



MYANMAR

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Statement by

His Excellency U Henry Van Thio,

Vice-President of

the Republic of the Union of Myanmar,

at the General Debate of

the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly

New York, 20 September 2017

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Mr President,

I would like to extend our congratulations to you on your election as President of the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly. We are confident that under your able leadership, this year's session will be fruitful.

**Mr. President,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Before I go into the substance of my statement, I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest sympathy to the government and people of Mexico for the loss of life and property caused by the deadly earthquake which hit Mexico City.

I also wish to convey our profound sympathy to the government and people of the United States who experienced horrendous consequences of hurricanes in a short span of two weeks. Our sympathies also go to the people of Puerto Rico who are still reeling from the effects of hurricane Maria.

The intensity and frequency of such natural disasters are evidence of climate change. Climate change is now becoming a reality posing a serious threat to our planet. The impacts of climate change are global in scope and unprecedented in scale. Myanmar is one of those countries that are highly vulnerable to the negative effects of climate change. As a country frequently affected by storms, floods and droughts, Myanmar welcomes the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. I am pleased to inform this august Assembly that yesterday Myanmar deposited with Secretary-General the instruments of ratification on the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol.

**Mr. President,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We welcome this year's theme "Focusing on people — striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet". Peace and stability is something that we are striving to achieve in Myanmar after nearly seven decades of civil strife and conflict.

Last year from this podium, our State Counsellor DawAung San SuuKyi set out the government's vision to end decades of internal armed conflict in Myanmar and to find lasting and meaningful solutions to the complex situation in Rakhine State.

Today, one year on, I stand before you to apprise you of the progress we have made and the remaining challenges. Given that the situation in Rakhine State has understandably been the focus of the world's attention in recent weeks, let me start by addressing this issue.

**Mr. President,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Yesterday, the State Counsellor briefed the Diplomatic Corps on the government's efforts regarding national reconciliation and peace. She highlighted the achievements in the past 18 months and challenges that remain. In touching upon the situation in Rakhine, she said that Myanmar shares the concern of the international community regarding displacement and suffering of all communities affected by the latest round of terrorist attacks. She also stressed that "We condemn all human rights violations and unlawful violence. We are committed to the restoration of peace, stability and rule of law throughout the State. The 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. Human rights violations and all other acts that impair stability and harmony and undermine the rule of law will be addressed in accordance with strict norms of justice. We feel deeply for suffering of all the people who have been caught up in the conflict."

**Mr. President,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The situation in Rakhine has been one of the top priorities of the government since it assumed office. The government has been endeavoring to restore peace and stability and to promote harmony among all communities.

The Central Committee on Implementation of Peace, Stability and Development of Rakhine State, chaired by the State Counsellor herself, was established on 30 May 2016 to address the specific needs of the State.

Additionally in August 2016, she set up a commission headed by Dr. Kofi Annan to advise the government on sustainable solutions to the complex situation in Rakhine.

We have been striving to ensure that the Rakhine State is duly developed while ensuring peace, stability and societal cohesion. This is no easy task. Deep mistrust developed over decades has to be slowly chiseled away.

On 24 August 2017, the Kofi Annan Commission released its final report. Our government immediately welcomed it.

We had hoped that today's occasion would be an opportunity for us to communicate to the world the progress that we have made towards implementing the Commission's recommendations.

It is therefore with deep regret that instead, I must primarily address you on the current state of affairs in Rakhine State, following the recent attacks by the terrorist group known as ARSA last month.

**Mr. President,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

As you are aware, within hours of the release of the Advisory Commission's report, a series of coordinated attacks were carried out on 30 police outposts in Northern Rakhine. The ARSA claimed responsibility for the attacks.

These attacks ignited fresh violence in the region, resulting insignificant loss of life, widespread suffering and mass displacement of all communities.

Those who have had to abandon their hearth and home are many – not just Muslim and Rakhine, but also small minority groups such as Daingnet, Mro, Thet, Mramagyi and Hindus. Most of the world has been oblivious of their existence and plight.

