



**Speech delivered by Her Excellency Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, State Counsellor
of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar
on Government's efforts with regard to National Reconciliation and Peace
(Nay Pyi Taw, 19 September 2017)**

**Excellencies and
Distinguished guests,**

Last year, when I addressed the United Nations' General Assembly as the representative of the newly established government of Myanmar, I reaffirmed our faith and confidence in the purpose and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. It is in this enduring belief in the capacity of nations to unite to build a more peaceful and prosperous world, a kinder and more compassionate home for all mankind, that we wish to share with members of the international community, the challenges that our country is now facing and the steps that we are taking to overcome them. This year, as I shall not be able to travel to New York for the United Nations' General Assembly, I have arranged this diplomatic briefing.

When our people voted for the National League for Democracy in the elections of 2015, they in fact entrusted to us, the task of carrying out three responsibilities: democratic transition, peace and stability, and development. None of these challenges are either easy or simple. Transition for us is a transition to democracy after half a century or more of authoritarian rule, and now we are in the process of nurturing our nascent and yet imperfect democracy.

Peace and stability was something that we had to achieve after nearly seventy years of internal conflict that started on the day of our independence back in 1948. And development has to be achieved within the context of the first two – nurturing democratic values, establishing peace and stability, and achieving the kind of sustainable development that would be seen as equitable by all our peoples.

Burma is a complex nation as all of you know, and its complexities are compounded by the fact that people expect us to overcome all of these challenges in as short a time as possible.

I think it is only fitting that I should remind you today that our government has not yet been in power for even eighteen months. It will be eighteen months at the end of this month. Eighteen months is a very short time in which to expect us to meet and overcome all of the challenges that we have been expected to do.

This does not mean that we are not ready to go on with our task of overcoming these challenges. Because I believe in the community of nations, I am prepared to share with all our friends who wish us well and who understand our problems and sympathise with us, what we have been doing to achieve democratic transition, peace and stability, and development.

I am aware of the fact that the world's attention is focused on the situation in Rakhine State. As I said at the General Assembly last year, as a responsible member of the community of nations, Myanmar does not fear international scrutiny and we are committed to a sustainable solution that would lead to peace, stability and development for all communities within that State. I then went on last year to give a brief outline of our plans to achieve this end.

Unhappily, on 9 October 2016, eighteen days after the delivery of my address at the General Assembly, three police outposts were attacked by armed Muslim groups. There were further attacks on 11 October and 12 November and these clashes resulted in loss of lives, injuries, burning of villages and the displacement of peoples in the affected areas. Many Muslims fled to Bangladesh.

Since then, the government has been making every effort to restore peace and stability and to promote harmony between the Muslim and Rakhine communities. Even before these outbreaks took place, we had established a Central Committee for rule of law and development in the Rakhine and invited Dr. Kofi Annan to lead a Commission that would help us to resolve the longstanding problems of that State. But, in spite of all these efforts, we were not able to prevent the conflicts from taking place. Still, throughout the last year, we have continued with our programme of development and the establishment of peace and harmony.

After several months of seemingly quiet and peace, on 25 August, thirty police outposts, as well as the Regimental Headquarters in Taungthazar village, were attacked by armed groups. Consequent to these attacks, the government declared the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army and its supporters responsible for acts of terrorism, as a terrorist group in accordance with the Counter-Terrorism Law, section 6, subsection 5.

There has been much concern around the world with regard to the situation in Rakhine. It is not the intention of the Myanmar government to apportion blame or to abnegate responsibility. We condemn all human rights violations and unlawful violence. We are committed to the restoration of peace, stability and rule of law, throughout the State. The security forces have been instructed to adhere strictly to the Code of Conduct in carrying out security operations, to exercise all due restraint, and to take full measures to avoid collateral damage and the harming of innocent civilians. Human rights violations and all other acts that impair stability and harmony and undermine the rule of law will be addressed in accordance with strict norms of justice.

We feel deeply for the suffering of all the people who have been caught up in the conflict. Those who have had to flee their homes are many – not just Muslims and Rakhines, but also small minority groups, such as the Daing-net, Mro, Thet, Mramagyi and Hindus of whose presence most of the world is totally unaware.

Humanitarian assistance was provided to displaced communities by a team led by the Minister of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement from 27 August 2017 onwards. Details of humanitarian assistance programmes will be made available to all of our guests in due course.

The final report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State chaired by Dr Kofi Annan, was made public on 25 August, in fact, the very day on which the last round of attacks took place. We are determined to implement the recommendations of the Commission. Those recommendations that will bring speedy improvement to the situation within a short timeframe will be given priority. Other recommendations we will have to take time over, but every single recommendation that will benefit

peace, harmony and development in the Rakhine State will be implemented within the shortest time possible.

The government is working to restore the situation to normalcy. Since 5 September, there have been no armed clashes and there have been no clearance operations. Nevertheless, we are concerned to hear that numbers of Muslims are fleeing across the border to Bangladesh. We want to find out why this exodus is happening. We would like to talk to those who have fled as well as those who have stayed. I think it is very little known that the great majority of Muslims in the Rakhine State have not joined the exodus. More than 50 per cent of the villages of Muslims are intact. They are as they were before the attacks took place. We would like to know why.

