



Security Council

Seventy-third year

8179th meeting

Tuesday, 13 February 2018, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait)

Members:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
France	Mr. Delattre
Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
Poland	Ms. Wronecka
Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
Sweden	Mr. Skau
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Allen
United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

The situation in Myanmar

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Myanmar

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Bangladesh and Myanmar to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, and Mr. Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Grandi is joining the meeting via video-conference from Amman.

I now give the floor to Mr. Jenča.

Mr. Jenča: We are discussing the crisis in Myanmar in this Chamber for the first time in 2018. It is now five months since the start of the violence that has forced 688,000 Rohingya across the border, and the outflow of people continues, although at a lower rate. As of 5 February, between 1,000 and 1,200 people were reportedly waiting on a beach in Maungdaw, planning to leave for Bangladesh. Since the last briefing by Under-Secretary-General Feltman on 12 December 2017 (see S/PV.8133), the General Assembly adopted resolution 72/248 on the human rights situation in Myanmar by vote.

The Secretary-General has laid out three priorities that provide an important framework for assessing the situation. Regrettably, while there has been certain progress, not all have been implemented thus far.

First, we need to end the violence and improve the security situation. Although large-scale acts of violence have subsided, concerns about threats and intimidation against the remaining Rohingya population from Bamar and Rakhine communities, as well as from militia and security forces in Rakhine state, persist. Bamar-Rakhine tensions remain high, further fuelled by incidents, such as a clash between the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army and the military on 7 January, or the incident in Mrauk U on 16 January, in which police shot and killed seven Rakhine nationalist

protestors, and later imprisoned two noted Rakhine leaders. We remain concerned about the protection of future returnees.

On 14 November 2017, the Government of Myanmar reportedly transmitted to the Bangladesh authorities a list of 1,300 of what it called suspected terrorists and asked for their extradition. The Government also published in the official newspaper the names and photos of hundreds of suspected terrorists. These steps have raised questions about due process and possible intimidation of potential returnees.

Secondly, humanitarian access must be secured immediately in the affected areas of Rakhine. Such access continues to be severely curtailed. The majority of humanitarian organizations that previously worked in Rakhine are simply not allowed to enter the area. A handful of organizations have been given travel authorizations, but in a short-term and unpredictable manner that impedes the systematic delivery of assistance. The United Nations does not have sufficient access to make a meaningful assessment of the humanitarian or human rights situation. Thus, there is little sense of whether the full range of humanitarian needs of the population is being met and whether the human rights of all people of the region are being protected.

Thirdly, we must ensure the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their places of origin or choice. Let me acknowledge the fact that the Governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar signed a memorandum of understanding and established a joint working group that reached an agreement on 16 January on a number of issues in order to facilitate the return process. It is also important to note that Myanmar has made progress in its logistical preparations to receive returning refugees.

On the issues related to repatriation, I will defer to High Commissioner Grandi to provide more details.

The Secretary-General has underlined the importance of implementing the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission as a key element of creating conditions for a safe and dignified return. The Government has taken some high-level steps to advance this process, including convening an advisory board, led by Mr. Surakiart Sathirathai and comprising distinguished national and international participants. At the end of its deliberations, the board offered

preliminary recommendations to the Implementation Committee, including the involvement of United Nations at an early stage, full humanitarian access as soon as possible, wider media access and the formation of an independent fact-finding commission.

In this context, I wish to reiterate that we urge the Government to cooperate with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and all United Nations human rights mechanisms, in particular the fact-finding mission mandated by the Human Rights Council, and with the Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Myanmar. It is important that the work of United Nations human rights mechanisms not be undermined by other mechanisms.

As suggested by the final report of the Rakhine Advisory Commission, we urge the Government to take a leadership role in promoting intercommunal cohesion, create an environment conducive to dialogue, foster the values of tolerance and respect for basic human rights between Rakhine and Rohingya communities, and accelerate and align the citizenship verification process in alignment with international standards and treaties. Overall, addressing the root causes is fundamental to ensuring a durable and genuine solution to this crisis. We have consistently said that the problem is statelessness. This must be addressed.

In line with the Council's presidential statement of 6 November 2017 (S/PRST/2017/22), the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, made her first official visit to Myanmar from 14 to 17 December 2017 to address reports of conflict-related sexual violence. In her consultations, she advocated for the swift adoption of a joint communiqué of the Government of Myanmar and the United Nations on the prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence, in accordance with resolution 2106 (2013).

While we discuss Rakhine, we also take this opportunity to note other developments in Myanmar, in particular the ongoing fighting as well as the peacemaking efforts between the Government and diverse ethnic armed organizations. We are concerned that fighting in Kachin and northern Shan states has escalated in recent months. This has cast a shadow on peace negotiations and provoked a number of serious human rights and humanitarian concerns. Such concerns include the situation in Tanai, Kachin, where many civilians have been killed or injured and

as many as 5,000 civilians are reportedly unable to leave the area, where fighting is ongoing. And as in Rakhine state, the Government has severely restricted humanitarian access in many of the most critical areas. The United Nations is therefore unable to verify the numbers of people affected.

On a more positive note, two ethnic armed organizations, the New Mon State Party and the Lahu Democratic Union, signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in Nay Pyi Taw today. The signing is the first of its kind for the ruling National League for Democracy Government and brings the total number of ethnic armed groups that have signed the Agreement to 10 out of 16.

Finally, I would like to address the unfortunate arrest of two Reuters journalists, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo. The Secretary-General has called in clear terms for the release of these journalists and urged the authorities to respect the right to freedom of expression and information. Allow me to reiterate those calls here today. The ability to exercise their right to freedom of expression and information is a barometer for respect for human rights more broadly. Reuters has now published the story these journalists were working on — a deeply disturbing account of the execution of 10 Rohingya men in the village of Inn Din, Maungdaw, in northern Rakhine state. The Associated Press has also published a report of five mass graves in Gudar Pyin village in Buthidaung. These and other shocking reports of grave abuses demand our attention and action for the sake of lasting peace and justice.

The President: I thank the Mr. Jenča for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Grandi.

Mr. Grandi: Abdallah is a father of eight from Buthidaung, in the northern part of Myanmar's Rakhine state. When he fled to Bangladesh in September last year he became a refugee for the third time. The first time was in 1978, when he came to Bangladesh as a young boy, and the second was in 1991. That second time he remained for three years and then, anxious to recover his home and his four acres of land, he returned to Myanmar as part of an organized voluntary repatriation operation.

Back home, he and his family started to rebuild their lives. They had seven cows and were able to make a living. But, he says, around two years after his return, "hope started to fade away". Forced

labour, confiscation of crops and cattle and relentless incremental restrictions on their freedom of movement, their right to worship and their access to livelihoods constrained their existence.

Last year his village was attacked. Houses were burned and others in his community, including his own nephew, were shot dead. Hiding nearby, he saw his own his own home torched. He had no choice but to flee again. And he is once again living in a flimsy shelter in Kutupalong refugee settlement, together with his family, despairing at the prospect of never being able to build a safe and stable life. “My decision to return was wrong”, he said recently. “That is why we are suffering now.”

It has been almost six months, as we heard, since the current rapid and chaotic outflow of more than 688,000 refugees from Myanmar to Bangladesh began, driven by violence and destruction, following decades of repression and exclusion. That movement has now been significantly reduced, but it still continues. Already this month, some 1,500 Rohingya refugees have arrived in Bangladesh. The Government and the people of Bangladesh continue to receive refugees and provide them with protection and support. For this, they are to be deeply commended.

With reports of insecurity continuing, as we heard from the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, it is critical that the border remains open and that those still fleeing are able to reach safety. The Government of Bangladesh, together with highly-skilled national and local organizations, the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies with solid donor support, has mounted an impressive response. Yet conditions remain overcrowded and precarious for many, including for host communities. Disease outbreaks, including diphtheria, have been met with decisive action but remain a significant risk.

We are now in a race against time as a major new emergency looms. The monsoon season will start in March. We estimate that more than 100,000 refugees are living in areas prone to flooding or landslides. Tens of thousands of particularly vulnerable refugees must be urgently relocated. Their lives are at grave risk. The foundation of existing shelters must be strengthened; bridges built and reinforced and new land found and made ready. The Government is steering a massive emergency preparedness effort. Nonetheless, international support must be stepped up to avert a

catastrophe. The Kutupalong area in Cox’s Bazar is now the largest refugee settlement in the world, with its own character, economy and emerging social structures.

As we have repeatedly stated, resolving the crisis means finding solutions inside Myanmar. However, while they are pursued — as they must be — significant support will be required in Bangladesh. Humanitarian action and funding must be sustained but longer-term support will also be required to help the Government reinforce local infrastructure and economy and ensure access to opportunities for refugees and the communities hosting them. Education and opportunities to develop skills and earn an income will be critical in order to avoid the deep despair that can set in when refugees are abandoned on the margins of societies. We must ensure that young people retain a vision of a future and that the ground is laid for eventual voluntary return. Failure to do that will inevitably lead to disillusionment and radicalization. It will also expose refugees to protection risks, including sexual and gender-based violence, trafficking and other forms of abuse and exploitation.

The causes of the crisis originate in Myanmar, and a genuine search for solutions must finally start. At the heart of it all is the restoration of rights, including the right of refugees to return home voluntarily, and in safe and dignified conditions. Let me be clear. Conditions are not yet conducive to the voluntary repatriation of Rohingya refugees. The causes of their flight have not been addressed, and we have yet to see substantive progress on addressing the exclusion and denial of rights that has deepened in recent decades, rooted in their lack of citizenship. But preserving the right of return and pursuing the conditions that will enable it to be exercised must remain a central priority. For that reason, I welcome the dialogue between the Government of Bangladesh and the Government of the Union of Myanmar on the voluntary repatriation of refugees, and the commitment to international standards on the voluntary, safe and dignified return, set out in the arrangement agreed between them in November 2017.

In line with my mandate to support Governments to pursue solutions for refugees, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has extended an offer of support to both Governments, including by participating in the joint working group established for its implementation. The framework for return should eventually be defined in a tripartite agreement among the two Governments and UNHCR. Our offer of support remains open.

The construction of infrastructure to support the logistics of return is important but should not be confused with the establishment of conditions conducive to voluntary repatriation. An end to violence and the destruction of property, and granting humanitarian access throughout Rakhine state — as called for by the Secretary-General — are critical, basic steps.

