



**Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission and
U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom**

Ending Genocide: Accountability for Perpetrators

Wednesday, July 28, 2021

10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Virtual via Zoom

As prepared for delivery

Good morning. I join Chair Maenza and Vice Chair Turkel in welcoming everyone to today's joint U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission hearing.

Although USCIRF has often appeared before the Human Rights Commission, this is the first time we've co-hosted a hearing together. I think it's a good practice for human rights bodies to coordinate their work when it makes sense to do so. In that spirit, we appreciate the invitation to co-host this morning.

We have an excellent group of witnesses with us today. I thank them for their commitment to human rights and for taking the time to share their expertise. And I especially want to welcome back former ambassador Stephen Rapp who we know well.

Today's topic, accountability for perpetrators of genocide and other grave human rights violations, is near to my heart.

Over the years I have met many survivors and descendants of victims of grave human rights abuses, war crimes, crimes against humanity and even genocide. What I have seen is that their search for justice and accountability is unceasing, but far too often is met with disappointment.

The massacre of El Mozote in El Salvador is but one example. In December 1981, over the course of three days, more than a thousand people were killed in cold blood by members of a U.S.-trained military battalion.

Last April, nearly 40 years after the slaughter, sixteen of the soldiers alleged to be responsible finally went on trial.

In between there were some important if partial victories: a ruling of state responsibility from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, an apology to the victims by the state, two ex-generals living comfortable lives in the U.S. deported back to El Salvador for trial.

But still – 40 years have passed. During those years many survivors died with their right to justice left unfulfilled. And looking at El Salvador today, it is far from clear that what happened in 1981 could never happen again.

In this hearing today our focus is on accountability for grave crimes committed against communities whose religious identity is among the reasons they have been victimized to the point of genocide, including Uyghurs, Yazidis and the Rohingya.

These are situations that members of Congress are deeply concerned about. We have repeatedly called for accountability for the states and non-state actors who are responsible for their suffering.

But I am not sure we always think deeply enough about the meaning of accountability, nor ask ourselves enough questions about how to ensure it.

Often we talk about the imposition of economic sanctions as accountability.

But sanctions are usually about naming and shaming perpetrators and imposing costs on them. They aren't necessarily designed to fulfill the rights of victims to truth, justice and reparations, or to make sure that the communities will not suffer the same crimes again in the future.

So I very much welcome this discussion today. I am interested in hearing about the lessons the witnesses draw from their experiences pursuing justice. And I look forward to their recommendations for those of us working to ensure that the U.S. government is doing its part to prevent future abuses and restore the rights of those who have been grievously harmed.

Thank you and I yield back.