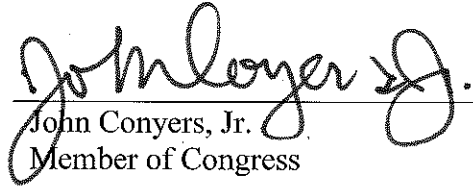
  
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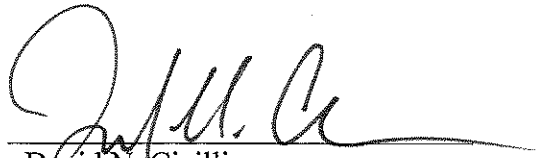
  
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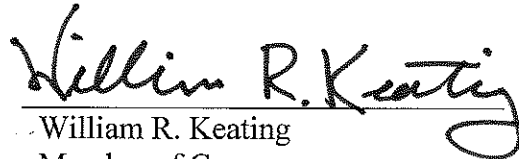
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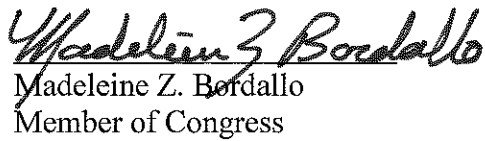
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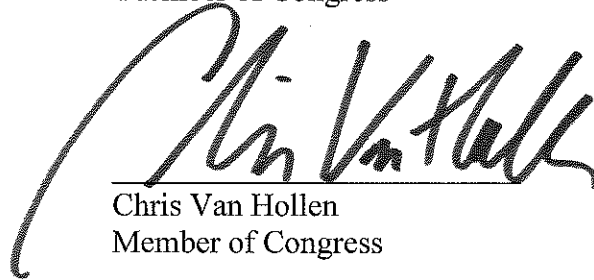
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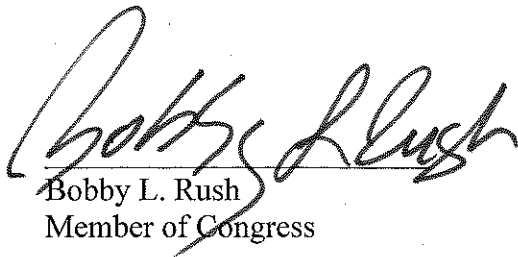
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