Humanitarian access, as the Council has heard, remains extremely restricted. UNHCR has not had access to affected areas of the northern part of Rakhine state, beyond Maungdaw town, since August 2017, and our access in central Rakhine has also been curtailed. UNHCR presence and access throughout the state are essential to monitor protection conditions, provide independent information to refugees, and accompany returns as and when they take place. Refugees must be able to return to a place of their choice, including the location where they previously resided. Temporary arrangements should be avoided. As we have seen in Myanmar and elsewhere, they have a tendency to persist for considerably longer than envisaged, and to take on a permanent character.

The recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State are an important blueprint for a peaceful and inclusive future, and, therefore, for the sustainable return of refugees. I fully endorse the two-track approach envisaged in the report: the first focused on access to citizenship and the restoration of rights for the Rohingya, including freedom of movement, access to education and basic services, and to livelihoods; and the second on inclusive development aimed at improving the condition of all communities in Rakhine state, and on fostering peaceful co-existence.

Refugees must determine the timing and pace of returns; building their confidence is crucial. Implementing the Advisory Commission's recommendations related to central Rakhine would be a concrete first step. There, around 120,000 internally displaced people, mainly Rohingya driven from their homes by intercommunal violence, are now in their sixth year of confined encampment. Granting freedom of movement, allowing them to return home and fast-tracking the confirmation of their citizenship would send a strong signal to refugees in Bangladesh that Myanmar is genuinely committed to taking responsibility for their protection and well-being, and to pursuing lasting solutions. As in the past, UNHCR stands ready to work the Government of Myanmar in those efforts, by providing technical advice and support

on securing solutions for the internally displaced, voluntary repatriation, and resolving statelessness.

Addressing the root causes of the appalling violence and systemic discrimination that has driven hundreds of thousands from their homes repeatedly over decades, and securing solutions to the current crisis will require substantial support to both Myanmar and Bangladesh. International political engagement, technical expertise and financial resources will be needed on both sides of the border, including for humanitarian and targeted development activities. Preferential trade arrangements, labour and migration pathways, innovative financing, enhanced national partnerships and expanded regional cooperation should also play a critical role. If solutions are successfully pursued, they have the potential to yield significant dividends across the wider region, while helping to prevent extremism, foster stability and spur economic development.

Despite all that they have endured, Abdullah and his family are still holding on to a vision of a future back in Myanmar. They say:

“We want to go back but we want the United Nations to accompany us and provide security. We want to go to the village we come from — the same place. We want our belongings and our land. We want our right to move around freely like other citizens.”

That call must be heeded. It is time to put an end to the repeated, devastating cycle of violence, displacement and statelessness to invest in tangible, substantial measures that will start to overcome the profound exclusion that Abdullah and the rest of the Rohingya community have endured for far too long. It is the responsibility of the Government of the Union of Myanmar, but international engagement and support are key to making it happen.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Grandi for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Jenča and High Commissioner Grandi for their briefings.

This weekend the United Kingdom's Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, visit Cox's Bazar, where he met some of the almost 1 million Rohingya refugees

enduring the difficult living conditions that we have heard about today. Visiting northern Rakhine, he saw with his own eyes the horror of what has happened there. When he met Daw Aung San Suu Kyi on Sunday, the Foreign Secretary said that there needed to be the right conditions created in Rakhine that made it safe for Rohingya refugees to return home free from fear and in the knowledge that their basic rights would be protected and upheld.

The Council stated last November that the Rohingya refugees must be allowed to return to their homes safely, voluntarily and in conditions of human dignity. The United Kingdom believes that the Council has a duty to ensure that those words are matched by action.

We should be clear on three things. We should be clear on why refugees fled Rakhine in the first place, indeed why they continue to do so; we should be clear that the conditions in Rakhine today are not yet suitable for informed, safe, voluntary and dignified returns; and we should be clear about what needs to be done now.

The Rohingya refugees fleeing Rakhine have suffered the most appalling violence: rape, murder, the burning of their villages. In December, Special Representative Pramila Patten briefed us on the horrific sexual atrocities allegedly committed by the Burmese security forces (see S/PV.8133). More details emerged last week of specific atrocities allegedly committed by Burmese security forces at Gu Dar Pyin and Inn Din villages. Even now Rohingyas still flee forced starvation and continued human rights violations. As many of us have said, this is ethnic cleansing.

We welcome the Burmese Government's willingness to enter into agreements in Bangladesh and the initial preparations that it has made for returns. Much of this is in response to the Council's focus on the crisis. But the United Kingdom believes that the conditions in Rakhine do not yet allow for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees.

We must be clear on the way forward. Last November's presidential statement (S/PRST/2017/22) remains the guiding frame set by the Security Council for the actions that need to be taken. I want to highlight four in particular.

First, both Myanmar and Bangladesh must cooperate fully with the United Nations. We welcome Bangladesh's initial engagement with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

(UNHCR), which now needs to be fully involved in the returns process, ideally through a tripartite agreement. Only UNHCR has the expertise to handle returns on the scale and give confidence to refugees. It is also essential that Myanmar allow the United Nations agencies to provide humanitarian support for all its peoples.

Secondly, the parties should take concrete steps to ensure that refugees will be able to return home on a voluntary basis and with access to accurate information. Refugees should not be sent to internment camps, and Myanmar must set out how its restitution of property and livelihoods will occur. Women and girls have suffered sexual and gender-based violence and face specific risks. They must be represented in any decision-making process and their views given special consideration.

Dismantling the camps for internally displaced persons that have existed in central Rakhine since 2012 and supporting their inhabitants in returning home would be a positive confidence-building measure. Again, we believe that UNHCR is the only agency with the necessary expertise and moral authority.

Thirdly, Myanmar must ensure the safety of all communities in Rakhine. This means an immediate halt to violence and human rights violations and steps to reduce intercommunal tensions. It also means giving refugees confidence that those who have committed crimes will be brought to justice through an open and transparent accountability process.

Instead, we have seen the arrest of two Reuters journalists who reported on the Inn Din massacre and the denial of access to United Nations-mandated human rights bodies. The United Kingdom calls for the release of the Reuters journalist and calls for the Burmese Government's full cooperation with the United Nations fact-finding mission, the Special Rapporteur and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Fourthly, Myanmar must demonstrate progress in implementing the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State recommendations. These recommendations continue to provide a blueprint for a more peaceful and prosperous future for all communities in Rakhine. Crucially, they address civil and political rights, including pathways for the Rohingya to receive full Burmese citizenship as well as addressing socioeconomic development. Genuine progress in implementation would demonstrate that the Burmese

Government is sincere about offering Rohingya refugees a viable future to return to.

Before I conclude, I want to once more pay tribute to Bangladesh for hosting the Rohingya community as they fled in panic for their lives. But while they remain, Bangladesh, supported by all of us in the international community, must protect refugees and provide for their needs. This includes getting children to school, helping men and women earn livelihoods, and providing support to victims of sexual violence. The humanitarian agencies need to deliver services and prepare camps for the monsoon season.

The United Kingdom stands with Bangladesh. We have contributed £59 million in assistance. We urge the international community to do more to support Bangladesh as it helps these refugees and the communities that host them.

The world watched in horror as the violence in Rakhine forced the Rohingya to flee. The Council has played a vital role in shining a spotlight on the situation and encouraging action by the authorities on the ground. We must not turn away or become distracted. We ourselves should stand ready to visit, and we must be ready to take further action.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset warmly to thank Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenča and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Filippo Grandi, for their particularly illuminating briefings and for their commitment.

The situation of the Rohingya in Rakhine state remains a source of serious concern for France, and I would like to thank the Kuwaiti presidency of the Security Council for having organized this important exchange of views.

In that context, I should like to share with the Council three lines of thinking.

The first area relates to the central question of the return of the hundreds of thousands of refugees currently in Bangladesh. The considerable efforts undertaken by Bangladesh, which is hosting almost a million refugees, must be commended and supported by the international community. The agreement of 23 November last between Burma and Bangladesh on the return of refugees is a first step towards the safe, dignified and voluntary return of Rohingya refugees to their homes when conditions so permit.

Here we must acknowledge that the conditions for such a return have not been met and that major progress remains to be made. It is crucial in particular that the High Commissioner for Refugees be fully involved in these discussions as part of a tripartite agreement with Burma and Bangladesh and that it be able to assist both countries in the implementation of the return process in accordance with international standards. Moreover, it is vital that measures to be taken in Rakhine to promote reconstruction, reconciliation and respect for human rights, as recommended in the report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, chaired by Mr. Kofi Annan.

Secondly, I should like to stress the need to strengthen our commitment to and our collective pressure for the full implementation of the demands made by the Council in its presidential statement of 6 November last (S/PRST/2017/22). If those demands are effectively implemented, they will contribute to creating the conditions for a safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees.

The first requirement was to put an end to the violence in Rakhine. While it must be recognized that the level of violence has decreased recently, hundreds of Rohingya continue to flee Burma to Bangladesh, and those who have remained there are still subjected to severe discrimination and intimidation. We continue to receive disturbing reports about the appalling living conditions of those who remain. Many villages have been razed and burned to the ground. Protecting the population must therefore remain our priority.

The second significant demand from the international community is to ensure safe and unhindered access for humanitarian actors. While the International Committee of the Red Cross and, to a lesser extent, the World Food Programme today have access to Rakhine, it is far from sufficient to identify and respond to all humanitarian needs.

A third essential element of the presidential statement adopted on 6 November concerns violations of human rights. We welcome the adoption by the General Assembly last December of the resolution on human rights in Burma (General Assembly resolution 72/248) and call for its full implementation. We condemn the serious human rights violations that continue to be committed in Burma, particularly in Rakhine.

A few days ago, a documented Reuters investigation uncovered unacceptable atrocities in a Rohingya

village — atrocities that could amount to crimes against humanity. The two journalists conducting the investigation are currently detained. We call for the immediate release, just as we reiterate our commitment to the freedom of the press and the protection of journalists, who must be able to exercise their profession freely, without fear of being intimidated or arrested. Respect for those freedoms is one of the foundations of any democratic society.

It is essential to shed light on human rights violations and to combat impunity. In that regard, we call on the Burmese authorities to cooperate with human rights actors, including the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar and the Special Rapporteur. We further call upon the Burmese authorities to provide all the necessary access to the team of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and to UNICEF. Human rights are part of the solution, and guaranteeing its full respect will help create the conditions for the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of refugees.

That brings me to the last request of the presidential statement — which I once again underscore today — namely, the full implementation of the recommendations drawn up by the Commission chaired by Kofi Annan. Burma is faced with many challenges. Those of democratic transition and reconciliation among communities, which make Burma such a rich and diverse country, are arguably the largest and most important for the future of the country. National reconciliation will lead to a solution to the crisis in Rakhine state. Full citizenship, the freedom of movement, equal access to basic services and respect for the right to property should be granted to every person without discrimination, regardless of their ethnic or religious origin. The report of the Rakhine Advisory Commission provides a road map for the Burmese authorities to address the root causes of the Rakhine crisis and create conditions for sustainable coexistence among communities. France encourages the Burmese authorities to continue to implement those recommendations, with the support of the group of independent experts appointed to that end.

