

Myanmar urged to end violence and protect vulnerable communities in Rakhine State – UN experts

GENEVA (31 October 2012) – Three United Nations experts on Myanmar, minority issues and internally displaced persons today expressed their deep concern over continuing inter-communal violence in Rakhine State, Myanmar, that has led to loss of life, destruction of homes and mass displacement, and called on the Government to urgently address the underlying causes of the tension and conflict between the Buddhists and Muslim communities in the region.

“If the country is to be successful in the process of democratic transition, it must be bold in addressing the human rights challenges that exist,” said the Special Rapporteur on Myanmar, Tomás Ojea Quintana. “In the case of Rakhine State, this involves addressing the long-standing endemic discrimination against the Rohingya community that exists within sections of local and national Government as well as society at large.”

Mr. Ojea Quintana stressed that “the situation in the Rakhine State illustrates the importance of Myanmar placing human rights at the heart of its ongoing reform process.”

“The Government has an obligation to protect all of those affected by recent violence, including the Muslim Rohingya community which is particularly vulnerable, to guarantee their safety and respond urgently to their needs, including shelter, food and medical care,” said the UN Independent Expert on minority issues, Rita Izsák. “It must act rapidly to ensure that this situation does not deteriorate leading to further loss of life and displacement of communities.”

Ms. Izsák described the Rohingya community as a “highly marginalized minority who have historically proved vulnerable to human rights violations in Myanmar and the region.” Armed groups have reportedly perpetrated the violence with impunity and attacked the Rohingya as well as some Rakhine Buddhists who had dealings with the Rohingya or other Muslims.

The UN experts welcomed Government acknowledgment of the violence and its assertions that it would take action against its instigators. However, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, Chaloka Beyani, said that “the Government must take urgent steps to halt further displacement and destruction of homes.”

“All displaced groups, including the Rohingya community, must be assisted to return and rebuild their homes with assurances of their human rights and security in the short, medium and long-term,” Mr. Beyani said. “All humanitarian agencies must have full access to the

affected populations.”

The human rights experts underscored that this situation must not become an opportunity to permanently remove an unwelcome community, and expressed their deep concern about the assertion of the Government and others that the Rohingya are illegal immigrants and stateless persons.

“The Rohingya constitute a minority that must be protected according to international minority rights standards,” Ms. Izsák said responding to the question of the legal status of the Rohingya in Myanmar. “The Government must take steps to review relevant laws and procedures to provide equal access by the Rohingya community to citizenship and promote dialogue and reconciliation between communities.”

An estimated 28,000 people have been displaced by recent violence in Rakhine State and some 4,600 homes burnt according to UN, media and NGO reports which indicate that many of the victims are Rohingya. The total number reported displaced is now over 100,000 since clashes broke out between ethnic Rakhine Buddhists and Muslim Rohingya in June.

ENDS

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>

UN Human Rights, country page – Myanmar:

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

Rita Izsák (Hungary) was appointed as Independent Expert on minority issues by the Human Rights Council in June 2011 and took up her functions on 01 August 2011. As Independent Expert, she is independent from any government or organization and serves in her individual capacity. Under her UN mandate, the Independent Expert is required to promote implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, which marks its 20th anniversary in 2012. Learn more:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Minorities/IEExpert/Pages/IEminorityissuesIndex.aspx>

Check the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/minorities.htm>

Chaloka Beyani, a Zambian national and professor of international law at the London School of Economics, was appointed as Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons by the Human Rights Council in September 2010. 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/issues/idp/index.htm>

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (in 49 languages):

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IDPersons/Pages/Standards.aspx>

For further information and **media requests**, please contact Mr. Graham Fox, (+41 796183429 / gfox@ohchr.org).

For **media inquiries** related to other UN independent experts:

Xabier Celaya, UN Human Rights – Media Unit (+ 41 22 917 9383 / xcelaya@ohchr.org)

UN Human Rights, follow us on social media:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/unitednationshumanrights>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/UNrightswire>

Google+ [gplus.to/unitednationshumanrights](https://plus.google.com/unitednationshumanrights)

YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/UNOHCHR>

Check the Universal Human Rights Index: <http://uhri.ohchr.org/en>