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**Statement by His Excellency U Kyaw Tin, Union Minister for International
Cooperation of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar
at the High-Level Segment of 37th Session of Human Rights Council
(Geneva, 27 February 2018)**

Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. At the outset, I would like to congratulate you for your election as the President of the Human Rights Council for 2018.

2. It is a great honour for me to deliver a statement at the High-level Segment of this august body, on this 70th Anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights. Myanmar was among the first who had voted in favour of the Declaration at its adoption in 1948.

3. The present Government has been paying greater attention to promoting human rights values more than ever before. Yet it is ironic that Myanmar is at the center of the international community's attention for various reasons including human rights questions.

Mr. President,

4. After taking office barely two years ago, the new Government set a clear goal - to achieve a peaceful, prosperous and democratic Myanmar. To that end, we have made national reconciliation and peace as our top priorities, with the aim of establishing a democratic federal union that will ensure peace, security and development for all the people.

5. Accordingly, the Government has pushed forward a peace process with myriad of ethnic armed organizations through holding Union Peace Conferences to end almost seven decades of internal armed conflicts. The Second Conference has resulted in a Union Accord consisting of 37 points for basic federal principles. Recently, it has made yet another significant step forward. Two more Ethnic

Armed Organizations, New Mon State Party and Lahu Democratic Union have signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) on 13 February 2018, bringing the total number of signatories to ten. More have yet to join NCA. The people in the respective regions have started to enjoy the fruits of peace and economic opportunities. NCA is the beginning of the political dialogue for solutions through negotiations. Ending armed conflicts shall bring an end to conflict-related human rights concerns.

Mr. President,

6. As Myanmar is undergoing a transition from half-a-century-long military rule to a democratic state, the situation in the country is so complex that it is beyond apprehension of many outsiders. In addition to the constitutional constraints, the Government has inherited the world's longest running internal conflicts, deep-rooted ethnic and communal divides, lack of efficient institutions and human resources and backwardness in many areas. Its complexities are compounded even more by the high hopes placed on the new Government by the people and the international community to overcome all of these challenges overnight.

Mr. President,

7. Despite many daunting challenges in ethnic discord and conflicts of the country, the world is focusing most on the situation in Rakhine State. One of the reasons is due to the incessant media campaign portraying it as a religious issue.

8. In fact, the Rakhine issue is not a religious one but a political and economic challenge involving migration, competition over limited resources, poverty and rule of law. It has recently evolved from the communal conflict into the issues of national security and terrorism. It has never been a case of religious discrimination or conflict between two different faiths, as majority of Muslims are residing peacefully and harmoniously in the remaining parts of this multi-religious country.

Mr. President,

9. We fully share the international community's concern over the humanitarian situation in Rakhine State. The Government is, therefore, committed to a sustainable solution that would lead to peace, stability and development for all communities within the State.

10. The State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, soon after taking office, took immediate proactive steps to resolve the complex issue of Rakhine State. Those steps include setting up mechanisms such as Central Committee on Implementation of Peace, Stability and Development of Rakhine State and Dr. Kofi Annan Advisory Commission. It is important to highlight that these bold steps were taken amid strong opposition by some domestic political forces. Myanmar was gaining momentum in these efforts with the positive response from the international community when the armed attacks against three police outposts occurred in early October 2016 and had completely changed the scenario in Rakhine State.

11. Again on 25 August 2017, within hours after the release of the final report of Dr. Kofi Annan's Commission, the so-called "Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army-ARSA" launched orchestrated attacks on 30 police outposts and the Regimental Headquarters leaving multiple deaths and injuries on security personnel and civilians. The security forces have no choice but to suppress terrorism and to restore law and order and protect the innocents. Muslim population in affected areas of Rakhine State crossed the border out of fear of conflict and violence. However, many Muslim villages remained intact.

12. Little is known or reported in the media about many people of Daing-net, Mro, Thet, Mramagyi and Rakhine minority groups and Hindus who have had to flee their homes as a result of violence.

13. Instigation, threats and false hopes given by ARSA also play a role in the mass displacement of people. As ICG report mentioned, ARSA attacks were intended as a provocation. It was those terrorist attacks that triggered humanitarian crisis. Yet, many conveniently failed to denounce provocative attacks or flag the

need to address the emerging threat of ARSA terrorist group on the population in Rakhine State. Any form of terrorist act for whatever cause must not be condoned.

Mr. President,

14. Repatriation of the displaced people is one of our immediate priorities. We have made significant progress in expediting the repatriation process. Following the agreement between Myanmar and Bangladesh on the “Arrangement on Return of Displaced Persons from Rakhine State” on 23 November 2017, the two countries have also signed the Terms of Reference-ToR for the Joint Working Group and the Physical Arrangement for Repatriation of Displaced Persons and they are being implemented now.

