MYANMAR

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**Statement by Mr. Kyaw Moe Tun**

**Director General, International Organizations and Economic Affairs Department,**

**Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Myanmar**

**at the General Discussion of the Third Committee of the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly**

**on**

**Agenda Item 72: (b) Human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms**

**(c) Human rights situations and reports of special rapporteurs and representative**

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**Statement by Mr. Kyaw Moe Tun, Director General, International Organizations and Economic Affairs Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Myanmar at the General Discussion on Agenda Item 72: (b) Human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms (c) Human rights situations and reports of special rapporteurs and representative**

**Mr. Chairman,**

As a member of the Non-aligned Movement, Myanmar opposes country-specific mandates which run contrary to the principles of universality, impartiality, objectivity, non-selectivity and non-politicization in addressing human rights issues. (The Universal Periodic Review mechanism of HRC is the appropriate platform for addressing the human rights situations in all countries in a uniform and objective manner and with the spirit of constructive engagement.)

(Myanmar has its very first democratically elected government in 50 years following the general election held in November 2015.) We are now undergoing a democratic transition with so many challenges and constraints. The new government is trying to establish a culture of democracy and liberalism in a balanced way to ensure our people are secure as well as free. This is the major challenge that Myanmar is facing at the moment together with the equally important the challenge of sustainable development. However, the Government is determined to fulfil its commitment to achieving the goal of building a peaceful, harmonious, prosperous and democratic federal union.

(The Government has made peace and reconciliation as a national priority and set out the agenda for peace and national reconciliation process. Moreover, it is steadfast in materialising its commitments to advancing human rights for benefits of the people.)

(Just over eighteen months the new government in office,) Myanmar has already achieved a great deal - from launching our new national health and education strategies to stabilizing the economy and building the foundations for future growth. (For example, within one year, deaths from HIV were halved – not because we are concentrating just on HIV/AIDS, but because we are concentrating on public health as a whole, the health of all of our peoples and all our communities. At the economic sector, Myanmar's success in creating a more investment friendly environment has been recognized by the World Bank Groups by rewarding "the Star Reformers Award at the Investment Competitiveness Forum in Vienna, Austria, on 26 October 2017.)

To support the development of a strong and inclusive democracy, Myanmar is strengthening governance and reforming our public institutions to create a fair and just society for all. Last year, the Parliament enacted, amended and revoked a total of 20 laws to be in line with the changing circumstances. (This will have lasting benefits for the country and included introducing new laws to grant rights of peaceful assembly. The legacy of decades of non-democratic rule cannot be undone overnight. Many challenges remain, but Myanmar has already taken significant steps. Today, there are over 30 independent media organizations and correspondents from 20 international outlets in Myanmar. Moreover, there are almost 900 NGOs and INGOs working on wide-ranging issues from women's rights to local development.)

In expressing Myanmar's strong commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights and respecting fundamental rights of individuals, Myanmar ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) on 6 October 2017.

The government is committed to ensuring greater freedoms for the people in the country — starting with political and media freedom. (After decades of restrictions on free speech with the existence of only state-controlled media, Myanmar now has a growing private media sector and has introduced new laws that grant rights of peaceful assembly.)

(Moreover, the government recognises concerns regarding section 66 (d) of the Telecommunications Law. Myanmar's parliament recently approved amendments to the law that bring greater clarity and definition to the provisions. Legislative change takes time but we are committed to building a more open and free society. It also needs to ensure that press freedom come with responsibility and accountability at this nascent transition.)

(Myanmar is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, with a long history of different faiths coexisting in harmony. Freedom of religion in Myanmar is guaranteed both in law and practice. For every 740 Buddhists, 450 Christians, 680 Muslims and 460 Hindus there is one monastery, one church, one mosque and one temple, respectively.)

To promote culture of peaceful co-existence, the Interfaith Friendship Group was set up in Myanmar on a nationwide scale, comprising of representatives from all faiths. (The Group is composed of 122 organizations at central, state, district and township levels.)

