

UN DEPUTY HUMANITARIAN CHIEF: “ALL PEOPLE AFFECTED BY HUMANITARIAN CRISES IN MYANMAR MUST GET THE ASSISTANCE AND PROTECTION THEY NEED”

(Yangon/New York, 8 April 2018): At the conclusion today of a six-day mission to Myanmar, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator Ursula Mueller called for strengthened humanitarian action based on the rights and needs of all communities, in line with international law and humanitarian principles.

“Protecting the most vulnerable people in Myanmar must be at the heart of the humanitarian response by the international community, national aid organizations and the Government,” said Ms. Mueller. “Wherever they are in the country and regardless of their ethnicity, religion and citizenship status, we need to work together to ensure that no vulnerable conflict-affected people are deprived of safe and sustained access to humanitarian protection and assistance. No-one in Myanmar should be left behind on the path towards a better future.”

At the outset of her mission, the Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator met with State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. They discussed the importance of ending conflict and of strengthening peace and reconciliation efforts. Ms. Mueller reaffirmed the commitment of the United Nations to supporting peace, stability, and development in Myanmar. She offered the continued support of the United Nations and its humanitarian partners to ensure that all people affected by conflict and natural disasters get the humanitarian protection and assistance they need. They agreed on the importance of strengthening national capacities. Ms. Mueller noted the efforts being made by the UN to strengthen the nexus between humanitarian, development and peace-building efforts.

The Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator also met with the Ministers of Defence, Border Affairs, International Cooperation, and the Minister of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement. The meetings with the Union Government were an opportunity to discuss humanitarian challenges in Rakhine, Kachin, and Shan states as well as the collaborative efforts of the international community and the Government on disaster preparedness efforts.

In Rakhine State, the Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator visited camps where about 130,000 people, most of whom identify themselves as Rohingya, remain confined in deplorable conditions after almost six years of displacement. In Maungdaw Township, she met with local communities affected by last year’s violence. Ms. Mueller also visited a refugee return transit site that the Government is constructing, some new housing projects, and witnessed areas where villages had been burned down or bulldozed.

“There is a humanitarian crisis on both sides of the Bangladesh-Myanmar border that is affecting the world’s largest group of stateless people,” said Ms. Mueller. “The unfolding tragedy in the refugee camps in Cox’s Bazar rightly captured the world’s attention, but we cannot, and must not, forget the plight of over 400,000 Muslim people still living in Rakhine State who continue to face a life of hardship and marginalization due to movement restrictions. These restrictions severely compromise their rights and obstruct their access to health, livelihoods, protection, education, and other essential services.”

“The Advisory Commission on Rakhine State has provided an important roadmap towards a better future for all communities in Rakhine State, but its recommendations need to be implemented holistically and impartially, in the spirit that they were written,” said Ms. Mueller. “The lives of the poorest and most vulnerable communities of Rakhine State, whether they are ethnic Rakhine, Muslim, or from other minority groups, will be profoundly transformed if each

recommendation is genuinely addressed and implemented. The conditions for the dignified, voluntary, and sustainable return of refugees and positive outcomes for internally displaced people in camps slated for closure can only be reached if the critical issues of freedom of movement, social cohesion, livelihoods, and access to services are addressed.”

The Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator welcomed the access that she was granted by the Government to visit communities in different parts of Rakhine. She was concerned, however, by the continued restrictions imposed by the authorities on the movement of the Muslim population, as well as the continued restrictions faced by humanitarian workers.

In her meeting with officials in the Rakhine State Government, Ms. Mueller called for movement restrictions to be dropped and for practical measures to be taken to allow humanitarian workers sustained and unfettered access to all people in need of humanitarian assistance and protection, in line with the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State.

“Humanitarian access in Myanmar has significantly worsened in the past year, not only in Rakhine but also in Kachin and Shan States. When you cut that humanitarian lifeline, there is a very real human impact,” said Ms. Mueller. “I was able to go to northern Rakhine and to some of the camps in Kachin State, but what matters most is that the people affected by violence and restrictions in these areas are themselves given access to the assistance and services they so desperately need.”

In Kachin State, the Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator met with representatives of international and national humanitarian organizations and visited camps where she spoke with displaced people. She also met with a group of women and girls who were taking action to respond to the needs of women in displaced communities, including preventing gender-based violence. The women emphasized the importance of prevention and education in building stronger, safer communities, and presented a joint letter to the Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator raising critical concerns shared by displaced women across Kachin.

At least 10,000 people have been newly displaced or re-displaced by fighting between the Myanmar Military and ethnic armed groups in Kachin and Shan States since the beginning of the year, while about 100,000 people remain displaced as a result of the conflict between the Myanmar Army and the Kachin Independence Army that restarted in 2011. Ms. Mueller was particularly impressed by the work of local civil society organizations. She met with representatives of a number of different local organizations and commended them on their outstanding work. She was encouraged to see that the Myanmar Humanitarian Fund channels more than 40 per cent of its funding through national organizations.

“The conflict in Kachin is one the world’s longest running, yet it is a forgotten humanitarian crisis,” said Ms. Mueller. “Clashes break out near displacement camps and civilian areas, landmines are still being placed in the fields and roads of Kachin and Shan States, and people continue to flee their homes. I call on all sides to ensure the protection of all civilians wherever they are, in line with international law.”

During her mission, Ms. Mueller also discussed ways of strengthening disaster preparedness and response. “Myanmar is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world and the last time I was here was nearly ten years ago in the tragic aftermath of Cyclone Nargis,” said Ms. Mueller. “I see that much has changed since then and while disaster risk reduction efforts need to be further enhanced, the Government and national organizations have made excellent progress in recent years in building national capacity for disaster preparedness and response.”

More funding is urgently required for the Myanmar Humanitarian Response Plan for 2018, which calls for \$183 million to meet the needs of 832,000 people in Rakhine, Kachin, Shan, and Kayin States.

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B-roll footage: <https://bit.ly/2GFo89e>

Handout photos: <https://bit.ly/2GHMgZ6>