

**Statement Delivered by H.E Dr. Win Myat Aye,
Union Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement of
Myanmar, at the Sixty-Ninth Session of the Executive
Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme**

**Mr. Chairman, the United Nations' High Commissioner for
Refugees, excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and
gentlemen:**

A very Good morning/afternoon.

It is my pleasure to be here with you all. As a union minister, I oversee the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement. In addition to this capacity, I'm currently chairing the Committee for Implementation on the Recommendations of late Mr. Kofi Annan's Advisory Commission for Rakhine State. I am also assigned to act as Vice-chair to the new Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development (UEHRD) in Rakhine State, that was established in October 2017, in which State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi acts as the chair.

I'd like to take this session as an opportunity to update the delegates regarding our efforts to handle the recent refugee crisis that involves the Muslim communities from Rakhine State who now take refuge in Bangladesh. As you all know, the security incidents in August 2017 caused by ARSA's attacks on the local police outposts has triggered large numbers of Muslim community members to seek refuge in neighboring Bangladesh. And we now have two things in our hand – one is to address the

current crisis; and the other one is to address the root causes of this problem through implementation of the recommendations from the Annan commission, which our government still firmly accepts and upholds.

I'd like to affirm that the position of our government is to repatriate those who previously lived in Myanmar. Within three months from the onset of the crisis, Myanmar signed a bilateral physical agreement with Bangladesh for repatriation of these refugees. And since then, we have worked towards fulfilling the contractual obligations of the said agreement.

As in any cross-border refugee crisis, this work depends on the level of bilateral collaboration and coordination between Bangladesh and Myanmar. Any hinderance in the process will have to be addressed through means of cooperation between the two countries, and not by any other means. Our government appreciates and values the friendship that we have with Bangladeshi authorities. And I'd like to affirm here that Myanmar is committed to address specific issues and bottlenecks in the repatriation based on this positive relationship with Bangladeshi authorities.

As we work towards repatriation, we understand the importance of creating conducive environments for such to happen. In that sense, we have also signed a tripartite MoU with UNDP and UNHCR to assist us in creating conducive environment for voluntary repatriation. Under this MoU, joint technical teams have also accomplished Phase I field assessment in selective

villages in Northern Rakhine State. We expect these two UN agencies to be able to advise us and work with us – not just on conditions favoring the repatriation but also those that will bring durable peace to Rakhine State.

Our government is the only government in Myanmar's modern history that took a voluntary initiative to solve the underlying issues, long before this current crisis happened in 2017. In 2016, our government established a commission led by the late Mr. Kofi Annan to help advice durable solutions to bring peace and development to Rakhine State. This is a testament of our genuine will to solve this issue. But unfortunately, the attacks happened just the day after the commission submitted its final report; and hindered all of our plans as we were swamped with responding the crisis in late 2017.

Nevertheless, we have formed the Committee for Implementation of Recommendation for Rakhine State in September 2017. And since the beginning of 2018, we were able to resume the implementation of the Annan recommendations with full momentum, and we are now back on track. To date, we have been implementing 81 out of 88 recommendations. Many are still in the process of implementation and will take time to complete, as these recommendations such as the ones for social cohesion takes time to accomplish by its own nature. However, we are committed to implementing these recommendations, and will do so in collaboration with like-minded agencies and partners.

We are aware of accusations regarding human right violations in the aftermath of this 2017 crisis. I should state here that our government is a government that has vowed to uphold the rule of law since taking of the office. Any perpetrators will be held accountable for their acts, based on evidence. We have recently established an Independent Commission of Inquiry led by two prominent international personalities. This commission will look at the evidence related to the accusations being made, and we are committed to take necessary actions based on its findings. And we also urge our partners to assist this commission as opportunities emerge.

Excellencies and delegates,

In conclusion, I give you my highest assurances that we are committed to restoring normalcy and peace in Rakhine State. We are also genuinely committed to a safe, dignified and voluntary repatriation of refugees who are now in Bangladesh. The scale of the issue is immense. And our government is open to work with likeminded partners. And we welcome your assistance and cooperation as we strive to achieve these.

Thank you.