INTRODUCTION

The following discussion and letter-writing guide is intended for use by any group interested in learning more about the history of the genocide being perpetrated against the Rohingya people of Burma (Myanmar). Discussion circles can be organized virtually, via Zoom or on a similar web-based platform, and may be expected to last for about 90 minutes. We recommend that groups limit their size to a maximum of 5-7 participants.

Organizers of the discussion should urge participants to use a strong internet connection, and should share the following link, so participants can access the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum’s virtual exhibit, “Burma’s Path to Genocide,”* and refer back to it throughout the discussion: https://exhibitions.ushmm.org/burmas-path-to-genocide

*Note: Participants are not expected to have previously seen or read through the exhibit prior to the discussion.
From “Born”
by Yasmin Ullah, *Rohingya poet and human rights activist

I was born of tired backs, exhausted bodies,
looking for provisions
so hard to come by,
walking miles carrying water
to makeshift huts,
without help—
water or mud,
you have to drink to survive.

I was born of empty stomachs,
tongues dried and parched lips,
from starvation of food and water
for months on end.

I was born of the forced crooked smile
blurred with tears,
the slow fade of resilience.

I was born as one of the forgotten,
of those the world doesn’t quite remember.
But at least I was born,
so you can hear me speaking up,
so you, the world, can listen.

*Collected in I Am a Rohingya: Poetry from the
Camps and Beyond, edited by James Byrne and
Shehzar Doja, ARC Publications (2019).
CHAPTER III (10 MINUTES)

Ask participants to turn to Chapter III of the exhibit and read through the chapter, while pausing to watch the videos that are embedded in the page. Pose the following questions for the group to discuss:

1. In reading the examples of hate speech from Burmese officials, media organizations, and political groups collected in this chapter, what surprised or shocked you?

2. What about this hate speech seemed familiar or reminiscent from other contexts? Do any historical examples come to mind where similar language was used to justify genocide?

3. Where have you heard language like this used recently in the United States?

Chapter IV-V (10 MINUTES)

Ask participants to read through Chapters IV and V of the exhibit and watch the accompanying videos. Please also read this article by UUSC staff reflecting on the persecution of the Rohingya in light of International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Return to the group and discuss the following questions:

1. What did you read or see in these chapters that made the strongest impression on you? What comes to mind first when you think back to these chapters?

2. Based on these readings and the exhibit as a whole, in what ways are Rohingya survivors and advocates working to secure justice and accountability for what was done to their community? What are some ways people around the globe can show solidarity with these efforts?

3. Both UUSC and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum were founded in response to the persecution and genocide perpetrated against Jews in Europe by the Nazi regime.
   - What connections do you see between the Holocaust and the events happening in Burma?
   - What connections do you see between our two organizations’ histories and the persecution of the Rohingya?

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION (15 MINUTES)

Refer back to your notes from the preliminary exploration and ask the group to consider the following questions:

1. Emotional check-in: Having reached the end of this exhibit, how are you feeling? What do you notice happening in your body? Where is there tension or hurt or other sensations?

2. Looking back on our discussion of the definition of genocide at the beginning of this session, what has changed about your understanding of genocide, after working through this exhibit? Please feel free to re-share the legal definition of genocide from the United Nations, featured above.

3. Based on what we learned in this exhibit, in what ways do we know that the persecution of the Rohingya in Burma constitutes a genocide?

4. Why is it important to use the term genocide to describe what is happening to the Rohingya people?
CALL TO ACTION: WRITE A LETTER (15 MINUTES)

Invite participants to join in a closing activity to write a letter to the U.S. State Department, calling on the U.S. government to officially label the persecution of the Rohingya in Burma a genocide. Encourage participants to draw on the preceding discussion and speak from the heart in articulating why it is important to make this formal genocide determination. Consider invoking UUSC’s history and values, our commitment to fighting religious persecution and defending the rights of displaced people around the world, and our founding as a rescue organization during the Holocaust.

Share the following four resources with participants as well, and encourage them to read and reflect on some or all of these before writing their letter:

- Read the Call to Action by Refugees International, describing their reasons for asking the State Department to make a public finding that a genocide has taken place against the Rohingya people.
- Read the December 2018 announcement from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum finding compelling evidence that genocide was committed against the Rohingya people.
- Read the conclusion from the article “The Slow-Burning Genocide of Myanmar’s Rohingya,” originally published in 2014. Well before the most recent and extreme wave of violence against the Rohingya in August 2017. The conclusion can be found at pp. 751-2.
- Read two essays by UUSC staff commemorating 25 years of human rights work in Burma and reflecting on the importance of solidarity with the Rohingya in the present political moment.

Ask participants to work quietly for several minutes as they read through these materials and write their letters. Afterward, they should feel free to share some of the words from their letters as inspiration for others.

Hand-written letters can be mailed to the following address:
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St., NW
Washington, DC 20520

Electronic messages can be sent to Sec. Michael R. Pompeo at the following email address: https://register.state.gov/contactus/ContactUsForm

CLOSING READING

From “Genocide”
by Mayyu Ali, Rohingya poet

Perpetrators lie in various ways
While the world still debates on genocide
You can see the fire but not how we are burnt
You can read of killings but not how throats were cut [...]
The documentation of my suffering offered prizes
But my pain hasn’t earned the justice yet

From “That’s Me, a Rohingya,” by Mayyu Ali

My skin trembles
Just to feel once the full meaning of freedom
My heart wishes
Just to walk once like in my own world
Nowadays, no one is like me

Only myself
Just a Rohingya!