

**Opening Remarks of H.E. U Maung Wai, Permanent Representative of the
Republic of the Union of Myanmar
at the Sixty-fourth Session of the CEDAW Committee
7 July 2016**

Madam Chairperson,
Honourable members of the CEDAW Committee,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and pleasure for my delegation to present updates to the Sixty-fourth Session of the CEDAW Committee.

First of all, I wish to introduce the members of our delegation, comprising the representatives from the various government agencies and a parliamentarian from the National Assembly.

Dr. San San Aye
Deputy Director-General
Department of Social Welfare
Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement

Daw Naw Hla Hla Soe
Secretary of Women and Child's Rights Committee of Amyotha Hluttaw
Member of ASEAN Women Interparliamentary Assembly (WAIPA)

Daw Naw Tha Wah
Director
Department of Social Welfare
Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement

Pol Lt Col. Min Kyaw Thu
Head of Branch
Division Against Transnational Crime
Myanmar Police Force Head Quarters

Daw Lynn Marlar Lwin
Deputy Director
Department of International Organizations and Economic Department
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

We see this as an opportunity for us to appear before the esteemed Committee to review and assess the progress we have achieved so far in the promotion and protection of women's rights, along with the challenges and areas to be improved. We believe that, through constructive engagement and dialogue, our discussions today will contribute to achieving the common goal of fulfilling our obligations contained in the Convention for all girls and women in Myanmar.

Myanmar is a society in which women enjoy equal rights with men in every aspect. In our history, Queen Shin Saw Pu ruled Myanmar in the 15th century. She was a four-time queen and finally the reigning monarch from 1453 to 1472 AD. Similarly, Myanmar women have served as intellectuals and laureates since the time of ancient Myanmar kings. This historical context serves as a very clear evidence of how Myanmar women are held in high esteem in our society.

Today, our democracy icon, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is taking the responsibilities in the capacity of State Counsellor and the Foreign Minister. Participation of women in Parliament has now increased to 13.5% in 2016 from 4.42% in 2012.

Women's rights are guaranteed and protected in our State Constitution as well as in the relevant laws. Due to non-discriminatory traditions and practices, women do not face social barriers in education, jobs and career development. Nonetheless, Myanmar women are not free from challenges. While many women pay more attention to their families than to their career development, their participation at decision-making levels is still unsatisfactory. Myanmar is therefore making its utmost efforts by introducing legislative and policy measures to address the underlying causes that hinder women's participation in political and public life.

Madam Chairperson,
Honourable members of the CEDAW Committee,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

I will now proceed to brief you on the overall human rights situation in Myanmar in this new era.

Since 2011, Myanmar has introduced a series of reforms to transform the country as a democratic society. These measures have significantly contributed to widening democratic space with greater freedoms and human rights for all people in Myanmar including women. Promotion and protection of human rights is high on the agenda of the new administration.

After the successful conclusion of transparent, free and fair elections in November last year, the democratically elected new government has taken office towards the end of March this year with the agenda of consolidating democracy, national reconciliation, peace and development. In the very early days, the President granted amnesty to 138 political prisoners on 8 April and again 83 prisoners on 17 April 2016.

The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement was signed between the government and eight ethnic armed groups on 15 October 2015. Building upon it, the new administration will endeavor to reach a ceasefire agreement with the remaining groups. The Union level Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) was reestablished. The 21st Century Panglong Conference or the Union Peace Conference is expected to be held in August. The State Counsellor herself is leading the UPDJC Committee as

the chairperson. Women parliamentarians are taking part in the Preparatory Committee for the Union Peace Conference and its two sub-committees. There will also be a forum of Civil Society Organizations to ensure that their views and suggestions are duly considered in taking further steps. Women's participation in the forum is also encouraged.

The Union Parliament has formed the Commission for Assessment of Legal Affairs and Special Issues. It is now reviewing over 140 domestic laws while taking into consideration the concerns raised by the people as well as national and international human rights advocates. Myanmar is now drafting the Prevention and Protection of Violence against Women Bill under the leadership of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement. Now the draft bill is being scrutinized by the Union Attorney General Office to give legal opinion, if necessary. Then, the bill will be sent to the Parliament for further debate.

Due to the legislative reforms which have taken place in recent years, the people of Myanmar are being able to enjoy greater freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and of association. One of the most visible areas of achievement in the promotion and protection of human rights in the new Myanmar is the freedom of expression as well as the freedom of media. Since August 2012, all publications have been exempted from pre-publishing censorship. Publication of private daily newspapers has mushroomed since April 2013. Currently, there are fourteen private dailies in the country. Nineteen foreign news agencies have opened offices. In Myanmar, no restriction is imposed on the use of internet and social media. Therefore, people are now increasingly using them.

