Dear Mr. Tom Tugendhat,

I appreciate the Committee's interest toward the Myanmar-United Kingdom Relations and the current situation in Myanmar. Our countries have a long history of bilateral relations, since the two countries had officially established diplomatic relations on 7 July 1947, even before Myanmar regained independence. This year marks the 70th anniversary of the diplomatic relations. On our part, Myanmar's vision is clear, as the country's foreign policy has always focused on the desire to promote and maintain friendly relations with all the countries in the world based on the five principles of peaceful co-existence.

With regard to the current situation in Rakhine State, I, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, would like to express that we understand and share the concern of the Committee and take note of it. The situation in Rakhine State is complex and sensitive in nature. Since the Myanmar government took office at the end of March 2016, finding a sustainable resolution for peace, harmony and development in Rakhine State has been the highest priorities and concrete measures are put in place to materialize it. In this context, the Central Committee on Implementation of Peace, Stability and Development of Rakhine State led by the State Counsellor was established on 30 May 2016, and four working committees were established on the same day to facilitate the work of the Central Committee. With the aim of addressing the key issue of statelessness and ensure all those eligible are granted citizenship as quickly as possible, citizenship verification pilot projects were implemented. However, since the Muslim community leaders asked their people not to cooperate, eventually those projects had to be halted. In retrospect, there was the example of some Muslim community refusing to take part when the nationwide population census was conducted throughout the country during 2014. People who reside in the territory of a sovereign country and who wish to become its citizens should abide by the law of the land as well as rules and regulations. Furthermore, they have the responsibility to cooperate with the authorities as well as to have the desire to integrate. It is important that people who wishes to become citizens does not oppose and go against the country, while all the inhabitants, including other ethnic people are joining hands and striving for the betterment of Myanmar.

The Myanmar Government has also established the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, chaired by Dr. Kofi Annan, to support the Government's efforts in addressing the issue comprehensively. The Advisory Commission handed over the final report to the Myanmar officials and it was made public on 25 August 2017. The Myanmar government
welcomed the report and has committed itself to carry out the recommendations to the fullest extent within the shortest possible timeframe, in keeping with the situation on the ground.

Even as constructive steps were being undertaken, three police border outposts in northern Rakhine State were attacked on 9 October 2016. In addition, thirty police border outposts and an army base were attacked on 25 August 2017 by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), also known by its former name AqMul Mujahidin. These violent and coordinated attacks targeting both our security forces and civilians resulted in many deaths and wounded. Also arms and ammunitions of the security forces were taken away. These attacks seriously threaten the prospects of stability and development in the Rakhine State. Investigations revealed that the terrorist group has external links and funding. Moreover, its leader had attended a six-month Taliban training course abroad. It is clear that the first attacks came at a time when human rights situation have been improving significantly in Myanmar with recognition from the international community and at a period when the EU decided not to table the draft resolution on the human rights situation. Additionally, the second attacks were deliberately timed to coincide with the release of the final report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State led by Dr. Kofi Annan as well as to attract international attention just before the UN General Assembly was to be held.

In responding to the terrorist attacks, the Myanmar security forces have been instructed to adhere strictly to the Code of Conduct, to exercise maximum restraint, and to protect all civilians. Myanmar authorities have been providing humanitarian assistance to all communities in the affected areas without discrimination. Whenever security condition prevails and the situation permits, the Government has allowed UN agencies, NGOs and INGOs to carry out humanitarian works.

Myanmar has the right to defend itself from terrorism and violations to territorial integrity and sovereignty. Terrorism today has become a global problem and it is a menace to the civilized world. Terrorism incidents in any part of the world, whether it occurred in Myanmar or the United Kingdom, or in any other country should be treated the same as dangerous and dealt accordingly. I would like to highlight the fact that Myanmar is facing with the terrorism threat in Rakhine State, and that our security forces are fighting the extremist terrorists.

