

**Security Council**

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Letter dated 22 July 2019 from the Permanent Representatives of Germany, Peru and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Germany and Peru, as co-chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council, and the United Kingdom, which worked in close cooperation with them, would like to share the summary of the meeting on Myanmar held by the Group on 4 June 2019 (see annex).

We should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Christoph **Heusgen**
Permanent Representative of Germany

(Signed) Gustavo **Meza-Cuadra**
Permanent Representative of Peru

(Signed) Karen **Pierce**
Permanent Representative of the
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland



Annex to the letter dated 22 July 2019 from the Permanent Representatives of Germany, Peru and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Summary of the meeting on Myanmar held by the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security on 4 June 2019

On 4 June 2019, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council convened a meeting on the situation in Myanmar. Council members were briefed by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar, Christine Schraner Burgener, the Resident Coordinator in Myanmar, Knut Osby, and the Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh, Mia Seppo, accompanied by senior members of their country teams.

Council members asked several questions about the lack of progress or action by the Government regarding efforts to combat conflict-related sexual violence, beyond developing plans, establishing committees and holding meetings. They also asked whether the joint communiqué of the Government of Myanmar and the United Nations issued in December 2018 had prompted a change in the level of cooperation and blanket denials by government actors regarding human rights violations, including sexual violence. They had further questions about the conditions that needed to be put in place for the voluntary return of refugee and displaced women, the ongoing work of the Independent Commission of Enquiry and the measures taken to avoid any harm caused by the documentation and investigation of sexual violence without due process or a direct link to services for survivors or a path to justice. Council members were also interested in the level of consultation of women and women's organizations on such matters as humanitarian access, decisions about the closure or relocation of internally displaced persons camps (such as on Bhasan Char island), the extent of trafficking and forced marriage in refugee camps and the availability of reproductive health and psychosocial services, and any plans to reform the Tatmadaw or implement the gender-related recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State.

The main points raised in the meeting are summarized below.

- The Special Envoy and the Resident Coordinators highlighted the importance of women and peace and security for their respective mandates and for the success of any peacebuilding efforts. The Special Envoy underlined the need for women's full and effective participation in the political, economic and social life to ensure lasting peace, as well as for prioritizing women-led initiatives to promote social cohesion, consulting women on any solution and taking into account women's needs and protection considerations. She also stressed that a broad-based participation of women from different backgrounds was especially needed in a country as diverse as Myanmar. She noted that, while the Head of Government was a woman, the overwhelming majority of her interlocutors at the central, regional and local levels in Myanmar were men, partly due to the predominance of military and religious actors in positions of leadership and their outsize role in public life and in decision-making, in particular with regard to peace and security issues.
- The vulnerability of women and girls was magnified by the high levels of gender inequality in Myanmar: for example, 50.5 per cent of women participated in the labour force, compared with 85 per cent for men; 90 per cent of women worked in the informal economy; only 12.7 per cent of members of state and regional parliaments were women; and women only made up 0.25 per cent of ward and

village-tract administrators. Although gender parity was better in the Myanmar civil service, only 1.5 per cent of director general positions were held by women. This was also reflected in peacemaking efforts. Despite the government commitment to ensure a minimum of 30 per cent representation of women, at the latest peace conference, only 6 per cent of the coordination teams of the ethnic armed organizations and 13 per cent of senior delegates had been women. As highlighted in the 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan and the 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview for Myanmar, the challenges faced by women and girls were particularly pronounced in remote and conflict-affected areas, where they were especially exposed to sexual and gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, early and forced marriage and trafficking, and faced barriers to having access to relief, services, information, income-generating activities, community participation and decision-making at all levels. This marginalization was further compounded for women and girls with disabilities, pregnant and lactating women, adolescent girls, older girls and female-headed households. For example, only 37 per cent of women gave birth in professional health facilities at the national level, but that number dropped to 19 per cent in Rakhine State.