My third, and last, comment touches on the importance of the international community, and in particular the United Nations, remaining fully mobilized on that subject. While the steps taken by the Burmese authorities are a first step, the commitments must continue to be translated into action. Much progress

remains to be made in each of the areas mentioned in the presidential statement adopted by the Council on 6 November. It is essential that the international community, especially by means of the Council, remain extremely vigilant and actively engaged. The next appointment of a Special Envoy of the Secretary-General will allow us to lend further support to that end.

France reiterates its support for the Burmese democratic transition and the efforts of the Government led by Aung San Suu Kyi in that regard. In the face of the tragedy in Rakhine, France will continue to insist, particularly within the Security Council, on the urgent need to put an end to the violence and discrimination against the Rohingya, deliver unhindered humanitarian assistance to the population in need of it and facilitate, when conditions are right, the safe, voluntary and sustainable return of refugees. France will continue its dialogue with the Burmese authorities to that effect, proceeding the visit made to Burma by Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian last November.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China listened attentively to the briefings delivered by the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Miroslav Jenča, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Filippo Grandi, and noted their positive assessment of the progress achieved in Rakhine state and the efforts made by Myanmar and Bangladesh. Those undertakings should be sufficiently affirmed. China is a friendly neighbour of Myanmar and Bangladesh. We attach great importance to the situation in Rakhine state and have provided emergency humanitarian relief for the displaced persons. At the same time, we have actively worked with both parties to push for dialogue and consultations with a view to finding a solution.

Since last November, the Foreign Minister of China, Mr. Wang Yi, visited Bangladesh and Myanmar and proposed a three-phase approach for the solution of the Rakhine state issue. It has been unanimously endorsed by Myanmar and Bangladesh. It pleases us to see that some of the approaches are being implemented. The goal of the first phase, which is to cease hostilities on the ground and restore stability and order, has basically been achieved. The goal of the second phase is to seek viable measures to find a solution to the problem through communication and consultations by both parties and is also being pushed forward. The third phase is to adopt measures to resolve the root causes of poverty through development. I am confident that this goal can soon be

achieved through the efforts of Myanmar to alleviate poverty in Rakhine state, along with the vigorous support of the international community.

The problem in Myanmar's Rakhine state has a complex historical, ethnic and religious background. It cannot be solved overnight. At present, the situation on the ground has been visibly eased. Humanitarian relief operations have been actively carried out. Myanmar and Bangladesh have maintained dialogue and consultations, held joint working group meetings on repatriation and worked with United Nations agencies.

The Rakhine Advisory Commission visited Myanmar recently and affirmed Myanmar's efforts to implement recommendations contained in its report. Recently, Myanmar invited foreign missions and media to Myanmar to visit the affected areas in Rakhine state. China appreciates Myanmar and Bangladesh for those efforts. China has noted that the process of repatriation of the displaced by Myanmar and Bangladesh has recently been delayed. We hope that the international community can objectively observe the difficulties and challenges encountered by the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh, remain patient and provide support and assistance. We also hope it will encourage both parties, Myanmar and Bangladesh, to appropriately solve the problems that emerged in the process of implementing their agreement through dialogue and consultations so as to repatriate the displaced at an early date.

The Security Council adopted a presidential statement in November 2017 (S/PRST/2017/22) on Rakhine state.

At the moment, the situation in Rakhine state is generally stable. China has consistently maintained that the appropriate way to resolve the issue of Rakhine state is through bilateral efforts by Myanmar and Bangladesh. Only when they reach a settlement that is acceptable to the countries concerned will the agreement be capable of being implemented and sustained and of obtaining the understanding and support of every sector in those countries. China hopes that Myanmar and Bangladesh will continue to take appropriate steps and that the Security Council and the international community will play a constructive role in the process.

Lastly, I would like to reaffirm my willingness to work with all the parties to actively advance efforts aimed at helping to restore order and achieve stability and sustained development in Rakhine state.

Mr. Orrenius Skau (Sweden): I would like to begin by thanking High Commissioner Grandi and Assistant Secretary-General Jenča for their important briefings this morning. As their remarks made clear, six months after the initial mass displacements from Rakhine, the situation in Myanmar and Bangladesh continues to be seriously worrying, and the crisis has clear implications for regional peace and stability. We joined with other colleagues on the Council in calling for this meeting today because we believe it is important to ensure that the Security Council remains seized of the matter and that the United Nations continues its active engagement.

The decision to flee one's home and undertake a dangerous journey to seek refuge in a foreign land is driven by fear for oneself and one's family. It is a decision taken when no other options remain. We have heard first-hand from those who have fled about the violence and abuse that drove them from their homes. However, we also know that when it is safe to do so, refugees want to return home. In that regard, we welcome the bilateral arrangement on the voluntary return of refugees reached between the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), with its global mandate as the international refugee agency, must be fully associated with the process, including by supporting verification, and should be invited to join the joint working group.

As we heard this morning, Rohingya refugees are still arriving in Bangladesh. The situation in Rakhine is clearly not yet ripe for their voluntary return. For that process to begin, it is critical to ensure conditions that will enable their return to be voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable, in line with international law and the principle of non-refoulement. UNHCR must be given access to Rakhine in order to assess conditions on the ground and support return operations from inside the country. Particular attention should be given to the special needs of survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, including their need for protection in the return process. Those who do decide to return voluntarily should be able to go back to their places of origin. The creation of new camps or camp-like arrangements for internally displaced persons in Rakhine must be avoided. Similarly, transition and reception centres should be temporary, and UNHCR and other organizations should have full access to them.

The Security Council presidential statement adopted in November (S/PRST/2017/22) still has to be

implemented in full, including by ensuring full and unimpeded humanitarian access. But it will not be possible to restore peace and stability in Rakhine state without also addressing the conditions that led to the violence and displacement in the first place. There is an urgent need for security, reconstruction and livelihood programmes that can benefit all the communities in Rakhine. Implementation of the Rakhine Advisory Commission report's recommendations must now be stepped up, in cooperation with international and regional partners. That will be critical if we are to address the root causes of the conflict, which are underdevelopment and discrimination. Implementation must include a genuine process towards citizenship for the Rohingya. While re-establishing the rule of law is urgent and a precondition for safe and voluntary returns, reconciliation between the communities in Rakhine will be essential for long-term peace and development.

The numerous reports of systematic, widespread and coordinated acts of violence are a strong indication that crimes against humanity have been committed in Rakhine. We are deeply concerned about the recent reports of mass graves, which must be duly investigated. Impunity for crimes against humanity in Rakhine cannot be tolerated, and those responsible for them must be held to account. The reports reinforce our awareness of how urgent it is that all crimes be fully investigated. In that regard, we urge Myanmar to cooperate with the Human Rights Council's fact-finding mission in order to help establish the facts of what has taken place in Rakhine. We look forward to the fact-finding mission's oral report to the Human Rights Council in March. If the Myanmar authorities do not genuinely address the issue of accountability, help should be sought from the international community, including by considering a referral to the International Criminal Court.

We want to pay tribute to the Government and the people of Bangladesh for generously hosting such a large number of refugees. While no effort should be spared to create the conditions for voluntary return, long-term planning and humanitarian support for the refugees in Bangladesh must continue. The conditions in the camps are dire, and with the monsoon rains coming, there is a risk of a second humanitarian crisis within the crisis. We welcome Bangladesh's efforts and its commitment to avoiding such a humanitarian disaster, and we encourage international partners to provide additional humanitarian support. It will be

essential to ensure that the host communities that are affected are also supported as part of those efforts.

There can be no doubt that the situation in Myanmar continues to be very worrying and requires both short- and long-term solutions. We call on the Government of Myanmar to fully engage with the United Nations and with other regional and international partners who want to provide assistance and can do so. Sweden and the international community stand ready to continue supporting Myanmar on its path towards peace, democracy and prosperity.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the convening of this essential meeting and the worrying presentations by Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenča and High Commissioner Filippo Grandi.

Peru regrets and has been following with deep concern the situation of Myanmar's Rohingya Muslim population, which has resulted from the wave of hatred and violence they have endured in northern Rakhine state. In the past five months the crisis has brought more than 700,000 people to Bangladesh and to the largest refugee camp in the world. While we welcome Bangladesh's generosity and efforts, we are concerned about the likelihood that the forthcoming monsoon season will worsen the situation, bringing the risk of new disasters and diseases. We are also concerned about the difficulties and delays in the implementation of the repatriation agreement signed by both countries in November, and especially about the lack of the conditions needed to ensure that the refugees' return of refugees is voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable. In view of the seriousness of the humanitarian situation, I will focus on two specific points.

First, we believe that the recommendations that the Annan Advisory Commission made in October constitute a suitable framework for ensuring the conditions for return. With the Advisory Commission's independent support for their implementation, the Myanmar authorities must act swiftly to make them a reality. Among other steps, that involves recognizing the full citizenship of the members of the Rohingya community and guaranteeing their safety, property rights, freedom of movement and right to make an informed choice about their place of return. Discrimination and hate speech must not be tolerated. Within the framework of the peace and national reconciliation process, the country's ethnic, religious

and cultural diversity should be safeguarded, along with the rights of minorities. Building a sustainable peace must also include ensuring access to basic services and generating economic and social development projects.

Secondly, in our view it is essential that Myanmar and Bangladesh's efforts to end this complex humanitarian crisis be supported by the international community, and by the United Nations in particular. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the competent and best disposed agency in that regard, and we advocate its full participation in the return process, from conception to execution, in line with the Council's November presidential statement (S/PRST/2017/22). We consider it urgent that the Government of Myanmar ensure full and unrestricted access for UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies throughout Rakhine state. We deem it essential that such assistance pay special attention to the needs of women and girls, particularly the survivors of sexual violence.

We consider it crucial that the Human Rights Council's fact-finding mission, in accordance with its mandate, investigate the human rights violations that have been reported in order to determine those responsible, punish the guilty and prevent such events from reoccurring.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): We thank High Commissioner Filippo Grandi and Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenča for their briefings on the most recent developments in Myanmar and the situation of the Rohingya.

The situation of the Rohingya refugees continues to be a source of grave concern. The complexity of the challenge in Myanmar's Rakhine state is very clear and has deep roots. That means that the societal and the humanitarian challenges are huge. Addressing the root causes that forced the Rohingya to flee in the first place will not be easy. However, efforts have to be made with the required seriousness of purpose.

