**Opening Remarks by H.E. Dr. Win Myat Aye, Union Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, at the Constructive Dialogue with the CEDAW Committee on the Exceptional Report at the 72nd Session of the CEDAW**

**Geneva, 22 February 2019**

Madame Chair,

Members of the Committee,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Afternoon!

* It is an honour for me to lead the delegation from Myanmar to discuss the Exceptional Report.
* Our delegation comprises key members and technical experts from the President’s Office, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, Union Attorney General’s Office, who have first-hand experience on the ground as well as from the Myanmar Mission in Geneva.
* In addition to my responsibilities as Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, I am wearing many hats as Chair, namely:
  + Myanmar National Committee on Women;
  + Committee for Implementation of Advisory Commission’s Recommendations on Rakhine State;
  + Socio-economic Development and Resettlement Working Committee
  + Repatriation and Resettlement Committee
  + And, as Vice-Chair of the Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development.
* The reason why the government has sent me here as Head of the Delegation truly reflects the importance Myanmar attaches to the work of the CEDAW Committee.
* Myanmar, as a responsible member of the CEDAW, has submitted the Exceptional Report addressing the questions pertinent to the work of the CEDAW.
* Since its accession to the CEDAW, Myanmar has striven for gender equality and combating gender discrimination.

Madam Chair,

* Myanmar is a society in which women enjoy equal rights with men in every aspect.
* Starting from 2011, there has been tremendous changes in Myanmar’s political landscape, which were unimaginable before.
* The general election in 2015 has been regarded as free and fair. The first democratically elected government assumed office in 2016.
* We are now on the path of democratic transition, away from centuries-long legacies of colonial occupation, ethnic rivalries and military rule.
* Here, I am reminded of the words of Charles Dickens “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times--- ”.
* For Myanmar, now is the best of times. The country is undergoing a transition from half-a-century-long military rule to a democratic state.
* This is also the worst of times. In addition to the constitutional constraints, the Government has inherited the world’s longest running internal conflict, deep-rooted ethnic and communal divides, lack of efficient institutions and human resources and backwardness in many areas. The complexities are compounded even more by the high hopes placed on the new democratic Government by the people and the international community to overcome these daunting challenges overnight.
* On top of these, the issue in northern Rakhine has become the focus of international attention. The issue in northern Rakhine is a huge complexing challenge of enormous dimension and many hidden complicating factors are involved.
* Notwithstanding those challenges, we are now striving to ensure that democracy takes firm root.
* Needless to say, this process takes time.
* We fully share the international community’s concern over the rights of Muslim women and girls in Rakhine.
* Please let me appraise you of the measures taken by the government regarding the protection and promotion of the rights of all women and girls, residing in the country.

Madame Chair,

* Myanmar attaches great importance to the promotion and protection of the rights of women and girls.
* With that in mind, the Government has restructured the Myanmar National Committee on Women. One of the important changes on the Committee is the inclusion of seven leading local non-government and civil society organizations that are very active in gender equality and women empowerment issues. The collaboration between the government, CSOs and NGOs will further enhance the implementation of the Committee’s work.
* Myanmar’s National Committee on Women is the mechanism in which the following **four policies are being implemented**:

(1) To effectively implement the existing laws and make new laws, as necessary, to ensure equal rights for men and women in all political, economic and social sectors;

(2) To prevent and protect women from all forms of violence;

(3) To ensure that women understand and have awareness of the laws that protect them; and

(4)To effectively implement SDGs and the provisions of the World Conferences on Women and the CEDAW

* The National Strategic Plan on the Advancement of Women (2013-2022) was reviewed by the National Committee on Women, and a new National Strategic Plan on the Advancement of Women (2019-2022) was crafted to accelerate the implementation process for the remaining four years.
* The Development Assistance Coordination Unit (DACU), chaired by the State Counsellor, has proposed ten Sector Coordinating Groups in which gender equality is an integral part.
* In this regard, the Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Coordination Group, comprising senior government officials, UN agencies, INGOs and donors, has been formed to provide technical support for the implementation of the National Strategic Plan on the Advancement of Women. At present, four technical working groups namely Women, Peace and Security, Violence against women, Women’s participation in politics and economy; and Gender mainstreaming, to implement this National Strategic Plan.

Madame Chair,

* Ensuring the Rule of Law is of paramount importance to Myanmar.
* To strengthen legal protection for women, the ‘Prevention and Protection of Violence Against Women ’ law has been drafted.
* Besides, we are also working to replace the existing “Suppression of Prostitution Act” with “The Prostitution Law”.
* Furthermore, the existing Child Law (1993) was reviewed and has been strengthened. A new Child Rights Law is being discussed in the Parliament.
* The Government of Myanmar, on 7 January this year, also formed a Committee on the Prevention of Grave Violations against Children in Armed Conflict.
* I am pleased to inform you that, in December last year, the Government of Myanmar signed the Joint Communique with the United Nations to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence in Myanmar.

