

**Remarks by Ms. Noeleen Heyzer,
Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar
General Assembly, 16 March 2023**

Madame Vice-President,
Distinguished Delegates,

It is an honour to share my reflection on Myanmar's urgent crisis and my efforts as the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General on Myanmar.

I am grateful that the General Assembly in December 2022 renewed its resolution for my role and continued support to my all-stakeholder approach in promoting a Myanmar-led process reflective of the will of the people.

In the resolution, Member States called for an immediate end to violence, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access, release of political prisoners and the need to find durable solutions for the Rohingya.

It underlines "the need for a peaceful solution for Myanmar, through an inclusive and peaceful dialogue between all parties, in accordance with the will and interests of the people of Myanmar."

Madame Vice-President,

In its third year, the impact of the military takeover on the country and its people has been devastating.

Violence continues at an alarming scale. On 1 February, the military extended the State of Emergency and intensified its use of force, including aerial bombing, the burning of civilian structures and other grave human rights violations to maintain its grip on power.

Martial Law has been extended to 47 townships and the regime has revived a 1977 law allowing civilians it deems "loyal" to carry firearms.

In Sagaing Region, the Bamar heartland and once a key recruiting ground for the military, there are recent reports of further atrocities including beheadings and mutilation of People's Defence Forces (PDF) combatants.

Violence continues to escalate in several of the country's ethnic areas. We just received reports that 28 civilians were killed by the military at a monastery in Southern Shan state this weekend.

I also recently met with ethnic Chin leaders who shared that Martial Law is currently in effect in eight out of nine townships in Chin State. They highlighted an increase in airstrikes and indiscriminate shelling targeting civilian areas and displacement sites.

People on the ground have implored, “Please, the people are asking countries not to give military arms that are killing us and intensifying the conflict.”

Despite brutal repression, widespread popular resistance to the military continues by non-violent and violent means, across much of the country.

A generation that benefited from Myanmar’s previous opening up, especially the youth, is now disillusioned, facing chronic hardship and many feeling they have no choice but to take up arms to fight military rule.

Heavy fighting has spread to areas previously unaffected by conflict, putting more civilian lives at risk and further complicating humanitarian operations delivering lifesaving assistance to the people of Myanmar.

The regime’s “four cuts” strategy – which seeks to block access to food, funds, information and recruits – continues to target civilians as collective punishment.

The military’s Five-Point Roadmap – its exit strategy – which is supposed to conclude with elections, has been far from a pathway out of the crisis it has created.

Despite stated intentions to deliver relief and build conditions for peace, the military has passed an “Organization Registration Law” and “Political Parties Law” that hinder humanitarian operations and shrink democratic space.

The regime has accused resistance forces of violence while the National Unity Government (NUG) continues to point to the military’s brutality.

The NUG has also condemned killings by the PDFs warning resistance groups not to perform inhumane acts.

With both sides intent on prevailing by force, there is no prospect for a negotiated settlement.

Humanitarian needs are rising across Myanmar as a result. As of today, 17.6 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, more than 1.6 million are internally displaced and an estimated 55,000 civilian structures have been destroyed since February 2021.

At least 29 per cent of households are facing moderate or severe food insecurity with conflict areas worst affected.

Myanmar's most vulnerable, including Rohingya and other ethnic minorities, the displaced, and women and children, are most gravely impacted.

The cost in human suffering will multiply and the political, human rights, humanitarian and socioeconomic crisis will intensify if urgent action is not taken.

We must send a strong signal that violence must end and support for democratic voices strengthened to help empower those seeking to chart a way for a peaceful future.

Madame Vice-President,

The Secretary-General and I have made clear that the military's proposed elections in the absence of inclusive political dialogue and conditions that permit citizens to freely exercise their political rights without fear or intimidation risk exacerbating the violence.

There is no public trust in the regime, whose interest is seen as consolidating its control by making a transition from emergency rule to a longer-term military-backed government.

The arbitrary arrests and detention of democratically elected political leaders, civil society actors and journalists continue unabated.

While severely underreported, women detainees increasingly face sexual harassment and violence.

Madame Vice-President,

It is critical that the country's future is decided by the people through a Myanmar-led process, reflective of all voices especially women, youth and minorities, to ensure the needs of all communities are addressed.

Sustainable solutions for the Rohingya people must be built into the design of a peaceful, inclusive and democratic Myanmar. Their voices have to be integral to decisions about their own future.

More than five years since the forced mass exodus from Rakhine State, the Rohingya are persecuted and stateless, and continue to suffer extreme hardship, living in difficult conditions and facing tremendous challenges.



Earlier this month, another massive fire ripped through a Rohingya refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, affecting 15,000 people.

The World Food Programme (WFP) has announced it needs to reduce rations for Rohingya refugees this month due to a severe funding shortfall amid competing global crises, issuing an urgent call for 125 million dollars to avoid the cut.

For the 2023 Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis, the United Nations and partners have appealed for 876 million dollars.

I urge Member States to redouble support to meet this extreme need. Now is not the time for donor fatigue.

Madame Vice-President,

I take this important opportunity to thank the Government of Bangladesh for showing humanity and immense generosity in carrying disproportionate responsibility in hosting over 1 million Rohingya refugees for more than five years.

I also heed Bangladesh's clear message that the current situation is not sustainable.

2022 was a deadly year for thousands of Rohingya who risked their lives in dangerous sea and land journeys. These increased by 360 per cent between 2021 and 2022 in the absence of progress in addressing the root causes of marginalization guided by the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State.