We want to be hopeful with regard to the efforts being made to facilitate the voluntary return of the Rohingya refugees in line with the memorandum of understanding signed between the Governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar. However, clearly, the challenges are formidable, all the more so since they relate to demands that the root causes be addressed. As High Commissioner Grandi said earlier, that entails the restoration of rights. That is why our approach

to addressing the issue needs to change. As some people are already saying, an international response that consists primarily of assigning blame for the humanitarian tragedy is no longer tenable. It is time for the international community to find a realistic workable solution.

In that context, there is a need to end the violence in Rakhine state and to create conditions for the safe and dignified return of the refugees and displaced persons, as well as to ensure humanitarian access. In that connection, we take note of the steps taken thus far by the Myanmar Government. However, there is no doubt that much remains to be done in order not only to alleviate the suffering and frustration of the people of Rakhine state but also to embrace all communities and to ensure peace and harmony. We believe that enhanced communication and cooperation between the Governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar are vital to ensuring the implementation of the arrangement on the return of persons displaced from Rakhine state in conditions of safety and dignity.

The role of the international community, including the United Nations and its various agencies operating on the ground, as well as other organizations, such as, *inter alia*, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, is also very important in support of such efforts. Ultimately, as we said earlier, what matters most is to address the root cause of the problem.

The implementation of the recommendations made by the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State will certainly contribute to tackling the long-standing obstacles to peace and development in Rakhine state. We commend the initial step taken by the Government of Myanmar but it is necessary to accelerate the implementation. That is a Herculean task, which requires the sustained commitment and engagement of the Government, as well as the support of the international community, to ultimately ensure that all communities are treated without discrimination, regardless of religion or ethnicity, and to support the voluntary, safe and dignified return of displaced individuals and refugees to their homes.

Finally, we appreciate the continued engagement of the Secretary-General through his good offices. We believe that a visit by the Security Council to both Bangladesh and Myanmar could be useful in order to gain a better appreciation of the situation on the ground and to support the Governments of both countries in

their efforts to address the situation of the Rohingya refugees. We take note of the briefing by Kuwait on this issue, and we hope that future presidencies will take up the matter.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I thank you, Mr. President, for putting this very serious issue on our agenda. Allow me to express my appreciation to Mr. Jenča and Mr. Grandi for their excellent briefings.

Today, I will focus on three issues: first, the current situation in Myanmar; secondly, how to ensure the safe, dignified and voluntary return of the Rohingya; and thirdly, the humanitarian challenges in the camps in Cox's Bazar.

Regarding my first point, on the current situation in Myanmar, every week that passes, we hear more stories of atrocities perpetrated against the Rohingya people following the events of last August — stories of mass graves in the village of Inn Din, a coastal village whence the entire Rohingya population of 6,000 people fled; stories of young girls who are the victims of sexual violence; stories of children who saw their parents and siblings killed and had to find their own way to safety in Bangladesh; and stories of almost 700,000 people who had to flee from their homes.

It is often journalists who bring us such stories. In that respect, as others have done, let me mention the plight of the Reuters journalists Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo. Both were detained two months ago while working on a report on the mass graves in Inn Din. We call on the Government of Myanmar to respect their rights. They should be released now. Furthermore, the Government should allow journalists to work independently and without undue interference, as stated in resolution 2222 (2015). Fundamental human rights are at stake, as Mr. Jenča said earlier.

The recent testimonies of the situation in Myanmar are shocking. They press upon us the need to address the mass atrocities and to find a durable and just resolution to the dreadful plight of the Rohingya. The crisis continues to affect the security not only of Myanmar but also of its neighbours. The situation therefore warrants the close and continued attention of the Security Council.

That brings me to my second point — the safe, dignified and voluntary return of the refugees. We welcome the steps undertaken by the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh to build a framework for

eventual return. We emphasize the right of return of all refugees to Myanmar. However, it is clear that the conditions in Rakhine state are not yet sufficient to start that process. Returns can take place only if they are voluntary, safe and dignified. The independent monitoring of that process is essential to ensuring that it meets international standards.

Myanmar should allow the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to play a role in the repatriation process. Access for United Nations and other humanitarian aid organizations into Rakhine state is key to establishing if it is safe enough to return. The voices of the Rohingya themselves also need to be heard. The large majority of Rohingya do not want to go back yet. They fear a repetition of the abuses that forced them to flee.

It is primarily up to the Myanmar authorities to ensure the safety of their own population. They have the primary responsibility to protect their own people. The many reports of grave violations and abuses of human rights, including by the military, need to be thoroughly investigated and to be prosecuted. We need accountability. That is crucial to ensure the long-term stability of Myanmar. We call on Myanmar to allow access for the fact-finding mission. We encourage Myanmar to accept the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court through accession or self-referral.

The return of the Rohingya must be dignified and sustainable. The root causes of the current crisis therefore need to be addressed. We call on Myanmar to establish a concrete action plan for the full implementation of the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, chaired by Kofi Annan. Living conditions need to be improved and decades of discrimination must be brought to an end. Returnees need access to appropriate shelter, not in camps, but in the villages that they fled from, and victims require proper rehabilitation. These are steps that should be taken right now.

This brings me to my third point: humanitarian challenges and especially the humanitarian situation in the camps in Cox's Bazar. We commend the generous efforts of Bangladesh to welcome and shelter the refugees on its soil. We are aware of the tremendous challenges the situation creates for the host communities. The international community will continue to depend on Bangladesh, as long as safe, voluntary and dignified returns remain impossible. The rainy season will only

increase the challenges in the Bangladeshi camps. We should all stand ready to help Bangladesh overcome these challenges, and we encourage Bangladesh to work with United Nations agencies, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, to meet them.

In conclusion, for the Rohingya to be able to return to their homes and to continue their lives peacefully and sustainably in Myanmar, we call on all parties to work on the following: first, a long-term political solution that respects the rights of minorities; secondly, accountability for perpetrators of violators of international humanitarian law and human rights law; thirdly, meeting the preconditions for a safe, dignified and voluntary return of Rohingya refugees; and fourthly, in the meantime, supporting the Bangladeshi efforts to shelter the Rohingya on their soil.

The situation is so serious that we should keep this issue high on the agenda of the Council.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I thank Mr. Grandi and Mr. Jenča for their briefings.

The news reports from Burma have long been brutal and heartbreaking. Because of the lack of access granted by the Burmese Government, few reports get out, but those that do are simply horrifying. The Associated Press recently told the story of Kadir, a Rohingya man from the village of Gu Dar Pyin. Kadir and 14 of his friends were choosing sides for a game of a traditional Burmese sport when the Burmese military began shooting. Survivors reported that more than 200 soldiers descended on the village, burning homes and shooting anyone who could not get away. Kadir got away, but only he and two friends survived the shooting. When he returned to the village six days later, Kadir found his teammates partially buried in mass graves. In all, there were reportedly five mass graves.

The Burmese Government regularly denies the existence of massacres and mass graves and claims to be fighting terrorists. But what Kadir found that day indicated that the military knew what it was doing was wrong and did not want the world to know. To his horror, Kadir saw that not only were his friends dead, but also their faces had been burned away with acid. Some had been disfigured by bullet wounds. The Burmese soldiers had also burned away the hands of the dead so the bodies could not be identified.

The Associated Press reporters who uncovered these atrocities deserve our thanks and praise. It is neither easy nor safe to report from Burma these days. Two Reuters reporters uncovered evidence of another massacre and mass grave in a fishing village last September and they paid for it with their freedom. They reported that the police ordered villagers to participate in the killing, dismemberment and burial in a mass grave of 10 Rohingya men and boys. Witnesses said that some were still alive when they were thrown into the grave. The police claim that they were acting in self-defence, that the Rohingya men attacked them, but the reporters compiled evidence, including photos, that contradicted the police. For the crime of reporting the truth, the Burmese Government arrested and imprisoned the reporters. They remain incarcerated in Burma without bail. We strongly call for their immediate and unconditional release.

Like the soldiers in Gu Dar Pyin, powerful forces in the Burmese Government have denied the ethnic cleansing in Rakhine state. To make sure that no one contradicts their preposterous denials, they are preventing access to Rakhine to anyone or any organization that might bear witness to their atrocities, including the Security Council. The result is that they are denying access to many organizations that the displaced and starving in Burma desperately need today.

Even before the violence started, malnutrition was a serious problem in Rakhine state, but now there are reports from Rohingya who have found refuge in Bangladesh that the military's actions are leading a campaign of purposeful starvation, forcing more families out of the country. Homes are being looted. Farmers are being denied the ability to harvest their crops. Girls and women are being abducted into sexual slavery.

We have urged Burma to work with the United Nations and its agencies to allow the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations immediate and unhindered access to Rakhine state. We repeat that call today with even more urgency. The need for humanitarian aid in Burma is dire and it is immediate.

The leader of Burma has been internationally celebrated in the past for her commitment to peace and to her fellow man. If any of that love of humankind can still be found in the Government of Burma, it must act now. The least it can do is allow humanitarian

groups access to those who are suffering. It costs the Government nothing to allow food to the starving, medical care to the wounded and psychological services to the sexually abused. The world is watching and waiting for Burma to act. What we have seen so far is cruel and barbaric. To top it off, it has the gall to blame the media. Unhindered media access is vitally important. Journalists, like the two imprisoned Reuters reporters, are an indispensable source of information.

I also call on the Secretary-General to quickly appoint a special envoy for Burma, and I call on the Burmese Government to allow a United Nations fact-finding mission and the Special Rapporteur into the country. Without the media and United Nations personnel in Burma to shed light on the crimes being committed, there is no hope for justice for the victims.

We are grateful to the people and Government of Bangladesh for hosting hundreds of thousands of refugees. We understand the burden that it creates, and we ask Bangladesh to continue to work closely with UNHCR and other international organizations to ensure that repatriations of refugees are voluntary. We ask that it continue to ensure the safety and security of both those who choose to relocate and those who do not. But, in the end, real progress depends on an end to the terror and the killing. We cannot expect nor should we ask refugees to return to Burma until it is safe to do so. They must be confident that they will not fall victim to the same horrors that drove them from their homes in the first place. Right now, those refugees do not have that confidence. Many are too scared to return to their country.

The Government of Burma — and the Government of Burma alone — has the power and the moral obligation to correct that. It must create the conditions to assure refugees that they can safely return to their villages and their homes. Burma and Bangladesh have had substantive discussions on repatriation and that is a good thing. But we can talk forever and not make progress, as long as the military and the Government continue to make living in Burma a death sentence for the Rohingya people.

