

Tabled by Mr Philip Green
DFAT, 26 October 2017

STATEMENT ON THE DIPLOMATIC TRIP TO NORTHERN RAKHINE ON 2 OCTOBER 2017

At the invitation of the Myanmar Government, we visited Northern Rakhine today. We went to a number of villages in Maungdaw and Rathedaung districts and met a mixture of local communities.

This initiative by the Government of Myanmar allowed us to show support for the many people of all communities in northern Rakhine who have suffered and still feel great insecurity.

We reiterate our condemnation of the ARSA attacks of 25 August and our deep concern about violence and mass displacement since. This was not an investigation mission and could not be in the circumstances. Investigation of allegations of human rights violations needs to be carried out by experts. We welcome the commitment of the State Counsellor to address human rights violations in accordance with strict norms of justice and call again on the Myanmar authorities to fully investigate allegations of human rights violations and bring prosecutions against those responsible. We also urge them to allow the UN Fact-Finding Mission to visit Rakhine.

We saw villages which had been burned to the ground and emptied of inhabitants. The violence must stop. The security forces have an obligation to protect all people in Rakhine without discrimination and to take measures to prevent acts of arson. We welcome the State Counsellor's statement that the security forces have been instructed to adhere strictly to a code of conduct, to exercise all due restraint and to take full measures to avoid collateral damage and the harming of innocent civilians. We encourage the Myanmar Government to move quickly to enable the voluntary, dignified and safe return to their places of origin of the hundreds of thousands of refugees who have fled to Bangladesh.

We saw on our visit the dire humanitarian need. We call once more for unimpeded humanitarian access to northern Rakhine and resumption of life-saving services without discrimination throughout the state. We welcome the media access that has already been allowed but call once more for journalists to be allowed full, unimpeded access to all parts of Rakhine.

We have stressed to the Union and State Government and to local authorities in Rakhine that the people we saw during this visit must not be subject to, and should be protected from, any reprisals, such as physical attacks or arbitrary arrest.

As friends of Myanmar we remain ready to work with the Myanmar Government to help Rakhine reach its potential. The Advisory Commission on Rakhine State has set out recommendations for a stable, peaceful and prosperous future for all communities in the state, irrespective of ethnicity, religion or citizenship status. We support full implementation of the report.

We sincerely hope that our visit is only the very first step in an urgently needed opening up of access for all, including the media, to all parts of Northern Rakhine.

This statement is issued by the following diplomats in Myanmar who all took part in a government arranged trip to northern Rakhine state on 2 October 2017: Ambassador Nicholas Coppel, Australia; Ambassador Karen MacArthur, Canada; Ambassador Jaroslav Dolecek, Czech Republic; Ambassador Peter Lysholt Hansen, Denmark; Ambassador Olivier Richard, France; Ambassador Ito Sumardi, Indonesia; Ambassador Giorgio Aliberti, Italy; Ambassador Wouters Jurgens, the Netherlands; Ambassador Steve Marshall, New Zealand; Ambassador Tone Tinnes, Norway; Ambassador Miodrag Nikolin, Serbia; Ambassador Paul Seger, Switzerland; Ambassador Kerem Divanlioglu, Turkey; Ambassador Scot Marciel, the United States; Ambassador-designate Kristian Schmidt, the European Union; Ambassador-designate Dorothee Janetzke-Wenzel, Germany; Mr. Bibian Zamora Giménez, Chargée d'Affaires a.i. Spain; Mr. Johan Hallenborg, Head of the Swedish Section Office; Mr. David Hall, Deputy Head of Mission, the United Kingdom; Ms. Silja Rajander, Deputy Head of Mission, Finland.