

Declaration by the Diverse and United Communities of Arakan

January 18, 2021

Participants from Rakhine, Muslim (Rohingya), and other minority communities have held a series of meetings since October 2020. All communities have expressed consent and reached the following consensus:

Whereas all our diverse communities confirm that we are united and belong to the Fatherland of Arakan, we agree to the importance of peaceful coexistence and the building of a new society based on

- the preservation and promotion of justice, peace, equality and human rights, including freedom of movement, freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and freedom of religion and worship
- full respect for each other's diverse identities, cultures, symbols, and languages.

Whereas we are proud and diverse people with an abundance of talents, skills and human capital to ensure our own socio-economic wellbeing and dignity, we pledge to pursue peaceful and democratic solutions for any differences of opinion that may stand in the way of progress, be it in the area of politics, social development, religious freedom or any other area that may give rise to dispute.

Whereas we are committed to peaceful coexistence and are determined to rebuild a just and equal society in a United Arakan based upon secularism, we wholeheartedly oppose any form of extremism and ideology that may harm our unity, prosperity and rule of law.

Whereas our Arakan is rich in natural resources and has considerable potential for development, including through interaction with other regional nations, we are the sole owner of the land and its resources. The power to decide about responsible use of these resources is vested in us, as is the responsibility to ensure that the people of Arakan are the prime beneficiaries of the land and its resources. We declare that any planned international and domestic investments and projects shall first be considered, consented to and prioritized by the people of Arakan ourselves, and before the Union Government takes action.

Whereas we welcome current developments related to a possible truce, as well as peace negotiations between the Arakan Army and Tatmadaw that are helping to reduce civilian casualties and displacement, we stand firm that long-term stability must come through a political settlement leading to greater autonomy and self-determination of the Arakan people.

Whereas we, the people of Arakan, welcome plans for possible elections or mandatory by election in the townships and wards where these were cancelled earlier, we will hold the authorities accountable for the conduct of free, fair and inclusive elections with full participation of not only Rakhine political parties and intra-ethnic parties, but also of Muslim (Rohingya) political parties as well as to reinstate the political party registrations. All voters, including Muslim voters, must have free access to the ballot in any election.

Whereas Muslim Kaman and Muslim (Rohingya) students are banned from attending colleges, universities, and other higher education institutes, we urge the Union and state governments to immediately end discrimination and to allow Muslim students to freely pursue higher education.

Whereas the freedom of movement of Muslims of Arakan is now severely restricted, impeding their travel, livelihoods, access to education and medical services as well as their access to other communities, we firmly believe that forced segregation based on ethnicity and religion has no place in Arakan. Forced containment in segregated villages, wards and camps, constitutes inhuman treatment and we urge the authorities to lift all restrictions once and for all.

Whereas Muslims and Kaman people are prevented from exercising their rights as citizens, we agree that use of ethnicity as a decisive factor in the determination of citizenship is not justifiable. It must be rejected. Therefore, we urge the authority to lift the discriminatory policy on citizenship and, more generally, to avoid judging people on the base of race and religion. Speedy process of citizenship shall be implemented by the ministerial levels immediately.

Whereas the communities of the Chin, Dinet, Hindu, Kaman, Khami, Maramargyi, Mro, and Thet face sectarian discrimination within Arakan State, including by decades-long policies of divide-and-rule and lack of much needed attention and sensitivity to our native people identity, culture and language, we shall protect the aspirations of our brothers and sisters and confirm the importance of eliminating all forms of discrimination and group pressure.

Whereas COVID-19 is a global pandemic which indiscriminately affects everyone, the government's virus vaccination should not leave anyone behind. In Rakhine State everyone must get as equal treatment as possible, regardless of race, religion, gender, ethnicity, and citizenship status.

Whereas, based on our experience and beliefs, we stand on justice and equality, we are convinced that our society finds strength in its diversity. We take great pride in our history and culture and know that by standing united we can move forward towards a dynamic future in which security, development and justice are guaranteed to all. The scope of our challenges

is immense but our joint strength and indivisibility are uniting us in the consensus that together we shall live forever in peace, harmony and prosperity and protect our Fatherland of Arakan and His united people.

May peace endow Arakan.

Signed By

Rakhine Community

Muslim (Rohingya) Community

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