I am profoundly grateful to my colleagues from the United Kingdom for arranging this meeting today. There are powerful forces at work trying to cover up the unspeakable horror taking place in Burma, but we owe it to both the victims and the rest of the Burmese people to demand transparency, access and accountability. We

need to honour the bravery of the Buddhist village elder who provided Reuters with horrific photographs of the atrocities at Inn Din because, in his words, “I do not want it to happen like that in the future.” We need to honour his hope for a better Burma, one in which such behaviour is not tolerated against any person or group.

Unfortunately, the Security Council has so far failed in its responsibility to act in response to the clear threat to international peace and security that has resulted from recent events in northern Rakhine state. We cannot look the other way in this situation. What happened and continues to happen in Burma is not okay. The Council must hold the military accountable for its actions and exert pressure on Aung San Suu Kyi to acknowledge that those horrific acts are taking place in her country. No more excuses.

I urge my colleagues to seize this opportunity to end our inaction and live up to our responsibilities as members of the Security Council. I call on all nations to join the United States to do more than just demanding an end to the atrocities in Burma, and to actually take the steps we know are needed to put the crisis on the path leading towards a solution.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d’Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks Mr. Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, and Mr. Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, for their excellent briefings on the current situation in Myanmar and for the work that they are doing in managing the crisis in that country.

Côte d’Ivoire welcomes the holding of this meeting dedicated to the crisis in Myanmar, a country in which one of the most serious humanitarian crises of our time is taking place. Today it is estimated that almost 888,000 internally displaced and refugees, most of whom are women and children, are facing a major humanitarian crisis. That situation calls for special attention from the international community, in particular the United Nations, which must take appropriate measures aimed at finding a lasting and sustainable solution to the daily tragedy that those segments of the population are living.

I would like to structure my statement on three main points, namely, the return of Rohingya refugees to their country, the question of the fight against impunity with regard to serious human rights violations and the need to maintain peace and security in the region.

With regard to the first point, my delegation believes that the return of the Rohingya people to their homes of origin is a moral obligation for the international community. Accordingly, Côte d'Ivoire is concerned about recent developments concerning the reportedly constant flow of people from Myanmar to neighbouring Bangladesh. My delegation therefore calls on the international community, as well as all other actors, to act so as to find concrete solutions to the crisis, in particular by providing needed humanitarian assistance and facilitating the voluntary return of all those displaced back to their land in a dignified and safe manner pursuant to presidential statement S/PRST/2017/22, issued on 6 November 2017. In that regard, Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the agreement of 23 November 2017 between the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh on the repatriation of displaced persons in Rakhine state. Accordingly, my country now calls on the two States to take all appropriate measures for the effective and successful implementation of that agreement for the well-being of the Rohingya people, and on all other actors, in particular the international community, to support those countries in their efforts.

My country is concerned about limitations that have been placed upon humanitarian access, the freedom of expression of the media and the freedom of movement of independent observers. Needless to say, such obstacles cast doubt on the possibility of a safe return of refugees. Moreover, Côte d'Ivoire commends the Government and the people of Bangladesh for the humanitarian commitment that they are showing towards those who have been affected by the crisis. My country encourages the Government of Myanmar to make greater efforts to ensure peace and security in the country and improve the living conditions of all segments of its population. Côte d'Ivoire also welcomes the commitment of the Government of Myanmar to implement the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, led by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Concrete solutions that ensure a decent and sustainable future for returnees are needed as part of an approach based on the inclusive economic and social development of Rakhine state.

With regard to the fight against impunity, my delegation condemns the serious human rights violations, the incitement leading to religious and ethnic hatred and the violence directed against Rohingya people. Côte d'Ivoire is particularly concerned about recent reports concerning the summary and extrajudicial executions

of Rohingya individuals by the Government armed forces, militias and self-defence groups. My country urges the Myanmar authorities to halt such acts and bring their perpetrators to justice.

With regard to the third point — the need to maintain peace and security in the region — my delegation condemns the attacks perpetrated by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army against the Myanmar security forces. Côte d'Ivoire is concerned about how terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida and the Islamic State might exploit the situation under the pretext of solidarity with Muslim communities, thereby leading to destabilizing terrorist activities.

Before concluding, my delegation encourages a regional approach to resolving the crisis. In that regard, it welcomes the actions taken by the States of the region, in particular the mission by the Parliamentarians for Human Rights of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which visited refugees on the ground. Similarly, Côte d'Ivoire calls on the international community to play a decisive role in supporting Myanmar in its search for peace and stability, as well as in its national reconstruction efforts.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Republic of Equatorial Guinea thanks Mr. Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Miroslav Jenča for their briefings, which, unfortunately, continue to illustrate the very troubling humanitarian situation of the Rohingya people. We hope that the situation will continue to improve since the Council meeting (see S/PV.8085) on 6 November 2017 during which presidential statement S/PRST/2017/22, along with other appeals, urged the Government of Myanmar to ensure that there would be no further excessive use of the military force against Rakhine state.

For the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, the issue of the Rohingya people, which fundamentally dates back to the colonial Administration of the previous century and involve complex historical, national and religious factors, requires a comprehensive approach. Current objectives and temporary solutions must go hand in hand with long-term goals and the search for a solution that analyses the root causes. Poverty is a major source of instability and conflict. The international community should pay more attention to, and support the reduction of, local poverty, focus on development by alleviating

poverty and seek peace through development in order to definitively solve the problem.

The images and reports we are seeing on the situation of the Rohingya people in Myanmar are truly worrying and can only be described as a humanitarian crisis. According to recent statistics, there are 680,000 Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, while 176,000 of the Rohingya who remain in northern Rakhine suffer from severe food insecurity. That the most vulnerable population is going through such a difficult situation is undoubtedly cause for great concern, and calls for action to help the victims.

In that regard, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea calls on the Myanmar authorities to assume their responsibilities and to seek an immediate solution to the crisis that the Rohingya population is going through. Serious accusations of ethnic cleansing and other atrocities must be considered with the utmost seriousness, and an investigation must be opened in order to shed light on the situation and lead its possible perpetrators to face justice.

Assuming their responsibilities also includes ensuring peace and security in the country, especially in northern Rakhine state. That means responding to the terrorist attacks attributed to the militants of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, who deserve our strongest condemnation. The Government of Myanmar has an obligation to ensure that the population fully enjoys its rights within its territory.

In that regard, we request the Myanmar authorities to take steps to create the right conditions for the peaceful coexistence of all ethnic and religious communities in Rakhine state and to make preparations — with the necessary guarantees — to receive those who wish to return to their original places of residence. The Myanmar authorities must be prepared to manage the potential reintegration of the returnees, must ensure their rights and must contribute to rebuilding. They must intensify and promote activities that prevent the escalation of violence, restore law and order throughout the country, create normalized socioeconomic conditions and solve the refugee problem.

The Myanmar Government should make every effort to comply with the recommendations of the Advisory Committee led by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and work with the Bangladeshi authorities on the repatriation of displaced persons in Rakhine state.

We urge all parties to refrain from actions that could lead to further degradation of the situation and to continue the constructive dialogue at all levels without politicizing it. That is the only possible way to comprehensively solve the complicated problem of the Muslim minority in Myanmar. Equatorial Guinea supports all efforts to facilitate interreligious interactions within the country by involving the spiritual leaders of all religions.

We take note of the contributions and actions of Bangladesh, which, despite its difficulties, provides timely humanitarian aid and welcomes those in need. Equatorial Guinea greatly appreciates the generosity, efforts and contributions of Bangladesh. The international community should provide additional assistance to Bangladesh commensurate with its needs.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea believes that, in order to reach a concerted solution in the mass movement of the population across the border between Myanmar and Bangladesh, we must first secure the goodwill of both countries. The two parties have met a number of times and are expected to sign a repatriation agreement aimed at finding an acceptable solution to both parties. This issue must be adequately addressed by Bangladesh and Myanmar through bilateral channels.

The international community, including the Council, must offer favourable conditions and create an adequate environment to promote bilateral consultations between Bangladesh and Myanmar. We are convinced that, with the support and assistance of the international community, Bangladesh and Myanmar will surely be able to improve the situation and find ways to solve the problem through negotiation.

I would like to conclude my comments on behalf of Equatorial Guinea by referring to the offer of support of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to both the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh and to the refugees in finding a long-term solution that would benefit the refugees, the authorities of both countries, the host community of Bangladesh and all the communities of Rakhine state. The implementation modalities of the agreement, which should be in accordance with international standards, would contribute significantly to resolving the problem.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to begin by thanking our briefers, Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, and Mr. Filippo

Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, for their informative briefings.

We are deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation of the displaced Rohingya community. It is up to the international community to maintain the humanitarian and development assistance to both Rohingya refugee camps situated in Bangladesh and to Myanmar's institutions, which provide assistance to Rakhine state.

We would like to see the report of the Fact-Finding Mission of the Human Rights Council, which is due in March. However, we regret that the Fact-Finding Mission was not allowed to visit the country. While we appreciate the agreement concerning the voluntary repatriation of the Rohingya community and understand the desire to proceed rapidly, we can support only returns that are safe, voluntary and dignified. We understand that at this moment, regrettably, there are no such conditions on the ground for returns. However, it is the responsibility of the Government of Myanmar to ensure that the displaced Rohingya will have a safe place to return to and live in peace. We believe that foreign humanitarian assistance will be key in fulfilling that obligation.

We are of the view that the Rakhine Advisory Commission's recommendations remain essential to addressing the ongoing security, human rights, development and humanitarian crisis situation in Rakhine state. We hope that the Government will implement them without delay.

Poland remains ready, through the new United Nation system, to provide the assistance needed to find a long-term solution to the crisis for all communities in the Rakhine state. We are deeply troubled by the news of the existence of previously unreported mass graves near the village of Gudar Pyin. We have to remain focused on making sure that the perpetrators of such criminal acts are held accountable. We urge the Myanmar authorities to cooperate with an independent and credible investigation into allegations of atrocities in northern Rakhine.

In a situation of this kind, the most vulnerable suffer the most. The situation of Rohingya women and children is heartbreaking. We urge the Government to fully comply with its national action plan to address the grave violations against children, particularly to end and prevent the recruitment or use of children in the national army. Furthermore, we urge the authorities to

grant access to the United Nations Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting to armed groups listed in the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/1099).

In the light of these circumstances, we wish to recall the importance of the freedom of the press and the need to comply with resolution 2222 (2015), on the protection of journalists in armed conflict. I wish to underline that Poland and the European Union are strongly committed to supporting Myanmar's democratic transition, peace, national reconciliation and socioeconomic development.

