

Myanmar: UN expert greets latest commitments on human rights and calls for swift implementation

GENEVA (20 November 2012) – The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Myanmar, Tomás Ojea Quintana, welcomed today the latest commitments from the Government of Myanmar on human rights as significant steps forward in the ongoing reform process, and encouraged the authorities to focus now on their prompt implementation.

These pledges announced by the Government on 18 November include the resumption of prison visits for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the setting up of a mechanism to review prisoner lists, addressing the situation in Rakhine State, and an invitation to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to establish a country office.

“These are significant commitments made by the Government of Myanmar, with tremendous potential to effect significant improvements in the country’s human rights situation,” Mr. Ojea Quintana said, noting that they are consistent with some of his previous recommendations, including those in his latest report* to the General Assembly last month.

“I now encourage the Government to work with all stakeholders, including the international community, in working out the necessary details and ensuring that they are properly implemented,” the Special Rapporteur said.

“Full access to places of detention by international and national monitoring groups will help to address ongoing concerns about the condition and treatment of prisoners and detainees, including in Rakhine State where many hundreds of people have been detained since June this year,” he pointed out.

Regarding the setting up of the review mechanism on ‘prisoner cases of concern’ by the end of December 2012, the Special Rapporteur emphasised that a vital element of this commitment will be the involvement of relevant stakeholders, including political and civil society organisations and released prisoners themselves.

“The outcome of this mechanism should be that no prisoners of conscience are left behind bars,” the human rights expert said. “To achieve this will require meaningful consultation with a wide range of people from both inside and outside of Government circles.”

In this regard, he welcomed the presidential order of 16 November that led to the release of around 50 prisoners of conscience, but again called on the Government to ensure that these releases are without conditions. He also called for steps to be taken to ensure prisoners’ reintegration into society, including access to medical services and education and employment opportunities.

In Rakhine State, Mr. Ojea Quintana welcomed the commitment by the Government to strengthen the rule of law, to work with the international community to meet humanitarian needs, and to address ‘contentious’ issues such as citizenship.

In addition, the expert highlighted the need for the Government to develop a clear strategy to address the tensions that exist between groups on the grounds of ethnicity and religion, which will include addressing the discrimination and human rights violations committed against the Rohingya community.

“Developing a strategy to tackle discrimination should be an integral part of the Government’s efforts to secure a future where the range of ethnic groups in Myanmar can live in equality and peaceful coexistence,” he stressed.

The Special Rapporteur also welcomed the commitment to extend an invitation to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to establish an office in Myanmar. He highlighted the importance of

the office being given a full mandate for the promotion and protection of human rights, and freedom of movement and access across the country.

Mr. Tomás Ojea Quintana (Argentina) was appointed by the United Nations Human Rights Council in May 2008. As Special Rapporteur, he is independent from any government or organization and serves in his individual capacity. Learn more, log on to:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/countries/mm/mandate/index.htm>

(*) Check the full report: <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N12/520/48/PDF/N1252048.pdf?OpenElement> or <http://www.un.org/en/ga/third/67/documentslist.shtml>

UN Human Rights, country page – Myanmar:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/countries/AsiaRegion/Pages/MMIndex.aspx>

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