I feel deeply saddened for the suffering of all the people who have been caught in the conflict, not just Muslims and Rakhines, but also small minority groups such as the Daing-net, Mro, Thet, Mramagyi and Hindus of whose presence most of the world is completely unaware. It should be pointed out that Muslims are not a minority in northern Rakhine as they comprise 95% of the total population. For your information, there are also many Muslims who have not joined the exodus as more than 50% of the Muslim villages in northern Rakhine remain intact and are living in peace with the neighbours; Buddhists and Hindus. There are reasons behind why people have fled as well as why people have stayed. I would like to draw your attention to the fact that since the October 2016 attacks, over 160 civilians were gruesomely killed and 91 people have been abducted including many Muslims by the terrorists. These civilians were accused of collaborating with the authorities and speaking to
the media about the true situation. Also, recent reports have emerged of the ARSA killing innocent Hindu villagers. Thus, those people now in Bangladesh were escaping the fighting as well as evading the radicals within their own community. The scotched-earth policy employed by the terrorists is another factor. The men were conscripted to join the ARSA in fighting the security forces and many villages had been intimidated to flee to the Bangladesh side so that they can attract international attention. It must be noted that the ARSA terrorists mingled with villagers wearing ordinary clothes and hides among the Muslim population. Furthermore, the extremists are spreading information that there are abundant food, clothing and shelter provided by the UN agencies, NGO and INGO organizations waiting for them on the other side of the border. Additionally news that hopes of resettlement in a third country, even in western countries is floating around. Reports have also emerged that there were extremist terrorists and their family members among the people who are now at the other side.

By just looking at the surface, one cannot claim to understand the complexity and sensitivity of the issue. Historical aspects of the situation should also be taken into consideration since the mainstream media do not mention about those facts. The challenges in Rakhine State are deep rooted and multi-faceted, in fact, the problems have roots to the British colonial periods, when Myanmar was administered as a province of British India. During those periods, the British brought in cheap labourers from mainly Bengal as well as many people to assist in the administration fields. I think it is very little known fact outside of Myanmar that even after Myanmar's independence, illegal immigrations have taken advantage of the weak border, especially during the periods such as the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war. Since the 1940s there have been Islamic separatist insurgencies in that area in the form of Mujahiden and later as so-called Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) which has been terrorizing and killing the indigenous population. The so-called term "Rohingya" itself is controversial, since the word could not be found in official British colonial records including population census files. Additionally, before and after Myanmar's independence, the Mujahid party representing the Muslims in the area have demanded several demands to the central Government; however, it will be interesting to know that the term was not used in those unreasonable demands.

Accusations of "ethnic cleansing" and "genocide" are totally false. Such terms must not be used lightly as these should be considered only after there are solid evidences. These terms are very serious charges that required legal review and judicial determination. We witness deliberate attempts to spread fabricated news with the intent to mislead the public. Misinformation and disinformation are written and published in order to generate problems between different communities, with the aim to promote the interests of the terrorists. Taking this opportunity, I can assure you that the leaders of Myanmar, who have been struggling so long for freedom and human rights, will never adopt a policy of genocide or ethnic cleansing and the government will do everything to prevent it.

Assertions in the media that horrifying crimes have been committed against innocent people have only served to intensify the anxiety of the international community. While such claims might appear realistic at initial glance to an ordinary viewer, skilled observers with knowledge of the history of Myanmar and exposure to the propaganda tactics of terrorists
will see such comments for what they really are. Terrorists and their lobbyists are working together to wrongfully portray Myanmar's image by making up stories to incite anger and promote misunderstandings. It is vital not to fall into the trap of the extremist terrorists.

