



# PRESS RELEASE

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## Assistant Secretary Richard's Rakhine State Visit – Press Release January 21, 2015

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees, and Migration Anne C. Richard traveled to Rakhine State, Myanmar, January 16-19, 2015, visiting the state capital, Sittwe, conflict-affected villages in Maungdaw Township and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Sittwe. During the visit, she held discussions with state, district and township officials, Rakhine and Rohingya community representatives, and international humanitarian agencies. Richard's travel followed her participation in the U.S.-Myanmar Human Rights Dialogue and a trip to Kachin State.

Richard urged officials and others in Rakhine State to minimize loss of life and human suffering associated with communal tensions between Rakhine's ethnic and religious communities, mitigate the risks of further violence, and lay the groundwork for peace and communal reconciliation. She also urged the government and community leaders to help accomplish these goals by providing protection and security for all of Rakhine's residents, allowing greater freedom of movement, ensuring unimpeded humanitarian access and assistance to those in need, providing equal access to citizenship for eligible Rohingya, and promoting trust between communities.

"The current situation in Rakhine State benefits no one. We engaged with both communities and both Muslims and Buddhists are disadvantaged by the poverty, restrictions, and lack of rights in their society," she said.

Richard was encouraged by the assurances provided by Union and state-level government officials that humanitarian agencies would have unfettered access to deliver aid to all those in need, irrespective of race or religion, and in accordance with international principles. Humanitarian agencies reported that conditions at IDP camps had improved, though the humanitarian situation remains a concern two-and-a-half years after violence first broke out in the state, she noted.

Richard welcomed the government's commitment to carry out its citizenship verification process to assess the citizenship status of Muslims in Rakhine State, which she stressed must be done in a voluntary, transparent, and consultative manner, and in full accordance with international standards. The delegation also urged the government to eliminate the requirement for identification of ethnicity or race in the citizenship verification process.

Richard also heard Rakhine leaders express strong concerns about economic conditions in the state. The United States recognizes the legitimate grievances of the Rakhine people about the need for increased stability, development, and economic opportunity that will benefit all communities, Richard said. "These perspectives need to be understood and addressed urgently to move towards peace and reconciliation," she said.

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