



## **U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Hearing**

### **Ending Genocide: Accountability for Perpetrators**

Opening Remarks as prepared for delivery

#### **Vice Chair Turkel**

Thank you very much, Chair Maenza. I would like to join in welcoming you all to today's hearing.

While too often states fail in their obligation to prosecute crimes of genocide, there are some positive developments, particularly in relation to accountability for international crimes committed against the Rohingya. In November 2019, the Gambia, on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, initiated proceedings against Burma for its alleged genocide against the Rohingya community at the International Court of Justice, or ICJ. The International Criminal

Court, or ICC, is also investigating crimes against the Rohingya, although its jurisdiction is limited.

In USCIRF's 2021 Annual Report, USCIRF recommends that the U.S. government actively support efforts to hold Burmese officials accountable through the international legal system, including by strengthening the documentation of mass atrocities. In the wake of Burma's military coup, which brought many of the perpetrators of the violence against the Rohingya community into power, accountability is urgently needed.

In other contexts, the pathways to justice for genocide victims are less clear. This is the case for Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in China who are victims of genocide and crimes against humanity. The ICC will not initiate an investigation into crimes committed against the Uyghurs because China is not a party to the court, and China would veto any attempt by the Security Council to refer the situation to the ICC or create an ad hoc tribunal. The ICJ is also not an option, as China has submitted a reservation to the Genocide Convention's jurisdiction.

With international courts inaccessible, civil society launched the Uyghur Tribunal as an independent investigation into the crimes that have occurred. While the Tribunal's efforts are not state-sanctioned, its work is providing a voice for survivors and creating a collection of evidence that might someday contribute to a criminal process. Other efforts to document the ongoing genocide, such as the work of journalists who are reporting on the horrors in China, are also important for strengthening the legal argument for international accountability mechanisms to hold Chinese officials to account.

Thank you very much to our witnesses for taking the time out of their busy schedules and important work to join us today. I look forward to hearing what you have to say about these topics.