

Jewish Organizations Call on Senate to Advance Burma Sanctions to Address Rohingya Crisis

Broad coalition of Jewish groups and leaders pen letter to Senate Foreign Relations Committee in support of Burma sanctions, refugee assistance and accountability around crimes against the Rohingya people

Today, a broad coalition of organizations from across the Jewish community — including leaders of major organizations and the Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative and Orthodox movements — released a letter urging the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to advance the Burma Human Rights and Freedom Act of 2017 (S. 2060). Twenty-four national organizations, including American Jewish World Service, the Anti-Defamation League and the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, signed this letter, alongside 48 local organizations and 248 rabbis and communal leaders. The letter urges Senate Foreign Relations Chairman Bob Corker and Ranking Member Ben Cardin to champion this legislation, advance it through the Committee process, and ensure its passage in the full Senate.

In the face of unconscionable atrocities against the Rohingya people by the Burmese military, the signers have joined together to press for the immediate passage of the Burma Human Rights and Freedom Act of 2017. The bill would increase humanitarian aid for displaced Rohingya communities, codify targeted U.S. sanctions against those responsible for the violence, and establish a mechanism to help provide accountability for crimes committed against the Rohingya people and other minorities in Burma. As the letter states, passing the legislation “would send a powerful message to the Burmese military and the global community that the United States will not be silent or inactive in the face of mass atrocities.”

The full text of the letter is available [here](#). The letter was signed by the following national organizations:

- Ameinu
- American Conference of Cantors
- American Jewish Committee
- American Jewish World Service
- Anti-Defamation League
- Central Conference of American Rabbis
- The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding
- The Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights
- JACOB: Jewish Alliance of Concern Over Burma
- Jewish Council for Public Affairs
- Jewish Labor Committee
- Jewish Women International
- Jewish World Watch
- The Orthodox Union
- Rabbinical Assembly
- Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association
- Reconstructionist Rabbinical College/Jewish Reconstructionist Communities
- The Shalom Center

- T’ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
- Union for Reform Judaism
- United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ)
- Uri L'Tzedek: Orthodox Social Justice
- Women of Reform Judaism
- The Workman’s Circle

Robert Bank, President and CEO of American Jewish World Service, said: “As Jews, we understand all too well from our own history of persecution that the mass murder and displacement of the Rohingya people by the Burmese military demands nothing less than a strong and swift response by the United States. The bipartisan Burma Human Rights and Freedom Act of 2017 represents a critical step in addressing the crisis. Additionally, it would re-establish an official U.S. policy on Burma that prioritizes the advancement of human rights, support for religious freedom, the bolstering of civil society and the implementation of democratic reforms.”

David Bernstein, President and CEO of Jewish Council for Public Affairs, said: “As Jews, it is incumbent upon us to shatter the walls of indifference to the slaughter, persecution, and displacement of the Rohingya people at the hands of the Burmese military. Who will raise their voice for these people if not Jews? For us, "never again" is not a slogan, but a firm, moral commitment not to remain silent or inactive in the face of unspeakable atrocities. We call on the Senate to swiftly pass the bipartisan Burma Human Rights and Freedom Act of 2017, which would sanction those responsible for the violence and provide humanitarian aid to the Rohingya people.”

Susan Freudenheim, Executive Director of Jewish World Watch, said: “We may not be the ones to blame for horrific acts of genocide, but we are all responsible for saving the lives of the persecuted. We must do all that we can to aid the Rohingya, and supporting the Burma Human Rights and Freedom Act of 2017 is an important step.”

Jonathan Greenblatt, CEO and National Director of the Anti-Defamation League, said: “As Americans and Jews, we cannot stand silent in the face of the slaughter and expulsion of the Rohingya on the basis of their ethnicity and religion. Absent significant international pressure, led by the U.S., the violence against the Rohingya could worsen and more innocent lives will be lost. We strongly urge the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the full Senate to pass this important resolution which will target those behind these unspeakable atrocities and provide much needed assistance to Rohingya refugees.”

Rabbi Jill Jacobs, Executive Director of T’ruah, said: “As U.S. rabbis and cantors, we raise our voices to urge the Senate to support the Burma Human Rights and Freedom Act of 2017. As Jews, we see haunting historical parallels between the Jewish experience and the current plight of the Rohingya people, who are facing a concerted campaign of murder, rape and expulsion at the hands of the Burmese military. The U.S. government must not remain silent or inactive in

the face of mass atrocities. It must assist the refugees with humanitarian aid and hold the Burmese government accountable for its crimes.”

Rabbi Jonah Pesner, Director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism and Senior Vice President of the Union for Reform Judaism, said: “The U.S. is overdue to take meaningful action to stop the persecution of the Rohingya people, which has been compounded by the global community’s disheartening inaction. In Leviticus, we are commanded, ‘You may not stand idly by when your neighbor’s blood is being shed’ (Leviticus 19:16). As Jews, we know all too well the price paid when good people do not act to protect those who are targeted because of their faith or ethnicity. We continue to urge the U.S. government to do all it can to stop the violence against the Rohingya people, to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches those in need, and that all those responsible for acts of ethnic cleansing are held accountable.”

Rabbi Arthur Waskow, Executive Director of The Shalom Center, said: “Torah (Deut 23: 15-16) teaches: “You shall not hand over to their master slaves who have escaped from him to you. Let them live beside you, among you, in the place within your gates that they choose, that seem good to them. Do not maltreat them!” All the more must we act to protect those — like the Rohingya — who are fleeing genocidal arson, rape, and murder rooted in fury at their very identity.”

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