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**Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights
situations and reports of special rapporteurs
and representatives**

Letter dated 24 October 2013 from the Permanent Representative of Myanmar to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith a memorandum on the situation of human rights in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (see annex).

I should be most grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 69 (c).

(Signed) Kyaw Tin
Ambassador
Permanent Representative



Annex to the letter dated 24 October 2013 from the Permanent Representative of Myanmar to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Memorandum on the situation of human rights in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar

I. Introduction

1. Since the emergence of the civilian Government led by President U Thein Sein on 30 March 2011, Myanmar has turned a new page in its history and embarked on a path of peaceful democratic transition with far-reaching multiple reforms. The speed and scope of the changes unfolding in the country have won wider international recognition and encouragement and have led to changes in policies of the West with regard to Myanmar. This resulted in momentous changes in the tone and tenor of the annual resolution of the European Union on the situation of human rights in Myanmar adopted by the Third Committee at the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly. Resolution [67/233](#), in which the Assembly welcomed the positive developments in Myanmar, was adopted without resorting to a vote and without dissociation by the Myanmar delegation for the very first time in many years. While reconfirming its consistent policy against the selective tabling of a country-specific resolution on the human rights situation, Myanmar joined in its adoption without a vote, while expressing reservations about certain paragraphs.

2. Despite this positive turn of events at the United Nations and the unparalleled progress made by Myanmar in its democratization efforts, the situation of human rights in Myanmar will be once again considered by the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session, in accordance with resolution [67/233](#). This memorandum is meant to increase awareness of Member States and the international community about the current status of Myanmar with regard to human rights, freedom of association, freedom of expression, media freedom and the ongoing democratic reforms.

II. Process of democratic transition

A. Political reforms

3. Myanmar is at a critical juncture in the history of the nation. The new constitutional Government of President U Thein Sein came into office on 30 March 2011, and over the past two and a half years, it has embarked on a process of transition to democracy. In keeping with the aspirations of the people of Myanmar, the Government has been undertaking unprecedented and wide-ranging political and socioeconomic reforms. The reform process is based on the two fundamental needs of the people; that is, to establish peace, stability and the rule of law; and to advance socioeconomic development of the lives of the people.

4. The objective of the political reform is to bring about peace and stability, national unity and reconciliation. In the first 30-month period of its term, the Government has been able to lay a firm foundation for building a democratic society. Political space has been created for every stakeholder and the all-inclusive

political system is in place. Political parties have been formed and many parties are represented and actively participating in the Parliament. They are also making necessary preparations in anticipation of the upcoming 2015 general elections.

5. In a relatively short span of time, the legislative bodies, at the Union (central) level and at the various State and region levels, are functioning actively and in an effective and vibrant manner. Numerous legislations have been enacted that are based on democratic principles and values, and for the benefit of the people, including new laws permitting greater freedom of press, freedom of speech and association. A committee to review the Constitution has also been formed by the Parliament to look into the possibility of amending the present Constitution. The three branches of State power — administrative, legislative and judiciary — bodies are working harmoniously with full dynamism in the interest of the State and the people, in accordance with the Constitution.

6. In the light of the positive political developments and with a view to enhancing national reconciliation efforts, the President granted amnesties on 11 occasions and set free more than 20,000 prisoners in order that they may also be able to take part in the national reconsolidation and nation-building process. A special committee, comprised in part of former prisoners, is working diligently to ensure that no prisoners of conscience remain behind bars by the end of the year.

7. Necessary domestic legal frameworks and administrative arrangements have been put in place to pave the way for civil societies to thrive. As a result, the country has seen a dramatic rise in the number of civil societies and their increased participation in public affairs. This new and emerging sociopolitical trend has also contributed significantly to strengthening democratic values and practices. Myanmar has been able to nurture a new culture of dialogue and accommodation among people of differing views and belief. Political actors in Myanmar, together with the people, are taking a forward-looking approach to maintaining the reform process, putting the interest of the country and the people at the fore. The Government is also taking steps to establish the rule of law, good governance and clean government.

