



Committee on International Justice and Peace

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3160

WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG/JPHD • FAX 202-541-3339

September 21, 2017

Rear Admiral Garry E. Hall
Special Assistant for International Organizations and Alliances
National Security Council
White House
Washington, DC

Dear Admiral Hall,

As Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I urge that the Administration work with other nations and international organizations to provide urgently needed humanitarian assistance to the Rohingya who have experienced so much suffering and pain over decades, and to the countries that are providing refuge to those displaced from Burma. We also urge consideration now of durable solutions and protections to address the growing Rohingya crisis, as well as consideration of possible resettlement for certain non-Rohingya refugees for whom it is the most viable solution.

Rohingyas are fleeing, often with just the clothes on their backs, as they are attacked and their villages in Burma are burned. The scale of the violence has caused some 370,000 Rohingyas to flee in the past few weeks into Bangladesh, according to UN estimates. There they are crowded into makeshift shelters, hoping for safety and food, in a poor, densely populated country prone to flooding. UNICEF estimates that 60% of the Rohingya refugees are children who face grave health risks. Bangladesh is trying to cope with this influx, but its infrastructure is overwhelmed and its resources are limited.

The situation in Burma is complicated by long-standing ethnic divisions in a country where the military still exercises significant influence over governance and the economy. But as Burma emerges from years of isolation, it must recognize and adhere to international standards of human rights. The Rohingya crisis in Burma and the U.S. response to it has implications for U.S. cooperation with the Muslim world in combating violent extremism as several Muslim nations are rallying in support of the Rohingya.

Pope Francis, who will be making a trip to Bangladesh and Burma in late November, spoke about the “persecution of our Rohingya brothers and sisters,” and prayed, “Let all of us ask the Lord to save them, and to raise up men and women of goodwill to help them, who shall give them their full rights.” Cardinal Charles Bo, Archbishop of Yangon, has called the persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine state “an appalling scar on the conscience” of his country. He has asked for full and independent investigations into allegations of “ethnic cleansing,” not only of the Rohingya but also of other minorities in Kachin and Shan states and throughout Burma. He has advocated for religious leaders to work together to stem the violence that is being perpetrated in the name of religion.

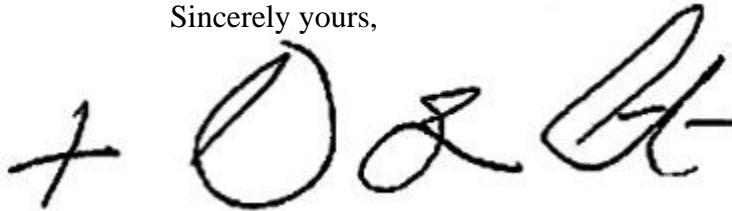
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Given your position and interest in advancing multilateral cooperation and religious freedom, I ask that you support efforts to provide vital humanitarian assistance to the Rohingya and to the countries sheltering them as refugees and to examine the need for durable solutions, including resettlement. At the same time, I would encourage the U.S. government to use its influence to promote a resolution to the long-standing conflicts in Burma that have led to such violations of human rights for these minorities.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'A' followed by a large 'O', a cursive 'C', and a cursive 'A'.

Most Reverend Oscar Cantú

Bishop of Las Cruces

Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace