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**STATEMENT BY PROFESSOR JOHN PACKER, DIRECTOR OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS RESEARCH AND EDUCATION CENTRE, UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA**

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I first visited Arakan/Rakhine State in 1993, as a UN Staff Member investigating serious violations of human rights against the Rohingya people. That was in the shadow of the [forced return from Bangladesh](#) – refoulement – of about a quarter million Rohingya who had fled in the second large exodus of Rohingya from their homelands. In August/September 2017 a similar and much larger mass exodus of Rohingya – some 800,000 victims – caught [international headlines](#) this time with live video circulated globally in real-time. That was the fifth major exodus of Rohingya. By then, about 80-85% of all Rohingya (over 2 million refugees) had been forced out of their homeland, most to Bangladesh, many others within the region – to Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and India, and beyond, notably to Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Now, today, we are witnessing the 6<sup>th</sup> major push as a large part of the about half million Rohingya remaining in Arakan/Rakhine, Myanmar, have been displaced, their homes and communities destroyed and thousands clamouring again at the border with Bangladesh or to find any rickety ship to take them to safety abroad.

Described as the [most persecuted minority in the world](#), Rohingya have been subjected to an extraordinary and persistent litany of gross and systematic violations of human rights against these entirely innocent and non-threatening people. Scholars have labelled the on-going persecution as a “[slow-burning genocide](#)” conducted over decades and generations, systematically destroying a people who have done nothing except to exist as a distinct community in a valuable place in the northern Bay of Bengal squeezed between competing States, unsympathetic governments and murderous forces. Today, perhaps only 5% of Rohingya remain in their homes shaking with all-encompassing fear while

watching their lands and livelihoods be taken or destroyed and their identity denied and dismantled as they are dispersed around the world.

Today, you have heard from leading young women Rohingya – articulate, educated, courageous and manifestly competent. They are calling – pleading – for help, as they do all within their meager resources to help at least the women and children in refugee situations where they face increasing hate, exclusion, and deprivation. In sum, Rohingya face an existential threat... their very existence as a distinct people, torn from their homeland and at pains to maintain, much less enjoy or celebrate, their identity.

They ask for our recognition and political support. This should be easy to give. They ask also for concrete and material assistance – to their people through them. This should also be easy to give. Indeed, evidence shows that assistance directed to and through women, focusing on education and self-help organisations, is the most effective use of resources. They also ask for accountability of the perpetrators – of the genocidal *junta* destroying Myanmar and of other perpetrators specifically violating Rohingya.

All this Canada can do. And surely as part of a meaningful Feminist Foreign Policy. We have the privileged position and capacity to delivery all this. We cannot hesitate to do so. The Human Rights Research and Education Centre at the University of Ottawa, which I direct, fully supports this clear and compelling call to action.

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