8. Peace is a prerequisite for political stability and economic development. Myanmar has been in armed conflict with more than a dozen ethnic armed groups for over six decades since regaining independence. Lack of internal peace and stability deprived the country and the people of Myanmar economic development, political stability and national unity in the past. Therefore, soon after assuming State responsibilities, President U Thein Sein invited all armed groups to the negotiation table to take part in peace talks. As a result of genuine goodwill and the relentless efforts of the Government, tangible progress has been made in national reconciliation efforts. The peace overtures of the Government have led to the conclusion of ceasefire agreements with all armed groups for the first time in over 60 years.

9. The Government and the armed groups are now striving to sign a nationwide ceasefire agreement in Nay Pyi Taw as soon as possible. Soon after the nationwide ceasefire agreement is signed, a meeting with all stakeholders will be held to discuss the drafting of the framework for political dialogue. The political dialogue process at the Union level will serve as a forum to reach a comprehensive and lasting peace agreement.

B. Economic reforms

10. In parallel with its political reforms, the Government has also launched several waves of bold economic reform to improve the socioeconomic development of the country. This has led to the opening up of the economy through economic liberalization measures, including financial reforms, the creation of an investor-friendly environment, the revitalization of tourism, the initiation of environmental protection and the adoption of a people-centred approach to development.

11. Recognizing that the success of the reform depends on the extent to which it can quickly deliver benefits to the broader population, the Government is paying special attention to achieving inclusive and equitable economic development. To that end, it has established a programme for poverty alleviation and rural development through the promotion of agriculture and microfinancing. It aims to reduce the current poverty rate from 26 per cent to 16 per cent by 2015, in keeping with the Millennium Development Goals.

12. During the first half of the President's term, the Government laid a firm foundation for the market-oriented economic system and managed to remove external obstacles hindering foreign trade and investments. Most sanctions have been lifted, opening the way for increased trade with and investment by all countries. For the benefit of the broader population, the Government is encouraging foreign investments that emphasize jobs creation and agriculture and rural development.

13. With a view to ensuring a tangible outcome of short-term development, the first five-year national plan (2011-2012 to 2015-2016) is being formulated in collaboration with regional authorities and government bodies. While implementing the Framework on Economic and Social Reform, which principally focuses on promoting inclusive growth and quick wins, the Government is also formulating a macro-level long-term plan, namely the National Comprehensive Development Plan (2011-2031). The main objectives of the plan are industrial and agricultural development.

14. With the opening of its economy, Myanmar has captured the growing attention of international investors. Many investors, tourists and global firms are rushing to tap the newly emerging markets of Myanmar. The Government enacted the new foreign direct investment law in 2012, which was drafted in a way so as to ensure mutual benefit for foreign investors and its citizens. The law also ensures benefits for foreign investors by according tax exemption benefits and more flexibility in terms of investment ratios in joint ventures.

15. As at August 2013, a total of 600 foreign investment project proposals from 32 countries with a pledged amount of \$43,682.28 million had been approved in 12 economic sectors. For the sake of transparency, the Government is taking steps to practice internationally recognized extractive industry initiatives. It also has plans in place to promote responsible tourism to conserve nature and culture and to protect the interests of the local people.

16. The Government has aimed to achieve sustained economic growth at 7.7 per cent in the next five years and to move forward to a knowledge-based economy. In the remaining years of its term, the Government plans to accord high priorities to fulfilling the basic socioeconomic needs of the people, particularly, electricity

supply, adequate drinking and irrigation water, and small and medium enterprises and industrial development in order to generate more job opportunities.

C. Administrative and governance reform

17. The third wave of reform is focused on administrative and governance areas. Since assuming office, the President has stressed the emergence of good governance and clean government. To that end, the Government has been taking various concrete steps. For instance, the anti-corruption law was promulgated on 8 August 2013. The National Anti-Corruption Body was also established.

