

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, PC, MP
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Dear Prime Minister:

We write to you as a community of Canadians deeply concerned about Canada's so far limited response to the Rohingya crisis, and particularly about the fact that Canada has yet to designate as genocide the egregious conduct of Myanmar carried out (and continuing to be carried out) against that country's defenseless Rohingya ethnic minority.

Since August 2017, Myanmar has committed atrocities against the Rohingya in plain sight of the international community. Numerous reliable reports indicate the mass murder of tens of thousands of Rohingya civilians (including children and babies), the widespread and systematic gang rape of thousands of Rohingya women and girls, the orphaning of tens of thousands of Rohingya children, the complete destruction of more than [360](#) Rohingya villages and the creation of more than [720,000](#) Rohingya refugees. The exact numbers of victims is unknown as Myanmar refuses full and unfettered access of expert, impartial investigators into Rakhine state where the atrocities occurred. In the face of these horrific crimes, the world's response has been largely to watch without intervening, to issue weak and ineffective objections to or criticisms of what Myanmar has perpetrated, to respond meaningfully only to the resulting humanitarian crisis and not to the source of the crisis, and to take limited steps towards the prospective accountability of a handful of Myanmar officials responsible for genocide.

Research and studies by international human rights scholars and prestigious bodies like [Yale Law School](#) and [Queen Mary University of London](#) have concluded that what the Rohingya have experienced is a genocide, born of a genocide agenda, systematically implemented by the Myanmar authorities since at least the early 1980s when the Rohingya were in effect stripped of their citizenship and their basic rights. The fact that it took the mass murder of tens of thousands of people since last year, the destruction of hundreds of communities, and the creation of the world's largest refugee camp to bring this issue to the world's attention is scandalous. Furthermore, despite the depravity, the horror, and sheer magnitude of the crimes and atrocities committed, the international community has yet to take any actions to defend or protect the Rohingya remaining in Myanmar in response to the policy of genocide by the military and civilian leaders of that nation.

With the release on July 19, 2018 of a comprehensive report by the NGO [Fortify-Rights](#) about how the Rohingya were specifically targeted for extermination, it is an inescapable conclusion that the atrocities were pre-planned and, therefore, intentional. The 160-page report reveals how the Myanmar government made systematic preparations to commit mass atrocities against Rohingya civilians up to a year before August 2017. Such meticulous planning to commit atrocities aimed at one specific ethnic group, with the pre-meditated intent to destroy that group at least in part, is the very idea and definition of genocide.

According to noted genocide scholar [Dr. Henry Stanton](#), the president of [Genocide Watch](#), there are 10 stages of genocide – classification, symbolization, discrimination, dehumanization, organization, polarization, preparation, persecution, extermination and denial. The Myanmar government has engaged in all of these stages and continues to carry out stage eight and nine – persecution and extermination – while executing the last stage (denial) of the crimes they have committed.

The world's response to Rohingya persecution appears no different than what happened in Rwanda, Darfur and the Balkans, where the world was aware of the terrible things to come or occurring but did nothing to prevent or stop them. It is also similar to the response of western states to the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany, where they were aware of what was happening but did not intervene to save the lives of the innocent.

Prime Minister, on several occasions since last September either you or Liberal Members of Parliament have spoken out publicly about what happens if we do not remain committed to defending human rights. You expressed those sentiments when you spoke at the dedication of the [National Holocaust Memorial](#) on September 27, 2017 when you said “this monument is a reminder of the devastating cost of allowing hatred and tyranny to overcome openness, inclusion and freedom.” Members of your government expressed similar sentiments about opposing hate, bigotry and xenophobia when they spoke on Victims of Genocide Day, Holocaust Remembrance Day, and for Holocaust Memorial Day. While the words are a welcome historic reminder of the human consequences of closing our eyes to human rights atrocities, they are empty and meaningless if not acted upon to prevent a genocide taking place before our eyes.

Canada’s failure (along with that of the international community) to recognize and address the Rohingya Genocide almost a year after atrocities came to light is not only inexcusable it also undermines the international legal system and in fact encourages the Myanmar government to repeat this violence against other minorities – a process that is already under way against the Kachin and Karen ethnic minorities. The absence of a clear, effective and quick response to one genocide then encourages other genocides. In this regard, it is deeply troubling to read recent reports of steps taken by politicians in Assam, India to strip millions Indian Muslims of their citizenship, corral them into internment camps, violate their fundamental human rights, and raise the prospect of their forced deportation from the only home they have known.

As a long-standing party to the *UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, which was signed by former Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson when he was Canada’s UN representative, Canada has both a moral and legal obligation to act in the case of the Rohingya. So far, Canada has failed even to mention the Genocide Convention much less to take action. Moreover, as welcome as humanitarian aid is, it is no substitute for decisive measures that would prevent or arrest ongoing genocide, punish those who perpetrate it, and hold the State of Myanmar responsible for its breaches of this key treaty of the post-World War 2 international order.

As Canadians, we want our government to be a global leader in efforts to resolve this crisis and give the Rohingya hope for a better future. Therefore, we urgently call upon the government to live up to Canada’s international legal obligations under the UN Genocide Convention by labeling as genocide what is still happening to the Rohingya people in Myanmar. In addition, we call on Canada to ensure that justice is served by seeking the prosecution of all of Myanmar’s military and civilian leaders who are responsible for or complicit in perpetrating genocide, and ensure that the government of Myanmar is held accountable and pays reparations for destroying the lives and livelihoods of the Rohingya victims of their genocidal policies.

If Canada wants in fact to uphold the rules-based international order, and if Canada is genuinely committed to the words “never again”, then such fundamental norms and powerful words need to be supported by clear and decisive actions to protect, defend and seek justice for the Rohingya – a people that have been targeted for extermination by a racist and xenophobic regime that sees them as less than human.

Sincerely,

Rohingya Human Rights Network

Canadians Supporting Refugees in Dire Need

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