

Testimony from the International Campaign for the Rohingya in Support of HB 533-Prevention of Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity and the Commission on Genocide Prevention-Maryland End Genocide Bill

Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk, members of the Committee:

Thank you for hearing our testimony. My name is Michael DeLong and I am here on behalf of the International Campaign for the Rohingya, a nonprofit that works to advocate for the Rohingya people and amplify their voices with international organizations, governments, corporations, and civil society. We strongly support HB 533, as known as the Maryland End Genocide Bill, which will ensure that Maryland spends and invests its taxpayers' money in a manner that reflects good moral values, and will aid the Rohingya and other victims of genocide.

The Maryland End Genocide Bill directs the state government to enter into contracts with only those corporations that have adopted a formal policy of refusing to do business with governments that engage in genocide or crimes against humanity. It requires the Maryland State Treasurer to ensure that any shares held by the State are voted in favor of shareholder resolutions that say companies should not do business with governments committing these crimes. The bill will have Maryland act as a market participant, and just like any other consumer or investor, the state will be free to apply ethical standards in its procurement and investing.

HB 533 will also create the Maryland Commission on Genocide Prevention to research which governments are at risk for or have committed genocide or crimes against humanity, to identify corporations that do business with those governments, and to hold hearings on the implementation of this bill.

The Rohingya are an ethnic Muslim minority group living in Myanmar and are one of the most persecuted ethnic groups in the world. For decades the Burmese military, which runs the country, has oppressed them. They are denied the right to move freely, to attend higher education, are subjected to routine forced labor, have lost much of their land, and are routinely harassed and attacked by the police. The government has regularly whipped up hatred and organized pogroms against them. In late 2017, the Burmese military organized a massive genocidal campaign against their villages-people were massacred, women sexually assaulted, and entire communities burned down or forced from their homes.

The atrocities caused over a million Rohingya to flee to other countries, creating one of the world's largest refugee camps. The Rohingya who remain are still marginalized and face violence. The Burmese military, which effectively is the government, has substantial investments outside the country and reaps profits from corporations doing business within the country. Financial pressure is therefore one of the few ways the outside world can exert influence to change their behavior and protect the Rohingya from further harm.

By passing this bill, the Maryland Legislature can help the Rohingya and join citizens of Maryland and around the world who are using ethical purchasing practices to influence corporations to help end genocide. And the Maryland Commission on Genocide Prevention can also highlight and develop further ways in which the state can help end genocide. The Maryland End Genocide Bill enables the state government to use its investment and procurement powers to act in solidarity with people at risk of genocide or other grave human rights abuses.

The bill places no burdens on small and local businesses, since the restrictions only apply to companies with over \$100 million in annual revenues. It also doesn't involve Maryland in any interactions with a foreign government, because it just requires the state government to change its own internal procurement and investment policies and practices.

I first became involved in helping the Rohingya and working to protect their human rights years ago. Two Rohingya refugees came to Oregon Senator Jeff Merkley's office, where I was interning at the time, and gave a powerful presentation about the oppression their people were experiencing.

HB 533 will take action to promote human rights and help the Rohingya. I urge you to pass this bill and not to remain apathetic in face of such oppression. All that is required for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing. Martin Luther King Jr. said that "it may well be that we will have to repent in this generation. Not merely for the vitriolic words and the violent actions of the bad people, but for the appalling silence and indifference of the good people." In this hour, we should not be silent and indifferent.

Thank you very much, and please contact us at [michaeldelong94@gmail.com](mailto:michaeldelong94@gmail.com) or 925-708-1135 if you have any questions.