D. Private sector development reform

18. In order to strengthen entrepreneurship and promote private sector participation in the national development agenda, the Government is focusing its attention on private sector development as the fourth wave of reform. At this stage, the Government is placing great emphasis on improving the institutional infrastructure and regulatory framework in order to facilitate business, trade and investment.

III. Promotion and protection of human rights

19. Myanmar attaches great importance to the promotion and protection of human rights. It accords priority to the right to development and has been striving for the equitable and balanced development of the country. Section 347 of the State Constitution stipulates that the Union shall guarantee citizens the enjoyment of equal rights before the law and equally provide legal protection.

20. With a view to further promoting and safeguarding the fundamental rights of citizens as prescribed in the Constitution, a 15-member Myanmar national human rights commission was formed on 5 September 2011. The commission comprises independent experts from all strata of the society, including those from the various ethnic groups who are respected by their communities. The commission has been carrying out various activities to promote and protect human rights, including tackling complaints on alleged human rights violations filed by people or organizations within or outside the country and raising human rights awareness in the government ministries and the general public. The commission itself stands as an independent human rights entity and works in line with the Paris Principles. The commission is associated with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights.

21. In order for the commission to carry out its functions more effectively, the Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) of Myanmar approved the draft national human rights commission law on 28 August 2013. The draft law will be adopted soon after deliberation in the Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) and the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Assembly) in the coming months.

22. The consideration of the human rights situation of a country falls under the purview of the Human Rights Council. The universal periodic review mechanism of the Council enables the international community to act in an objective, prudent and

consistent manner. To that end, Myanmar actively participated in the universal periodic review process in January 2011, after submitting its first national report to the universal periodic review working group. From among the 190 recommendations it received, Myanmar is in the process of implementing the 78 recommendations acceptable to the country. Following up on its commitment made at the universal periodic review session, Myanmar has become a State party to several core human rights instruments. It acceded to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography on 7 December 2011 and 16 January 2012, respectively. At present, it is actively considering accession to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Myanmar will be submitting its second national report to the universal periodic review working group in 2015.

23. Myanmar is carrying out discussions with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in order to reach a mutually acceptable agreement regarding opening an OHCHR office. Furthermore, after a seven-year hiatus, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has resumed prison visits to observe the conditions of prisoners and to upgrade prison facilities in Myanmar.

A. Prisoners of conscience

24. In February 2013, President U Thein Sein appointed a 16-member committee to review cases of inmates identified as prisoners of conscience. After carefully considering the recommendations submitted by the committee, the President has so far granted amnesty four times in 2013, benefiting 245 prisoners. While amnesty was granted on humanitarian grounds, it was aimed at enabling the prisoners to serve national interests. The most recent amnesty, which was granted on 8 October 2013, resulted in the release of 56 prisoners. The prisoner review committee held its seventh meeting on 12 October 2013 in order to fulfil the commitment made by the President to clear Myanmar jails of prisoners of conscience by the end of the year.

B. Freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association

25. Under the ongoing legislative reform, existing laws that are not in line with the State Constitution and the applicable international norms and standards are being reviewed for possible amendment or repeal or replacement. This task is being carried out in keeping with national capacity and priorities.

26. In order to promote civil and political rights, the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law was enacted on 2 December 2011. Similar to the practice in other democratic countries, all public gatherings or demonstrations need prior permission from the authority concerned in accordance with the prescribed law and its by-laws. The recent increase in the number of peaceful demonstrations across the country is clear evidence of the prevalence of freedom of expression and assembly in the country.