Let me be clear. The government of Myanmar is deeply concerned about the present situation in Rakhine. Our deepest sympathy goes to the families of all innocent civilians and members of the police and security forces who have lost their lives. There is no denying that this is a problem of significant magnitude.

I am happy to inform you that the situation has improved. No armed clashes have been reported since 5 September.

Accordingly, we are concerned by reports that the numbers of Muslims crossing into Bangladesh remain unabated.

We would need to find out the reason for this exodus. What is little known is that the great majority of the Muslim population decided to remain in their villages.

We share the need to ensure that vital humanitarian assistance is provided to all those in need.

Moreover, we acknowledge that the duty to respond to the challenges in Rakhine State is first and foremost the duty of our national government. The situation in Rakhine is complex. The challenges we face are significant. We have accordingly adopted an integrated national strategy to address this problem.

I am pleased to announce the launch of a committee chaired by the Union Minister of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement to implement the recommendations of the Advisory Commission. To ensure transparency and accountability, the Committee is mandated to publicly issue a progress report every four months. In addition to the Committee, we intend to establish an Advisory Board comprised of eminent persons from both Myanmar and abroad.

At present, humanitarian assistance is our first priority. We are committed to ensuring that aid is received by all those in need, without discrimination. We have already dedicated significant national funds and resources to humanitarian relief operations.

I am also pleased to inform you that a new government-led mechanism, established in cooperation with the Red Cross Movement, has also started its humanitarian assistance activities.

On behalf of the government of Myanmar, I would like to express my gratitude to all those countries who have offered to contribute towards this assistance programme. In particular, we are grateful for the generous offers of support that we have recently received from many of our friends across the world.

At the same time, we are working hard to enhance relations with Bangladesh. The Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and the National Security Advisor visited Bangladesh in January and July of this year. We were hoping for a visit from the Home Minister of Bangladesh but it had to be postponed as the Minister could not come in August. We will welcome him at any time that he is able to come and hope to take forward our cooperation on border security matters.

There has been a call for the repatriation of displaced people who have recently fled from northern Rakhine to Bangladesh. The State Counsellor in her speech yesterday stated that Myanmar was prepared to start the verification process at anytime. Our two neighbors have had the experience of such a process in 1993 through the establishment of a joint working group for implementation of repatriation process. We can develop a process based on the experience of 1993.

Mr. President

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Myanmar stands together with the rest of the world in condemning terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. Terrorism constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security. Our position is clear. We cannot condone terrorism.

At the same time, the government is working to ensure that acts of terrorism will not distract us from pursuing the long term strategy that is necessary to address the complex challenges in Rakhine State today.

The recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission provide us with a clear roadmap. Our implementation Committee began its work last week and in due course we will be inviting observers to witness some of our programmes.

**Mr. President,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The recent events in Rakhine State are a painful reminder that we face difficult challenges ahead on the long journey towards peace, prosperity and democracy.

However, please allow me to reiterate this: our commitment to peace remains as strong and as unwavering today as it was one year ago when our State Counsellor, DawAung San SuuKyi, first addressed you from this podium.

As part of this commitment, we have made the national reconciliation and peace process our top priority. Our vision here is clear: to achieve a democratic, federal Union, based on the principles of freedom, justice, equal rights and self-determination.

With regard to the peace process in the country, I am pleased to inform you that in May this year, we successfully held the second session of our Union Peace Conference. For the first time, we were able to discuss and define key principles that will form the basis of a federal, democratic Union. The Union Accord, consisting of thirty-seven principles covering the political, economic, social and environmental sectors was signed by representatives of the government, the parliament, the military, ethnic armed organizations and political parties.

Although we have made real progress, we know that the road ahead is long and convoluted. Our democratic transition is fragile. At this important juncture in our nation's history, we only ask that the international community continues to support our efforts to achieve peace, prosperity and democracy.

**Mr. President,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Before I conclude this statement, let me reaffirm Myanmar's faith and confidence in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

I would also like to emphasize Myanmar's firm commitment to a world in which peace and harmony prevails.

I thank you, Mr. President.