- Widespread and systematic sexual violence had been thoroughly documented by the United Nations fact-finding mission and was the focus of a report that the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had requested from the Government of Myanmar under its exceptional reporting procedure and had considered earlier in 2019. It was not clear how sexual and gender-based violence was being addressed by the government-led Independent Commission of Enquiry, and its experts had not been able to visit the refugee camps in Bangladesh, but it would be important to cooperate fully with the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar and to advise other actors on “do no harm” guidelines when evidence and testimonies were being gathered in an uncoordinated manner. Several participants noted that the call for justice among the Rohingya community was very strong.
- In the refugee camps in Bangladesh, 52 per cent of the Rohingya refugees were women and girls, who had restricted mobility, and the lack of formal education, livelihood opportunities, access to justice or official recognition of the Rohingya refugee population as a whole put them at greater risk. Adolescent girls were particularly vulnerable to trafficking, and the United Nations had recently set up an anti-trafficking task force in Cox’s Bazar. Women and girls were also the most vulnerable elements among the host community, which was also in need of humanitarian assistance. In spite of the resistance against female volunteers and humanitarian workers by conservative elements within the Rohingya refugees, Rohingya women were having an important role in the response to help the community, preventing violence, advising on counselling, finding services and volunteering in the health and protection sectors. In 2018, hundreds of women, who called themselves “peace women”, had organized themselves to call for justice and submitted a request for the International Criminal Court to investigate genocide and persecution, including gender-based violence as an instrument of both crimes, and presented hundreds of testimonies from women in the camps. There had also been a remarkable increase in demand for family planning and in births in health facilities, which was an important social transformation in itself. There were currently 119 safe entry points to women-friendly spaces and other facilities in the camps. Efforts had been put in place to promote social cohesion and dialogue between the host community and the refugee population and to promote the participation of women in camp management and leadership. However, less than 20 per cent of the humanitarian appeal had been funded in the present year, and the lack of resources had a

severe impact on reproductive health, efforts against gender-based violence and mental health services. In addition, there was an acute need for longer-term investment in transformative initiatives focused on gender equality, such as in the fields of education, livelihood and legal aid, which was limited owing to the Government's position on the current phase of humanitarian assistance.

- Some of the measures taken by the Government that were highlighted by participants included the adoption of the National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (2013–2022), which included a section on the role of women in emergencies and conflict prevention; a national strategy on the closure of internally displaced persons camps, in which it was stated that the resettlement of female-headed households must be prioritized; a draft law on the prevention of violence against women and on their protection; and the joint communiqué on conflict-related sexual violence. The joint communiqué had been signed in December 2018, and a steering committee had been established to oversee its implementation, meeting in April for the first time and co-chaired by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement and the Ministry of Defence, but the United Nations had not been involved or consulted in the development of its draft action plan. The Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan (2018–2030) referred to the importance of women's participation for democracy and peace, and the indicators framework under development to monitor progress against that plan and the Sustainable Development Goals contained a specific indicator measuring the participation of women in the peace process. The National Committee for Women's Affairs, chaired by the Minister of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, coordinated the implementation of the National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (2013–2022), and one of its four technical working groups was dedicated to women and peace and security and had begun to meet more regularly as of 2018, with the inclusion of national civil society organizations and the support of the United Nations. In conflict-affected states, such as Mon, Kayin, Kayah and Shan, initiatives had been launched to integrate into development plans and state priority plans at the local level elements of commitments made towards women and peace and security, and interreligious and inter-ethnic work on social cohesion and reconciliation was being carried out, but less so in Rakhine State, owing to the intensity of the conflict and lack of access. The Government had approved plans for a women-led centre working on social cohesion in Rakhine State, and the two women had recently been appointed as camp managers for the first time in that State. The Government also collaborated with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Humanitarian Assistance Centre to build interim camps but, more than anything, the Rohingya in Rakhine State needed rights, freedom of movement and a path to citizenship.

