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Remarks at the May 19 United Nations Security Council Arria-Formula Meeting on Myanmar

Saturday 27 May 2023, by [Wai Wai Nu](#), [Women's Peace Network](#) (Date first published: 19 May 2023).

On May 19, 2023, as a civil society member, Wai Wai Nu spoke at the [United Nations Security Council Arria-Formula Meeting on Myanmar](#) before Member States of the Council, ASEAN, ASEAN Dialogue Partners, and bordering countries.



I thank the United Kingdom for convening this Arria-Formula meeting. My name is Wai Wai Nu, and I am the founder and executive director of Women's Peace Network, a former political prisoner, and a member of the Rohingya community.

Since the Council passed resolution 2669 last December, the junta has committed atrocities of an increasing frequency and scale. We are now witnessing the junta arbitrarily arresting and detaining many more civilians, torching and razing more villages, and burning and killing more civilians to death. These atrocities are leaving women, girls, and LGBTQ+ members at greater risk of the military's targeted sexual violence. Last month's Pazigyti massacre resulted in Myanmar having one of the highest numbers of airstrikes in the world.

According to the Special Rapporteur on Myanmar's human rights situation, some members in this very council are supplying the weapons and aviation fuel that are facilitating the commission of such crimes. The Council must now redress its failures, and reaffirm its commitment to peace and security in the world.

Excellencies: **Cyclone Mocha and its aftermath are now exacerbating such life-threatening risks for communities in western Myanmar, particularly in Rakhine State.** The cyclone left a trail of devastation in the country with landslides and flooding, and destruction of homes and internally displaced persons camps, and injuries and deaths.

However, four days after Cyclone Mocha hit Myanmar, the junta is still blocking

humanitarian assistance to Rakhine State - including from UN agencies. These areas' communities have had no food or even water for days. Another day without the international community's life-saving support will starve them to death.

We know what this looks like. In 2008, over 140,000 lives were lost in Myanmar in a similar crisis - Cyclone Nargis. Following that cyclone, the military dictatorship deliberately obstructed international relief efforts to affected areas, and even held a sham constitutional referendum. The military's wilful disregard of human lives magnified Nargis's devastation. This is the same, Burmese military that composes the junta today.

If history repeats itself again, it will further devastate communities in Myanmar - especially the 600,000 Rohingya remaining in the country. This is because most of the Rohingya live in the areas affected by Cyclone Mocha, and their conditions make them disproportionately vulnerable to such disasters. In Rakhine State, the Rohingya have for decades been forcibly segregated in conditions of total destitution. 140,000 Rohingya have long been confined in IDP camps in areas vulnerable to natural disasters - and shelters made to last only a couple of years.

The Council must recall that the state-sponsored violence in Rakhine State, in 2012, is what resulted in such IDP camps. And it was in Rakhine State where the Burmese military systematically and brutally murdered, tortured, raped Rohingya, and burned down their homes - forcing hundreds of thousands to flee in 2017. That was the year when this very Council responded with a presidential statement urging for "the root causes of the crisis in Rakhine State to be addressed."

Meaningful steps to address the apartheid in Rakhine State - and the decades-long genocide against Rohingya - could have mitigated Cyclone Mocha's aftermath. These steps could have prevented the deaths of over 400 Rohingya, and the disappearance of hundreds more.

So, when we witness the junta sabotage the evacuation of Rohingya before Cyclone Mocha, or block aid to the IDP camps, they become further evidence of the ongoing genocide. They add to the junta's tightening restrictions on Rohingya's freedom of movement, access to education and healthcare, livelihood, marriage and birth, and other basic rights. According to my organization, Women's Peace Network, the junta has used these measures to arbitrarily arrest and detain over 3100 Rohingya since its attempted coup.

Such are the junta's deliberate steps to exacerbate the dire conditions of life - for Rohingya - in Rakhine State.

Excellencies: In the context of genocide, states must condemn and halt the military's pilot repatriation project - because it will not ensure the voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable repatriation of Rohingya refugees.

The project is designed to give the junta control over every aspect of the returning Rohingya's lives in Myanmar. It will enable the junta to control the Rohingya's access to humanitarian assistance, to segregate them in internment camps, and to force them to accept the discriminatory National Verification Card scheme: the NVC.

Consequently, the project will further entrench the ongoing apartheid in Rakhine State. And worryingly, it will place more Rohingya in a position of vulnerability for continued acts of genocide.

In fact, the lack of voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable repatriation is prolonging the refugee crisis. Accordingly, it has become one of the main causes of human trafficking of the Rohingya, the boat crisis, and the rise in gang and militant violence in the refugee camps - combined with the deteriorating security and camp conditions, and the worsening food crisis.

To genuinely create the conditions for Rohingya's repatriation, the Council thus must end the impunity that has enabled this genocide. This is the same impunity that emboldened the military to launch a coup, and even act in violation of every single point of the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus - since its adoption.

Your Excellencies: **Time and time again, the military has shown us that it will not stop committing crimes** - It can never be trusted as a stakeholder for peace and security in Myanmar.

Relying on the military to transform itself will thus further disintegrate the situation in Myanmar into a regional crisis. Despite this, ASEAN still hasn't effectively responded to the situation in Myanmar. ASEAN's refusal to take any further actions or even reconsider its failed Five-Point Consensus is disappointing.

And based on the ASEAN Chairman's statement last week, the AHA Centre will likely continue to collaborate with the military on its sham repatriation efforts - including by implementing the genocidal NVC. This strategy from ASEAN will only prolong the crisis and bring further instability to the region.

Excellencies: **In resolution 2669, the Council decided to stay actively seized of the matter in Myanmar.** Accordingly, I urge the Council to build that resolution. The Council must urgently exercise its Chapter VII mandate and power to end the human rights and humanitarian catastrophe, and bring peace and security to Myanmar and the region.

This includes the Council's actions to immediately end impunity in Myanmar and hold the Burmese military leaders accountable for their international crimes. It must at least fulfill the shortcomings of resolution 2669 by imposing a comprehensive arms and aviation fuel embargo, and an economic sanctions regime targeting the military. These urgent actions should also include criminal prosecution of the military by referring it to the International Criminal Court, or creating of a special or ad-hoc tribunal on Myanmar.

The Council must also ensure the delivery of aid to the areas affected by Cyclone Mocha through community-based organizations and civil society in Myanmar - not the military. Local CBOs have access to the affected areas, and are trusted by their communities.

Lastly, the Council must scrutinize, monitor, and possibly facilitate, any effort to repatriate Rohingya. No repatriation should proceed without proper international protection, equal rights and full citizenship, as well as the resititution of land and property for Rohingya.

After decades of genocide against Rohingya, over two years since the military's attempted coup, and nearly a week of Cyclone Mocha's devastating, foreseeable and preventable aftermath, **it is the responsibility of this Council to take forceful action.**

The people of Myanmar are relying on you.

Wai Wai Nu, Women's Peace Network



P.S.

• Women's Peace Network is composed of lawyers, community leaders, and peace activists from Myanmar and around the globe who share a common goal: peacefully promote and protect human rights.

We strive to ensure that Myanmar is a place where all people can enjoy peace, justice, and prosperity and live together harmoniously.

<https://www.womenspeacenetWORK.org>