15. We have put already in place adequate logistic and physical preparations to receive verified returnees and opened two reception centres and one transit centre in Maungdaw Township since the agreed launching date of 23 January 2018. We are also taking measures to create conducive conditions for safety, law and order and protection of all civilians from both communities.

16. With a view to launching of repatriation process as soon as possible, Myanmar has provided to Bangladesh side the list of more than 1,200 verified persons as well as information relating to resettlement plan, provisions of livelihood assistance, access to basic services, and safety arrangement for verified returnees. We are also seeking more detailed information on over 8,000 returnees provided by the Bangladesh side for further verification. We have also sought cooperation of Bangladesh for the repatriation of thousands of displaced people staying on the borderline.

Mr. President,

17. Humanitarian assistance is being provided to all affected communities through Red Cross Movement, ASEAN Coordinating Center for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Center), and also with Philippines and Thai Red Cross Societies, FAO and WFP.

18. The Government is making progress in implementing the recommendations of Dr. Kofi Annan's Commission as a roadmap. The Ministerial Committee assigned to this task has recently issued its first progress report to the public.

19. The Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development in Rakhine State is implementing short and long-term measures for peace, stability and development of Rakhine State. The Advisory Board comprised of national and international experts has met for the first time in Nay Pyi Taw on 23 January 2018 and made a tour of Rakhine State to get onground information. The Board's advice to the Committee will contribute to the effective implementation of the recommendations.

20. With a view to granting more access, we have organized day-trips to Rakhine State in three groups for all diplomatic corps including UN agencies to see for themselves ground situation and our readiness for repatriation. We have also arranged a number of trips for visiting dignitaries and media personnel.

21. With regard to the involvement of the UN Agencies, we have indicated in the bilateral Arrangement on Return of Displaced Persons that UNHCR and other mandated UN agencies would be invited to take part, as appropriate, in various stages of return and resettlement. In this regard, I am pleased to inform the Council that on 23 February 2018, the Myanmar authorities held a meeting with the UN Resident Coordinator a.i and the country representation of UNHCR and invited UNDP and UNHCR to jointly assist the Government's efforts in carrying out livelihood development for all communities in Rakhine State and for repatriation and resettlement of the displaced persons respectively.

Mr. President,

22. In the fight against terrorists who used civilian recruits, there will always be violence, collateral damage and civilian casualties. With regard to alleged human rights violations, we have stated time and again that the Government shall never condone impunity and action will be taken against any perpetrators in accordance with the law if there is concrete evidence.

23. In relation to the Inn Din incident, the Tatmadaw immediately after it came to their knowledge, has formed a high-level enquiry team and conducted an investigation on the incident. Actions are being taken against 16 individuals including military, police officers and villagers who had acted in violation of standard operating procedures and rules of engagement. This action is a clear sign of accountability and could be seen as a positive step forward in fight against impunity.

24. In this regard, Myanmar strongly objects the use of such words as “ethnic cleansing” or “genocide” in reference to the situation in Rakhine. The leadership of Myanmar who have long been striving for freedom and democracy shall never tolerate such crimes and shall do everything to prevent them from occurring.

25. Accuracy of information is essential in making a right policy decision. In order to make a fair and balanced analysis of an issue, all narratives by all stakeholders must be heard and considered. Recently, a group of Myanmar nationals were denied of their participation in a Berlin Conference accusing Myanmar of “Genocide”. This is one of the cases indicating that there is a movement suppressing the different narratives on Rakhine issue.

Mr. President,

26. There are many areas where Myanmar is expecting the international community to play a constructive role in relation to Rakhine State. We reiterate our call for understanding the complexity and help our efforts in finding a durable solution. Our development needs and priorities should not be overlooked as Myanmar desires to transform aid-dependent communities to self-reliant ones in the resource-rich Rakhine State.

27. Our main focus now should be addressing the humanitarian situation, repatriation, resettlement, development, reconciliation and peaceful coexistence of the communities. In this important juncture, the encouragement and constructive approach from the whole international community is essential.

28. Taking non-constructive measures would be counterproductive as it will further polarize the communities and undermining the efforts for the long-term objective of reconciliation. It could even lead to derailing our ultimate goal of national reconciliation and democratisation process. More immediately, it could make more difficult in finding a resolution to the present humanitarian situation.

29. The international community can best help Myanmar by understanding the legitimate concern and fears of both sides and supporting long-term reconciliation and economic development pursuing the Kofi Annan Recommendations as a roadmap.

Mr. President,

30. Myanmar today is indeed facing the most challenging time in her history of transition. We shall be turning our present challenges into opportunities for national reconciliation and peace leading to further strengthening our democracy. We believe that the success of democratic transition will in turn overcome these challenges.

31. In closing, I wish to express our sincere appreciations to all those who have demonstrated understanding and extended their continued support and encouragement. We firmly believe that constructive engagement with the Government is the only way forward in finding sustainable solution for Rakhine issue and would be helpful to our path to a democratic federal union with sustainable peace and development.

Thank you.
