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Statement by H.E. U Thaung Tun, National Security Advisor to the Union Government of Myanmar at the meeting on the situation in Myanmar in the United Nations Security Council

28 September 2017

Mr. President,

I thank you for the opportunity to address the Security Council with regard to the turmoil that has recently befallen Myanmar's Rakhine State and the ensuing humanitarian situation.

I have listened carefully to the statements made by the distinguished Secretary-General and the representatives of the member states of the Council.

The common thread that runs through the commentaries is the allusion that "something is rotten in the state of Rakhine." Assertions in the media that a campaign of terror has been unleashed in Northern Rakhine and that unspeakable crimes have been committed against innocent people have only served to heighten the concern of the international community. While such assertions might appear reasonable at first glance to a lay observer, expert observers with knowledge of the history of Rakhine and Myanmar and exposure to the propaganda tactics of terrorists will see such comments for what they really are – subjective and emotionally charged account.

Nevertheless, we understand the concern of the international community and take serious note of it.

Mr. President,

I would like to take this opportunity to apprise you of the situation obtaining on the ground and of our efforts to end the violence, assist all innocent civilians affected by the turmoil and plans to find a lasting solution to the daunting challenges we face.

First, we recognize that there is a serious situation that needs to be addressed.

But we also need to recognize that the recent round of violence was triggered by the attacks launched by so-called ARSA terrorist.

We are committed to a sustainable solution that will lead to peace, stability, development and the return of displaced communities to their homes.

We feel deeply for the suffering and plight of all affected communities -- Rakhine, Muslim, Daingnet, Mro, Thet, Maramagyi and Hindu. They are all victims of violence and terrorism.

Terrorism constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security. It has no place in our civilized world. I am sure you will agree with me when I say that we cannot condone terrorism in any form and manifestation.

The government of Myanmar has strongly condemned the acts of terror committed by ARSA in northern Rakhine. The highest Islamic organization in Myanmar, the "All Myanmar Islamic Religious Organization" as well as the "Interfaith Dialogue Group of Myanmar" have expressed their solidarity with the government and issued statements condemning the acts of terror committed by ARSA. They stressed that no religion can condone violence that result in the loss of life and property. They expressed their support for the government's efforts to address the situation in Rakhine and its endeavors to promote national reconciliation and peace in the entire country.

In this regard, we welcome the statements of the UNSG and of many countries represented here in this table condemning the attack of terrorism.

The government will work to ensure that the fight against terrorism will not distract us from our commitment to bring peace, harmony and development to Rakhine State. It is striving to restore normalcy. There have been no armed clashes and clearance operations since September 5.

Second, I wish to stress that there is no ethnic cleansing and no genocide in Myanmar.

Ethnic cleansing and genocide are serious charges and they should not be used lightly. It would be a sad commentary of our times if we allowed emotions to cloud our view and assert that what is happening in Rakhine is ethnic cleansing without first undertaking a legal review and making a judicial determination. I can assure you that the leaders of Myanmar, who have been struggling so long for freedom and human

rights, will never espouse policy of genocide or ethnic cleansing and the government will do everything to prevent it.

As clearly stated by the State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in her address to the diplomatic corps in Nay Pyi Taw on 19 September, we condemn all human rights violation and violence. We are committed to the restoration of peace, stability and rule of law throughout the country. Security forces have been instructed to adhere strictly to the Code of Conduct in carrying out security operations, to exercise all due restraint, and to take full measures to avoid collateral damage and the harming of innocent civilians.

Myanmar is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world. It is home to 135 officially recognized ethnic groups, each with its own distinctive culture and adherence to a variety of religions, including Buddhism, Islam, Christianity and Hinduism. Religious groups have been living in harmony throughout our history.

The situation that we face today is due to terrorism and is not based on religion.

It should be noted that Muslims are not a minority in northern Rakhine. They constitute 95% of the total population. What is little known is that the vast majority of Muslims did not abandon their hearth and home. While there have been an exodus, more than 50% of the Muslim villages in northern Rakhine remain intact and are living in peace with the neighbours; Buddhists and Hindus.

Representatives of the diplomatic corps in Yangon, accompanied by the media, will visit northern Rakhine on Monday. They will have the opportunity to witness firsthand the situation on the ground.

I am happy to affirm that the government of Myanmar has invited the Secretary General and the Under Secretary General to visit Myanmar. We hope to welcome them in the near future to enhance cooperation between Myanmar and the United Nations.

Third, the government of Myanmar is fully aware of its primary responsibility to address the humanitarian situation.

We have been providing assistance to all displaced people without discrimination. We are collaborating with the Red Cross Movement and donor countries to provide assistance expeditiously in accordance with humanitarian principles. The ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) has agreed to work with us to deliver humanitarian assistance to all displaced persons.

Fourth, we are concerned by reports that thousands of people have crossed into Bangladesh. We would like to fathom reasons for the exodus. We will talk to those who have fled as well as to those who have opted to remain in their villages.

Recently, some hundreds of Muslim villagers left their homes and headed towards the border notwithstanding the efforts of the regional authorities to persuade them to return to their villages. The villagers voiced their concerns regarding the availability of humanitarian assistance in a sustained manner as well as fears that they are becoming a minority in their own area.

It is learnt that the villagers have been threatened over the telephone and that they have been persuaded by their fellow men who are already in Bangladesh to join them. Moreover, the villagers remain fearful of retaliation by the ARSA following the revelation that a large number of Hindu villagers have been massacred and buried in mass graves.

The authorities have reassured the villagers that they would be provided assistance and security. However, some have chosen to cross over to Bangladesh.

There has been a growing clamour for repatriation of refugees who have fled from Myanmar to Bangladesh. I would like to stress here Myanmar is prepared to start the verification process at any time. Our two neighbors have had the experience of such a repatriation process in 1993.

We are working to enhance relations with Bangladesh. I have met with the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh here in New York last week. The Minister of the Office of the State Counsellor will visit Dhaka this weekend to further discuss matters of mutual concern and to find ways and means to move ahead. We have also invited the Minister of Home Affairs of Bangladesh. We will welcome him any time that he is able

to come to Myanmar and hope to take forward our cooperation on border security matters.

Our stated willingness to discuss the issue of repatriation gives the lie to the assertion that there is a policy of ethnic cleansing on our part.

Mr. President,

The new government in Myanmar inherited a challenging situation in Rakhine State and has had to deal with the consequences of actions by other actors.

The current crisis is due to the acts of terror perpetrated by ARSA. To address the situation, the government launched a number of initiatives including the Rakhine Advisory Commission chaired by Dr. Kofi Annan. The recommendation of the Kofi Annan Commission represents a viable roadmap to forge forward.

An implementation committee for the recommendations has already been formed and work is in progress. Two meetings have already been held. We must give this committee time and space.

At this critical juncture in the life of our young democracy, it is imperative that the international community join hands with us to ensure that democracy takes firm root and that we will succeed in carrying out our responsibility to establish peace, stability, and development in Rakhine and in the whole of Myanmar. That is only way we can solve the Rakhine conundrum.

The Security Council must refrain from taking measures that exacerbate rather than alleviate the situation. It can and must do no less.

Thank you.

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