

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

May 21, 2014

His Excellency Thein Sein
President
Republic of the Union of Burma
Ministry of the President's Office
Naypyidaw, Burma

Dear President Thein Sein:

I write to express my deep concern about the worsening humanitarian crisis involving Muslim Rohingya in Burma's Rakhine State. We have made progress in building ties and cooperation between our two countries over the past several years, yet several critical human rights and humanitarian concerns threaten to impede further progress, with the situation in Rakhine State and Buddhist-Muslim communal violence highest among them.

As you well know, the Rohingya are facing horrific attacks, including massacres, destruction of their villages through arson, and confinement in squalid camps that essentially function as detention facilities. More than 140,000 Rohingya are now Internally Displaced Persons because of violent attacks on their villages and communal violence between Buddhist and Muslim communities, which has continued unabated. Pending legislation to restrict inter-religious marriage and limit the number of children Muslims can have is further exacerbating the crisis. I am gravely concerned that we are witnessing a rapid unraveling of the progress and efforts you and your government have made to bring your nation forward for the twenty-first century.

In February 2014, your government expelled Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) from Rakhine state, where MSF provided treatment for tuberculosis, malaria, HIV/AIDS, and obstetrics to approximately 700,000 people. The expulsion occurred after MSF said it had treated Muslims believed to be victims of an attack by a Buddhist mob. In just the first two weeks of MSF's absence, 20 women are known to have died from lack of access to basic obstetrical care. I strongly urge you to move quickly to permit MSF to return to Rakhine state.

Moreover, in March 2014, Buddhist mobs attacked international aid agencies in Rakhine state, resulting in the evacuation of 170 humanitarian providers, and greatly limiting the ability of the international community to provide assistance to the people of Burma. I remain profoundly concerned that if the basic needs of the Rohingya are not met soon, there will be devastating human consequences. To that end, I urgently request that your government take immediate steps to end the persecution of the Rohingya, ensure the security of international aid groups and facilitate their immediate access to Rakhine state.

The advances that your nation has made over the past several years have been notable but failure to address these issues runs the risk of putting in danger the progress your nation has made over these past several years.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez
Chairman

cc: Major General Khin Aung Myint, Speaker, House of Nationalities
General Thura Shwe Mann, Speaker, Lower House of Parliament
Lieutenant General Ko Ko, Minister of Home Affairs
Brigadier General Khin Yi, Minister of Immigration and Population
Lieutenant General Thet Naing Win, Minister of Border Affairs