

# LIGHT ONE CANDLE FOR THE ROHINGYA PEOPLE

## *A reading for candle lighting on Chanukah*

**We invite you to dedicate the 6th candle on the 6th night of Chanukah to the Rohingya people of Burma.** On Erev Shabbat of December 7th, please join with **American Jewish World Service (AJWS)**, the **Jewish Rohingya Justice Network** and concerned Jewish people across the U.S. to speak out against the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya people of Burma.

In August 2017, the Burmese military launched its campaign of ethnic cleansing against this long-persecuted community, forcing more than 700,000 Rohingya women, men and children to abandon their homes and flee to refugee camps across the border in Bangladesh. Our shared history of persecution calls upon us to tell their story and work toward a just resolution to this conflict.

**Please incorporate the following reading into your candle lighting in their honor, and in recognition of all who flee from religious or ethnic persecution around the world today. Together we will shine a light for the Rohingya people.**

*Read aloud:*

*Our tradition recounts that when the ancient Greek army invaded Judea and defiled the Temple Mount, the Jews ran for their lives, retreating into caves to practice their religion in peace.*

*Tragically, this pattern has repeated itself throughout the ages—both for Jews and for other persecuted minorities like the Rohingya community of Burma. Just over a year ago, the Rohingya people fled genocide and now live in exile, hoping for a safe return to their land.*

*Tonight, as we light our candles in the relative safety and warmth of our homes, we bear witness to all those who yearn for safety and comfort. We know that all should have the right to live free from persecution and fear. No one should be forced to flee because of who they are or what they believe.*

*We dedicate this candle to the Rohingya people, and to all who seek shelter from persecution today.*

*To the refugees living a daily struggle for food, water, shelter and survival.*

*To the brave activists who are fighting for equality, dignity and peace.*

*To the children hoping for a life without fear.*

*May the light that we kindle tonight shine bright, illuminating our pursuit of justice. May it remind us that each of us has the capacity to dispel darkness and bring light and hope.*

**Proceed with your candle lighting blessings.**

**Note:** Candle lighting is often inter-generational, and so we welcome you to decide which sections of this reading are appropriate to teach your family or community. This reading may be inappropriate for some young children, and older participants may want more information about the plight of the Rohingya people, which you will find on the following page.

## Background on the Rohingya Crisis

The Rohingya people of Burma (Myanmar) have faced decades of abuse and violence at the hands of their own country's military. This persecuted ethnic minority has been stripped of its citizenship, driven from its land and interned in camps.

In August 2017, the violence escalated to ethnic cleansing, when the military began a vicious campaign of burning villages and brutally murdering people. In the aftermath, more than 700,000 Rohingya people fled to Bangladesh—many on a weeks-long journey—carrying nothing but their children and a few belongings. Top UN officials say these atrocities bear the hallmarks of genocide.

**The plight of the Rohingya people echoes the persecution and violence suffered by Jews throughout history. In 2017, AJWS convened the Jewish Rohingya Justice Network, a diverse coalition of leaders from across the Jewish community to act powerfully on our promise of “never again.”**

AJWS, for example, funds social change organizations in Burma that are working around the clock to help refugees in camps in Bangladesh meet basic needs for food, shelter and water; recover from their profound traumas; and weather the devastation wrought by the monsoon rains. It also supports Rohingya and other human rights activists in Burma and around the world who are fighting to end the persecution and achieve justice. AJWS has issued a rallying cry for the Rohingya people—pushing the U.S. government to take action and orchestrating a unified Jewish response.

**The Jewish Rohingya Justice Network** petitioned Congress to pass the Burma Human Rights and Freedom Act of 2018, a bill calling for immediate U.S. government intervention.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee advanced the bill to the full Senate in February 2018, thanks in part to this advocacy. The House followed suit with a similar bill in May, which passed with overwhelming support and included language that AJWS helped shape, calling for increased humanitarian aid, U.S. sanctions against Burma and a mechanism for accountability for crimes against the Rohingya. Though this legislation is currently stalled in the Senate, the U.S. government acted on several of its key components. In August 2018, the US sanctioned several Burmese military officials and denied them entry visas into the U.S. And in September 2018, the administration increased humanitarian aid to the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

**If you would like to join us in advancing a just end to the Rohingya crisis, please visit [www.ajws.org/lightforrohingya](http://www.ajws.org/lightforrohingya)**

**JEWISH ROHINGYA JUSTICE NETWORK** is a powerful consortium of Jewish NGOs advocating for the rights of the Rohingya. **Members include:** American Jewish World Service, American Jewish Committee, Anti-Defamation League, HIAS, JACOB, Jewish Community Relations Council of New York, Jewish Council for Public Affairs, Jewish World Watch, Rabbinical Assembly, Reconstructing Judaism, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, T'ruah and The Union for Reform Judaism. **Allies:** Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, Hebrew College, The Muslim-Jewish Solidarity Committee, The New York Board of Rabbis, The Shalom Center and Uri L'Tzedek.