

vote on the motion to invoke cloture on the McFadden nomination.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ORDERS FOR THURSDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2017

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it adjourn until 10 a.m., Thursday, October 26; further, that following the prayer and pledge, the morning hour be deemed expired, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, the time for the two leaders be reserved for their use later in the day, and morning business be closed; finally, that following leader remarks, the Senate proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the Palk nomination under the previous order.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ORDER FOR ADJOURNMENT

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, if there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask unanimous consent that it stand adjourned under the previous order, following the remarks of Senator DURBIN and Senator WYDEN.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Illinois.

ROHINGYA HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, the Rohingya are one of many ethnic groups, largely Muslim, who have been living for centuries in Burma and now in Myanmar, with the majority of them in the western coastal Rakhine State.

Deep-seated misconceptions about their roots and faith have led to decades of discrimination, about which many of us are aware because of press reports. They have been denied citizenship, had their movement restricted, and have been deprived of basic healthcare. It is no wonder that the Rohingya people are considered to be one of the most persecuted minorities in the world.

Today, as a result of a military crackdown against them in the Rakhine State—an overzealous, disproportionate response to attacks on security outposts by some militants last October and then again this August—countless Rohingya have been brutally killed, and more than 600,000 have fled to overwhelmed and desperate camps in neighboring Bangladesh.

The scorched-earth tactic by the Burmese military has left hundreds of villages literally burned to the ground, and the reports of rape, starvation, mass killing—even reports of security forces burning people, babies, alive—have been horrifying. Satellite images and maps indicate that the destruction

by the Burmese military is not episodic, it is systematic.

In Bangladesh, aid groups have been unable to keep up with the influx of refugees. The unprecedented scale of the crisis and the lack of infrastructure in the makeshift camps have created significant gaps in access to food, medical care, and even safety and shelter.

The international community has condemned the violence against the Rohingya, and rightly so.

Countries around the world—reputable international human rights organizations such as the Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and even the U.N.—have denounced the military's campaign against the Rohingya.

In a speech to the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva last month, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, called the Burmese military operation against the Rohingya people "a textbook example of ethnic cleansing."

Many of my colleagues in this Chamber joined me when I introduced S. Res. 250 to condemn these atrocities, and a large group of us also wrote to the administration recently to urge Secretary Tillerson and Administrator Green to help resolve the crisis and provide critically needed aid.

Just yesterday, in a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing, my friend and colleague, Senator BEN CARDIN of Maryland, labeled the crisis a "genocide." Yet Aung San Suu Kyi, the de facto leader of Burma, the Nobel laureate, has largely done and said too little.

I have followed Aung San Suu Kyi over the years. I joined many of my colleagues in praising her struggle for democracy. After 15 years under house arrest, she and the National League for Democracy won a landslide victory in the first national vote since Burma's transition to civilian rule in 2015, more than two decades after her party was denied its victory in the 1990 election.

I admired her so much for her non-violent struggle for political freedom and human rights. And while I recognize she still has a fragile relationship with the Burmese military, which still has considerable power, I am sadly disappointed in her lack of leadership when it comes to the plight of the Rohingya people—her fellow countrymen—men and women who are in a desperate situation.

She claims she is committed to restoring peace and the rule of law. Yet she has spoken of so-called allegations and counter-allegations instead of addressing the widespread, well-documented abuses by her own country's security forces.

I was glad that Aung San Suu Kyi in 2016 appointed investigators, led by former U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, who recommended this summer that Burma review a 1982 law that strips most Rohingya of citizenship. Yet the Burmese Government has yet

to implement any of the Commission's recommendations and further continues to deny access to the Rakhine State to other U.N. investigators, journalists, and NGO groups. Some officials have even accused the Rohingya of faking rape and faking the burning of their own homes. What a preposterous claim.