27. Myanmar has taken impressive steps in the media reform process. Censorship requirements on domestic journals and periodicals were abolished as at 20 August 2012, thereby paving the way for freedom of the press. Subsequently, an interim

press council was formed in September to draft a code of conduct for journalists and to help prepare a draft media law with a view to protecting media personnel and settling press disputes. The telecommunications sector has been liberalized and open to public investment. Today, there are hundreds of weekly private journals and many private newspapers in Myanmar. The media reform has been regarded as one of the most dramatic and visible areas of the whole reform process of the Government in the transition to democracy. The new Printing and Publishing Enterprise Bill has been submitted to the Union Parliament and will become law in the near future.

C. Prevention of underage recruitment for military

28. The efforts of the Government to address the issue of underage soldiers have made significant progress since the signing of a joint plan of action with the United Nations on 27 June 2012. It is a historic development demonstrating the strong commitment of the Government to end its armed forces' recruitment and use of underage children. Since the launch of the plan of action, there have been no new cases of underage recruitment, thanks to the introduction of systematic screenings at the recruitment centres. In 2012 alone, the Government was able to prevent 538 underage applicants from slipping into the military service at the screening stage.

29. As part of this programme, awareness campaigns were launched extensively at various levels among the armed forces in cooperation with the country task force on monitoring and reporting to deepen understanding about the action plan and the law prohibiting underage recruitment. As part of the efforts, training courses were held for senior-level officers at the military command centres on human rights treaties relevant to the prevention of underage recruitment. Stringent scrutiny was enforced not only in the recruitment and training stages, but also in the post-training period.

30. In keeping with the plan of action, the Government has already allowed the United Nations task force to conduct at least 14 monitoring visits to regional commands, basic military training facilities, military recruitment centres and mobile recruitment teams. There might still be some cases of individuals who committed illegal recruitment. Such individual offenders were not condoned by the Government. Legal action was taken against them, in accordance with Military Directive No. 65, which specifies punishment depending on the degree of violation. Isolated cases of individual offenders must be distinguished from the policy of the whole institution of the armed forces, which legally prohibits the recruitment of children under 18 years of age. Since the commencement of the plan of action, a total of 176 underage children have been discharged and reintegrated into their families.

31. The Government has invited the team of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict to visit Myanmar at the end of November 2013, demonstrating its high-level commitment to cooperate with the United Nations to fully implement the plan of action.

D. Elimination of forced labour

32. The International Labour Conference formed a commission of enquiry in 1997 to investigate the compliance of Myanmar with Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29). In its report of 1998, the commission recommended that:

(a) The Village Act and Town Act 1907 be brought into line with Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29);

(b) High-level political commitment be made to ensure that no one is compelled to work against his or her will;

(c) Penalties that may be imposed under section 374 of the Penal Code for extracting forced or compulsory labour be strictly enforced in conformity with article 25 of Forced Labour Convention, 1930.

33. Myanmar has fully complied with the aforementioned recommendations, as well as other recommendations made in connection with International Labour Organization (ILO) Labour Convention No. 87 on freedom of association. As a reflection of its acknowledgement of the efforts of Myanmar in addressing the issue of forced labour and freedom of association, the International Labour Conference has lifted all the restrictions imposed on Myanmar, normalizing Myanmar/ILO relations.

E. Religious harmony

34. Notwithstanding what has recently occurred, Myanmar is a multi-ethnic and multicultural country with a long history of peaceful and harmonious existence among different faiths. Although Buddhism is the religion of the majority of its people, other religions, such as Christianity, Islam and Hinduism, coexist and flourish throughout this multi-religious country of Myanmar. Religious tolerance and freedom of worship are guaranteed in the State Constitution. Section 34 of the State Constitution clearly prescribes freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess and practise the faith of one's own choice. Fully cognizant of the importance of religious freedom in a multicultural country, the Government encourages and maintains interreligious harmony and freedom of worship of different faiths. This constitutional right is clearly reflected in the fact that Buddhist pagodas, Christian churches, Islamic mosques and Hindu temples stand side by side throughout the country, testifying to the prevalence of religious harmony and tolerance. Sadako Ogata, following her visit to Myanmar as an independent expert of the Commission on Human Rights in 1990, cited Myanmar as a "model society" for religious tolerance.

