

**Statement by H.E. U Wunna Maung Lwin
Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of
the Republic of the Union of Myanmar
at the
24th Session of the Human Rights Council
Geneva, 13 September 2013**

Mr. President,

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to deliver a statement before the Human Rights Council today. I am confident that, with your able leadership, the 24th Session of the Council will greatly contribute to the betterment of human rights situations around the globe.

Mr. President,

I had the privilege to address this august body during the early days of the new administration in Myanmar. It was in September 2011 at the 18th session of the Human Rights Council that I was able to inform this forum of the developments at home. This time around, I am very pleased to update you today on the progressive developments that have taken place since then.

Mr. President,

The Government and people of Myanmar have been working together on reform agenda that covers the political, social, economic, and administrative spheres.

In the first 30 months of its five-year term in office, the Government has been resolutely striving to fulfil the fundamental desires of the people. These desires are no different than those of all other peoples in the world. One of them is to live in peace where the rule of law prevails. The other is the socio-economic development of their lives.

In order to achieve peace and the rule of law in the country, political stability must come first. In Myanmar today, that stability is progressively being achieved. A series of new legislations on the establishment of political parties, the formation of associations and other organizations and the freedom of expression have contributed to the emergence of a conducive political climate. There are also other contributing factors. Since the current government took office in March 2011, ten amnesties have been granted by the President. A special committee, including some former prisoners, is now actively working to scrutinize and identify prisoners eligible for future amnesties.

Peace negotiations with ethnic armed groups are yielding tangible results, further brightening the prospects to end the prolonged armed conflict. To date, ceasefire agreements have been reached with all 13 ethnic armed groups; a nationwide cease-fire agreement is expected to be signed soon.

Mr. President,

A firm foundation has been laid for an all-inclusive political process. Formerly divided political forces are now finding a common ground to participate in the nation building tasks. Some are involved in the legislative process as parliamentarians while others are playing their part as researchers, civil servants, media people or rights activists. The legislative bodies are now functioning effectively. It is heartening to observe that a new culture of dialogue is taking roots in the society.

Mr. President,

Democracy can be sustainable only with the accompaniment of economic development. Towards this end, we are replacing the centralized economy with a competitive market economy. Our exemplary actions in this regard include the introduction of a new floating currency exchange rate, the lower interest rates, the relaxation of commercial licensing, the streamlining of the monetary and banking policies and the enactment of a new foreign investment law. With these new measures, we believe that the major fundamentals for our new economy are now in place.

Mr. President,

While the reform process gathers momentum, delivering tangible outcomes, we are encountering new challenges of different nature. Among them is the communal violence that broke out in Rakhine State in 2012. Even though there are sensitivities among the communities, the situation is gradually returning to normalcy. While managing the situation responsibly, the government has given priority to the maintenance of law and order in Rakhine State and other parts of the country. It is important to highlight here that such communal violence should not be portrayed or construed as religious or racial conflict.

Mr. President,

Contrary to the unfounded allegations, the government pursues a zero tolerance policy against the perpetrators of the violence, regardless of faith or race. The overall security environment has now been stabilized in Rakhine

State. The Border Area Immigration Control there, known as NaSaKa, has been abolished. People in Rakhine state are now well protected thanks to the beefed-up police strength. There is no reason to harbour security concerns for anyone in Rakhine State.

It is pertinent to highlight here that it has never been the intention of the government to create the separation or segregation, as termed by some quarters, of communities in Rakhine State on a permanent basis. The temporary community-wise re-settlement is to provide security, shelter, food and other immediate assistance. As soon as the prerequisites such as the restoration of confidence and trust and the emergence of a favourable environment for daily livelihoods are met, a harmonious co-existence of the two communities would naturally follow. In this way, the recurrence of violence can be deterred and prevented.

Mr. President,

In order to effectively carry out rehabilitation and reconstruction tasks in Rakhine State, the Central Committee and seven work committees for the realization of peace, stability and development were established in March 2013. A Coordination Centre was set up in Sittwe on 4 May 2013 to facilitate and expedite the socio-economic development activities being undertaken by UN entities, NGOs and INGOs in cooperation with the government.

Vice-President Dr Sai Mauk Kham, in his capacity as the chair of the Central Committee, paid a field trip to Rakhine State on 7 and 8 July 2013. He was accompanied on the field trip by foreign diplomats and the officials from UN agencies. Opinions from the people in various camps were heard and the donations of cash and kind were handed out to both the communities during the trip.

