

LETTER IN SUPPORT OF THE ROHINGYA PEOPLE

BY E-MAIL

February 8 2021

The Hon. Marc Garneau
Minister of Foreign Affairs
125 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
K1A 0G2

Dear Minister Garneau,

We, the undersigned Senators, elected officials at the provincial and municipal levels and civil society leaders, write today to urge Canada to rapidly renew its crucial humanitarian support of the over one million Rohingya refugees who have fled to Bangladesh. We note that the aid approved in the spring of 2018 expires soon.

The situation has grown more urgent in the last days. The coup in Myanmar is a major setback on the road toward democracy in that country, threatening the Rohingya still within the country's borders and making the possibility of a political settlement allowing the voluntary return, in safety and dignity, of the nearly 1.2 million Rohingya now in Bangladesh close to impossible.

Canada's financial aid provides vital support and services to the refugees. Our commitment expires in only a few months and no announcement has been made toward its renewal.

Moreover, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees indicates that there is a looming financial crunch that will oblige the cancellation of many of the most basic services to the refugees in the months to come. Bangladesh, the host country, does not have the financial capacity to make up the shortfall.

The coup has made it even more vital for the international community to provide stable and predictable funding for the Rohingya refugees. We urge Canada to set an example and by its leadership convince the international community that the Rohingya people cannot be abandoned. Clearly no political settlement is imminent that would permit the safe repatriation of the Rohingya to their homes in Myanmar meaning that addressing the need for urgent financial aid must be an immediate political priority.

We thus request that the Government of Canada quickly announce a renewal of its annual support as was enumerated in Canada's Strategy to Respond to the Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar and Bangladesh that was made public in May 2018. That response dedicates \$300 million of international assistance over three years.

We also urge that Canada be part of the solution in addressing the need to provide education to Rohingya children. In particular, NGOs working to aid the Rohingya urge that a portion of future Canadian aid explicitly target the education of girls.

In September 2018 both the House of Commons and the Senate unanimously passed MP Andrew Leslie's Motion recognizing the Rohingya situation as genocide.

A request was made to your predecessor Chrystia Freeland in a letter from the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Prevention of Genocide and other Crimes Against Humanity dated May 29, 2019, which called for Canada to initiate legal proceedings before the International Court of Justice in regard to Myanmar's breach of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide.

Recently, Canada and the Netherlands issued a statement in support for Gambia's case against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice. We support the stated intention to intervene. That however has not yet led to any action. We urge Canada intervene under article 62 of the Courts Statute and not under article 63, since the former permits a full-fledged participation versus the latter.

In the interim, we also request that Canada admit Rohingya refugees in the way it did Syrian refugees in 2015 and 2016.

A delegation from our informal coalition is willing to meet you to further discuss these requests. We do not wish the Rohingya to be forgotten. Their situation is dire and several recent gestures of the host country such as relocation of several thousand Rohingya to Bhasan Char island is not in their interest.

C.C. Chrystia Freeland, Marco Mendocino, Bob Rae

Yours truly,

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