

MYANMAR: THE PLIGHT OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE AND THE MUSLIM MINORITY MUST NOT BE FORGOTTEN

(New York, 1 March 2016): The Director of Operations for the Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, John Ging, briefed media in New York following his recent visit to Myanmar, 22 to 25 February.

Myanmar is going through an impressive democratic transformation, which is unlocking significant economic growth and development. However, not everyone in Myanmar is benefiting in this transition and Mr. Ging's mission focused on the people displaced by ongoing conflict in Kachin and northern Shan States and by the continuing impact of the 2012 inter-communal violence in Rakhine State.

In Kachin and northern Shan states, over 100,000 people remain displaced by conflict and living in temporary camps, despite the ceasefire signed last October. Visiting Woi Chyai and Je Yang displaced camps in the non-Government controlled areas Mr. Ging lamented the senseless loss of life and human suffering caused by this conflict. Communities in Kachin raised their concerns about the proliferation of landmines. Myanmar has one of the highest numbers of landmine casualties in the world. "It is the most vulnerable people that suffer most but I am very impressed by their resilience: they have endured so much," said John Ging, but warned that "much more must be done on the landmine issue." He also complimented humanitarian organizations on their outstanding work with particular praise for national NGOs.

In Rakhine State, around 120,000 Muslims (mainly Rohingya) and 5,000 ethnic Rakhine remain displaced following the inter-communal violence of 2012. Mr. Ging visited IDP camps in Myebon where he met people from both communities and saw first-hand the humanitarian conditions in the camps. While acknowledging that the State Government has made progress in improving the living conditions for some, Mr. Ging expressed shock at seeing so many temporary shelters in a state of collapse and the appalling sanitation conditions. Muslim camp inhabitants are still prevented from moving freely and in many cases, denied access to local hospitals.

"It was heartbreaking to see so many children in these dreadful conditions," said Mr. Ging. "One mother told me that her baby, less than a month old, died from lack of oxygen in December after she was denied access to treatment at the nearby township hospital in Myebon, as a Rohingya Muslim. Mr. Ging appealed for an end to such discriminatory and repugnant policies. "These do not reflect the values of the people of Myanmar or the historical diversity of the country," said John Ging. "Segregation and disenfranchisement are flawed and inhumane policies and history teaches us that they fail every time."

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In his meetings with community leaders in the camps, Mr. Ging was encouraged by the tolerance and understanding expressed by the people he met. “People of both communities have not lost hope of returning to their homes and they still want peaceful coexistence between communities. To make that happen, however, the Government and the international community must work much harder to create the conditions conducive to return,” said Mr. Ging, “Myanmar is making impressive progress but nobody should be excluded or left behind.”