The enactment of the Peaceful Gathering and Procession Law in July 2012 allows Myanmar people to organize peaceful demonstrations and exercise their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly. The law is now before the Parliament for necessary amendment. Myanmar is a community with strong civil society organizations. Deeply-rooted mindset of helping, sharing and caring each other make our society more resilient. Against this backdrop, Myanmar acknowledges and encourages the role of CSOs and NGOs. The Law on the Registration of Organizations which requires only voluntary registration was enacted in 2014. Over 820 NGOs and CSOs are now functioning across the country along with 150 INGOs.

Greater freedoms and increasingly exercise of their rights, voices of women have been heard more than ever and it helps the government in addressing the challenges, concerns and difficulties faced by the women of Myanmar.

Madam Chairperson,
Honourable members of the CEDAW Committee,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to present the drafting process of Myanmar's national report to the CEDAW Committee. The leading government agency in the drafting process is the

Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement as it serves as the focal ministry for the advancement of women in Myanmar.

The Ministry has formed the Report Drafting Committee comprising 32 members representing the concerned ministries, the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission, non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations. Then, the Committee set up a core group to collect information effectively. The Drafting Committee organized a series of meetings and circulated the second draft report to the relevant ministries as well as to NGOs' drafting members for their comments and suggestions. The third draft was developed accordingly and forwarded to the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs for its careful consideration.

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement conducted two more workshops with all interested stakeholders and formulated the fourth draft. Then, the fourth and final draft was presented to the Foreign Affairs Policy Committee. The report was then submitted to UNCEDAW Committee through the Permanent Mission of Myanmar in Geneva on 8th January, 2015.

After the submission, UNCEDAW Committee sent back a list of issues containing 20 questions for clarification in January 2016. A coordination meeting took place on 20th January 2016 to answer the questions clearly and the responses were sent to Ministry of Foreign Affairs for further process.

On the 18th May 2016 and 9th June 2016, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement and the UN Women jointly organized mock sessions. Seventy participants including the official delegation, senior officials from government ministries, parliamentarians, representatives from civil society organizations and UN agencies participated in these mock sessions.

I am very delighted to learn that almost all NGOs representatives coming to Geneva for today's session have contributed to the success of these drafting and consultation process.

Madam Chairperson,
Honourable members of the CEDAW Committee,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

With the kind permission of Madam Chairperson, I would now like to request Dr. San San Aye to further brief the Committee on more specific measures we have taken for the advancement of women in Myanmar in different areas. I thank you.

Statement on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Myanmar

Dr. San San Aye, Deputy Director General,

Department of Social Welfare,

Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement

Madam Chairperson,

Honorable Member of the CEDAW Committee,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Advancement of Women in Different Areas

National Machinery

Madam Chair,

Myanmar does not have separate women Ministry though we formed Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs (MNCWA). It is a National Level Mechanism for advancement of women. The Committee is led by the Union Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement and hold biannual meetings every year. The meetings review the running women development programs, monitoring policies and guidelines to meet the needs of situation on the ground.

The MNCWA serves as a national mechanism which mainstreams women's rights in government policy making and coordinates with relevant line ministries in implementing women development tasks.

At present, the committee is reforming its structure in line with current political, economic and social conditions with following new policies;

- Guiding in reviewing existing laws and regulations, enacting necessary new laws and legislations to effectively achieve genuine gender equality for women in political, economic and social sectors,
- Preventing all forms of violence against women and providing protection services,
- Raising awareness of women on related protective laws for women and gaining necessary knowledge,

- Implementing sustainable development goals laid down by United Nations,
- Policies and principles described in World Women Conferences and United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and other planned activities in accordance with state's policy.

The significant thing in reforming MNCWA is including representatives from Parliament and Human Rights Commission and (6) representatives from leading women organizations. MNCWA new organizational set up has approved by the cabinet on 3rd July 2016. We will have a great momentum for enhancement of Women Activities with all stakeholders after this review meetings.

Gender Equality as National Priority

Madam Chair,

For current political landscape of Myanmar, National League for Democracy (NLD) party won election and new government came into force on 1st April. The new government committed a change for a better life and people-centered approach in all sectors. The NLD government have tasks in plenty to undertake for a significant change in Myanmar.

The State acknowledges not to be afraid of change including harmful social and cultural practices on women. We have to anticipate and embrace it instead. The State is now forcing ourselves to change of heart and change of behavior for the better. People both men and women living with loving-kindness and integrity to make our motherland, Myanmar, peaceful and prosperous forever is our ultimate goal.

Other than, STATE Counsellor, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi called for not only providing material support but also sharing technical and capacity building assistance to Myanmar at the meeting with International Development Association.

In her address the State Counsellor said that Myanmar is prioritizing national reconciliation and internal peace. She highlighted it is also striving to overcome the impacts of climate change and ensure gender equality for development, the promotion of education and employment, good governance and the improvement of the

administrative mechanism. The State Counsellor called on international development partners to support the country's efforts to realize its undertakings.

Implementation of National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (2013-2022)

Madam Chair,

National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (2013-2022) (NSPAW) that has developed by the MNCWA with the objectives of all women in Myanmar are empowered and able to fully enjoy their rights with the support of the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and enabling systems, structures and practices are created for the advancement of women, gender equality, and the realization of women's rights.

