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BURMA US Congress calls on Burmese regime to recognize Rohingyas as “full and equal” citizens

US Congressman Christopher Smith has today introduced a resolution in the House of Representatives calling on Burma’s military regime to immediately recognize the Rohingya people “as full and equal citizens of Burma”, and to lift all restrictions on movement, marriage and access to education. The resolution also calls for an end to the regime’s campaign of religious and ethnic persecution “amounting to crimes against humanity throughout Burma”.

Congressman Smith met Maung Tun Khin, President of the Burmese Rohingya Organization UK (BROUK), earlier this year, during a visit to Washington DC organized by Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW). Speaking about today’s resolution, Congressman Smith said, “This legislation underscores the plight and human rights abuses endured by the Rohingyas with the hope and expectation that the light of scrutiny will result in new actions by the many governments that can and should provide assistance and refuge to the Rohingyas. It is an international call to action to alleviate their suffering and persecution in every way that we can.”

In addition to highlighting the suffering of the Rohingyas in Burma, the resolution urges the government of Bangladesh to address “the dire humanitarian conditions and food insecurity in the makeshift camps” along its border with Burma, in co-operation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and to “desist from forcing unregistered Rohingya to return to Burma”. It also highlights the situation of Rohingyas in Saudi Arabia, and urges the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to allow Rohingyas “access to education and livelihoods”.

Addressing Burma’s crimes against humanity, the resolution urges the United States Government to “proactively support” the recommendation by the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Burma for the establishment of a UN Commission of Inquiry.

Maung Tun Khin, President of BROUK, said, “This is an extremely important resolution, not only for the Rohingya people but for all the people of Burma. We are in full support of the call for a UN Commission of Inquiry to investigate crimes against humanity committed by the regime against its people, and we are grateful to Congressman Smith for his support.”

CSW’s East Asia Team Leader Benedict Rogers said, “We are delighted that Congressman Smith has introduced this very important resolution, which is the first time the plight of the Rohingyas has been given such attention. We hope that the regime in Burma will sit up, listen, end the cruel and dehumanizing treatment of the Rohingya people and restore their citizenship. We hope the Bangladeshi government will take action to improve the plight of Rohingya refugees, and that the United States will make the Rohingyas’ situation a priority.”