I recognize the dramatic progress Burma has made over the years. It will take a long time to overcome many of the challenges in such a young democracy, and I understand that Aung San Suu Kyi, as State Counselor, has a limited role under the power-sharing agreement with her military, which has largely been responsible for the violence I have described. But I would urge her to live up to her own words upon delivering her Nobel Peace Prize lecture in 2012 to address the historic and brutal suppression of the Rohingya and support ethnic reconciliation in Burma. In fact, Aung San Suu Kyi quoted the following passages from the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the U.N. General Assembly in 1948, as the answer to why she fought for democracy and human rights in her home country in Burma. She said:

[D]isregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people.

[I]t is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law.

These are wise words used by Aung San Suu Kyi when she received her Nobel Prize. They are words that apply today to this crisis within her own country.

I am committed to doing what I can in Congress to hold those in the Burmese military personally accountable for the reprehensible human rights violations against the Rohingya.

I want to note that I have also had the opportunity over the October recess to meet with some members of the Rohingya community who have resettled in my home State of Illinois over the years.

About 1,500 Rohingya people live in the Chicagoland area. Among them is Nasir Zakaria. He helped found the Rohingya Culture Center in Chicago—the first Rohingya community center in America. The center helps provide a safe, familiar space for Rohingya people new to the country, as well as critically needed resources, such as translators, ESL and computer classes, help with paperwork, and much more.

When I met Nasir and the other members of the community about a week ago with my wife, they told me about the phone calls and photos they receive late at night from family and friends fleeing the violence, looking for safety in Bangladesh.

I also heard from community members who recently returned from a medical mission to Bangladesh. They showed me the photos they brought back. One food line to feed refugees was literally 1 mile long. Healthcare is limited. Safe drinking water is limited. Cholera is detected. It is a horrible situation for these people who have been tossed out of Myanmar and now are trying just to survive nearby Bangladesh. The stories are horrific, and they are all the same.

Here is an image of this exodus that was printed in the New York Times. It shows families fleeing Burma across the border to Bangladesh with smoke rising in the background from the villages that they lived in being burned.

The stories I heard were of helpless, poor families walking on foot through jungles, crowding in boats along the Naf River, leaving behind everything with accountings of rape, killing, and arson by the Burmese military. They arrive in Bangladesh sick, exhausted, and desperately in need of the most basic things—food, clean water, medicine, a safe space to rest their heads.

Here is another image, which is heartbreaking. It is an indication of what happens in the refugee camps when food arrives, this time in a camp known as Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh.

A UNICEF report last week stated that 58 percent of the refugees who have poured into Cox's Bazar are children, noting that they are in hell on Earth. They are acutely malnourished, they need clean water and vaccines, and they are at risk of exploitation by traffickers. This is unacceptable.

I understand that Bangladesh and Burma have discussed a repatriation plan recently, but many refugees don't have any documents. They were literally burned out of their homes. We need to call on the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. Filippo Grandi was in my office last week, and he stressed how important it is for us to speak up and to help on this issue, that we ensure the voluntary right of return and we ensure the safety of those who do return and we make sure that the paper requirements for return are reasonable for people who are literally homeless and stateless at this moment.

Many are wary of returning without an assurance of full citizenship, given the risk of further persecution or the threat of being placed in camps in Myanmar when they return. I don't blame them, because the atrocities committed against the Rohingya over the past months and weeks are not new by any means.

Nasir Zakaria in Chicago told me that more than three decades ago, when he was only 14, he was kidnapped by militants targeting the Rohingya in Burma. He never saw his parents again.

Nasir eventually escaped to Bangladesh, made his way to Malaysia, where he worked for 18 years in construction before he finally made it to the United States with a green card in 2013. He learned English, worked as a

dishwasher in a hotel near Chicago, supported his wife and three children, met others in the community, and helped to create the Rohingya Center that I visited.

Here is a picture of Nasir Zakaria with his son, Mohamed, in their Chicago apartment. You can see the American flag in the background. He is very proud of this Nation that he now calls home.

