

# Faith Groups in Canada unite their voices in an appeal to the People of Myanmar: 'Seek Justice and Reconciliation!'

On 20<sup>th</sup> September 2018, the Canadian House of Commons unanimously adopted a motion recognizing the recent violence against the Rohingya people as genocide, the gravest of crimes under international law.<sup>1</sup> The Parliament of Canada on six other occasions has formally recognized such horrendous occurrences: the Armenian genocide, the Holodomor (the genocidal famine of Ukrainians by the Stalinist Soviet regime), the Holocaust (the genocide of European and North African Jews during World War II), the genocide of Tutsis in Rwanda, the Srebrenica genocide in Bosnia and the genocide of the Yazidis people by ISIS.<sup>2</sup> More recently, the Government of Canada has recognized the crime of genocide against the Romani people during the Second World War.<sup>3</sup>

The 20<sup>th</sup> September vote in the Canadian House of Commons follows the release of the report by the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on Myanmar, which detailed gross human rights violations in Rakhine, Kachin, and Shan States and recommended that those responsible for these crimes “be investigated and prosecuted in an international criminal tribunal for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.”<sup>4</sup>

As faith leaders of diverse communities in Canada, we are united in our belief and concern for the inviolable dignity of all persons. Each of our respective religious traditions calls on us to be a light in the darkness, a voice in the deafening silence, to make our voices heard and our presence felt when peace has been shattered and the vulnerable are being persecuted. It is for these reasons that we feel compelled to speak out together for the people of Myanmar, particularly the Rohingya, and to say: *Never again!* No more war, no more dehumanizing our brothers and sisters, no more killing of innocent women, men and children. We strongly encourage the people of Myanmar to build peace, to heal the wounds of your communities through dialogue and forgiveness, and to let justice be realized for those who have been wronged.

With heavy hearts and deep sorrow, we see once again the pain and sufferings of the twentieth century manifesting themselves, this time in Myanmar. We recognize again the same horrific themes: the systematic dehumanization of peoples, the indifference of many, and the all too frequent display of moral cowardliness. As Canadians we ask ourselves how to respond to such a faraway conflict. There are indeed a number of ways to help. Financial contributions can

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/rohingya-myanmar-military-1.4831956>

<sup>2</sup> Cf.

[https://www.canada.ca/en/canadianheritage/news/2017/04/statement\\_by\\_ministerjolyongenocideremembrancecondemnationandpre.html](https://www.canada.ca/en/canadianheritage/news/2017/04/statement_by_ministerjolyongenocideremembrancecondemnationandpre.html) ; <http://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/42-1/house/sitting-97/hansard>

<sup>3</sup> Cf. <https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2018/08/statement-by-minister-of-foreign-affairs-and-minister-of-canadian-heritage-and-multiculturalism-on-romani-genocide-remembrance-day.html>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/FFM-Myanmar/A\\_HRC\\_39\\_64.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/FFM-Myanmar/A_HRC_39_64.pdf)

be made through a host of aid agencies. We can speak out to our elected officials. Both of these are praiseworthy endeavours. There is another option as well. Each of us can redouble our efforts to become agents of peace and reconciliation in our own families, workplaces and communities, to be bridges of understanding in a time of deep division and discord. Peace starts in our own hearts and our local communities as does the fomenting of division and conflict. Let us work together to sow the seeds of peace! As faith leaders, we implore our faithful to turn towards the power of prayer and pray for justice, reconciliation and peace for the people of Myanmar!

As this year marks the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations' Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide – the first human rights document adopted by the UN General Assembly – let us raise our voices once again and say: *Never again!*

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