

Statement by H. E. Mr. Masud Bin Momen, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations in New York at the Security Council Meeting on the 'Situation in Myanmar' (under Rule 37) on Thursday, 28 September 2017

Mr. President,

We thank you for convening this meeting and giving us the opportunity to speak. We commend the Secretary General for his unremitting attention to the issue.

According to the UN, since August 25th, nearly half a million people have entered Bangladesh fleeing violence in northern Rakhine State. Despite serious constraints, Bangladesh has given shelter to these distressed Rohingyas, majority of whom are women and children. Our Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has personally stood by the side of this most persecuted minority in the world.

We are providing these forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals with basic and emergency humanitarian assistance. The international community has come forward in the spirit of responsibility sharing, although the UN and other relevant partners are stretched beyond their capacity. Our authorities are also conducting biometric registration of all those that arrived in the last one month.

With this fresh influx, Bangladesh is currently hosting over 900,000 forcibly displaced Rohingyas from Myanmar. This is an untenable situation, to say the least.

Despite claims otherwise, violence has not ceased in northern Rakhine State, neither has the exodus of Rohingyas to Bangladesh. Only last night, an additional 20,000 entered into Bangladesh. Any individual among the new arrivals would make it known why this exodus is continuing. They all narrate use of rape as a weapon to scare families to leave. Available reports suggest that villages after villages have been burnt; people have been looted and abused in the Rakhine State. These atrocities attest that the Myanmar Government is using arson to de-populate northern Rakhine and take over ownership of lands.

The indiscriminate killing and torture by the Myanmar security forces, aided by vigilante groups acting on religious and ethnic affiliation, has already been cited as a 'text book example of ethnic cleansing' by the U. N. High Commissioner for Human Rights. This has also been emphasized by our Hon'ble Prime Minister in her statement in the General Assembly. The Security Council perhaps has a responsibility to examine whether military operations and consequent developments in northern Rakhine State point to any "threat to peace" and "breach of the peace" and what could be done to restore peace.

Under the present circumstances, it is of utmost importance that the remaining Rohingya civilians in northern Rakhine State are guaranteed unconditional protection by creating UN-administered 'safe zones' inside Myanmar. It must also be ensured that the humanitarian assistance being provided reach all affected communities, in particular to the Rohingyas. Myanmar must ensure full and unfettered humanitarian access to the UN and other humanitarian agencies.

In line with our 'zero tolerance' policy to terrorism and violent extremism, we have unequivocally condemned the alleged attacks on Myanmar security forces by extremist elements and offered to help Myanmar to combat terrorism through 'coordinated patrol', 'joint inspection' and even 'joint operation'. Regrettably, in the backdrop of our overtures, we have heard senior Myanmar leaders and state entities referring to the alleged extremists as 'Bengali terrorists'. There is perhaps no taker for the baseless and malicious propaganda to project Rohingyas as 'illegal immigrants from Bangladesh'. This is not only a blatant denial of the ethnic identity of the Rohingyas, but also an affront to Bengalis all over the world. This has to stop.

Myanmar claims, half of the Muslim villages are vacant, despite presence of about 30,000 military and other forces. Myanmar's official narrative also claims that a particular terrorist group has gathered such strength and capacity that it has been able to enlist most male members of the Rohingya community in northern Rakhine State, and use civilians and children as combatants and human shields. This state of volatility constitutes a larger threat to regional peace and security and as such should be a major security concern for the international community, including this Council.

Likewise, the new narratives of 'Muslims-killing-Muslims' or 'Muslims-killing-Hindus' should be seen as the State's failure or abnegation of its primary responsibility to protect its civilians. Allegations and counter-allegations of various forms of atrocities, which amount to crimes against humanity, must be fully investigated by a Security Council-mandated fact-finding mission.

The Council should also take into account that reportedly more than two divisions of armed forces had been deployed by Myanmar in areas near our border since the first week of August 2017. Troops were spotted within 200 meters of the zero line, and heavy armaments and artillery are reportedly placed in close proximity of our border. There have been 19 reported incidents of Bangladesh's air space violation by Myanmar helicopters and drones, including the latest one the day before yesterday. Anti-personnel mines have reportedly been laid along the stretch of the border to prevent the return of Rohingyas to Myanmar. There have been incidents of firing on Bangladeshi fishermen resulting in death of one.

Bangladesh continues to exercise utmost restraint in the face of such repeated, unwarranted and willful provocations. As a responsible and responsive State, we shall forge ahead seeking peaceful and lasting solution to this protracted situation through diplomacy, dialogue and cooperation. Accordingly, our Prime Minister made a five-point proposal last week at the General Assembly that have been largely echoed by the Secretary General and Council members this afternoon. Pursuant to those points, the immediate priorities should be to cease all forms of violence and ensure protection and humanitarian assistance for those affected or vulnerable in Rakhine State.

At the same time, Bangladesh looks forward to immediately start working with Myanmar and the international community to help implement the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State and ensure the safe, voluntary and sustainable return of all those displaced from Myanmar into our territory over the years, including the recent arrivals.

In this regard, previous precedents including the 1992 arrangement through adaptation in the context of current realities, challenges and priorities can be used. For this, Bangladesh prefers joint-verification in the presence of international observers. The forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals should return to their places of original abode in safety, security and dignity.

As stated by our Hon'ble Prime Minister in the General Assembly, which I would like to reiterate, "The crisis has its root in Myanmar and its solution has to be found in Myanmar." Bangladesh, however, remains committed to engage with Myanmar and the international community for resolution of this outstanding critical issue.

Our experience from the last three decades makes it obvious that the bilateral track loses its momentum as soon as the international community shifts its attention elsewhere. We, therefore, urge this Council to keep this issue alive in its agenda and make sure that we manage to arrive to the point of its logical conclusion. We also invite the Council members to conduct a field mission to Bangladesh and possibly Myanmar to gather first-hand accounts of the unfolding humanitarian crisis.

Mr. President,

To conclude, on behalf of the Government and people of Bangladesh, I convey our sincere appreciation and gratitude to each one of the Council members for the show of support we have seen this afternoon.

I thank you.