Participants in the meeting made several recommendations. First, the Myanmar country team had recently submitted four proposals to the Peacebuilding Fund that focused on the role of women and young people in building peace, and it was crucial that they receive the resources needed. Second, it was important for the Security Council to find a way to urge the Government to implement the gender-related recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, the national strategy on the closure of internally displaced persons camps, the memorandum of understanding with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme, and the recommendations of the United Nations fact-finding mission. Third, participants also requested that the numerous visits by senior officials from the international community be used to communicate many of the points raised at the present meeting and scale up the advocacy of women and peace and security, rather than leaving those issues to be raised only during visits by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on

Sexual Violence in Conflict or the Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) or of the United Nations Population Fund. Lastly, the national action plan on women and peace and security in Bangladesh currently in preparation should include actions in favour of Rohingya women and girls. UN-Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group, highlighted some of the recommendations shared in writing with Group members, which included the ones listed below.

- The Security Council should adopt a new resolution or presidential statement on the situation in Myanmar and include language to urge the national authorities and ethnic armed organizations to ensure women's meaningful participation, including in decision-making roles, in national peace conferences, bilateral negotiations and the monitoring of the existing nationwide ceasefire agreement; call upon the Government of Myanmar to cease discriminatory practices and review laws and regulations that discriminated against or disadvantaged women and girls from ethnic minorities, including the Rohingya; and encourage the international community to support civil society organizations throughout Myanmar and in the states affected by conflict in order to build peace and reconcile communities, de-escalate intercommunal conflicts, counter disinformation and hate speech, promote social cohesion, report on human rights violations, provide services to survivors of gender-based violence, accelerate reconstruction efforts, and support women's participation and representation in decision-making, including in the forthcoming elections.
- Council members should use their political and diplomatic influence, as well as their financial resources, to provide a path for justice for the women and girls affected by the conflict, scale up the services supporting women and girls in refugee camps, including access to formal education, skills development and livelihood opportunities, and their multi-year investment in women's civil society organizations, put women's leadership at the centre of humanitarian efforts and conversations about repatriation, resettlement or other options, and finance women-led peacebuilding efforts, in line with the Secretary-General's call for allocating a minimum of 15 per cent of peacebuilding funds to advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women.
- The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, as the pen holder on Myanmar in the Security Council, and the co-chairs of the Informal Expert Group, should share the outcome of the present meeting with relevant stakeholders in regional organizations, including ASEAN, the European Union and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, key donors and civil society, and explore opportunities for joint advocacy vis-à-vis the Government of Myanmar on some of the issues raised at the meeting.

The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict complemented those suggestions with further recommendations on mandates to implement them. It welcomed the joint communiqué but explained that this was only one step, and that the draft action plan that had been developed had not been shared with the United Nations, whether in Myanmar or at Headquarters, in New York. Furthermore, the framework of cooperation signed with the Government of Bangladesh also needed to be implemented and, to date, no focal point had been appointed and no action plan had been presented. The Security Council should request that the national authorities of Myanmar facilitate unimpeded access for humanitarian aid organizations across the territories affected by conflict, including organizations assisting sexual violence survivors and providing sexual and reproductive health care; reiterate the need for the prompt investigation into and prosecution of security personnel, including senior officials, for serious international crimes, including conflict-related sexual violence; and remind the Governments of Myanmar and

Bangladesh and their international partners of the need to ensure the availability of sexual and reproductive health services, including obstetric, prenatal and postnatal care, contraceptive information and services, emergency contraception, HIV post-exposure prophylaxis, safe abortion, maternal health-care support, psychosocial counselling and mitigation measures to prevent child and forced marriages and conflict-related trafficking, in line with Council resolution [2331 \(2016\)](#).

The Co-Chairs closed the meeting and expressed their intention to convene a follow-up meeting before the end of 2019.