IV. Situation in Rakhine State

35. At a time of democratic transition when the society was opened up through liberalized policies and control, Myanmar went through unfortunate intercommunal violence in Rakhine State, sparked by a brutal crime that brought suffering and caused the loss of lives and homes to both sides of the communities.

36. In fact, it was an issue of communal violence between two communities on the western border that have a long history of mistrust and tension over the competition over resources. It was not an issue of a particular religion having been targeted by the Buddhist majority, as was widely alleged. Every act of violence was sparked by a provocative criminal act that was exploited by some miscreants who in no way represent the Myanmar Buddhist community as a whole. The wrongful portrayal or perception of the communal clashes as religious conflict has led to the spread of such violence to a few pockets inside the country.

A. Brief history

37. Subsequent to the declaration of war by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland against Myanmar in 1824, the Rakhine and Taninthari regions fell under British control in 1826, following two Anglo-Myanmar wars. The British Administration and its economic policy encouraged a large migration of people from then British India to Myanmar. Agro-farming and land plots were expanded, with the aim to collect taxes. The British found the local labour force in Rakhine inadequate, and thus a large number of cheap labourers from India were brought into Rakhine by the British to be employed in the cultivation of the fertile lands in Rakhine.

38. The number of imported labourers from the East Bengal also increased. Eventually they became the second largest population in Rakhine. The State is underdeveloped and resources are limited, which has created competition for jobs between the native Rakhine population and the expatriates. The frustration and competition is seen largely in economic activities and social settings. Furthermore, whenever sensitivities arise, differences in culture, race and religion give way to misunderstandings, disapproval and conflicts.

39. Its location bordering a densely populated country, the colonial legacy and the weaker socioeconomic situation are the root causes that have contributed adversely to the situation in Rakhine State today.

B. Factual accounts of the communal violence

40. The communal violence that broke out in Rakhine State in May and June 2012 was triggered by a brutal criminal case. A similar pattern of violence followed in Meiktila township, Lashio and Kantbalu in 2013. During the public disorder, both Buddhist and Muslim communities lost human lives, properties, houses, schools, monasteries and mosques.

41. In restoring law and order, the authorities took prompt and resolute actions while exercising maximum restraint. The Rakhine Investigation Commission, composed of high-profile individuals from all strata of the society and academia and religious leaders from the Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic and Christian communities, released its report to the public on 29 April 2013. The report analyses the root causes of communal violence in Rakhine State in a comprehensive, pragmatic and forward-looking manner.

42. The sentiments between the two communities in Rakhine State and the exaggerated media reports have influenced the people elsewhere in the country and have fuelled minor crimes or incidents, turning them into large-scale violence.

C. Short-term measures taken by the Government

43. In order to end the conflict and implement the reconstruction activities swiftly, the Government established, on 23 March 2013, the Central Committee for the Implementation of Stability and Development in Rakhine State, which is chaired by Vice-President Sai Mauk Kham. The Government also established seven subcommittees, assigning each of them to work on the rule of law, security and law enforcement, immigration and review of citizenship, temporary resettlement and reconstruction, international cooperation, social and economic development and strategic planning. The Government has been providing decisive leadership in resolving the conflict in Rakhine State in a manner that will ensure national security, promote the rule of law and protect human rights. The Chair of the Central Committee for the Implementation of Stability and Development in Rakhine State visits Rakhine State from time to time and oversees the effective implementation of the work of the working groups on their respective duties.

44. President U Thein Sein also made an inspection tour of Mrauk U, Kyauktaw and Maungtaw townships of Rakhine State on 1 and 2 October 2013. The President inspected internally displaced persons (IDP) camps and met with people from the Rakhine community and the Islamic faith leaders from Sittwe on separate occasions to discuss community peace and development matters.