This is what I think we have to work towards. Not just looking at the problems, but also looking at the areas where there are no problems. Why have we been able to avoid these problems in certain areas? For this reason, we would like to invite the members of our diplomatic community to join us in our endeavour to learn more from the Muslims who have integrated successfully into the Rakhine State. If you are interested in joining us in our endeavours, please let us know. We can arrange for you to visit these areas, and to ask them for yourself, why they have not fled, why they have chosen to remain in their villages, even at a time when everything around them seems to be in a state of turmoil. Apart from what we are doing in the matter of allaying the fears of our people, I would like to say that we have been continuing with our socio-economic development programmes in Rakhine.

Let me outline a few of them. The Rakhine State Socio-Economic Development Plan 2017 – 2021 has been drafted to boost regional development in various sectors. Hundreds of new jobs and opportunities have been created for local people through Public Private Partnerships. The viability of a new Special Economic Zone to bring new jobs and businesses is being assessed. In terms of infrastructure development, electrification has been expanded with new roads and bridges built, including a new highway connecting remote areas previously only accessible by boat. All people living in the Rakhine State have access to education and healthcare services without discrimination. Healthcare services are being provided throughout the State including hard to reach areas, with new mobile clinics. The government has

upgraded 300 schools in Rakhine. The vocational and technical training programmes have begun. Muslim students also have access to higher education without any discrimination.

Humanitarian aid reached all communities in 95% of the affected areas before the recent attacks on August 25. We are now starting another round of humanitarian aid endeavour which we hope will take care of all the peoples in the region.

With regard to IDP's, three camps have been closed and the necessary assistance provided, including the building of new houses. There is more to do in this area. We are aware of the challenges and we are facing them.

With regard to citizenship, a strategy with specific timelines has been developed to move forward the National Verification Process. But this is a process which needs cooperation from all communities. In some Muslim communities, their leaders have decided that they are not to join in the verification process. We would appreciate it if all friends could persuade them to join in the process because they have nothing to lose by it. We are also trying to promote inter-communal religious harmony by engaging inter-faith groups. A new curriculum is to be introduced in schools with a focus on moral civic ideas and peace and stability.

A new FM radio channel has been set up to provide information on, amongst others, healthcare, national verification process, and education to all communities. It broadcasts in Rakhine, Bengali and Myanmar languages.

Training and capacity building for police and security forces is being provided in cooperation with the EU and United Nations agencies.

Since December 2016, local and foreign media groups have been given access to areas previously off-limits in Rakhine. Even after the outbreaks on 25 August, we arranged for several media groups to visit the afflicted areas.

The government is working hard to enhance existing relations with Bangladesh. The Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and the National Security Advisor visited Bangladesh in January and July of this year. We were also hoping for a visit from the Home Minister of Bangladesh but it had to be postponed, for reasons,

I think of other commitments on the part of the Minister. We will welcome him at any time that he is able to come and we hope to take forward the arrangements with regard to the security of the border which we are trying to implement together.

There has been a call for the repatriation of refugees who have fled from Myanmar to Bangladesh. We are prepared to start the verification process at any time. A verification process was set up as early as 1993 and based on the principles to which both countries agreed at this time, we can continue with the verification of those refugees who wish to return to Myanmar. We will abide by the criteria that was agreed on at that time. As our National Security Advisor has assured Bangladesh, and which I can confirm now, we are ready to start the verification process at any time. Those who have been verified as refugees from this country will be accepted without any problems and with full assurance of their security and their access to humanitarian aid.

I understand that many of our friends throughout the world are concerned by reports of villages being burnt and of hordes of refugees fleeing. As I said earlier, there have been no conflicts since 5 September and no clearance operations. We too are concerned. We want to find out what the real problems are. There have been allegations and counter-allegations and we have to listen to all of them. And we have to make sure that these allegations are based on solid evidence before we take action.

Action will be taken against all peoples, regardless of their religion, race, or political position who go against the laws of the land and who violate human rights as accepted by our international community. We have never been soft on human rights in this country. Our government has emerged as a body committed to the defence of human rights. Not of any particular community's rights, but of the rights of all human beings, within the borders of our country.

As we concentrate on problems in the Rakhine State, I would also like to take this opportunity to remind you that there are problems as serious for us as what is happening in the west of our country. We have been trying to build peace out of internal strife. A peace that must be lasting and that must be accompanied by sustainable and equitable development. We would like to invite you to take part in this peace process. To join us in finding lasting solutions to the problems that have plagued our country for years.

The peace process that we started last year in August is continuing and we are having many difficulties. I am not surprised by this because it is the way of peace processes anywhere in the world, that they come across difficulties and sometimes the processes stall and sometimes they come to a dead halt and sometimes it seems as though everything is falling apart, and yet, in the end, we all gather together and move forward. Because all of us basically want peace rather than war. We want harmony rather than conflict. This is the aspiration shared by all our peoples: peace, stability, harmony and progress. It is not a large agenda, but it is a difficult one.

