

It is time for Special Rapporteur to act with prudence

By Dr Tha Sein

The situation in the Rakhine has reached an extremely dangerous phase with the continuous killing of civilians and the state has been racked by violence in recent months. Journalists who have reported from Rakhine State confirmed that many Muslim villagers have been killed by Muslim militants who turned the region into a hotbed of violence.

Muslim villagers described to Reuters earlier this year how Harakah al-Yaqin (HaY), or Faith Movement, began as a small group of leaders who recruited hundreds of young men in the

run-up to the October attack. Anthony Davis, a security analyst with Jane's at HIS-Markit, said the militants appeared to be regrouping and attempting to eliminate potential intelligence liabilities and to a degree to intimidate waverers among the population.

It is the unshakable will of Myanmar to go to the end if the militants want to remain unchanged in their violent stance. The area clearance operations of the government are an exercise of its legitimate right to resolve the problems that are a legacy of decades of internal conflict, isolation, and underdevelopment and defend peace and stability in the country and

the region at large.

The recent Special Rapporteur's end of mission statement on the Rakhine situation was met with public objections across a large section of the country. The statement is a clear manifestation of the heinous intention to inflame, rather than resolve, the complex and challenging situation that confronts the country. It is time for the Special Rapporteur to renew her perspective on Myanmar's stance towards the Rakhine situation and to act with prudence.

Myanmar, a peace-loving country, cherishes peace and places a great value for peace. It will face acts of terror

with firmness and determination and an indomitable spirit. It would be a big mistake to think that Myanmar would tolerate such violent acts as it is in the process of modernizing its deterrent capability as a vital way to pursue peace through strength.

We may thus see the historical significance of the measures taken by Myanmar that rose to a dignified country in the face of pressure. The country should abide by and promote social norms for equality and fairness, and allow the traditions of honesty and generosity to come to life while safeguarding its dignity in the present hostile world. ■

Wilderness areas are being destroyed but the World Heritage Convention can protect them

Only 1.8 percent of wilderness in global World Heritage sites currently protected, but many opportunities to increase this

This article is provided by University of Queensland

A University of Queensland-led international study published today urges the UNESCO World Heritage Convention to better conserve wilderness areas within Natural World Heritage Sites.

Lead author and UQ PhD student in the School of Earth and Environmental Sciences James Allan said the study revealed that only 1.8 per cent of the world's wilderness is protected in these sites.

Mr Allan said while some sites like the Okavango Delta in Botswana and Purnululu National Park in Australia both had excellent wilderness coverage, there were broad gaps in wilderness coverage across the globe.

The study identifies protected areas within these gaps, for example the Hukaung Valley Tiger Reserve in Myanmar or Eduardo Avaroa Andean Fauna Reserve in Bolivia that have good wilderness coverage and may warrant consideration for World Heritage Status.

Globally important wilderness areas are increasingly being shown as not only strongholds for endangered biodiversity, but critical in the fight to abate climate change, for regulating local climates, and supporting many of the world's most culturally diverse but politically and eco-

nomically marginalised communities, according to Mr Allan.

"Despite their importance, wilderness areas are being destroyed at an alarming rate and need urgent protection.

"The World Heritage Convention has the ability to do this by improving wilderness coverage within Natural World Heritage Sites."

Natural World Heritage Sites (NWHS), via the formal process run by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), are globally recognised as containing some of Earth's most valuable and most threatened natural assets.

Senior author Associate Professor James Watson of UQ and the Wildlife Conservation Society said wilderness conservation had been almost completely ignored in environmental policy.

"There is not just an important opportunity but an urgent need for a global environmental convention to recognise the importance of conserving wilderness before it is too late," Dr Watson said.

"The World Heritage Convention can better achieve its own objectives by increasing wilderness coverage within NWHS, which in turn will raise the profile of wilderness conservation globally, and provide wilderness areas with additional protection they need. It is a win-win situation."



PHOTO: WCS



The Hukaung Reserve is home to 35 species of mammals, such as the Indochinese tiger, Indochinese leopard, Indian elephant and bears and monkeys; over 370 species of birds; 46 species of frogs; 37 species of fresh water fish; four species of turtle; many species of butterfly and 13,500 plant species.

The Hukawng Valley Tiger Reserve covers 21,890 square kilometres. The Myanmar government has also designated 6,500 square kilometres of the valley as a protected forest reserve.

Myanmar is home to a rich variety of habitats and ecosystems, including 14 terrestrial ecoregions supporting 233 globally threatened species. Among those species are 37 that are critically endangered and 65 that are endangered. The country contains large expanses of species-rich and globally threatened ecosystems, such as lowland tropical forests and mangrove ecosystems, which are critically threatened elsewhere in the region.