Mr. President,

One of the issues we are addressing seriously is the legal status of people in Rakhine State.

In April, a preliminary population verification survey relating to immigration and citizenship was conducted in all 14 townships in Rakhine State. The mission was tasked to issue birth registration certificate, to de-register the deceased, to register new arrivals, to replace old documents with new ones and so on. Unfortunately, however, this pilot exercise encountered violent resistance at some camps because of the misunderstanding, instigations and incitements against it by some quarters. The pilot survey was halted

temporarily. But, despite this, the preparations to resume the survey are underway and it will resume at an appropriate time in the near future.

It is necessary to understand the general sentiment of the people of Myanmar. While they are ready, and as it has been the case, to accept those who meet the criteria of the 1982 Citizenship Law as citizens, they do not accept the term 'Rohingya' which has never existed in the country's history.

Mr. President,

We are fully aware of concerns with varying degrees on Rakhine State and related questions expressed by the international community including the Organization for Islamic Cooperation-OIC. A Presidential Statement issued at the 23rd session of the HRC is a goodwill gesture by Myanmar signalling its genuine intention to work with the international community in addressing the issue. We believe that this gesture should be reciprocated appropriately. Currently, Myanmar has been cooperating with the United Nations, INGOs and NGOs to facilitate their humanitarian assistance providing to both the communities in Rakhine State without any discrimination.

Mr. President,

Anxiety and distrust between the two communities is still high, particularly at the grassroots level. Advocacy to promote understanding and accept peaceful and harmonious co-existence between the communities of different faiths or races is one of the highest priorities of the government. To this end, President U Thein Sein met with the Interfaith Friendship Group two times in a row in July 2013 and called on the people to pay a mutual respect to different beliefs, to fight against religious hatred and to join hands with the government, the civil society and the community-elders.

It is encouraging to observe that, these days, the interfaith dialogues are taking place more frequently across all spectrums of the society in Myanmar. In one of his radio addresses to the nation in August 2013, President U Thein Sein stressed this: "Our society must never tolerate thoughtless, ruthless and abusive violent acts in the name of religion. We must always condemn and prevent hate speech veiled with religious overtones."

Mr. President,

Let me now turn to the work of the HRC that is relevant to Myanmar.

Just last month, Myanmar received the eighth visit of the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Tomas Ojea Quintana. He spent ten working days in the

country. The government facilitated his request to visit Rakhine State, Kachin State, Chin State, Shan State, Nay Pyi Taw, Yangon, Mandalay and Meiktila. In principle, Myanmar opposes country-specific mandates because they do not create a conducive environment for genuine cooperation and dialogue. However, in the spirit of cooperation with the UN, we receive the Special Rapporteur twice a year since the appointment of successive Special Rapporteurs throughout these years.

Mr. President,

We continue to believe that the UPR process is the uncontroversial monitoring mechanism to address human rights situations in all countries. In this spirit, Myanmar constructively participated and submitted its report in the UPR in 2011. We are now making preparations for the second cycle.

Furthermore, Myanmar and the OHCHR are continuing their negotiations on a host country agreement for the OHCHR country office. Last month, we handed over the counter draft of the said agreement to the OHCHR. And the discussions on the draft agreement are ongoing.

The Myanmar National Human Rights Commission was established soon after the government took office in 2011. A draft law on its composition, mandate and functioning has been approved by the Amyotha Hluttaw (Parliament). Views and opinions are being solicited from the public to be incorporated into the draft law.

Mr. President,

Over the years, we have witnessed instances of political transformation in many countries around the world. In some cases, these transformations took place with violence and bloodshed. However, our political transformation has been progressing well in a peaceful manner despite some challenges. Taking this opportunity, I wish to express my deep appreciation for the countries near and far which support Myanmar's reforms in helpful ways and means. The lifting or relaxation of economic sanctions on Myanmar has paved the way for economic opportunities for the benefit of the 60 million people.

Such unique efforts, courage, commitments and outcomes of Myanmar's democratization process deserve fair and just recognition from the international community. On our part, we will continue to extend our cooperation to the United Nations and the international community as a whole. Our goodwill should be reciprocated by constructive contributions by all quarters.

I thank you, Mr. President.
