



BURMA
TASK FORCE

STOP
GENOCIDE

Faith
Coalition

SAVE
UIGHUR

FREE
KASHMIR

SAVE
INDIA

POWERED BY SOUND VISION

Honorable Delegate Shane Pendergrass
Chair, Health & Govt. Operations Committee
House Office Building, Room 241
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of HB533 – State Government – Prevention of Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity and the Commission on Genocide Prevention

Attn: Chair Shane Pendergrass and Health & Govt. Operations Committee Members:

Dear Hon. Shane Pendergrass and Committee members:

Thank you Chair for hearing our testimony. My name is Hena Zuberi. I am a resident of Maryland and here to represent Justice For All, a human right organization with consultative status at the United Nations and Maryland Muslim Advocates, a coalition of over 45 mosques and Muslim organizations.

We are living in perilous times and the threat of mass atrocities is increasing around the world. As an organization committed to anti-genocide work for the past 25+ years since the Bosnia genocide, Justice For All, whole heartedly supports the Maryland End Genocide Bill H 533 which, we understand, will direct the state government to formalize contracts only with corporations that refuse to do business with governments that engage in genocide or crimes against humanity.

Failure to confront the rise of authoritarianism today reminds us of the period of appeasement before the beginning of World War Two and the Holocaust. It would be a shame on us all if “never again!” proved an empty slogan. When we consider our duty to prevent future genocides, placing common sense conditions on procurement and investing is one of the more effective nonviolent alternatives to conflict.

Many corporations have come to embrace social responsibility. Ethically sourced products have become attractive to many consumers. We are confident that shareholders will recognize the importance of adopting a policy of refusing to do business with governments that engage in genocide or crimes against humanity.

The Uighur people, for example, are subject to terrible privations in Xinjiang (East Turkestan) and throughout China. As two million Uighur are forced to work in factories and re-education camps, their culture is being systematically erased, their historical

monuments bulldozed. In Myanmar (Burma) the Rohingya minority has undergone a genocide, with hundreds of villages destroyed, mass killing and mass rapes following decades of extreme persecution. Quite recently the same military perpetrators have committed a coup against Burma's elected government. Moreover, there are several other frightening examples of demonization and mass displacement in Central African Republic, Nigeria, and in indigenous peoples' areas around the world.

Though mass atrocities unfold in different ways, scholars of Genocide are documenting troubling situations where warning signs abound. We cannot ignore this terrible trend. For the sake of humanity, it is crucial to make it more inconvenient to turn a blind eye to crimes against humanity wherever they may take place.

We recognize that some overseas companies, in China for example, may agree to support socially responsible policies and still be implicated in forced labor. This is another reason why we support this well-designed bill-- it will establish the Maryland Commission on Genocide Prevention to research abuses and hold hearings on the implementation of the Act.

We are confident that taxpayers will not wish to see their monies flowing to companies complicit in behavior so antithetical to human rights norms and the principles of Democracy. We appreciate that the bill simply requires the state government to change its own internal procurement and investment policies and practices in line with these values. There are no heavy-handed new regulations on business or commerce. There will be no burden on small or local businesses. Nor does this bill stray into foreign policy. We understand that some cities, like Dayton Ohio, have already voted to support similar policies. It is time for the states to show their moral leadership as well.

Maryland has come a long way since it was a slave state. Over the decades it took many, many efforts to move to a more free and equal society, and as a nation we are certainly not at the finishing line yet. But in today's globalized economy, the products we buy support the sort of world we wish to live in. When we buy products made through slave labor or do business with corporations linked to the government or a military of a foreign power, due diligence is called for.

Some of us will recall the anti-apartheid movement that forced corporations to divest from South Africa under pressure from municipal and state laws. This bill does not force divestment unless the company is unable to disentangle itself from major human rights abuses. However, it does require us to be more cognizant and more responsible regarding the supply chain. Do these same chains strangle and oppress vulnerable minority populations?

Please pass H 533.

Sincerely,

Hena Zuberi
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References:

Justice for All

www.justiceforall.org

Genocide Watch

<https://www.genocidewatch.com/>

US Holocaust Memorial Museum Early Warning Project

<https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/simon-skjodt-center/work/early-warning-project>