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Statement by Ambassador Hau Do Suan,
Permanent Representative of
the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to the United Nations
at the Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security: Sexual violence in conflict
(New York, 23 April 2019)

Mr. President,

My delegation wishes to congratulate you for Germany's Presidency of the Council. We are confident in your wisdom and able leadership. I assure you of our full support and cooperation.

I thank Secretary-General Mr. Guterres, SRSG Ms. Patten and other briefers for their important briefings.

The "Women, Peace and Security agenda" of the Security Council is crucial in the fight against conflict-related sexual violence. In this regard, Myanmar welcomes the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the mandate of the SRSG on Sexual Violence in Conflict through the Security Council resolution 1888 (2009), and the twentieth anniversary of the Security Council resolution 1325(2000) on Women, Peace and Security.

Mr. President,

The Government of Myanmar in building a people-centered democratic nation, places promotion and protection of human rights as a high priority in its political agenda. The government upholds the policy of zero-tolerance against any form of sexual violence including conflict-related ones. The root causes of the conflict-related sexual violence lie in lack of peace and stability. Therefore, we are putting our utmost efforts for the cessation of conflicts and building sustainable peace and national reconciliation.

Mr. President,

Allow me to share briefly the efforts made by Myanmar in the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence in recent months. Based on the Government's firm commitment to address this issue and in the spirit of cooperation with the United Nations, we have signed the Joint Communiqué with SRSG on Sexual Violence in Conflict in December last year to prevent and address the conflict-related sexual violence.

Soon after signing of the Joint Communiqué, in February this year, the Government of Myanmar has facilitated the visit of SRSG Ms. Patten and her team to Myanmar. In March 2019, a ministerial level National Committee on Prevention and Response to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence was formed to implement the Joint Communiqué, and the First National Committee meeting was held subsequently. The National Work Plan will be drafted with technical assistance from the United Nations.

Mr. President,

To transform the zero-tolerance policy against sexual violence into action, domestic legal reform is essential for the effective implementation of the protection of the rights of women and girls. In this regard, the "Prevention and Protection of Violence against Women Law**"** has been drafted and will soon be enacted by the Parliament. The new Law stipulates the need to protect women from all forms of violence, including domestic abuse, marital rape, sexual violence, harassment by stalking, harassment in the workplace and public place and violence through tradition and customary practices.

The Government has regularly submitted reports relating to actions taken by the Government on the protection of the rights of women and prevention of sexual violence against women and girls to CEDAW Committee, and also included in the UPR process of the HRC. We are also working closely with the UN Women in formulating and implementing the National Strategic Plan on Advancement of Women (2013-2022) for gender equality and women empowerment.

Mr. President,

With regard to the alleged sexual violence committed against women, the Independent Commission of Enquiry (ICoE) was established to investigate all allegations of human rights violations following ARSA terrorist attacks in August 2017 in northern Rakhine. The mandate of the Commission is to seek accountability and reconciliation. The Commission is carrying out its mandate with independence, impartiality, and objectivity.

The Commission has publicly invited submissions on the allegation of human rights. The Commission will soon be visiting Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh to meet with alleged victims of sexual abuse. The Commission's work will be evidence-based. Therefore, the international community should support the work of the Commission. ICOE will submit its final report to the Office of the President towards the end of the year.

The Government of Myanmar is willing and capable to address accountability on sexual violence. Action will be taken in accordance with the law where there is sufficient evidence.

Mr. President,

The Annual Report of the SG on conflict-related Sexual Violence acknowledges the important steps taken by Myanmar to protect the rights of women and children. However, it is regrettable that the Tatmadaw (Myanmar Armed Forces) has been listed in the annex of the report since last year despite Myanmar's genuine efforts to engage constructively with the office of the SRSG. We are also disappointed that the atrocities committed by ARSA terrorists against non-Muslim ethnic minority people especially women and children had not been adequately reflected in the report. We must not forget that the unprovoked, coordinated ARSA terrorist attacks on 30 Government security outposts in August 2017 were the cause of the subsequent humanitarian crisis.

Mr. President,

Much as we all condemn conflict-related sexual violence, we must respond in accordance with the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, particularly peaceful resolution of conflicts through dialogue and negotiation; respect for sovereignty of countries and recognition of their primary responsibility to maintaining peace and security and upholding the rule of law.

In tackling the issue of sexual violence in conflict, the international community should be guided by universally accepted norms of impartiality, non-selectivity and non-politicization of the issue. Constructive approach through dialogue and providing assistance to the country concerned would only bring about positive results in the efforts to resolve the problem.

Exerting unfair pressure upon a country, solely based on unrealistic lofty human rights standards without giving any due regard to the condition of the country concerned will surely fail and will meet total rejection from the people of the country.

The first obligation of international actors, whether they are a UN agency, an INGO, CSO or a media outlet, is "to do no harm". Often times and regrettably, so much damage have been done due to predetermined political agendas of some countries and organizations, applying double standards by abusing UN systems with biased attitude.

Let me just give you an example of how much damage can be done to a country by international community and international media in a crisis situation. I am quoting from an article by Jacob Goldberg titled "When the story comes before the survivor" appeared in the 2019 February 21 issue of Columbia Journalism Review. In October 2017, a refugee woman named Rajuma Begum, 20, told The New York Times's Jeffrey Gettleman that Myanmar soldiers beat and gang-raped her and shot her mother and brother. She told him **" They threw my baby into a fire".** These words have been passionately quoted repeatedly by the media, human rights activists and many diplomats and even UN officials in an attempt to justifying the accusation of the alleged atrocities committed by the Myanmar security forces.

But, before Rajuma told Gettleman that her baby was thrown into a fire, she had already told a different version of her story. She told Al Jazeer in September 2017, **" They ripped my son from my arms and threw him on the ground and cut his throat".** Later, she told others that her baby was killed with a machete, making no mention of the fire. In any case, the damage had been done.

This is just one example among endless fake and manufactured accounts with the malicious intent to tarnish the image of the government and people of Myanmar. If we are to succeed in our effort to end sexual violence in conflict, we must rise above politicization and dramatization of the violence.

As for Myanmar, we shall continue to engage and work constructively with the Office of the SRSG to achieve our objective of ending sexual violence.

I thank you.