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**Oral Update**

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Mr. President, members of the Human Rights Council,

The High Commissioner has provided you with an accurate and very sobering update on the deteriorating conditions in Myanmar.

Last year I presented you with a conference room paper on the human rights of Myanmar’s children warning that unless conditions changed, these children would become a lost generation. I deeply regret to report that many of those dire warnings have come to pass.

By of the end of last year, more than 800 children had been killed or maimed since the coup began, most victims of indiscriminate attacks by junta forces. 387 children are currently being held behind bars as political prisoners. 51 children are being detained as hostages for the purpose of putting pressure on their parents or others. More than 660,000 children are now displaced by conflict. 5.8 million children require humanitarian assistance. The ongoing conflict has disrupted safe access to education for millions of children while also undermining the delivery of critical health services including routine immunizations.

These tragic developments, and the High Commissioner’s report, beg two important questions:

1. What can be done to change the course of this tragic, downward trajectory? And,
2. Is the international community meeting its fundamental obligation to help the victims of these atrocities?

The people of Myanmar need and deserve action by UN Member States – action that supports their heroic efforts to save their country and denies the junta the three things that it needs to sustain its brutality and oppression – weapons, money, and legitimacy.

I am worried, however, that the political will that is necessary to sustain this action could be waning. That some governments appear ready to move on, to accept the junta’s illegitimate claim to power and focus their attention and resources elsewhere. I fear that some are ready to cover their eyes as the junta attacks civilians, burns villages, and imprisons thousands of political opponents. Out of sight, out of mind.

Mr. President, it is imperative that this trend be reversed. The military junta of Myanmar must be disabused of any notion that time is on its side, that it need only wait out a fickle and distracted world.

Member States must be prepared to step up and stop or at least slow access to what the junta needs to continue Myanmar’s nightmare.

**Weapons.**

I recently issued a Conference Room Paper, “[**The Billion Dollar Death Trade**](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/myanmar/crp-sr-myanmar-2023-05-17.pdf),” that documents how the junta has imported more than $1 billion in weapons and weapons-related materials since the military coup. This was done with the full knowledge that these weapons could be used to kill thousands of innocent people, to commit probable war crimes and crimes against humanity.

This is unconscionable.

Singapore is among the nations mentioned in my paper, and I am pleased to report that the Government of Singapore is now investigating the report’s findings that 138 Singapore-based suppliers were involved in the transfer of $254 million of weapons-related materials. I recently met with Singapore government officials with whom I shared further details of these transactions. I look forward to the outcome of their investigation. If the shipment of these materials are stopped, the junta’s capacity to commit war crimes and crimes against humanity will be significantly disrupted.

**Money.**

Foreign currency enables the junta to purchase arms, supply its weapons factories, and fuel its jets and helicopters. It is essential that the international community act in a coordinated manner to deprive the junta of these funds.

The European Union has provided important leadership by sanctioning the junta’s largest source of revenue, Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE). The United States recently announced that it has imposed sanctions on the Myanma Foreign Trade Bank (MFTB) and Myanmar Investment and Commerical Bank (MICB). These are very important steps and could have far reaching impact.

But as important as these steps are, more can and must be done. The US and others should join the EU by imposing sanctions on MOGE, while all should join the US in imposing sanctions on Myanmar financial institutions. Indeed, greater coordination among those governments that have imposed sanctions – and their cooperation in the enforcement of these sanctions – would be highly significant.

**Legitimacy.**

Projecting an appearance of legitimacy is also critical to the junta. Time and again, we have seen the military propagandize any engagement with foreign diplomats or international bodies. The junta would like to signal to the people of Myanmar that it is a respected member of the international community and, like it or not, is here to stay.

This body, the Security Council, and the General Assembly have all condemned the coup. The leader of the junta, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, and senior level junta officials are prohibited from participating in ASEAN Summits and Foreign Ministers’ meetings. I was recently in Indonesia where President Widodo has called for an even wider prohibition on junta participation in ASEAN.

But these principled positions are now being challenged both within and beyond ASEAN. Some regional governments appear ready to engage the junta as if it were the legitimate government of Myanmar, as if it were not murdering its own people.

Now the Commander-in-Chief of the Myanmar Air Force, which continues to kill and maim untold numbers of innocent people with jet fighters and helicopter gun ships, has been named Chair of the ASEAN Air Chiefs’ Conference. This despite being responsible for probable war crimes.

I frankly cannot imagine any justification for this inexplicable policy. It is a classic lose-lose proposition: The people of Myanmar lose because the junta will use this designation to legitimize forces that continue to brutally attack them. ASEAN loses by being directly associated with the atrocities of a ruthless military.

