



Communiqué by Heads of Missions of the European Union

5 February 2014

1. The embassies of France, Germany, Italy, Denmark, the Czech Republic, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the EU Delegation have just concluded a four-day mission to Northern Rakhine State. We would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Government of Myanmar for the excellent cooperation and hospitality extended to us during this mission, and notably to the Union Minister for Border Affairs, Lieutenant General Thet Naing Win, the Chief Minister of Rakhine State, U Hla Maung Tin, and the Deputy Minister of Immigration and Population, U Kyaw Kyaw Win, and their teams.
2. The purpose of the visit, which had been planned since December 2013, was to assess the overall situation in Rakhine State in its political, humanitarian and development dimensions, and to get first-hand information by listening to both sides involved in the ongoing communal conflict. Wherever the mission went, we listened to the voices of Buddhist and Muslim communities and their political and religious leaders, town elders as well as civil society and international partners.
3. In Rakhine State, the mission visited Sittwe (including Aung Mingalar), Maungdaw, Mrauk-U, and Myebon. The delegation visited several temporary IDP camps where populations, both Rakhine Buddhists and Muslim communities displaced by the recent violence, are still residing. While the mission also went to Duu Chee Yar Tan village in Maungdaw and listened to a group of women from the village, it should be underlined that the purpose of this trip was not to carry out an investigation into the recent violent incident as the mission had neither the authorisation nor the expertise to do so. We welcome the President's commitment to launch an independent investigation into the events in Duu Chee Yar Tan village in order to swiftly shed light on the events, and thereby address the rumours that continue to circulate.
4. It emerged clearly from the discussions that both Buddhist and Muslim communities have suffered tremendous trauma in recent months. Both communities live in poverty and fear. Despite some radical voices, the mission understands that what both sides have in common is the aspiration of achieving security, peace and prosperity in Rakhine State. Confidence and trust should be restored to create the basis for a lasting solution through reconciliation, the respect for the rule of law and eventually economic development.

5. In meetings with Rakhine Buddhists, the mission was struck by the pride with which they spoke about their history. They also talked about the perceived threat to their identity and to what they consider their territory, mentioning what they perceive as an imbalanced population growth. The mission took note of their request that all people of Rakhine State should respect the rule of law, in particular the 1982 Citizenship Law. Rakhine Buddhist interlocutors also stressed that all people of Rakhine State should participate in the Government's initiatives such as the verification exercise and the census.

6. We also listened to the grievances of the Muslim community whose property and livelihoods have been lost. Restrictions on the freedom of movement, limited access to education and health services, and prolonged insecurity make a return to normalcy impossible for many of the displaced. They also told the mission about their deeply-held conviction that they are citizens of Myanmar.

7. For the future, a sustainable long-term solution needs to be found to generate hope and reduce tensions, and to ensure that Rakhine State can prosper again and realize its enormous economic potential. We welcome the Government's agreement to share as soon as possible with international partners its Comprehensive Strategy and Action Plan for Rakhine State, so that the value of external assistance can be maximised under an overall framework while acknowledging the wish of the Government to keep the Rakhine situation as a domestic issue. The EU stands ready to engage constructively with the authorities in order to look into possibilities of supporting a joint response to improving the lives of the people of Rakhine State.

8. From the outset the EU has been and continues to be a strong supporter of Myanmar's transition and reform path. As a constructive partner, the EU is currently providing around 70 million Euros (over 100 million US\$) to the people of Rakhine State, and much more is to come. A large share of our current assistance is of a humanitarian nature and therefore purely based on needs; it strives to support people from both communities with the greatest needs in an impartial and balanced way. For our implementing partners to be effective, they need the Government's cooperation to provide full security and access. At the same time, freedom of movement should be re-established so that IDPs can begin to rebuild their livelihoods and reclaim their human dignity rather than being dependent on external assistance.

9. The mission encourages the Government and all parties to reach out to both communities in order to facilitate dialogue and break the vicious cycle of poverty, conflict and underdevelopment. The EU stands ready to help this process, in close coordination with the government of Myanmar and other stakeholders in the country, as well as with other international partners of goodwill.

10. We would like to thank again the Government for organising this extensive visit, and for the freedom of movement and access we were granted which allowed us to get a balanced picture of the situation on the ground.