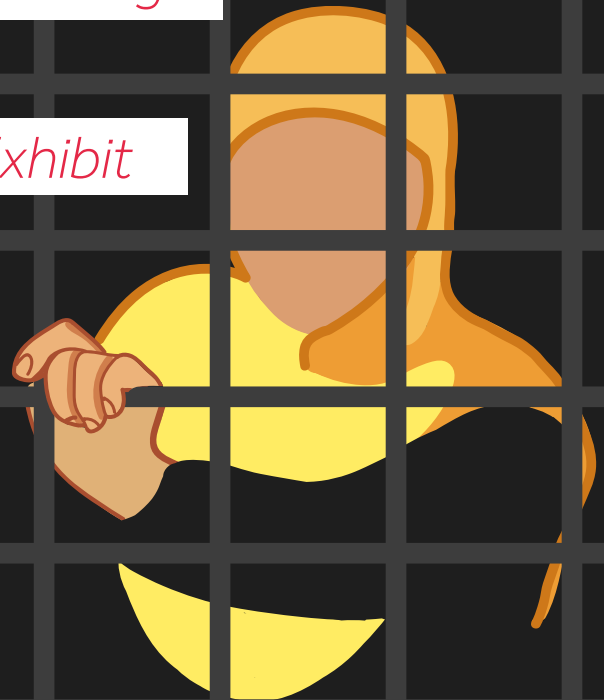


Burma's Path to Genocide

A UUSC Discussion and Letter-writing

Guide to Accompany the U.S.

Holocaust Memorial Museum Exhibit



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.

OPENING READING

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).

PRELIMINARY EXPLORATION (10 MINUTES)

Before turning to the exhibit, assign roles as group facilitator and note-taker. Ask participants to respond to the following questions. Make sure to capture responses in writing.

- 1. What did you know about Burma (Myanmar) and the Rohingya people coming into this discussion? [If the answer is nothing, that is perfectly fine!]**
- 2. Do you have any personal connections or experience related to this part of the world?**
- 3. What is your understanding of what is meant by the word genocide? What are some examples of genocide you are aware of, in U.S. history or from around the world?**

After discussing this last question, share with the group the legal definition of genocide, found in Article II of the [U.N. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide](#).

CHAPTER I (15 MINUTES)

Ask participants to open the link to the virtual exhibit. Let them know they can find a menu of chapters of the exhibit on the upper right-hand side of the web page. Ask participants to click on Chapter I and spend a few minutes quietly reading this page to themselves. Feel free to ask participants to mute themselves or turn off their videos temporarily if this makes reading easier.

After everyone has finished reading the chapter, return to the larger group. Ask them to address the following questions:

- 1. What in reading this chapter surprised you the most?**
- 2. Did the information presented in this chapter align with what you previously knew about the history of Burma or the region? Was any of it different?**

Chapter I of the exhibit mentions that British rule created or exacerbated tensions among local communities in Burma. In what ways might colonialism have contributed to present-day violence and discrimination in the country?

*If time allows, ask participants to read pp. 695–6 from an article “The Slow-Burning Genocide of Myanmar’s Rohingya,” by Maung Zarni and Alice Cowley, which can be found at this [link](#).

CHAPTER II (10 MINUTES)

Ask participants to now turn to Chapter II of the exhibit and quietly read this chapter. Remind them to watch the videos that are included in the exhibit as they scroll through. Then pose the following questions:

- 1. In reading through these two chapters, what most struck you? Are there particular images or words that stay with you?**
- 2. Why do you think government officials stopped using the word Rohingya? What does this have to do with the definition of genocide as you understand it?**
- 3. What parallels do you see between the events described in this chapter and events that have happened in the United States? How about elsewhere in the world?**

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>



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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!

*Collected in Mayyu Ali, [Exodus: Between Genocide and Me](#), Black Raven Publishers (2019)