Mr. President, those responsible for these atrocities should not be serving in leadership positions in ASEAN. They should be serving sentences for their crimes.

The second question that I would like to address is whether the international community is meeting its fundamental obligation to help the victims of these human rights violations and atrocities.

No group has suffered more from the military’s brutality than the Rohingya Muslim minority. In 2016 and 2017, genocidal attacks led by the military forced approximately 700,000 to cross the border into Bangladesh, literally running for their lives.

Make no mistake – the Rohingya were attacked not because of anything that they had done, but because of who they are and the God they pray to.

More than a million are now trying to survive in refugee camps in Bangladesh. But, because of a lack of support from the international community, Rohingya children are being denied the food and nutrition that they need. 41 percent of Rohingya children are suffering from stunted growth and more than half are anemic. And this was before the World Food Programme was forced to cut already meager food rations by 17 percent in April and an additional 20 percent in June.

Mr. President, this is unconscionable and should be unacceptable to everyone in this chamber. How is it possible that, more than halfway through 2023, the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis Joint Response Plan is only 27 percent funded?[[1]](#footnote-2) The Rohingya are prohibited from working and are completely dependent on this aid. Yet they are being forced to survive on rations valued at US$0.27 per day!

A mother in the camps was in tears when she tried to describe to me the painful process of deciding what foods she would no longer be feeding her children. And, she told me, this is not just about hunger or malnutrition, cuts in food rations are causing a rise in tensions and violence in the camps.

During my recently concluded mission to Indonesia, I spoke with Rohingya refugees who had travelled to Aceh given that life in Bangladesh had become so untenable. Last year, more than 3,500 Rohingya undertook sea journeys across the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea – a 360% increase over the year before. At least 348 are believed to have died from starvation, dehydration, or mistreatment by traffickers or smugglers, while others are believed to have drowned. The refugees in Aceh described to me their perilous journey, including the account of families sharing the only meal available on board their boat – a single onion.

Now, plans are being made by the junta and Bangladesh officials to launch a pilot program to repatriate Rohingya refugees back to Myanmar. Of course the Rohingya, like all refugees, have a right to return to their home country. But, as I and many others have pointed out, conditions in Rakhine State are anything but conducive to the safe, dignified, and sustainable return of the Rohingya.

Rohingya refugees are being forced to make an impossible choice: stay and watch as your children suffer hunger and malnutrition; repatriate back to Myanmar where you will have no rights and where you and your family will be surrounded by the very forces whose genocidal attacks drove you over the Bangladesh border in the first place; or put your fate, and that of your family, into the hands of smugglers and climb aboard unseaworthy vessels.

Mr. President many calls for justice for the Rohingya have been made in this body. Just yesterday a resolution was tabled on the Rohingya that was initiated by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. This is commendable but frankly insufficient. Rohingya children cannot eat resolutions.

Last month I spoke to the OIC Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission and have appealed to individual OIC countries for support for these Rohingya children. I explained that the hunger and malnutrition that are being imposed on them is causing permanent developmental damage.

If every OIC country that supported the OIC initiated resolution on the Rohingya made a meaningful contribution to the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis Joint Response Plan, many thousands of young lives and families would be impacted.

But the fact is, only one of the 57 OIC member states donated anything to the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis Joint Response Plan last year.

And, this is but one group of Member States that have failed to adequately support this resource.

Mr. President, we can and must do better.

I realize that there are other issues and challenges before this Council, but I believe we are at a critical juncture in Myanmar and that it is time to refocus and reengage on the Myanmar crisis. I urge Member States who support the people of Myanmar to develop a coordinated strategy and action plan where the action of one government is linked to the action of others. That these actions be proactive and targeted like a laser beam on undermining the junta’s capacity to continue its attacks against the people of Myanmar by denying it weapons, money, and legitimacy. That there be a public convening of these states to launch these coordinated actions and shine the light of public attention on what has become an invisible crisis – attention that can help to cultivate the political will necessary for sustained action.

And, as Member States work to address the root cause of the Rohingya crisis within Myanmar, I also urge you to commit the funds necessary to stop the shameful neglect and suffering of the hundreds of thousands of Rohingya children and families who are outside of Myanmar.

Thank you for your kind attention and for your support of my mandate. I look forward to working with you on the action required to meet this enormous human rights challenge.

Because action is precisely what the people of Myanmar need and deserve.

Thank you.

1. <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/1132/summary>; <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/1143/summary>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)