

Press Statement

UN Secretary General's Special Advisor on Myanmar and senior UN Representatives visit to Rakhine State, Myanmar

Yangon, Myanmar - On 22 May a joint visit to Rakhine took place with Mr. Vijay Nambiar the Special Advisor to the Secretary-General on Myanmar, Ms. Renata Dessallien the UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in Myanmar, and senior Representatives of the UN System in Myanmar. The visit was in the context of the ongoing "boat crisis" in the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal as well as the UN's ongoing focus on the humanitarian and development situation in Rakhine State.

The delegation met with the Chief Minister, Mr. Maung Maung Ohn, and other representatives from the State government, as well as undertook a visit to Ale Than Kyaw Village to inspect the situation of the disembarked migrants. The UN commended both the Union Government of Myanmar and Rakhine State Government for the important rescue of over 200 migrants in Myanmar waters on 21 May. Of these rescued migrants it is believed that 200 are young Bangladeshi males, 19 of whom were minors between 15-17 years of age. The migrants were taken ashore by the Myanmar Navy, and provided food, water, and temporary accommodation by the Myanmar government, local community, and Myanmar Red Cross Society, with support from the UN and INGOs.

Mr. Nambiar recognized that the rescue had been undertaken with great seriousness and irrespective of the nationality of the stranded migrants. The Myanmar government was urged to continue the search and rescue operations as there are believed to be many more migrants still stranded at sea. Both sides discussed the seriousness of the situation of migrant smuggling, human trafficking and irregular migration affecting both Myanmar and the broader region. They agreed on the need for concerted action against the brokers and criminal syndicates involved in perpetrating such activities throughout the region. The UN has offered support to the government of Myanmar to address these issues and both sides agreed of the importance of tackling these challenges both nationally but also at the regional level. The UN therefore welcomed the confirmation that the Government of Myanmar will participate in the Regional Meeting to be held in Bangkok on 29th May to discuss this issue and to identify areas for regional cooperation.

Inevitably, much media attention has been focused on the conditions in the countries of origin of these migrants as well as the root causes leading to people to undertake such dangerous journeys by sea. The UN recognizes and appreciates the recent improvements in the conditions in Rakhine, including efforts to improve the situation of the IDPs. The Government has started to enable IDPs to return to their places of origin and is assisting with livelihood enhancement, health and education. The Government is requesting the UN and international community for assistance to help scale up the ongoing improvements, both for the IDPs and for all people of Rakhine State.

Notwithstanding these welcome improvements, more work needs to be done to address the daily issues of discrimination, restricted freedom of movement, and deprivation of fundamental rights faced by the IDPs and other Muslim populations. The UN Delegation emphasized that the citizenship process and legal status, in particular, need urgent and comprehensive solutions, not only in Rakhine State, but also for other groups in Myanmar. The UN reiterated that efforts to address these rights need to be combined with concerted measures to urgently ramp up development initiatives for all communities of Rakhine State so that the critical challenges facing the state of extreme poverty, deprivation and exclusion are tackled through a comprehensive approach.