And as we go forward in our efforts to redress the ills of this nation, I would like to ask our friends who understand and sympathise with, both our aspirations and our problems, to join us. We would like you to join us in a positive and constructive way to find new paths towards peace and stability and towards harmony.

We would like you to think of our country as a whole. Not just as little afflicted areas. It is as a whole only that we can make progress. I would like to use the analogy of a healthy human being. A healthy human being has to be healthy all over. You cannot neglect his general health just to concentrate on one particular ill. I use this analogy because our [health] sector is one that has made the greatest progress since we came into the administration last year. By concentrating on public health, we have found that other health problems can also be better addressed. For example, within one year, deaths from HIV were halved – not because we are concentrating just on HIV/AIDS, but because we were concentrating on public health as a whole, the health of all of our peoples and all our communities. This is how I would like you to look at our country.

We are a young and fragile democracy facing many problems, but we have to cope with them all at the same time, in the way that we have to cope with all of our health problems at the same time. We cannot just concentrate on a few. I would like to invite you to join us in finding new ways, new answers, more constructive, more positive, more innovative, and possibly more daring.

If we cannot resolve our problems quickly, it does not mean that we are never going to be able to resolve them. It just means that the suffering of our peoples is extended. We would like to bring an end to the suffering of our peoples as quickly as

possible. We would like to make our country a nation, within whose borders, everybody can live in security and prosperity. This is a large order. This is a big ambition. But it is not one impossible to fulfil. We all have to join together.

I accept that the real responsibility lies with us, the people of this country. All the people of Myanmar, from the government, to each and every single individual within this country has the responsibility for the development and progress of this country. But, we would like our friends to join us in our great endeavour. This is certainly a big endeavour. An ambitious endeavour. A determination to build out of a country, beset by many problems, a State that is healthy, that is strong, that can look forward to a secure future.

It is sad that in meeting our diplomatic community, I am obliged to focus on just a very few of our problems, when there are so many which I think we could resolve together. That is why I am opening the door to all of you who wish to join us in our endeavours. We invite you to join us, to talk to us, to discuss with us, to go with us to the troubled areas, where we can guarantee security for you, because we don't want the added problems of anything happening to any of you, so we would like you to join us, then to see for yourself what is happening and think for yourself, what can we do to remove these problems? And also, I want you to take special care to study the peaceful areas – how have they managed to keep the peace? How have they managed to preserve harmony? Why are they not at each other's throats in these particular areas? These are the answers that we need. It is not just a matter of removing ills, but also of promoting what is positive. We have to remove the negative and increase the positive, and we would like to do that together with all of you.

As you will probably be aware, our Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement is leading our humanitarian assistance programme. We are very happy that the International Committee of the Red Cross is joining us in this and we would welcome others who would like to aid us in our endeavours. Many have already committed to help us by donating generously – in cash as well as in kind. We will make sure that everything that is given towards the promotion of peace and harmony in the Rakhine is used in the best possible way to benefit all communities.

We don't want Myanmar to be a nation divided by religious beliefs, or ethnicity or political ideology. We all have the right to our diverse identities and we all have the right to strive to fulfil our lives in the ways in which we believe are right. But we also have to work together because we belong to one nation. And as we belong to one nation, we also belong to this world.

It is for this reason that we place great importance on the role of the United Nations as an assembly of nations which was created to promote peace and harmony, to ensure that our world should not ever again, in future, fall into the suffering that we all experienced during the Second World War. It was with the intention of putting an end to wars - that is to say - putting an end to conflicts, that the United Nations was established, and I would like to think that what we are doing here today, may be the beginning of a truly strong and effective movement to bring an end to all the conflicts within Myanmar. The conflicts between our communities, between our peoples, and also the conflict of ideas with regards to how we are to go forwards. Conflicts of ideas can be sorted out, can be removed through discussion and dialogue and through open-minded and the generosity and courage, that enables us to see other people's point of view. I would also like to say that the generosity and courage that would enable other people to see our point of view as well.

It is by cooperating only, that our world can go forward. By attacking each other, either with words, or with weapons, or even with emotions, will not help us. Hate and fear are the main scourges of our world. All conflict arises either out of hate or fear. It is only by removing the sources of hate and fear that we shall be able to remove conflict from our country and from our world.

As you know, there are many allegations and counter-allegations. I have not gone into any of them because it is not my purpose to promote and encourage conflict, whether of ideas, or of arms, but to try to promote harmony and understanding. I hope that you will understand us and join us in our endeavours.

As I said earlier, this is a diplomatic briefing. This was intended to keep the members of our diplomatic community and the representatives of our friends from all over the world, in touch with what we are trying to do. But in some ways, it is more than just a diplomatic briefing. It is a friendly appeal to all those who wish Myanmar

well. A friendly appeal to help us to achieve the ends that I think, you would agree are desirable, not just for this particular country, but for countries all over the world.

Thank you.