

President U Thein Sein delivered a remark on the Report of the Rakhine Investigation Commission

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Nay Pyi Taw, 6 May

President U Thein Sein delivered a remark on the Report of the Rakhine Investigation Commission today. The full text of the remark is as follows:

The recent reforms carried out by the Government centres on three parallel processes: a peace process that strives to end all ethnic conflicts ongoing since independence and achieve lasting peace; the transformation from military rule to democratic administration; and the replacement of a centralized economic system with a market-oriented economy.

If the entire country works together to successfully implement these reforms, I am convinced—even in the face of many challenges and difficulties—that we will be able to create an open society where all citizens can enjoy equal opportunities to pursue their dreams. Whatever our prospects for a bright future may be, we are still at a sensitive stage in the reform process where there is little room for error; as such, senseless, irrational, reactionary and extremist behavior and action by some of our citizens may lead to the failure of the reform process itself. I would like to seriously caution you that we, as citizens, must refrain from doing anything that will jeopardize our transition to a peaceful, democratic nation.

The Rakhine Investigation Commission was established in mid-2012 with the intention to systematically uncover the root causes of communal violence in Rakhine State. The Commission released its report to the public on April 29, 2013. The Commission's report has analyzed the issues surrounding communal violence in Rakhine State from various perspectives. The report is comprehensive, pragmatic and forward-looking. I want to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the dedication and contribution of the Commission members in this effort.

My administration remains determined to resolve the on-going problems in Rakhine State in a systematic and pragmatic manner. It will also undertake all necessary measures to create a harmonious society where all communities can live together peacefully.

In doing so, we must heed lessons from our own history, liberate ourselves from the shackles of past memories and historical mistrust, and look ahead to finding lasting solutions.

Because of our previous inability to institute proper democratic practices and establish an open society, our country has witnessed many armed conflicts, hardships, distrust between various ethnic groups, economic backwardness and underdevelopment.

We are undertaking democratic reforms to remedy these problems. In this democratization process, we must ensure that all citizens are able to enjoy freedom of religion and freedom of speech. In order for religious freedom to prevail, there must be tolerance and mutual respect

among the members of different faiths. Only when there is tolerance and mutual respect, will it be possible to coexist peacefully.

The government, for its part, will respect and protect the right of all citizens to worship any religion freely. We are all citizens of our beloved Myanmar. As citizens we should take pride in the fact that we are a multiethnic, multi religious society. Diversity can be strength. As President I am determined to represent every citizen of my country, no matter their ethnicity, religion or social status. I ask all of you, my fellow countrymen, to stand up against hatred and to reach out to those of different belief and backgrounds than yourself. Find the similarities and values you share and build on them. A strong modern Myanmar depends on you and your willingness to let diversity be your strength. Not our weakness.

I also want to comment on the right to free speech, which is the essence of democracy. However, some people abuse this right with speech intended to provoke, cause fear and spread hatred, thereby exacerbating the conflict between different religious communities. We must be mindful that the abuse of certain rights could jeopardize the enjoyment of many other rights.

In our country, Buddhist temples and pagodas, Christian churches, Islamic mosques and Hindu temples exist side by side with each other. Throughout history Myanmar has enjoyed social harmony between members of different ethnic groups.

The failure to pay sufficient attention to the real and perceived root causes of the conflict—ranging from the explosive birth rate, the long shared border between Myanmar and Bangladesh, negative colonial legacy, the economic backwardness in both the Rakhine and Muslim communities—and misportrayal of the conflict in Rakhine State as religious violence between Rakhine and Muslims have made it more difficult to resolve the problems we are facing. Concomitantly, we can also see the negative effect of the mis-portrayal of communal violence as religious conflict in the outbreak of violence in places like Meiktila and Oakkan.

If we look at the main recommendations put forward by the Rakhine Investigation Commission, the actions that should be taken immediately are the restoration of law and order and the enforcement of rule of law. I, as the president of the country, will do everything in my power to make sure that all security apparatus will cooperate and coordinate with each other to effectively perform the law enforcement duty entrusted to them. I have instructed all security forces to perform the duties entrusted to them without any bias and in accordance with law and public servant code of conduct. Anyone who breaks the law and carries out violence will be prosecuted in accordance with the law in a transparent and accountable manner.

We are also under taking relief activities to help people who lost their homes and other property during the violence. We will also do everything in our power to provide secure temporary shelters for the internally displaced before the rainy season, to remedy malnutrition among children, to help those traumatized by violence, to prevent epidemics, and to create job opportunities for the people of Rakhine State. We will also swiftly undertake economic development programs in the state.

In so doing, we will also be seeking assistance from our international partners. The government will provide the international aid agencies and international organizations that are engaging in relief activities with the necessary assistance.

I want to note that some of the activities undertaken by international relief agencies may have worsened the situation in the conflict affected areas in Rakhine State.

I therefore would like to urge all relief agencies to take into account local sensitivities when planning activities and to try and win the trust and support of both communities.

Furthermore, in line with the recommendations of the Rakhine Investigation Commission, the Government will take all necessary security measures to deter illegal immigration. In addition, the Government will deal with the citizenship-related issues by adopting short-, medium and long-term strategies.

The Government will also adopt and implement short-, medium- and long-term plans to create a harmonious society and achieve economic development in Rakhine State. In so doing, the Government will adopt the recommendations of the Rakhine Investigation Commission as the basis for these plans.

However, the Government will also continue to welcome suggestions from civil society and other community groups.

This is a situation that requires time and careful handling. We have to ensure that we do not inadvertently create additional difficulties when we address it. We ask everyone to recognize that this is a complex and sensitive issue that requires wise, careful as well as decisive action. In order to end conflict and implement reconstruction activities swiftly, the Government has established a Central Committee for Implementation of Stability and Development in Rakhine State (CCISD) on March 23, 2013. In order to implement the policies adopted by the CCISD, the recommendations of the Rakhine Investigation Commission and other necessary actions, the Government has also established seven subcommittees on rule of law, security and law enforcement, immigration and review of citizenship, temporary resettlement and reconstruction, social and economic development and strategic planning on March 29, 2013. I also want to inform you that the Government will provide genuine and decisive leadership in resolving the conflict in Rakhine State in ways that will ensure national security, promote rule of law and protect human rights.

One of the lessons we can take from the Rakhine Investigation Commission is that the defective policies adopted by previous governments have led to human rights violations within our society. Therefore, in resolving all the problems we are facing now, it is time for us to stop casting blame on each other and adopt pragmatic approaches that will help us create a peaceful and harmonious society in Rakhine State.

I would like to conclude by saying that the Government will take all necessary actions to ensure the basic human rights of Muslims in the Rakhine State and to accommodate the needs and expectations of the Rakhine people. (END)