D. Improvement of living conditions

45. Currently, 59 temporary camps are sheltering over 120,000 displaced persons who come from both communities; 1,883 long houses have been built in Sittwe, Yathedaung, Kyauktaw, Mrauk U, Minbya, Kyaukphyu, Yan Byae, Pauktaw and Myaepone townships in Rakhine State by the Union Government, the Rakhine State government, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and NGOs; 1,235 individual houses have also been constructed. At present, 87,362 IDPs from the non-Rakhine community have been housed in 2,769 long houses, while 6,578 people from the Rakhine community have been accommodated in 19 long houses and 1,242 individual houses.

46. An average food requirement for each month is 2,100 metric tons; 21,717 metric tons of food, including rice, edible oil, salt, pulses and beans, and nutrition powder, have been distributed. Household boxes, delivery kits, kitchen utensils, tarpaulin sheets, blankets and mosquito nets have also been distributed.

E. Health and education

47. Access to clean water and sanitation is also a priority in order to prevent the outbreak of disease in the camps. The construction of 3,273 toilet facilities, the digging of four new water wells and the upgrading of 27 water reservoirs and ponds have been completed at the camps.

48. In addition to the existing clinics, 29 more health clinics are under construction in 11 townships in Rakhine State. Services are available for emergency transportation of patients from IDP camps to the nearest hospitals. Education on reproductive health is conducted, and necessary information kits are provided. Nutrition programmes for children are conducted in 10 townships. Mobile health clinics are also operating there. Fifty thousand hygiene kits have been distributed. Treatments for children suffering from malnutrition are being provided at 14 camps and 59 villages.

49. While 30 new schools have been built, 20 existing schools are being renovated in the Sittwe, Yathaytaung, Pauktaw and Myebon townships. In order to cater education services to 7,972 Rakhine and non-Rakhine schoolchildren in 24 camps in six townships, 213 school teachers from their own communities have been trained in teaching skills.

F. Security and law enforcement

50. The Border Area Immigration Control forces, known as NASAKA, were responsible for the maintenance of security in the region during the communal violence last year. NASAKA was abolished in July 2013.

51. Myanmar observes a State policy of zero tolerance for impunity. Any perpetrator of communal violence, regardless of faith or race, is penalized. Punitive actions have been taken against those who have been involved in violence. In Rakhine State, 1,189 perpetrators were detained and tried. In Meiktila, 82 people, including 63 Buddhists, have been detained. In Lashio, out of 67 people who were detained and tried, 57 were Buddhists. In the Thandwe case, over 70 persons, most of them Rakhine Buddhists, have been arrested. The perpetrators are treated in accordance with the existing law. The capacity of inexperienced police forces is being strengthened through trainings with external assistance, including ICRC, to effectively handle mob violence.

G. Long-term measures taken by the Government

52. In order to end the conflict and implement the reconstruction activities swiftly, the Government established the Central Committee for Implementation of Stability and Development in Rakhine State to carry out short- and long-term plans. It also established seven subcommittees, assigning each of them to work on the rule of law, security and law enforcement, immigration and review of citizenship, temporary resettlement and reconstruction, international cooperation, social and economic development and strategic planning. A coordination centre for the effective execution of conflict prevention and reconstruction activities was set up in Sittwe in May 2013.

53. The Government has been making extensive efforts to provide temporary shelters and food, as well as to improve the living conditions of all affected persons, without discrimination, in cooperation with United Nations agencies, NGOs and bilateral donors. Necessary logistical assistance to support livelihoods, including in the form of tractors, power tillers, seed-paddy, chemical fertilizers, fuel, fishing boats and nets, is being provided to the local population. Considerable progress has

been achieved in the construction of shelters, housing, schools and health clinics, as well as food security and education and health services.

54. The upgrade and installation of telephone landlines in the Buthidaung, Gwa and Yanbyae townships are complete. Mobile phones for camp management authorities at temporary camps have also been distributed. For the ease of daily life, temporary bazaars will be established. One such bazaar is already in place.