Since my last report to the General Assembly, a humanitarian ceasefire in Rakhine State between the Arakan Army (AA) and Myanmar Armed Forces (MAF) has led to some improvements in humanitarian access in Rakhine.

Access to northern Rakhine remains restricted, however, and the situation of the Rohingya remains precarious.

Taking advantage of the ceasefire, the State Administration Council (SAC) is preparing for the return of Rohingya refugees and IDPs.

I fully support the General Assembly's call that the return and relocation of displaced persons is carried out in accordance with international standards and best practices.

Return cannot be the mere act of closing camps or moving people. It must be a process that achieves durable solutions and guarantees the safety and wellbeing of the population concerned.

Issues such as citizenship, freedom of movement, land ownership and access to education, schools and livelihoods must be properly addressed.

During my visit to Bangladesh last year, the Rohingya made it clear they want to be engaged directly in decision-making. They feel their exclusion from discussions and decisions about their future has entrenched their marginalization.

It is imperative that sustainable solutions for the Rohingya people are integral to Myanmar-led solutions towards a peaceful, democratic and inclusive future.

Madame Vice-President,

In December, the Security Council adopted an unprecedented resolution on Myanmar, which stressed the importance of close coordination between the UN and ASEAN Special Envoys to address the Myanmar crisis.

Three days ago, Indonesia's Foreign Minister and I briefed the Security Council reinforcing this cooperation between ASEAN, the UN and international partners.

We stressed that the people of Myanmar must see concrete progress in the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus, namely de-escalation of violence and unimpeded humanitarian aid towards alleviating the suffering of all communities.

The Security Council resolution complements the resolution of the General Assembly and is an opportunity to further develop a coherent international response to the crisis, promoting a Myanmar-led process reflective of the will of the people, the delivery of humanitarian assistance without discrimination, respect for human rights, addressing the root causes of the Rohingya crisis, and to work towards ending violence in all forms.

As highlighted by the General Assembly and the Security Council, cooperation with regional organizations such as ASEAN, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the European Union is essential and close coordination with these organizations and their respective Envoys, as called for by this Assembly, constitutes a vital part of my work.

Madame Vice-President,

Despite the grim situation with ongoing challenges, there are clear areas where we can try to make some meaningful progress.

In recent interviews with Rohingya mothers, young women and youth rescued during precarious sea journeys, they all had a single message – “we want a future and education.”

Education is a powerful tool to transform lives, avoid a “lost generation” and enable the Rohingya to become leaders and contributors upon their voluntary and sustainable return to Myanmar.

I deeply appreciate my crucial partnership with the OIC and its Special Envoy in our collaboration to seek practical solutions to the Rohingya crisis, including our initial discussions during my recent visit to Jeddah on the possibility of upscaling education for the Rohingya.

Accountability remains essential, and I continue to remain in close contact with the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar and the Independent Investigative Mechanism on Myanmar (IIMM).

Madame Vice-President,

In delivering my mandate, I will continue to focus on reducing the suffering of the people of Myanmar through concrete initiatives and based on continued close engagement with relevant partners and stakeholders, including affected communities.

At the request of Myanmar actors, including key ethnic armed organizations, the NUG and humanitarian civil society organizations, I have supported their efforts to establish and convene an Inclusive Humanitarian Forum (IHF), which aims to open up operational space to deliver humanitarian aid through all available channels.

The Forum could comprise core group of Member States, notably Myanmar’s neighboring countries and other regional actors, to engage inclusively in seeking a comprehensive assessment of ground realities and identify ways to overcome obstacles for operational actors to more effectively reach those in need.

My discussions on the IHF continue to advance, and the Myanmar stakeholders have established a Joint Secretariat that also includes civil society representatives.

Already, the IHF discussions with local actors have proven to be an important vehicle driving constructive discussions and building greater solidarity and coherence.

I have been working with Indonesia as the new ASEAN Chair. Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi and I are in close cooperation. I have discussed with her the urgency of concrete progress on the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus to contribute to a conducive environment towards the path of national reconciliation.



We have also discussed the possibility of a regional framework to protect the Rohingya and all refugees from Myanmar. I echo the call of the Secretary-General to ASEAN leaders at their November Summit to maintain open borders and provide protection and assistance to refugees from Myanmar, in line with the humanitarian and non-political nature of asylum, so that no refugee is forced to return to unsafe conditions in Myanmar.

I look forward to visiting Jakarta to further advance our collaboration.

Madame Vice-President,

It is important we continue to advance the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda on Myanmar, empowering women and youth as change agents.

We must amplify their voices and utilize the expertise of those on the ground, listening to them to understand their struggles, and ensure women play leading roles in bringing about positive change to their communities and country.

I welcome Member States' support as I plan to organize a roundtable on Myanmar "Envisioning the Future through Women's Eyes" ahead of the Security Council Open Debate on WPS later this year, which I hope will be an opportunity to amplify the voices of women leaders on the ground and their important work.

Madame Vice-President,

Despite the tragedies and deep uncertainty in Myanmar, there is unprecedented solidarity that has emerged in the country. People, especially women and youth across communities, are working together to address old divides along ethnic and religious lines. They are shaping the country's internal dynamics and politics to reset Myanmar's democracy, human rights and governance deficit.

I know that this General Assembly will renew its commitment supporting the will of the people, including the Rohingya, to build a peaceful, just and democratic union of Myanmar for all.

Thank you.