I wish to thank and commend the Government and the people of Bangladesh who have opened their borders and homes by providing relief and refuge to the Rohingya community. I would also like to repeat what has already been said in this Chamber multiple times: history will judge our actions as well as our inaction.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): On behalf of the delegation of Kazakhstan, I wish to express our deep sympathies and condolences to the delegation of the Russian Federation as well as the families of the victims of the plane crash near Moscow on Sunday, 11 February, which resulted in the loss of lives of all 65 passengers and six crew members on board.

I would like to thank the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Filippo Grandi, and the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Miroslav Jenča, for their updates on the latest developments in Myanmar and the plight of Rohingya refugees who fled to Bangladesh. At the outset, my delegation wishes to express its grave concern with regard to the Myanmar Government's inhuman treatment of the Rohingya population and its sluggishness in addressing the root causes of the problem.

My delegation has noted the signing, on 23 November, of the memorandum of understanding between Myanmar and Bangladesh on the voluntary return of refugees to Myanmar. We also praise the work done by joint working group of Myanmar and Bangladesh on implementing the memorandum, with the timeline for the return of refugees commencing on 23 January and designed to run over a period of two years. However, the repatriation process has been postponed due to the difficulties in compiling and verifying the list of people to be repatriated and the absence of necessary safeguards for potential returnees.

We see the value in the request of Bangladesh that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) be involved in verifying the resettlement process to guarantee that conditions are met on the ground for the return of refugees. The Rohingya refugees have no trust or confidence in the sincerity of the Myanmar authorities' actions. Indeed, there can be no durable or lasting solution for the return of Rohingya refugees without addressing the questions of the restoration of their rights and freedoms, including access to education and employment, freedom of movement and a path towards a just and sustainable solution to the issue of citizenship.

I would like to reiterate that Kazakhstan is of the firm view that unhindered access for humanitarian assistance to the affected population is crucial in Myanmar. We therefore call on the Government of Myanmar to allow unfettered and safe access to United Nations agencies that can help to provide emergency assistance and alleviate the suffering of the victimized population. Kazakhstan commends the efforts of UNHCR, which has airlifted 1,500 metric tons of emergency life-saving aid to Bangladesh to assist 250,000 refugees and helped to develop the Kutupalong extension, a new site near Kutupalong refugee camp.

We laud the hospitality of the Government of Bangladesh, which is helping refugees and providing them with shelter, medical care, food and other forms of assistance. We also find it very inspiring how other States, international organizations and individuals are giving a helping hand to those in need regardless of distance, views or religion. The Government of Kazakhstan has allocated a half a million dollars of official humanitarian assistance for Rohingya refugees from Myanmar in Bangladesh.

We note the efforts of the Myanmar Government to stabilize the situation in northern Rakhine and organize the visit for the diplomatic corps residing in Myanmar to the reception centres at Taung Pyo Letwe and Nga Khu Ya as well as a transit centre, which are all steps in right direction. At the same time, Kazakhstan expresses its deep concern about the revelation of mass graves in the country. The journalists who reported on the graves should be released and allowed to work freely. We also take note of the statement by the spokesperson of the Government of Myanmar that "actions according to the law" would be taken against those members of the security forces who killed 10 Rohingya men in the northern Rakhine village of Inn Din.

My delegation believes that it is necessary for the Government of Myanmar to conduct credible investigations into gross human rights violations, and a United Nations fact-finding mission should be organized so that the perpetrators are brought to justice. Only through full disclosure of the atrocities and by taking action against those responsible can we expect the Rohingyas to have the confidence they need to return home and for trust among all communities to be re-established at the national level, thereby deterring the recurrence of these kinds of violence in future. Finally, my delegation is of the view that the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission are valuable and that their full implementation will be necessary to restore intercommunal harmony, sustainable peace, stability and prosperity in Rakhine state.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Mr. Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Under-Secretary General for Political Affairs, for their briefings on the situation in the Rakhine state of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

Despite some positive developments on the ground, we reiterate our deep concern about the continuing effects generated by the violence perpetrated in August 2017 against several minority ethnic groups in Rakhine state, in particular against the Muslim ethnic group, the Rohingyas. We are struck by the fact that, according to the report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees dated 9 February 2018, the number of refugees has increased from 640,000 to 688,000 people, which means that, since the last time the Security Council considered the situation, in December last year (see S/2017/8133), 48,000 people were forced to flee to Bangladesh as a result of the absence of conditions that would guarantee their security and stability in Myanmar.

This increase in the number of displaced persons and refugees implies a more serious challenge, in the light of the precariousness to which these people must be exposed, given that refugee camps in Bangladesh are at the mercy of such potential climatic events as floods or landslides that have the potential to worsen the already complex humanitarian situation. In addition, the outbreak of diphtheria in refugee camps in the town of Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh continues to be a matter of concern, as the World Health Organization has

reported more than 5,000 clinically recorded cases and 37 deaths from the disease as of 3 February this year.

Furthermore, in order to prevent the further worsening of conditions, it is crucial that wide and unrestricted access to humanitarian assistance be guaranteed to all the towns where internally displaced persons are found, and we therefore call upon the relevant parties, in particular the Government of Myanmar, to fulfil their obligations. In that regard, we want to emphasize the initial willingness that the Government of Myanmar has shown to work with the various United Nations agencies, and we urge it to continue to greatly expand its coordination efforts.

We have taken note of the agreements signed between the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh in November of last year and this January aimed at launching the process for the Rohingya refugees' return, as well as the coordination that both countries have begun on exchanging the information and documentation needed to achieve that goal. However, in our view it will be essential to ensure the establishment of conditions that will enable the refugees to make a voluntary, informed, dignified, safe and permanent return to their places of origin, and to make quite sure that there is no replication of the conditions that would make their return one of isolation and confinement in areas where they do not belong.

We want to emphasize the efforts of Myanmar's ministerial committee to start work on implementing the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, and we encourage it to continue its best efforts to comply with them and produce concrete and lasting results. In that regard, we reiterate our call for the continuation and intensification of the investigations needed to identify those responsible for the serious violations of human rights committed against the Rohingya population and to bring them to justice to answer for their actions with no impunity, as was established in the Council's 6 November presidential statement (S/PRST/2017/22).

Bolivia would like to emphasize once again that there is no alternative to dialogue for resolving this crisis, and for that, the parties must commit all their efforts to implementing strategies conducive to negotiation, mediation, consultations and the exercise of good offices and refrain from resorting to rhetoric that may provoke confrontation or violence. We also reiterate that if we are to achieve a stable and sustainable

solution to the issue, we must consider the root causes of the conflict.

Lastly, my delegation wants to highlight the willingness and spirit of brotherhood that the Government and the people of Bangladesh have shown in dealing with this crisis. We call on regional organizations, and the international community in general, to continue their valuable collaboration on the efforts to resolve this sensitive situation.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, and Mr. Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, for their substantive briefings. The complex, multifaceted topics they touched on require a painstaking and consistent approach on the part of the international community and thorough and impartial study by experts. Any labelling or attempts to use contradictory and subjective media reports, often hastily put together, to identify the guilty and condemn them only make it harder for us to arrive at a solution.

In our opinion, the situation in the Rakhine national region, including its northern areas adjacent to Bangladesh, remains difficult but in general under control. The Myanmar authorities' planned social and economic development efforts there have in large part contributed to that, and steps are being taken to create special economic zones in the region. In the town of Maungdaw, in particular, the central market, which has more than 400 trade outlets, has reopened, and 16 closed-circuit television cameras have been installed for security and monitoring purposes. It is important to note that the central and regional authorities are prioritizing housing construction and modernization of road and transport infrastructure. In northern Rakhine, one transit and two reception centres for receiving refugees have been built, with 640 shelters that can provide temporary housing for more than 30,000 refugees.

Regarding the international community attention to the efforts in Naypyidaw to implement the recommendations of the Advisory Commission led by Kofi Annan, we commend the work of the group of advisers under the Myanmar ministerial committee led by Thailand's former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Surakiart Sathirathai.

The expanded access to Rakhine state being granted to foreign observers is a positive step. In

particular, a number of groups of journalists have visited the region in recent weeks, including employees of Russian television. On 6 February, representatives of neighbouring states visited Rakhine, and the authorities organized a similar trip for representatives of the local diplomatic corps on 9 February. They visited the Kanyin Chaung economic zone and Ngakunya settlement, as well as refugee transit and reception camps. An inspection of the border zone was even arranged for the first of those groups.

The situation regarding the repatriation of refugees continues to be very difficult, but we see some positive signs there too. We note the steps taken by Naypyidaw and Dhaka to implement their agreement, signed on 23 November 2017, on a programme for the return of persons displaced from Rakhine, including the convening on 15 and 16 January of the first meeting of the bilateral working group and its adoption of a plan for the return of Muslims who have fled to Bangladesh. In our view, the document has laid a foundation for solving the most difficult issues related to refugees' repatriation to Myanmar. We believe that in the current circumstances it is important to facilitate a resolution of the Rakhine situation, focusing on practical assistance to the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh in a spirit of equality and mutual respect. We would like to emphasize that the Myanmar refugee situation is a issue of bilateral relations between Myanmar and Bangladesh that should be resolved through appropriate consultations. We realize that the Dhaka authorities are bearing a tremendous burden with regard to hosting and sheltering this huge number of refugees on their territory, one beyond the capacities of any single country, and the international community must therefore provide Bangladesh with all the support it needs in this area.

However, we are very concerned about the attempts to delay a resolution of the repatriation issue on the pretext that Myanmar lacks the conditions for the safe, dignified and sustainable return and resettlement of repatriates. Needless to say, their living conditions must comply with humanitarian standards, but the arguments of those who are creating artificial obstacles to the process and inciting refugees by fuelling their anxiety are unacceptable. We will continue to urge all the parties to refrain from violence, emphasize the importance of respecting Myanmar's sovereignty and work to resolve the multilayered and complex problems in Rakhine by exclusively political means, through a

dialogue between Naypyidaw and Dhaka and between representatives of all nationalities and faiths.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I will now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Kuwait.

I would first like to express our condolences to the families of the victims of the plane accident that occurred in Russia on Sunday.

At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, and Mr. Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, for their briefings.

The world is following the proceedings of our meeting in the Security Council today and expects us to persist in our principled position supporting the principles of international law and human values above any political considerations, so as to deal with one of the worst tragedies of our modern history: the tragedy that the majority-Muslim Rohingya minority continue to live.

This tragedy, which has resulted in the deaths of many innocent people and the displacement of hundreds of thousands more owing to their persecution and forcible displacement, actions that can be described as ethnic cleansing. The State of Kuwait condemns and denounces these actions, which contravene international norms and principles, carried out in Rakhine state in Myanmar since August and which has led to the displacement of approximately 650,000 people of the Rohingya minority. Here we emphasize the need for the Government of Myanmar to assume its primary responsibilities to protect its citizens and ensure that excessive force is not used.