Madame Chair,

* As the Chair of the Working Committee for Rehabilitation of Displaced Persons and Improving Socio-economic Development in Rakhine State, I make several visits to Rakhine State every month.
* Taking this opportunity, I wish to appraise you of the situation on the ground.
* The issue in Rakhine State is highly complex and too complicated for outsiders to comprehend.
* Any solution to this issue will require thorough understanding of the local context, historical background, genuine concerted efforts and, most importantly, time.
* We are serious and genuine to solve this issue.
* Since our government came to office, we have focused on bringing peace, stability and socio-economic development in Rakhine State. However, the terrorist attacks by ARSA in 2016 and 2017, and their consequences have undermined our efforts and the progress we had achieved.
* Notwithstanding these attacks, the Government continues with its efforts to seek sustainable solution for Rakhine State.
* There are specific programmes dealing with women and children in Rakhine State, as mentioned in the Exceptional Report.
* We have a joint project in collaboration with UN Women and UNDP, entitled “Inclusive Development and Empowerment of Women in Rakhine State, Myanmar”. This project includes service delivery for women victims of violence, provision of trainings on women’s leadership and gender. It also provides vocational training for women’s economic empowerment, and capacity building programs for judicial officials in Rakhine State.

Madame Chair,

* Despite the many complex challenges, we strongly believe that a durable solution lies there to enable various communities live together in peace and harmony.
* The recommendations from the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, led by the former Secretary-General of the UN, the late Dr. Kofi Annan, help us find a sustainable solution to the issue in Rakhine.
* Our government remains committed to implementing the recommendations.
* Now, these are being implemented by respective Ministries through specific action plans.
* We also believe that social cohesion is one of the key requirements to the solution. In this regard, we have many projects being carried out in Rakhine State. They also include inter-communal dialogues as well as those between the communities and local administrators.
* I am proud to mention that our women colleagues are playing a leading role in most of these dialogues.

Madame Chair

* The process of repatriation for verified residents of Myanmar from Bangladesh continues despite some naysayers.
* Myanmar has invited the ASEAN Secretariat and the ASEAN AHA Centre to cooperate in the process of repatriation of displaced persons in Rakhine State.
* The ASEAN Emergency Response and Assessment Team (ERAT), from the AHA centre has been deployed in Northern Rakhine State to conduct needs assessment for the repatriation process.
* Furthermore, Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) is also collaborating with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) as the ‘Red Cross Movement’ to provide humanitarian assistance in Rakhine State.
* To complement the Government’s efforts on repatriation, assistance from the private sector has also been sought through the Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development in Rakhine (UEHRD). The UEHRD was established as a national movement to provide humanitarian assistance to all communities in Rakhine State and to rebuild Rakhine State by bringing development and facilitating poverty reduction through its programmes.
* Meanwhile, as we focus on creating a conducive environment for the returnees, we are also committed to ensuring accountability where there be evidence of human rights violations including sexual violence.
* The Government has, time and again, reiterated its principled position of promoting and implementing rule of law, justice and accountability.
* Myanmar is willing and able to investigate allegations of crimes and/or violations of human rights in its territory.
* For this reason, the Independent Commission of Enquiry (ICOE) was established to investigate allegations of human rights violations and related issues following the terrorist attacks by ARSA with a view to seeking accountability and formulating recommendations on steps to be taken to ensure peace and stability in Rakhine State.
* The ICOE has launched its Call for Submissions, inviting those with evidence and supporting data related to allegations of human rights violations in Rakhine State, to come forward and submit them for further action.

Madame Chair,

* We are focusing on bringing peace and stability to ALL its people.
* We are trying to ensure women and children enjoy the benefits of peace, stability, and development in the country.
* The role of women and their participation in the peace process is critical.
* The Government is working towards seeking agreement on the Union Accord which will contain basic principles for establishing a Democratic Federal Union in Myanmar.
* In this Union Accord, the rights of all people regardless of race, religion, gender and disabilities will be respected.

Madame Chair,

* Before I conclude, I wish to stress that Myanmar today is indeed facing the most challenging time in her history.
* We firmly believe, the success of our democratic transition will overcome these challenges.
* In this regard, it is imperative that the international community best assist us by rendering constructive engagement and positive support, by taking into account both international best practices and the local realities.
* Please let me end by informing you that, on my behalf, deputy head of delegation will facilitate the discussions.
* Thank you Madame Chair.

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