

Statement by H.E Dr. Win Myat Aye, Union Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement of Myanmar, at the 70th Annual Plenary Session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (ExCom)

(Geneva, 8 October 2019)

Mr. Chairman,

Mr. High Commissioner,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

It's a privilege to participate in this Plenary Session of the Executive Committee. We take note of the High Commissioner's remarks yesterday.

I am pleased to recall the visit of the High Commissioner to Myanmar in May this year and the signing of the MoU between our Ministry and the UNHCR during the visit.

Mr. Chairman,

Myanmar is a country that has been seriously affected by irregular migration since colonial times.

Although Myanmar is not a party to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, the Government has committed to achieving the realization of human rights based on international humanitarian principles.

Myanmar voted in favor of the Global Compact on Migration (GCM) and welcomed the measures outlined in there to prevent and reduce irregular pathways of migration around the world. Myanmar underscores the importance of state-led approaches to managing the migration issues affecting them, based on unique circumstances and security concerns.

Myanmar also supports the "IBelong Campaign" launched by the UNHCR.

We participated in the Asia–Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting for the High Level Segment on Statelessness, held in May this year.

Mr. Chairman,

Myanmar has experienced 70 years of ethnic strife, 5 decades of military rule, and a few years of democratic transition.

National reconciliation and peace is the highest priority of the government. We believe that ending armed conflict will contribute to resolving conflict–related issues including internal and cross–border displacement.

Myanmar holds the view that systematic documentation is of paramount importance in addressing the issue of undocumented people throughout the country.

With that in mind, national verification cards (NVC) are issued, in accordance with Myanmar’s Citizenship Law. It is a procedure applied to all in the whole country including the displaced persons from Rakhine State and returnees from Thailand.

NVC is a path to citizenship. The NVC process to citizenship, which took 2 years, has now been shortened to 6 months.

Our new Child Rights Law guarantees the right to register at birth for all children, regardless of race, religion, and gender. Birth registration is conducted nationwide free of charge with the aim to achieve “no child left behind”. Mobile teams are sent to remote areas; pilot projects for the online system are in progress in some States.

As someone who is deeply involved in the entire process, I wish to share with you the situation obtaining on the ground with regard to the displaced persons from Rakhine State. As a result of ARSA terrorist attacks in 2016 and 2017, many people were displaced. Myanmar is ready to receive those displaced persons who had resided in Myanmar. The agreement between Myanmar and Bangladesh calls for the issuance of identity cards to the returnees.

The displaced persons now in Cox's Bazar, who had been residents in Rakhine, have different legal status. We cannot classify all of them as stateless.

Some have identity cards issued by the Myanmar government. Those who qualify for citizenship under the existing Law will be issued citizenship cards. Those who do not have any identity card will be issued NVCs immediately. They will proceed with the process to apply for citizenship, at the same time.

NVC guarantees freedom of movement to the extent that the security condition allows. The holders of NVCs can even travel to Bangladesh, by using border pass. It behooves them to cooperate fully with Myanmar authorities in the national verification process. We cannot ignore the fact that there have been social restrictions on the freedom of movement. We are addressing it by building trust and harmony among communities.

As we feel suffering and plight of all displaced persons, our priority now is to expedite repatriation. Myanmar delegations visited the Camps in Cox's Bazar 3 times to address the delay of repatriation. I, myself, met with displaced persons and explained to them the benefits of holding NVCs. During my first visit in April 2018, it was learned that the agreed forms were not distributed and the information on repatriation process was not disseminated among displaced persons. Thus, during our visit in July this year, we distributed information sheets which clearly explain repatriation process and benefits of getting national verification cards.

We have been aware of many obstacles including destructive movements in the camps to hinder repatriation and exploit the plight of displaced persons. That also needs to be addressed.

Despite obstacles, including killings and threats by ARSA, some 300 people from Cox's Bazar have returned under their own arrangement and on their own volition. They have resumed their lives in conditions of safety and dignity. It is also learnt that many people

want to return to Myanmar. The speedy repatriation of those who have long expressed their desire to return including the some 400 people of Hindu faith should be allowed.

We continue our efforts in creating more conducive condition for all returnees. While we are implementing the recommendations on Rakhine including the recommendations of Dr. Kofi Annan Commission, the Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement, and Development – UEHRD is implementing the projects to be ready for repatriation and resettlement.

ASEAN also joined our endeavors in the course of repatriation.

The UNDP and UNHCR teams are implementing 34 Quick Impact Projects under the MoU. Our Ministry is in close cooperation with the UNHCR in implementing programmes to meet the basic needs of the returnees.

With regard to the IDPs, we have recently developed a nationwide IDP camps closure Strategy covering Kachin, Shan, Rakhine and Kayin States with the assistance of an external expert, provided by the Swiss Development Agency. This National Strategy will be followed by action plans. The action plan will be carefully formulated by taking into account of the local context including the needs and concern of the IDPs and host communities, as well as in line with internationally accepted norms and standards. Consultation will be held widely especially with the IDPs and host communities.

Mr. Chairman,

Myanmar is facing several challenges in its delicate democratic transition. The issue in Rakhine is one of the most complex challenges.

As we address the delicate and sensitive issue deeply rooted since colonial time, we cannot see and address any issue in isolation. We need to look at the issues from the multidimensional perspective. We must listen to the voices of all communities. We are taking a holistic approach for long term stability, security and sustainable development.

For successful repatriation, Myanmar will continue its committed efforts with genuine political will and strict adherence to the signed agreements.

While we appreciate the support given to us by many friends and partners, we look forward to practical assistance and constructive cooperation from international community in our efforts to ensure that all displaced persons can resume their lives in conditions of safety, dignity and full enjoyment of the rights they deserve.

I thank you.
