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Remarks for Free Rohingya Coalition  
Myanmar Genocide Memorial - 4th Anniversary of Rohingya Genocide  
August 25, 2021

I spoke last year at this same event, and as I reflect on the situation of the Rohingya a year later, I focus on three emotions: frustration, hope, and gratitude.

I do not mean to use these words in a trite sense, because I think together, they can help to motivate stronger international solidarity and response to what is happening in Myanmar and to the Rohingya.

**Frustration.**

I feel deep frustration again towards the international community. Despite the crucial efforts of humanitarian workers, the regime for refugees and displaced persons remains exceedingly inadequate in upholding the most minimum conditions of human dignity. In 2017 and before, hundreds of thousands of Rohingya fled extreme violence only to end up in refugee camps or with irregular status in countries where their rights continue to be infringed. They cannot attend school or seek livelihoods, they are profoundly traumatized, and women and girls continue to struggle to avoid sexual exploitation and violence.

Every couple of months, fires and flooding devastate parts of the camps. The complacent international community allowed the warehousing of Rohingya on Bhasan Char Island, where refugees are vulnerable to natural disasters and other threats.

It is absurd that the international response keeps people in misery when countless humanitarian experts and activists (international, Rohingya, and Bangladeshi) have identified alternative ways to spend humanitarian funds so that Rohingya can live with more dignity, and as a consequence, support themselves and benefit surrounding communities.

And since the February coup, while the risks for the Rohingya become more urgent, the international community’s response has not been sufficient to restrain the military and negotiate an acceptable way forward for the country.

**Hope.**

Last year, I spoke about how I believe that the most crucial factor in securing equal rights for Rohingya in Myanmar were the efforts of Burmese citizens *inside* the country to advocate for equality and recognition of the rights of all ethnic minorities, including the Rohingya.
A year ago, such a shift in public consciousness seemed like a long way off. But since the coup, as I imagine you have seen, the extent of Burmese support for equal rights has been stunning. The National Unity Government has articulated an inclusive democratic vision, and prominent representatives have supported justice and repatriation for the Rohingya. Many have issued apologies to the Rohingya for not doing more to protect and stand up for you in the past.

Gratitude.

Much has been said and written about the urgent needs of the Rohingya inside and outside Myanmar. Fulfilling these needs requires us to embrace your full humanity and channel resources accordingly. And doing that means recognizing that Myanmar and the rest of the world also needs the Rohingya.

Rohingya activism – which has translated into legal cases at the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court, Argentina courts, and other international bodies – has played a significant role in awakening and shaping recent Burmese activism for democracy and inclusion in Myanmar. Numerous Burmese activists now speak with eloquence and authority about rule of law, democracy, and human rights. Their example in turn helps to sustain international commitment to democratic norms in the in Asia, the West, and other troubled places. Thus, our freedom has been enhanced by Rohingya’s persistent demands for justice and equality.

And I thank you for that. I thank you for your art, your poetry, your music, your writing, your entrepreneurship, and your outreach. Your survival amidst harsh conditions demonstrates and is a source of strength.

So with frustration with the international community’s own lack of accountability, yet with hope and gratitude, the international community must do nothing less than acknowledge genocide and renew our solidarity and support for the Rohingya and equal rights for all in Myanmar.

Thank you.