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Statement by Adama Dieng, United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, on his visit to Bangladesh to assess the situation of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar

(Dhaka, 13 March 2018) From 7 to 13 March I visited Bangladesh to assess the situation of the Rohingya population who have crossed the border from Myanmar to Bangladesh since the most recent incidents of violence in northern Rakhine state in October 2016 and August 2017. During my visit, I had the opportunity to meet Bangladeshi authorities, civil society actors and members of the diplomatic community. I also visited refugee camps in Cox's Bazaar, where survivors I met shared horrifying stories of what they have endured.

What I have heard and witnessed in Cox's Bazaar is a human tragedy with the fingerprints of the Myanmar government and of the international community. The scorched earth campaign carried out by the Myanmar security forces since August 2017 against the Rohingya population was predictable and preventable. Despite the numerous warnings I have made of the risk of atrocity crimes, the international community has buried its head in the sand. This has cost the Rohingya population of Myanmar their lives, their dignity and their homes.

Let us be clear: international crimes were committed in Myanmar. Rohingya Muslims have been killed, tortured, raped, burnt alive and humiliated, solely because of who they are. All the information I have received indicates that the intent of the perpetrators was to cleanse northern Rakhine state of their existence, possibly even to destroy the Rohingya as such, which, if proven, would constitute the crime of genocide. However, whether or not we consider that the crimes committed amount to crimes against humanity or genocide, this should not delay our resolve to act and to act immediately. We owe this to the Rohingya population.

First, the root causes of the problem must be addressed. Only then can this population return in safety and dignity to Myanmar. The fate of the Rohingya has been sealed since the day they were born. A fate of persecution and exclusion. We must change this and give them the opportunity that every human being should be afforded in life: to enjoy their fundamental human rights in freedom and safety. The recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission provide a road map for the Myanmar Government. As a priority the stateless status of the Rohingya community must end and the issue of their citizenship be addressed properly and definitively.

Second, there must be accountability for the crimes that have been committed. I am perplexed by the denial of the widespread commission of serious crimes that has characterized the response of the Myanmar authorities. I urge the international community, in particular the United Nations Security Council, to consider different accountability options. The world needs to show that it is not ready to tolerate such barbaric acts.

Third, the Rohingya must receive protection and support as refugees while in Bangladesh. I welcome the remarkable work done by the Bangladeshi authorities in responding to the arrival of almost 700,000 Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar in the space of six months. I call on the international community to do more to support Bangladesh in shouldering this responsibility by

providing support to the refugees and host communities. The social and economic strains and the environmental impact that this influx of refugees is placing on the area and the host community is clearly visible. I encourage the Bangladesh government to facilitate more dialogue between the two communities to avoid misperceptions and the build-up of tension.

I was encouraged by the commitment made by the Bangladeshi authorities I met that refugees would not be repatriated against their will. What I have heard and seen makes it clear that the majority of the Rohingya want to return to Myanmar, but only when they are able to do so in safety, dignity and with access to the basic rights that are fundamental to us all. So far, the Myanmar authorities have shown no genuine efforts to allow this. In fact, refugees continue to cross the border. It is imperative also that the Rohingya, while in Bangladesh, are afforded more chances to uplift themselves educationally and through access to livelihoods. Doing so will help them both in Bangladesh and when they are able to return to Myanmar.

We must not fail the Rohingya population again. They have endured what no human beings should have to endure. The solution to this problem lies first and foremost with the Myanmar authorities, by creating the conditions for the Rohingya population to return home in safety and be entitled to the same rights as any other citizen of Myanmar. The international community also has a responsibility to protect this population from the risk of further atrocity crimes. Under the present conditions, returning to Myanmar will put the Rohingya population at risk of further crimes. However, accepting the current *status quo* would be a victory for those who planned the attacks. We must not accept either of these scenarios.

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