Moreover, I should like to express my country's appreciation for the considerable efforts that the Government of Bangladesh is making in hosting these innocent people on its territory. Last October, the State of Kuwait co-chaired the donors conference for the Rohingya refugee crisis and pledged \$15 million. That amount, contributed by official and civil-society bodies, is part of Kuwait's efforts to alleviate the severity of the tragedy and of international efforts to alleviate the suffering of the Rohingya refugees.

This tragedy has put an entire generation of children at risk of losing everything and of not receiving an education which determine their future, or any medical services or health care — not to mention the destruction of their homes and villages.

Since the Security Council issued its presidential statement S/PRST/2017/22, on the situation in Myanmar on 6 November 2017, we have been closely following the ongoing developments in Myanmar. We have taken note of the three agreements signed between Bangladesh and Myanmar, which are aimed at ensuring the voluntary return of refugees to their homes. Such voluntary return cannot begin until additional, explicit confidence-building measures have been taken in order to ensure a safe return to and a dignified life in Rakhine state. Here I would like to refer to some of the measures that must be taken before there can be a voluntary return of refugees.

The Government of Myanmar must take all measures necessary to ensure the immediate cessation of violence and prevent the excessive use of force against civilians. Refrain from establishing new refugee camps for displaced persons in the northern part of Rakhine state. Adopt all measures to combat any incitement to violence or hatred, and restore peace and harmony among the various sects under the rule of law. Allow access to United Nations agencies and its partners and allow freedom of movement to all those in Rakhine state in a safe and unhindered manner. Involve the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the bilateral talks between Myanmar and Bangladesh.

These are some of the measures that we deem important and that must be taken before the refugees can return home. Moreover, we believe that these measures must be accompanied by other arrangements, most importantly a call upon the Government of Myanmar to take all measures necessary to establish peace and harmony among the various communities through dialogue and within a comprehensive national process for peace and reconciliation in which all segments of society can take part. It must eliminate the root causes of the plight of the Rohingya minority without discrimination and regardless of ethnicity or religion. Moreover, they must be granted their inherent right to nationality, as confirmed by the General Assembly in its resolution calling for the granting of full citizenship rights to the Rohingya minority (resolution 72/248).

In conclusion, I would like to end my statement today with a verse from the Holy Koran in which the exalted and Almighty Allah The great and Almighty decrees that:

“O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into

nations and tribes, that ye may know each other ... Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).” (*The Holy Koran, XLIX:13*)

This holy verse confirms that Islam is a religion of love and peace, and opens the way to human unity, without any intolerance based on race, colour or language. We here may speak different languages and have different customs and views, but once we sit in this Chamber we all become responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security. The Council, when united, has taken historic and memorable positions. I invite all present to once again show our ability to overcome all political divisions and intensify our efforts to take measures and decisions that would grant those innocent people the chance to live and offer them a safe, dignified and free life.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Myanmar.

Mr. Suan (Myanmar): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for allowing my delegation to participate in this meeting. My delegation wishes to congratulate you on the Kuwaiti presidency of the Council. I am confident that under your able leadership, the Council's important debates will bear fruitful results. I assure you of our support and cooperation.

I also thank Mr. Miroslav Jenča and High Commissioner Grandi for their briefings on the situation in Myanmar.

We appreciate the constructive approach adopted by the Secretary-General and the United Nations in our engagement. We will continue to cooperate with the United Nations.

In this connection, we are glad that the visit of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Patten to Myanmar last December was very positive. We are working closely with her Office for further cooperation.

My delegation is keeping in close touch with members of the Council as well as with the Secretariat to maintain a constructive partnership in the spirit of cooperation.

Since the issuance of the presidential statement on the situation in Myanmar on 6 November last (S/PRST/2017/22), Myanmar has made great strides

towards the restoration of the rule of law, peace and stability, and preparations for the repatriation of displaced persons from the Maungdaw area. The implementation of the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State has gained momentum in the process of promoting sustainable peace, stability and development in Rakhine state.

Myanmar and Bangladesh have made significant progress in our bilateral efforts for the repatriation of displaced persons. After the signing on 23 November last of the memorandum of understanding on the arrangement on the return of displaced persons, on 19 December 2017 the terms of reference for the joint working group were signed; the first meeting of the group was held on 15 January. The physical arrangement for repatriation agreement was signed by the two sides on 16 January. According to that agreement, the repatriation process was scheduled to commence on 23 January. The returnees will be received at two reception centres and then temporarily accommodated at a camp before permanent settlement.

As an initial step, Myanmar will receive 300 returnees a day to ensure a smooth and safe return. The number will be increased based on the progress of the return and will be reviewed in three months. The number of transit camps and reception centres may be increased based on requirements as the repatriation process progresses.

In the process of repatriation, Myanmar will draw on the services of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as needed and at the appropriate time. Recently, on 5 and 6 February, UNHCR conducted its second workshop on voluntary repatriation in Myanmar.

In an effort to expedite the implementation of the repatriation process, Myanmar provided to Bangladesh a list of 500 Hindus and 750 Muslims, verified as Myanmar residents, to be included in the first batch of repatriation.

In addition, on 30 January the Myanmar Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided the Bangladeshi side with information relating to a resettlement plan, the provision of livelihood assistance, access to basic services, and safety arrangements for verified returnees.

We have made the necessary preparations and are now ready to receive the first group of returnees. We will continue to work in close consultation and cooperation

with Bangladesh for the voluntary, safe and dignified repatriation of displaced persons in accordance with the bilateral agreement.

I would like to take this opportunity to inform the Council that the Minister of Home Affairs of Myanmar will be visiting Bangladesh on 15 February to discuss with his counterpart matters relating to cooperation in repatriation and to find a solution to the problem of people being stranded on the zero line of the border. Officials from both sides of the border will also be meeting at the border on the same day to encourage people to return to their villages, because the building of houses or habitations on the zero line of the common border is prohibited in the boundary agreement. We appreciate the traditional good-neighbourly relationship with Bangladesh and we are confident that we will be able to overcome all problems arising between the two neighbours with a spirit of friendship and cooperation.

In recent days, members of the diplomatic corps and representatives of United Nations agencies — including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, World Food Programme, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Bank — have been given access to the Maungdaw areas to observe the preparations for repatriation and the situation on the ground. The Government has arranged a day trip for all diplomatic corps members residing in Myanmar, including United Nations agency representatives, to Rakhine state in three groups. The first and second groups went on 6 and 9 February, respectively. The third group will be going on 15 February. Likewise, visiting dignitaries, such as the Foreign Minister of Japan and the Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom, have also visited the area with their accompanying media.

We are fully aware that the Government has the primary responsibility to protect its own people. As lives in the affected areas, especially the Maungdaw area, return to normalcy, the police forces have largely taken over the security responsibility in most parts of Maungdaw district. Although no major clashes with terrorists have been reported in the past six months, there is always a threat posed by Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army terrorists, who are taking refuge among innocent people. They will take every opportunity to undermine law and order and public security. They will not hesitate to use their brutal tactics of intimidation and killing of innocent people who want a peaceful life in harmony with other communities in Rakhine. The

recent media reports of the killing of two camp leaders from refugee camps in Bangladesh sent a warning to those who want to return to their villages.

Under such circumstances, and in order to establish the rule of law and sustain peace and security, the capacities of the security forces must be strengthened. It is regrettable that, at a time when we most need international support for building the capacities of our security personnel, some countries have adopted new restrictions and sanctions on Myanmar with regard to cooperation in the security sector. Such actions could have negative effects on the maintenance of peace and stability in conflict areas.

On humanitarian assistance, the Government and the Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development in Rakhine have been providing food and household needs to all communities in Rakhine state, in addition to building infrastructure and increasing business activities for the economic development of the region. The Red Cross Movement continues to play an important role in providing services to address the urgent need of humanitarian assistance in affected areas.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management is also actively participating in the Government-led mechanism to deliver humanitarian assistance. We highly appreciate ASEAN's understanding, support and constructive engagement in our efforts to find a peaceful and lasting solution to the Rakhine issue.

The Government of Myanmar has embraced the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State as a road map to resolve the root causes of the problem of Rakhine state and achieve sustainable peace and development for all. The Government is committed to implementing the recommendations made by the Advisory Commission, as well as other recommendations made by the Maungdaw Region Investigation Commission. The Committee for Implementation of the Recommendations on Rakhine State has begun taking steps towards their implementation. The Committee has recently published its first report on the progress of the implementation of the recommendations.

The Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement, and Development has been spearheading various projects with great momentum

in the implementation of the recommendations of the Advisory Commission. One of the most significant developments in that regard was the formation on 14 December of a 10-member advisory board to the Committee for Implementation of the Recommendations on Rakhine State, headed by Mr. Surakiart Sathirathai, former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Thailand. The primary purpose of the board is to provide an external perspective and advice to the Committee for a more effective and efficient implementation of recommendations.

The board has also already provided five points of advice to the Implementation Committee as preliminary reflections. The points made by the board concern the sustainability of implementation projects, the wider participation of United Nations agencies in the repatriation and resettlement process, and the granting of full humanitarian access, among others. We are encouraged by the board's conviction that constructive and positive work can be done to help bring peace, reconciliation and economic progress to all communities in Rakhine state.

Concerning allegations of human rights violations, the Government of Myanmar has always made its position very clear that it will not condone any action of abuse. If there is concrete evidence, action will be taken against the transgressor in accordance with the law, no matter who or what he is. With regard to the Reuters report of December last year on the finding of 10 bodies in a cemetery in Inn Din, Maungdaw, the Tatmadaw immediately formed a high-level enquiry team and conducted an investigation of the incident.

It was found that 10 Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army members had been arrested by security forces on 1 September 2017, soon after the terrorist attacks on 25 August. The next day, 2 September, they were executed and buried in the village cemetery without being handed over to the police. Therefore, actions are being taken against 16 individuals, including army and police officers and some villagers who acted in violation of standard operating procedures and rules of engagement. The action taken on the part of the Tatmadaw is a positive step forward in taking responsibility, and deserves encouragement.

Recently, the Associated Press and the BBC reported widely on alleged mass graves in the village of Gu Dar Pyin, in Buthidaung township. The Rakhine state Government sent a 17-member inspection team to the

village, comprised of regional administrative officials, local Rakhine and Muslim community elders, doctors, immigration officers and security officers. According to the interviews and area inspections, no mass grave was found in the reported area. Moreover, the local elders confirmed that there had been no such incidents in the village. However, the Rakhine state Government is now extending the investigation to nearby villages. The Government of Myanmar will continue to ensure accountability for all crimes committed, as no one is above the law.