H. Cooperation with the international community

55. Myanmar is grateful to the international partners that are donating funds for the relief and rehabilitation of the affected communities in Rakhine State. The main donors include Australia, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The international organizations rendering assistance include the United Nations agencies such as UNHCR, the United Nations Children's Fund, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Health Organization, the World Food Programme and the United Nations Population Fund; and other entities such as the European Commission Humanitarian Office and ICRC; NGOs such as Malteser, Care, Save the Children, Médecins Sans Frontières, Oxfam, Solidarities, CDN, ZOA Refugee Care, DRC, Coalition of Dutch NGOs, Swedish Civil Contingency Agency and Church of Sweden.

56. Since the launch of emergency, resettlement and reconstruction programmes in July 2012, donations from those international partners amounting to \$73 million have been received and disbursed. However, the contribution of \$6.2 million still needs to be mobilized to meet the requirements of current programmes.

57. The Government of Myanmar has already spent over 12.45 billion Kyats from its own resources, in addition to providing materials and services for affected persons. Local well-wishers have also contributed in cash and kind valued at billions of Kyat. However, international assistance continues to play an important role in providing humanitarian assistance.

58. The Government stands ready to provide access and facilitate humanitarian and other assistance from any sources, including the Member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) if the assistance is non-discriminatory and meant for both affected communities. In this regard, the Government has extended an invitation to the Secretary General of OIC and six Ministers for Foreign Affairs of its Contact Group to visit the country to find ways to provide humanitarian assistance to both communities.

I. Challenges

59. As interfaith trust and harmony are vitally important for the lasting peace and development of the country, all communities need to be educated to practise and promote mutual respect, understanding, empathy and patience. To this end, Myanmar strongly opposes religious extremism and stands against those who instigate interfaith distrust and instability.

60. Although stability has been restored in the country, certain organizations and media both at home and abroad are still portraying Myanmar as a country where religious and racial discrimination is rampant through fabricated reports. If such fabrications are allowed to go unchecked, they could undermine the existing delicate situation.

61. Anxiety and distrust between the two communities, particularly at the grass-roots level, remain high. Advocacy to deepen understanding of peaceful and harmonious coexistence among different faiths and races is one of the highest priorities of the Government. The President had urged the Interfaith Friendship Group to work nationwide to help implement the main priorities of rehabilitation, the prevention of conflicts and the development of a long-term plan to resolve root causes. In October 2013, an interfaith conference of the leaders of five faiths was held in Yangon with the participation of religious community leaders. It is encouraging to witness that frequent activities of interfaith dialogue are now taking place at various levels across the country.

62. The Government is seeking a holistic solution, bearing in mind the national interest and taking international norms and standards into consideration. In this regard, the constructive engagement and cooperation of the international community with Myanmar will effectively contribute to its endeavours to find a long-lasting solution to the issue.

V. Conclusion

63. At this time of speedy democratic transformation, Myanmar faces many complicated and delicate challenges to establishing peace and stability while struggling for inclusive development to meet the high expectations of the people. Despite the limited capacity of the country, these challenges are not insurmountable. Myanmar cannot afford to allow any challenges to disrupt the ongoing reform process and looks to the international community to understand our complex challenges and to continue its support to Myanmar's efforts to overcome them.

64. Myanmar has changed and continues to change in the right direction with unparalleled progress in promoting human rights and democratization. Notwithstanding the remaining challenges, virtually all major concerns related to human rights have been addressed to a larger extent. In the light of these positive developments, the country-specific issue of Myanmar should not continue to come under scrutiny by the General Assembly, which is supposed to take up the issue of grave human rights concerns. This is not the time to expand monitoring of the situation of the country. On the contrary, it is now time to remove the issue from the agenda of the General Assembly and to end the mandate of the Special Rapporteur, which has already been extended for more than 20 years. Myanmar in the new era should be viewed, with a different mindset, from a new perspective.