**Statement of UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Tom Andrews**

**Address to the 58th session of the UN Human Rights Council**

**19 March 2025**

Thank you, Mr Vice President, Distinguished delegates,

Today I will be addressing the escalating crisis in Myanmar, but, I will also be addressing each of you with a warning and an urgent plea.

Myanmar is at a pivotal moment: UN Member States have been providing the people of Myanmar with critical support, including denying a brutal military junta the means to attack them. These actions have been making a genuine difference.

Governments have launched investigations of arms transfers to Myanmar that are being used to attack civilians. Some have imposed targeted sanctions on those engaged in these transfers and, in some cases, have done it in coordination with others.

Banks have been increasing their due diligence, some terminating their relationship with junta-controlled institutions.

Three weeks ago, Bangkok Bank informed me that it would no longer facilitate transfers that involve Myanmar Economic Bank, the principal junta-controlled financial institution enabling its acquisition of weapons and weapons materials.

This is an important step forward, was a key recommendation that I made in my conference room paper, “Banking on the Death Trade” and should serve as a model for others.

Last year, the junta’s military procurement from suppliers in Singapore dropped by 90%. Globally, junta military procurement using the international finance system has dropped by more than a third.

The military junta continues to face fierce resistance from the people of Myanmar and is steadily losing ground. According to credible reports, it now controls less than a third of townships nationwide and has lost tens of thousands of troops to defections, surrender or casualties.

The junta has responded to these losses by instituting a military conscription program that includes grabbing young men off the streets or from their homes in the middle of the night.

The junta has been escalating its attacks on civilians. Military aircraft have been bombing hospitals, schools, teashops, religious facilities, festivals and camps for internally displaced persons - camps where those who had lost everything in attacks by the junta had gone for safety.

I have spoken with families who experienced the unspeakable horror of witnessing their children being killed in such attacks.

Junta forces have committed widespread rape and other forms of sexual violence.

The number of civilian victims of landmines is steadily rising. More people are now killed or injured by landmines in Myanmar than in any other country in the world.

The actions of the junta have caused a humanitarian crisis. 20 million people – more than a third of the population of Myanmar – now require humanitarian assistance.

But just when the people of Myanmar wondered if conditions could get any worse, they are now becoming much worse. And this time it is NOT because of the military junta, it is because of decisions being made by those who had committed to support them in their time of need.

The sudden, chaotic withdrawal of support by member states, principally the government of the United States, is already having a crushing impact.

I have spoken with those who have lost access to medical care; to disabled persons and families of disabled children who have been locked out of rehabilitation centers.

I have spoken with human rights defenders providing food, medicine and other life-sustaining services who told me that their funding was terminated by a US government agency only days after being told, by the very same agency, that they had been granted a funding cut exemption.

There is a severe cost to this chaos, a cost that is not only going to be borne by the people of Myanmar, but the people of the region and beyond.

Deteriorating conditions in Myanmar and refugee camps will destabilize border regions and increase the flow of people crossing the border. There is growing fear among medical service providers that drug-resistant tuberculosis, for which Myanmar has become a global hotspot, will spread to neighboring countries.

Hopes that other nations might step up to fill the gaps left by these cuts are being dashed by announcements that aid budgets in other countries are also being cut, not as severely and not as abruptly, but reduced nevertheless.

A few days ago, the World Food Programme announced that one million people will be cut off from life-saving food assistance in Myanmar – one million people - because of a lack of funding. They have warned that unless a severe funding shortfall is quickly reversed, food rations for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh will be forced to be cut by more than half. More than HALF!

In other words, in less than two weeks Rohingya refugees will need to figure out how to feed their families when their already meagre food rations drop from 42 cents per day to 20 cents per day – 20 CENTS PER DAY!

When less severe cuts were made in 2023, there was an acute spike in malnutrition, threatening irreversible harm to children.

Distinguished delegates, if these cuts go through, we can count on health indicators plummeting and the desperation that will follow will fuel violence, human trafficking, child marriage, sexual exploitation and increasing numbers of people putting their lives, and those of their family, into the hands of smugglers.

Don’t get me wrong, questions about the efficiency and effectiveness of aid programs can and should be addressed, as should concerns about burden sharing. But this is not about either.

It is about callous decisions being made with little thought, and apparently, no concern for the consequences.

It is about causing immense suffering.

It is about blocking payments for services already provided by cash strapped health care providers.

It is about pulling the rug out from under human rights defenders and community leaders who have been courageously battling to save lives and to save their country.

In a word, it is about betrayal.

The Human Rights Council has been called the conscience of the United Nations.

You are in a position to do what others cannot, particularly those who are terrified that speaking up might further compromise their ability to deliver critical services in the midst of a deepening humanitarian crisis.

Aid, and partnerships with the courageous people in Myanmar, have demonstrated the importance – and the effectiveness – of international support for human rights. That support has made an enormous difference.

I urge the member states of this body to speak out, to issue a declaration of conscience against this unfolding disaster. And, I urge you to follow your words with action – action that includes funding life sustaining programs while making it clear that you reject baseless attacks on these programs and the people who make them work, people who reflect the very best of humanity.

Distinguished delegates, it is time to speak. It is time to act.

If NOT the Human Rights Council, who?

If not NOW, when?

Thank you.