The Rohingya Culture Center provides critical resources to more than 400 families in the Chicago area, one of the largest concentrations of Rohingya refugees in America. More than three decades after Nasir first escaped Burma, the Rohingya continue to be attacked and demonized.

Let me close by saying that we met today with the Myanmar Ambassador. Seven Senators sat down with him and expressed the sentiments that I have included in this statement.

First, let me give Mr. U Aung Lynn, the Ambassador, credit for coming to the meeting. He knew what we were going to raise. Yet he came, he took notes, and he assured us that he would respond to this; that we would be able to come back in a week or two for a progress report on what is being done; that he would allow or plead for access of U.N. personnel, as well as NGO groups, into the northern Rakhine area currently being denied access; that he would personally make it clear to his government we want those responsible for these atrocities held accountable. We want to make certain, as well, that those who are repatriated have a fair chance to return to a safe atmosphere in Myanmar and, ultimately, for citizenship.

It was a long list of requirements and requests that we gave to the Ambassador. He took them all in a positive way and told us he would be back to us in a matter of a week or two with a progress report.

Let me close by appealing to Aung San Suu Kyi to help resolve this crisis. I am counting on her. I do believe she is a good person. I hope that she will respond to this crisis in her own country the way she stood up with so much courage before.

I plan to meet with this Ambassador in a few weeks to chart the progress, and I look forward to working with my colleagues on a bipartisan basis to end this ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya people in Myanmar. We cannot allow the Burmese military to commit these atrocities.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, before Senator DURBIN leaves the floor, I just want to commend our colleague from Illinois. He and I have worked together for many years, and throughout that time, the Senator from Illinois has constantly been a voice for those who have no voice on these human rights concerns, laying out why the effort to step up is what we are all about as Americans.

I thank him. I enjoyed listening to him again. You don't really enjoy it because you hear about the suffering, but I am so glad that Senator DURBIN has made this case, and I thank him for it.

WILDFIRE DISASTER FUNDING ACT

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, across the West, 2017 will be long remembered as the year when fire was seared into our collective consciousness and ash rained down on homes and cars. There were mass evacuations, and scores just lost their hopes and dreams.

Devastating fires have hit my home State of Oregon, but Idaho, California, Washington, Colorado, Montana, Nevada, and more all were hit by fires that always seemed bigger and hotter and more powerful than what we have seen in the past.

These are not our grandfathers' fires. There are a whole host of reasons behind this, and today I just want to talk a bit about what happened, what it has meant, and at least a commonsense approach that Senator CRAPO and I have advocated for moving forward on a bipartisan basis.

The fact is, in the West, dozens of lives have been lost. Entire communities have been wiped out. An iconic national treasure in my home State, a place that Oregonians have always regarded—a special love for our Columbia River Gorge is practically in our chromosomes—it was burned over this year.

This month, a huge part of Northern California was burned. We talked to our colleagues Senator FEINSTEIN and Senator HARRIS about that. It is not just rolling hills and unoccupied land; the fires swept through entire cities. Some of the stories about those whose lives were lost in California just break your heart. School has been disrupted for more than a quarter million children. In some cases, it could be weeks before classes are back up and running.

In my home State, more than 600,000 acres were burned, nearly a third of that in the Chetco Bar fire that burned through southwestern Oregon. I was there to visit with folks in the community and the volunteers. There were volunteers from all over the country who were stepping up to help us deal with these fires. It sure was needed because, nationwide, almost 9 million acres burned. It is an area bigger than the size of eight States in our country—all of it up in flames. Compare that to the 1980s and the 1990s, when an average of around 3 million acres burned per year.

A brandnew report is out from the Department of the Interior forecasting how much the cost of fighting these fires is going to climb in the near future. The agency predicts a jump of 20 percent from fiscal year 2018 to 2019, and they believe that is a conservative estimate. If conditions are dry and temperatures are high, it could be even worse.

I am of the view—and it is something Senator CRAPO and I have worked on