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*Provisional***Statement by the Representative of Myanmar, Mr. Suan:**

Myanmar is striving to build a peaceful, prosperous and democratic nation after decades of military rule, isolation and internal armed conflict. In our efforts to achieve a people-oriented, democratic society, we are working hard to put gender equality and women's empowerment at the heart of our national development strategies. Our 10-year national strategic plan for the advancement of women covers key areas of the United Nations agenda, including women's empowerment and the prevention of violence against women and girls.

In 2014 Myanmar also signed the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict and became the one hundred and fiftieth State to endorse it. We are currently drafting a law on the protection of women and the prevention of violence against them that will cover all forms of violence against women and girls. We have also set up one-stop women's support centres throughout the country to support women and girls who have experienced violence. The centres provide physical, legal, psychological and social support.

Starting in 2016, we established national gender-based hotlines to help victims of violence to report such incidents and get counselling. We are also revising our child laws to include a provision on conflict-related sexual violence against children. Myanmar took a further step towards demonstrating its firm position on preventing and addressing conflict-related sexual violence by inviting Special Representative of the Secretary-General Patten to Myanmar in December 2017.

With regard to the joint communiqué proposed by the Special Representative, I would like to say that the Government has already implemented various measures, such as steps to raise awareness on preventing sexual violence. Reports on actions taken by the Government to ensure that the rights of women are protected and sexual violence against women and girls is prevented have also been regularly submitted to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and included in the Universal Periodic Review process of the Human Rights Council. We have also updated this information for the various United Nations special mandate holders. We intend to work with Myanmar-based United Nations agencies on implementing the five priority areas of cooperation identified by the Special Representative.

This year's annual report (S/2018/250) of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence acknowledges the important steps that Myanmar has taken to protect the rights of women and children.

However, it is most regrettable that the Tatmadaw, the Myanmar Armed Forces, has been listed in the report, despite Myanmar's genuine efforts to engage constructively with the Office of the Special Representative. Moreover, the decision to list it was made based on unverified allegations, despite our attempts to interview the alleged victims in camps in Cox's Bazar to investigate the cases. We are disappointed that our request for a proper investigation to be carried out was denied.

With regard to the alleged sexual violence mentioned in the Secretary-General's report, the Government of Myanmar has once again made its position very clear that it will not condone any human rights abuse. If there is concrete evidence, we will be ready to take action against any perpetrator in accordance with the law and without impunity. The recent sentencing of seven military personnel who were involved in the Inn Din incident to 10 years in prison with hard labour is clear testimony to the Government's strong commitment to the rule of law. My delegation categorically rejects the groundless accusations that sexual violence was used as a strategy to force Muslim people to flee their homes. In Myanmar, sexual violence is a crime that is abhorrent to our traditional values and strictly forbidden by our law and culture.

My delegation stresses that members of our armed forces are subject not only to our 1959 military act and military by-laws, but also to existing civilian laws and traditions. As such, severe legal action is taken against perpetrators whether they are civilians or members of the security forces, as has been demonstrated by a number of prosecutions of military personnel for sexual violence. Members of the armed forces have been clearly instructed to strictly follow the military code of conduct and to refrain from committing crimes, including any involving sexual violence. A series of capacity-building workshops have been held to educate military personnel on human rights, and the curriculum of our military training schools includes instruction on laws related to the prevention of sexual violence.

Myanmar strongly objects to the use of expressions such as "ethnic cleansing" and "genocide" in reference to the situation in Rakhine state. Such irresponsible accusations, based on unsubstantiated and one-sided allegations, fake news and reports tailored for political purposes, will only exacerbate the current situation and further polarize the various communities in the region. We are seriously concerned that such incessant rhetoric directed against Myanmar can have only a negative impact on the existing cooperation between Myanmar and the United Nations, as well as on our ongoing bilateral cooperation with Bangladesh in our efforts to find a lasting solution to the current humanitarian problems and to the complex situation in Rakhine.

As much as we all condemn conflict-related sexual violence, we should also deplore the exploitation of this sensitive issue by certain groups as a tool to achieve their own political goals. The problem of sexual violence cannot be resolved by naming and blaming. The international community must take a constructive approach by sharing information on violations and assisting Member States in their efforts to address the issue.