The case of two Reuters reporters has attracted much attention in recent weeks. Myanmar recognizes the freedom of the press, and they were not arrested for reporting. The two reporters are charged under the Official Secrets Act for illegally possessing confidential Government documents. Every citizen is bound by the existing law of land. It is important that the action of a journalist also be within the bounds of the law. In accordance with judicial procedure, they have full legal rights as defendants in the course of legal proceedings.

Achieving durable peace, harmony and development in Rakhine state will be contingent on nationwide peace and the success of the democratic transition of Myanmar. The greatest national endeavour for Myanmar today is to forge lasting peace. Without peace, stability and the rule of law, the country will not be able to realize its ultimate goal of building a genuine democratic federal union that will guarantee security, freedom and progress for all people.

To that end, the previous Government initiated the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement with ethnic armed groups to sustain peace. Eight out of about twenty armed groups signed the Agreement during the previous administration. I am pleased to inform the Council that today, 13 February, another two ethnic groups — the New Mon State Party and the Lahu Democratic Union — have signed the Agreement in Naypyidaw, bringing the total number of signatories to ten. The People's Republic of China, India, Japan, Thailand, the European Union and the United Nations have also signed the Agreement as international witnesses.

The 21st Century Panglong Conference is the forum bringing together all stakeholders to undertake political dialogue towards peace and lay the foundation for a democratic federal union. The first session of the Panglong Peace Conference, held in 2016, was the most inclusive peace conference in Myanmar's history.

The second session of the Conference took place in May 2017 and reached an agreement on part 1 of the 37-point Pyidaungsu Accord, which will constitute part of the basis for a future democratic federal constitution. Preparations are now under way for the third session of the Panglong Conference.

I would like to take this opportunity to express the Myanmar Government's sincere appreciation to all our friends around the world and to the United Nations for supporting the peace process. We hope that we can count on the continued support and encouragement of the international community in our efforts for lasting peace, sustainable development and democratic nation-building.

The current humanitarian crisis, which involves the Muslim people of Rakhine state, did not result from communal violence, as happened in 2012. It is the consequence of terrorist attacks on security posts, which triggered the security response of the Government forces. Such attacks were a clear and real threat to the security, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Myanmar. The matter is not a religious issue, as some people are trying to portray. The majority of Muslims in other areas across Myanmar have lived peacefully and in harmony with people of different faiths throughout history.

The challenges facing Rakhine state include poverty, resource competition, human rights, citizenship and immigration perspectives, to name a few. There is no easy quick fix to those highly complex challenges. Ultimately, it is up to the people of Myanmar to determine how to achieve a peaceful and prosperous Rakhine state. The solution must come from within. It must not be imposed from outside.

We appreciate the concern expressed by our friends and welcome the constructive cooperation of the international community. We need a solution to solve the problem. We would not allow action that would exacerbate the problem. In the policymaking process, we should not become hostage to the one-sided media and activists. Important judgments and policy decisions should be based on a careful examination of the information.

I would like to conclude by expressing my delegation's sincere appreciation to the members of the Security Council who have demonstrated an understanding of the complex challenges that we face today. We are grateful for their support and encouragement, which

we will continue to need. We believe that only mutual understanding and constructive cooperation will bring about positive results. The Government of Myanmar is determined to overcome all the challenges with the full support and contribution of the entire population of Myanmar. We will not allow the immediate challenges to undermine or to delay our ultimate goal of building a fully democratic federal union, with lasting peace and sustainable development.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Bin Momen (Bangladesh): We thank the brotherly delegation of Kuwait for convening this open meeting of the Security Council. We are grateful to the Council members that supported the call for this meeting. We appreciate the comprehensive briefings by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Assistant Secretary-General of the Department of Political Affairs.

Bangladesh continues to acknowledge the international community's support in providing life-saving humanitarian assistance to more than 1 million people forcibly displaced from Myanmar's Rakhine state. In the coming months, we will further strengthen efforts to improve shelters in preparation for the onset of the monsoon. We are providing informal education for children and adolescents in order to develop enabling skills and expanding spaces accessible to women and girls in order to help to further amplify their voices in decisions that impact on their future.

We appreciate the Council's sustained engagement through the implementation of presidential statement S/PRST/2017/22, adopted by consensus last year. Among other priorities, it is evident that our shared objective is to ensure the voluntary, safe and dignified return of the people forcibly displaced from Myanmar's Rakhine state to their original homes, or somewhere close. That critically depends on their perception of the situation on the ground to be conducive to their safe and sustainable return, with their rights restored and without the fear of reprisal. Our experience with the verification process for return so far makes it apparent that that has not been the case, as also recounted by the High Commissioner for Refugees. A series of emerging investigative reports about evidence of targeted killings and the discovery of mass graves in Rohingya villages in northern Rakhine state last year also perhaps explains

the prevailing reluctance to repatriation among those forcibly displaced.

We are currently in discussions with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) with regard to the voluntary, safe and dignified return of the Rohingya. We continue to urge the Myanmar authorities to involve UNHCR in the repatriation process in order to build confidence and trust among the returnees. We are also working closely with other relevant United Nations agencies and humanitarian actors to deal with the daunting challenges to provide succour to the Rohingya.

As envisaged in the bilateral documents concluded between our two Governments, it would be helpful to see tangible progress in realizing the commitments made by the Myanmar side, including with regard to implementing the practical and far-reaching recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, led by Mr. Kofi Annan. However, on that particular aspect, we have yet to see any specific results beyond a professed intention in the form of setting up a number of high-level entities. As recommended by the Advisory Commission, without a comprehensive rights-based approach, finding a lasting peaceful solution to the situation in Rakhine state will continue to pose a challenge to the Myanmar authorities.

One major restraining factor to voluntary return among the forcibly displaced is the fact that, despite Myanmar's claims to the contrary, the influx of the Rohingya into Bangladesh continues unabated to date. According to reports, the remaining Rohingya based in northern Rakhine state continue to cross the border to escape from hunger, hostility and abuse. In only the first 10 days of this month, a total of 1,500 new arrivals have been recorded on the Bangladesh side. Those latest entrants have cited the following as grounds for their continued exodus: persistent threats from both security forces and armed vigilantes and the occurrence of sporadic and indiscriminate violence; an acute food shortage and forced starvation due to the constraints imposed on harvesting their crops; the burning down of and denial of access to local markets, the cut-off of essential supplies, theft of livestock and restriction on humanitarian assistance; the forced closure of businesses and a lack of livelihood options; and the alleged abduction of girls and young women, as well as sexual violence and enslavement.

That unfolding situation is largely corroborated by the case of approximately 6,000 displaced Rohingya, who are currently staying in no man's land or on the zero line of the border between Bangladesh and Myanmar. So far, those people have refrained from entering Bangladesh and have reportedly expressed their willingness to return to their own villages in safety and to gain access to their lands and other livelihood opportunities. They have also reportedly asked for the restoration of their basic rights, including freedom of movement. Regrettably, however, the Myanmar authorities appear to have opted for compelling those people to leave the area and have proposed verification as a precondition for their return despite the fact that they have not crossed over to the other side of the border. We reiterate that, given the current situation on the ground, the early resettlement of those people from no man's land could in fact work as a crucial test for rebuilding the confidence to return among the forcibly displaced people in Bangladesh.

In order to carry out advocacy among the prospective returnees, Bangladesh has sought information from Myanmar about the preparations made in Rakhine state with regard to the rebuilding of villages, resettlement plans, the provision of livelihood assistance, access to basic services and safety arrangements, as envisaged in the arrangement signed between our two Governments last month. In response, the Myanmar authorities have shared information related to the construction of two reception centres and a transit camp on their side of the border. The repatriation process was scheduled to begin on 23 January. The process in fact started by establishing joint working groups on 15 January.

The prospective returnees have made it clear that they do not expect to go back to Myanmar to stay in camps. They would like to have assurance from the international community about the possibility of the following: first, resettlement in their original villages, not in closed camps; secondly, the restoration of their agricultural land and business ventures; thirdly, the right to cultivate and harvest their land and to run their business ventures; fourthly, the right to traditional fishing; fifthly, access to local markets; and sixthly, freedom of movement to conduct a normal life.

A number of forcibly displaced people in Bangladesh have also put forward claims for compensation for the arson and damage to their homes and property during the most recent cycles of violence. In the aftermath of the arson, there have been reports of confiscation of

land and abandoned property by the local authorities, which understandably acts as a deterrent to return. There have also been reports of the bulldozing and clearing of villages in northern Rakhine state that would not only eliminate features of recognition to establish ownership rights, but would also seek to wipe out any remaining proof or evidence of alleged atrocities committed against the forcibly displaced people.

It remains a matter of concern that the Human Rights Council's fact-finding mission continues to be denied access to Rakhine state. It is imperative that demonstrable efforts be made to ensure accountability for alleged crimes as part of efforts to heal the trauma suffered by the Rohingya and restore their confidence in the possibility of sustainable return. It is a matter of ongoing concern that northern Rakhine state remains out of the reach of international media and that very little humanitarian access to the affected people is allowed through relevant United Nations agencies and their local and international partners.

As recommended by the Council, Bangladesh remains engaged in good faith with Myanmar to create a situation conducive to the sustainable return of the Rohingya and other displaced communities. We have based our pronouncements and approach only on facts and steered clear of vilifying any individual or the friendly people of Myanmar. Even though the Rohingya humanitarian crisis is often projected as a bilateral issue between Bangladesh and Myanmar, it needs to be acknowledged that the present crisis is the result of systematic discriminatory and abusive policies pursued by the Myanmar authorities over decades. Our Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina therefore categorically said in her statement at the General Assembly last year, "The crisis has its root in Myanmar and its solution has to be found in Myanmar".

To that end, we urge the Security Council to act as the custodian of the process on behalf of the international community. Council members have once again demonstrated their readiness to do so by offering a number of constructive recommendations that we hope the Myanmar authorities will duly acknowledge and act upon. We are confident that the Secretary-General's Special Envoy will be able to serve as a conduit for the international community's meaningful engagement with Myanmar.

In this context, we reiterate our suggestion that the Council undertake a visit to Bangladesh and Myanmar

in order to witness the humanitarian situation on the ground and add momentum to the repatriation process in response to the legitimate aspirations of the Rohingya and other displaced communities. The voluntary return of forcibly displaced people can take place only under the assurance of non-criminalization, non-discrimination and sustainable resettlement and reintegration. For its part, Bangladesh will continue to seek the international community's engagement in

making sure that the bilateral instruments that we have so painstakingly put in place will deliver desired results for the most persecuted minority in the world.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.