

Note to correspondents:

Visit of the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs to Myanmar

United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman visited Myanmar from October 13 to October 17 at the invitation of the Government. In Yangon and Nay Pyi Taw, he met with State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, among other officials, as well as with representatives of Myanmar's civil society. He attended the ceremony commemorating the signing of Myanmar's historic National Ceasefire Agreement and met with the signatory ethnic organizations. He also met with the resident diplomatic community and representatives of international NGOs.

Most of Under-Secretary-General Feltman's discussions focused on the situation in Rakhine State and the plight of the hundreds of thousands of refugees who have fled to Bangladesh in the aftermath of the 25 August attacks on security positions and subsequent military action. He reiterated Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' call that humanitarian actors be given full and unhindered access to northern Rakhine State and that refugees be allowed voluntary, safe and dignified return to their place of origin.

Acknowledging the announcements by the Government of Myanmar, including the State Counsellor's address to the nation on 12 October, regarding the establishment of programs and policies to address the humanitarian concerns in Rakhine and the return of refugees from Bangladesh, the Under-Secretary-General encouraged the authorities to utilize the capacities, best practices, and extensive experience of the United Nations to help assure that stated intentions could be implemented in a timely and effective manner.

In northern Rakhine, the Under-Secretary-General viewed dozens of burned and destroyed villages by air and visited several communities affected by the recent violence. He also visited internally displaced persons' camps outside Sittwe, set up in 2012. He witnessed how, in addition to the documented endemic discrimination against the Rohingya population, socio-economic challenges adversely affect all communities. Mr. Feltman noted the Government's endorsement of the recommendations of the final report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State and urged their comprehensive implementation, which the United Nations can help support if so requested.

In discussions with Tatmadaw officials, the Under-Secretary-General noted that, in the UN's experience, successful counter-terrorism efforts do not rely exclusively on security measures. He urged the Tatmadaw to support the full implementation of the Advisory Commission's recommendations and credible investigations into allegations of human rights abuses by security officials in Rakhine. He underscored the importance of accountability and non-discriminatory rule of law and public safety as part of the comprehensive approach needed to address the fears and distrust among communities in Rakhine.

The United Nations is committed to supporting Myanmar and Bangladesh in their efforts to find a sustainable solution to the plight of the refugees and people affected by the recent violence and mass displacement. Returning to New York, Mr. Feltman will report to the Secretary-General as the United Nations continues to respond to the humanitarian and human rights crisis and positions itself to work with Myanmar to help relieve the suffering of the Rohingya population and address the grievances and needs of Rakhine and other ethnic groups.

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