



PRESS RELEASE

U.S. EMBASSY RANGOON

110 University Avenue, Kamayut Township, Rangoon, Burma

A joint diplomatic mission comprising U.S. Ambassador Derek Mitchell, Swiss Ambassador Christoph Burgener, and representatives from the Embassy of the UK visited Rakhine State on 11-12 November 2013. The delegation, accompanied by Union Ministers Lt General Thet Naing Win and U Khin Yi, visited the state capital of Sittwe, as well as Maungdaw, Pauktaw, and Myebon townships. The delegation held discussions with the Rakhine State Government, township officials, leaders from the Rakhine Buddhist and Muslim communities, international NGOs and UN agencies, and visited camps of internally-displaced persons (IDPs). The delegation is grateful for the assistance of the Union, State, and Township-level authorities in facilitating the visit.

The delegation noted the significant progress made in construction of temporary long-houses to shelter the 140,000 IDPs, which the government completed during the recent rainy season. The government's urgent action saved lives. Nonetheless, after more than a year since the initial violence of June and October 2012, the humanitarian situation in Rakhine state remains dire. Health services in Muslim IDP camps we visited in Pauktaw and Myebon, for instance, were deeply inadequate to address even the most basic needs, as were access to education and livelihoods. Inequitable conditions between Muslim and Rakhine IDP camps were clearly evident.

The delegation appreciated that Union and State-level government officials repeatedly and publicly affirmed their commitment to ensure unhindered access for humanitarian agencies to deliver vital assistance to all those in need, irrespective of race or religion, and in accordance with international humanitarian principles. We urge local authorities to take immediate and firm action against anyone instigating, intimidating, harassing, or harming humanitarian workers.

In meetings with our delegation, IDPs and local communities affirmed that security measures provided by the government have largely prevented further rounds of violence. However, they emphasized the urgent need for more security forces in the state in order to enforce the law and create conditions under which normal economic and social activity may occur over time. They commented that decisive government action to hold perpetrators of violence and abuse accountable, fairly and equitably with due process, will be the foundation of the development and rehabilitation of Rakhine State in the future.

The delegation also welcomed the government's commitment in coming weeks to initiate a process to affirm the citizenship status of Muslims in Rakhine State. We encourage the government to ensure that this is a transparent and time-bound process done in consultation with local communities.



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The delegation also heard voices of frustration from the Rakhine community over the lack of economic opportunity and development in Rakhine State, and the resentment this has engendered toward the Union government and the international community. We learned about the underlying fears and insecurities of the Rakhine people about their future as a society and culture, and about their proud history. These perspectives also need to be heard and understood to help address the situation in Rakhine State, and the delegation was grateful for the candor of the Rakhine interlocutors with which they engaged.

Nonetheless, the delegation was firm in conveying that the international community will never accept any interference with the delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance in any context, or violence against an entire people in the name of national identity or any other circumstance. Fear and insecurity are not a license for abuse, aggression or injustice toward others.

Rakhine State has enormous potential for economic development and future prosperity. Without rule of law, justice, equity, dialogue, and an end to the violence between communities, this potential cannot be realized. We strongly support President U Thein Sein's call for a zero-tolerance approach to the incitement, hate speech, and violent rhetoric which threatens the future prosperity and safety of all Rakhine State inhabitants. We further call on the government to put forward a clear plan for inclusive development and reintegration in Rakhine State, based on consultation with all local communities. The international community stands ready to support the government and all people of Rakhine State in building a peaceful, secure and prosperous future for the state and for the country as a whole.