



Republic of the Union of Myanmar
National Unity Government
Ministry of Human Rights



Remarks by H.E. Aung Myo Min, Union Minister of Human Rights
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum/US Permanent Mission discussion on the
human rights situation of the Rohingya

Geneva, 22 February 2023

Good afternoon,

I am very grateful for the invitation to join today's discussion on the human rights situation of the Rohingya in Myanmar. This week will mark six years since the Myanmar military's 2017 atrocity campaign against the Rohingya people in Rakhine state – a deliberate and systematic offensive of mass murder, disappearances, gang rape, arson and forced displacement.

Lives destroyed, histories erased. Crimes that the United States after careful, rigorous investigation and scrutiny, has determined amount to genocide.

I extend my appreciation to Ambassador Taylor and to Ms. Naomi Kikoler of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum for hosting today's important gathering.

Last April, I was invited to the Holocaust Museum to see its new exhibit entitled *Burma's Path to Genocide*. I was devastated by what I saw in the Museum's permanent collection and in the Myanmar exhibit – the horrors that we as humanity have repeatedly inflicted on people because of their ethnic, racial or religious identity. I expressed my deep shame that my country was featured.

As Union Minister of Human Rights, I can say that the National Unity Government shares this shame and acknowledges that historic exclusionary and discriminatory policies, practices and rhetoric against the Rohingya laid the ground for the atrocities that followed. Nor was 2017 a one-off event. Crimes against the Rohingya and other Myanmar minorities have recurred in waves over what the Museum's exhibit rightly called '*a history of persecution*'. That is, a history of dehumanisation.

In 2023, hundreds of thousands of Rohingya remain displaced from the country to which they belong. And a growing number, restricted to camps and denied any foreseeable prospect of a

return to their homes and livelihoods in Myanmar, have resumed treacherous sea voyages and placed their lives in the hands of traffickers. This shows just how desperate they are.

Last December, my Ministry issued a public call to ASEAN and its Member States to provide emergency assistance to Rohingya refugees stranded at sea, while urging that under no circumstances should they be refouled to Myanmar where they face certain persecution by the junta. During that same month, I issued a statement expressing shock and outrage at the discovery of 13 male bodies, believed to be trafficked Rohingya, dumped on a roadside in Yangon.

In short and to be frank, despite the generosity of our neighbours, there has been no discernible improvement in the lives of the Rohingya. They are no closer to returning home. There has been no justice or reparations. And not only do the perpetrators remain at large, these war criminals have scaled up their atrocities as an illegal military junta.

These circumstances, as you are all very aware, present substantial challenges. Another million Myanmar nationals have been displaced by the junta since its failed power grab in 2021. But this does not remove the responsibility that the National Unity Government has to the Rohingya and to other minorities.

So in the short time that I have left, I will discuss some of the steps that we are taking.

1. First, to truly recognise the extent and scale of the atrocities against the Rohingya, we must end the history of denial. Truth-telling and accountability are an essential part of this. The NUG continues to pledge its cooperation with national and international accountability mechanisms:

- We have made an Article 12(3) Declaration under the Rome Statute granting the ICC jurisdiction
- We have pledged our cooperation with the ICJ in the Gambia case, remain determined to represent Myanmar in the case, and we will accept and comply with whatever the Court decides
- We are sharing information with the IIMM and we are pushing countries to use universal jurisdiction to prosecute alleged perpetrators in their national courts.

2. Second, we are committed to bringing the Rohingya home in voluntary, safe and dignified ways. But we also have existing responsibilities right now. I had a series of meetings with Rohingya representatives including women and youth from Refugee camps

in Cox Bazar, and their needs are clear and immediate. The NUG is providing online education opportunities to Rohingya youth and we will identify additional forms of support in consultation with the community and our friends in the Government of Bangladesh.

3. **Third, we will strengthen Rohingya voices and are in the process of appointing a Rohingya representative within the Government.** We will also establish a consultative mechanism to ensure Rohingya input to the development of NUG policies, positions and programs.

4. **Fourth, there must be a complete overhaul of laws that are discriminatory, chauvinistic, and that have been historically used to curb the exercise of fundamental freedoms and to stifle dissent.** Consistent with the NUG's '**Policy Position on the Rohingya in Rakhine State**' issued in June 2020, the NUG is working with the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) and the Committee Representating Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) to develop a new ***Citizenship Act*** that bases citizenship on birth in Myanmar or birth anywhere as a child of Myanmar citizens, and to repeal the ***Race and Religion Protection Laws*** of 2015.

5. Finally, I firmly believe that the NUG – as the legitimate representative of Myanmar – has an obligation to report to the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms on the human rights situation in Myanmar, on the concrete steps that we are taking including in support of the Rohingya, to account for our shortcomings, and to be clear in our requests for technical support and assistance.

I am here in Geneva to engage with states and to push for a strong resolution on Myanmar at HRC52. But I am not welcome at the Council. For two years, Myanmar's seat at the Council has sat empty, despite our Ambassador in New York retaining his position and privileges at the General Assembly. It is within the power of the HRC Bureau and its Members to correct this inconsistency and to restore Myanmar's seat to the people.

I thank you all again, most particularly Ambassador Taylor and Ms. Kikoler, and I look forward to our discussion.