It is important not to link the situation to a religious conflict. The highest Islamic organization in Myanmar, the “All Myanmar Islamic Religious Organization” as well as the “Interfaith Dialogue Group of Myanmar” have expressed their solidarity with the government and issued statements condemning the acts of terror committed by ARSA. Myanmar is a peace loving country with as many as 135 ethnic nationalities resides in harmony throughout our history. Although the majority of people are Theravada Buddhists, there are no restrictions and citizens have the rights to practice different religions. Exaggerated media reports and overzealous concerns expressed by some quarters of the international community have sent wrong messages to the world against a country this is totally against violent extremism. The situation that we face today is due to terrorism and is not based on religion.

Nevertheless, the Myanmar Government remains firmly dedicated to seeing meaningful and durable solutions. Our State Counsellor has clearly expressed that the Myanmar government is determined to implement the recommendations of the Advisory Commission, and also stated the commitment to finding a sustainable solution that would lead to peace, stability and development for all communities. In this light, the Myanmar Government launched a number of initiatives, including the establishment of a committee, led jointly by the Social Welfare Minister and the Rakhine State Chief Minister, to oversee implementation of the Advisory Commission's recommendations. A new government-led mechanism, established in cooperation with the Red Cross Movement has also started its humanitarian assistance to all those displaced inhabitants. We are also discussing with our fellow ASEAN countries the possibility to utilize the ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance (AHA) Centre to provide much needed humanitarian assistance. Furthermore, initiatives are taken to enhance existing relations with Bangladesh. The Union Minister of the Office of the State Counsellor has visited Bangladesh to further discuss matters of mutual concern and to find ways and means to move ahead and also invited Bangladesh officials to Myanmar for discussions. Additionally, the Government has also invited the UN Secretary General and the Under Secretary General to visit Myanmar. A working group for verification will be set up to verified of those refugees who wish to return to Myanmar, based on the 1993 principles and criteria agreed between both countries. Since December 2016, local and foreign media groups have been given access to areas previously off-limits and even after the 25 August attacks. Actions will be taken against all peoples, regardless of their religion, race, or political positions who go against the laws of the land and who violate human rights as accepted by our global community. Due to the efforts of the Myanmar Government, the situation in the Rakhine State has improved and stabilized as since 5 September 2017, there have been no armed clashes and the security forces are maintaining law and order to bring the situation to normalcy. The Government has arranged a visit for the diplomatic corps, including British diplomats to the affected areas in northern Rakhine State on 2 October 2017, and they had the opportunity to witness the firsthand situation on the ground. We are committed to a
sustainable solution that will lead to peace, stability, development and the return of displaced communities to their homes.

In conclusion, I would like to express that there is a need for awareness that the recent round of violence was sparked by the attacks launched by the ARSA terrorist. The Myanmar Government will work to ensure that the fight against terrorism will not distract us from our commitment to bring peace, harmony and development in Rakhine State. Since the new Government took office, promotion and protection of human rights have been high on its agenda, and stands firm in its commitment to national reconciliation and peace throughout the country. It is time for the international community to show its fairness and assist Myanmar which is firmly committed in promoting democracy and human rights. There should be focuses on resolving, rather than inflaming the situation, by giving support to the Government’s continued efforts to address the complex issues. It is vital that one needs to understand and have a fair assessment and balance view of the situation. The international community can best help by supporting the Myanmar Government in its efforts to bring stability, peace and development in Rakhine State. I can assure you, no one craves more for a long lasting peace and stability in Rakhine State than the people of Myanmar. One sided allegations and estimates lacking credibility should not be recognized. It will be necessary to view the situation in Rakhine State objectively and in an unbiased manner. At this critical time for our fragile new democracy, it is essential to remove the negative and increase the positive, and we would like to do that together with all of you to promote harmony and understanding.

I hope that you will understand us and also hope that our views will be duly taken into consideration. I strongly urge the committee to refrain from taking measures that exacerbate rather than alleviate the situation. To assist you in better understanding the situation, I have enclosed copies of Press Releases of the Myanmar Government and related documents for your kind perusal.

Yours sincerely,

( Kyaw Zwar Minn )
Ambassador