(Culture, tradition and respect for religions taught Myanmar to have zero tolerance for hate speeche and religious extremism.) To address rising trend of hate speech and religious extremism, the government agencies and relevant stakeholders are working together for drafting a Law related to prevention of hate speech and religious extremism. (In this regard, we, with the support of the United

Kingdom, organized a workshop on striking a right balance between freedom of expression and hate speech last August. At the workshop, the international experts shared the international norms and standards in exercising freedom of expression, preventing hate speech and countries good practices.)

(Taking this opportunity, allow me to briefly touch on another important issue of the Rakhine State.) We share the concern of the international community on the current humanitarian situation in Rakhine and take it seriously. The Government has undertaken following three main tasks promptly:

1. Repatriation and provision of humanitarian assistance to returnees;
2. Resettlement and rehabilitation of all displaced communities; and
3. Establishment of sustainable peace, stability and development in Rakhine State.

(Subsequently the Union Enterprise for humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development in Rakhine State (The Union Enterprise) was launched on 15 October. (It is a partnership among the government, people, private sector, local NGOs and civil society organizations, development partners, UN agencies and INGOs.) On 17 October, the Committee for Union Enterprise, chaired by the State Counsellor, was established to oversee operation of the Enterprise.)

(As an ongoing humanitarian assistance, UEHRD provided 661 rice bags, 220 cans of cooking oil, 39 bags of pea, 12 bags of salt, 100 bags of onion, 100 bags of potato, 11 bags of dried chili and milk powders to Pantawpyin Village where Muslims live. It also provided 290 rice bags, 97 cans of cooking oil, 18 bags of pea, 7 bags of salt, 48 bags of onion, 48 bags of potato, 5 bags of dried chili and milk powder to the local ethnic Mro nationals living in Laung Don Village.)

(We are collaborating with Red Cross Movement, ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA), providing humanitarian assistance to the people in need without discrimination in the Rakhine State.)

**Mr. Chairman,**

Myanmar and Bangladesh authorities are working on a voluntary, safe and dignified return of displaced persons on the basis of 1993 agreement between the two countries. The delegation headed by the Home Minister of Bangladesh was recently in Myanmar for discussion on the issue of repatriation and border security cooperation between the two countries. During the visit, two MoUs were signed on the establishment of border liaison offices and on the security cooperation and dialogue.

Though such engagements are going on the bilateral front, we are quite surprised to witnessing the approach pursued by the delegation of Bangladesh in the United Nations fora. Therefore, a question has come across to my mind that whether the delegation has the genuine desire to solve the issue rather inflaming the issue.

Allow me to draw the committee's attention to the declassified internal minute of Ambassador T.J. O'Brien of the British Embassy in Yangon in 1975. The British Ambassador had a confidential talk with Bangladesh Ambassador K. N. Kaiser on 23 December 1975. The Bangladesh Ambassador "admitted that there were upward of ½ million Banglee trespassers in Arakan who the Burmese had some right to eject. He had implored the Burmese authorities not to press this issue during Bangladesh's present troubles and had been pleased that the Burmese had not taken advantage of his country's misfortunes in this respect".

**Mr. Chairman,**

The challenges we face for finding sustainable solution on the issue of Rakhine State cannot be overcome overnight. Sincere and genuine cooperation from the international community is crucial.

**Mr. Chairman,**

Democratic change doesn't happen overnight, it is a hard fought process. (When we say "democratic change", we are referring to changing the system and changing mind-set. Neither the people nor the government alone can bring about change. As State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi told the nation upon taking office, the 2015 elections were just the beginning of Myanmar's journey towards democracy, not the end.) Myanmar has so far achieved significant progress in democratic transition but many daunting challenges still ahead. We are resolute to overcome these challenges for benefits of the people.

The understanding and continued support of the international community is important for the success of Myanmar's endeavours to building a peaceful, prosperous, democratic Myanmar.

I thank you.

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