Goals for gender equality and women's rights can be well embedded into the government's reform agenda by implementing NSPAW by ensuring that gender equality perspectives are woven into sector policies, plans, and programs across government ministries and NGOs. We may need to sit together for reviewing NSPAW and formulation of Costed Action Plan in collaboration with all stakeholders in very soon.

Currently, we are trying to make an assessment of NSPAW Implementation in (18) concerned Ministries. The process includes questionnaire development, consultation with high level people, basic and advance enumerator trainings, field visits, interview with concerned officials, screening data, reporting and publishing the results.

Evidence based Implementation

Madam Chair,

Regards to achieving evidence based implementation, Department of Social Welfare is studying series of researches with the cooperation of other partners organizations.

With the guidance of the Department of Social Welfare, the Gender Equality Network (GEN) conceptualized and conducted a qualitative research study on the

drivers of gender inequality, termed: “Raising the Curtain: Cultural Norms, Social Practices and Gender Equality in Myanmar”. The study was launched in December 2015 in all State and Regions. The qualitative study sought to further understand social and cultural norms and their impact on men and women in relation to various domains, including family, community life, work, health and education.

Violence against women is a serious and reprehensible human rights violation that affects the health, livelihoods and opportunities of women in Myanmar. Civil society actors, government authorities and international stakeholders increasingly recognize the extent and scope of this issue across the country.

Department of Social Welfare and Gender Equality Network conducted, ‘Behind the Silence: Violence against Women and the Resilience (Myanmar)’. The research presented to fill the gap on what is known about women’s experiences of abuse and violence by their husbands and other men. It signals an increased interest and investment by the Government, as well as national and international actors, to build the evidence base, and enhance activities to respond to and prevent violence against women across the country.

In addition, Gender Equality and Women’s Rights in Myanmar: A Situation Analysis has being conducted by the Department of Social Welfare in collaboration with UN Women and ADB. The report will be launched in upcoming months.

Women Access to justice

Madam Chair,

The Prevention and Protection of Violence against Women Law (PoVAW Law) is being drafted and the Department of Social Welfare, Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement leads the process in cooperation with the UN Gender Theme Group and Gender Equality Network. The Steering Committee, Advisory Committee and Working Committee were formed to drafting the Law.

The Working Committee organized (13) meetings with line ministries, UN Gender Theme Group and GEN. Awareness raising workshops on the law were organized 10 times in States and Regions. As Myanmar is the member state of

UNCEDAW, the PoVAW Law is drafted to be in line with provisions described in CEDAW and 1995 Beijing Platform for Action.

Myanmar determines to build the society as no one is above the law. Whoever commits sexual violence, including rape, against women and girls shall be punished according to existing laws. For law enforcement and military personnel, verdicts are more stringent as they shall be prosecuted in accordance with the military rules and regulations.

The Department of Social Welfare (DSW) under Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement could tackle only prevention matters and has very limited efforts in receiving and solving social problems of the public. To reduce this weakness, DSW planned to start emergency help line at Union Level and Public Relation Corner in Yangon Region as one of the 100 Day program of the Ministry. And, the department also has being developed the system on Social Case Management under the Myanmar National Strategy Plan for Social Protection with limited resources.

In addition to that, the Information Center for trafficked victims has been established in 2014 in order to provide information, psychosocial support, coordinate between victims and victims' support agencies and to seek job opportunities for victims.

Women in Northern Rakhine State and Rehabilitation of Rakhine State

Madam Chair,

The newly installed civilian government has formed Central Committee for Implementation of Peace and Development in Rakhine State headed by State Counsellor and (4) working committees were formed consequently.

The Union Minister of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement took the role of chairmanship in Settlement and Socio- economic Development Working Committee. That working committee mainly intended to rebuild peaceful relationship between two communities and strong cooperation of concerned actors for fast and effectively implementation such as providing fair settlement in Rakhine State, providing job

opportunities for socio economic development and sustainable livelihood and businesses, providing infrastructure.

Conclusion

Madam Chair,

According to 2014 Population Census, (70%) of total population in Myanmar are living in rural areas. Though remote areas are yet to be given priority, the State is strengthening its outreach development programs in all sectors.

Before going to my conclusion, I would like to state that Myanmar Government will continue our commitment, not only to eliminate gender discrimination but also to protect and promote the rights of women. As reported, Myanmar has made significant steps ahead on advancement for women since we became a state party to the convention in 1997. But, we are still facing many challenges and keep trying to overcome those.

To this end, I would like to express our sincere thank to you and distinguished committee members for your kind attention. We have tried as much as possible to make comprehensive report, there may be some areas where we might have failed to adequately dealt with or other which still need improvements. Thus, we are willing to listen and learn from the wisdom of the committee members. Your opinions and observations will cooperate as much as possible with a view to promoting the achievement of women enhancement in Myanmar.

Thank you