



## [The United States Formally Declares That Myanmar's Army Committed Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity in Its Repression of the Rohingya](#)

Earlier this week, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced that the United States was officially recognizing the human rights violations committed against the Rohingya people by Myanmar's army as genocide. The weighty declaration comes roughly a year after Blinken revealed that he would conduct a new review on the violence perpetrated toward the ethnic minority group in the Southeast Asian country. With the designation, the United States has now echoed the position expressed by rights advocates for years, which pointed to the evidence that the Myanmar military's mass atrocities were a clear and systematic attempt to persecute the Rohingya. The U.S. State Department has voiced its hope that the declaration will increase international pressure to hold the repressive military junta accountable and make it more difficult for them to commit further heinous abuses. The military took power from a civilian government in a February 2021 coup, and has been engaged in a brutal and violent crackdown against activists, opposition figures, journalists, and others.

The Rohingya, a mainly Muslim minority, have faced various human rights abuses at the hands of the Myanmar military – which is formally known as the Tatmadaw – for decades. In recent years, the violence has resulted in one of the most dire and large-scale refugee movements in history, with over 675,000 Rohingya fleeing Myanmar in just 3 months back in 2017. Some of the inhumane violations that they have faced include summary execution, severe torture and rape, forced labor, extortion, and displacement. They have also been stripped of their citizenship by the Myanmar government. At the end of 2019, more than 1 million Rohingya remained in crowded refugee camps in the neighboring country of Bangladesh. However, the Bangladeshi foreign minister announced in 2020 that Bangladesh would no longer accept Rohingya refugees.

Previously, the United States had declined to label the crimes against the Rohingya as a genocide, instead opting to use the term ethnic cleansing, which is not defined in international law. Genocide on the other hand is codified under international law in Article 2 of the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. There it is defined as “any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group, such as: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to a member of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.” Currently, there is an ongoing investigation by the International Criminal Court. The Gambia has also officially filed a case in the International Court of Justice for the crime of genocide against the Rohingya.

Following the United States' declaration this week, an additional \$1 million in funding will be given to the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar. During the course of the probe so far, it has been alarmingly found that nearly three-quarters of those interviewed personally witnessed a military execution. The investigation has also included detailed and credible information from impartial human rights organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Entities like these have long called for the United States to declare the abuses against the Rohingya as a genocide, and advocates are hopeful that this will bolster the efforts to hold the Myanmar armed forces accountable for their disturbing array of crimes.