

## **CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

**Speech of EU Ambassador Kristian Schmidt**

**Human Rights Day**

**Yangon**

**10 December 2017**

Executive Director EQMM, U Aung Myo Min  
Ambassadors, Colleagues from Australian, Swedish and US Missions  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to be invited to speak at International Human Rights Day. This day - December 10 - in 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Human rights Day is a reminder to the world that human rights are always work in progress. No country has reached perfection, and I doubt we ever will. All nations have challenges - this is true in Europe, as it is here in Myanmar.

Celebrating Human Rights Day has become a tradition also here in Myanmar – a country which has made great progress in so many areas, and which continues to make big leaps in its development.

We note with great sadness the recent violence in Rakhine State. We have expressed our sympathy with all victims – including the security personnel who lost their lives in the initial attacks of August 25th. We condemn all terrorist acts, and the human rights violations they have surely committed.

The victims are from all ethnic groups. All communities in Rakhine state are victims of past and recent injustices. It is clearly imperative to introduce non-discriminatory rule of law and civilian administration for all.

More than 700 000 civilians – the vast majority of Muslim faith – are currently in refugee camps in Bangladesh. They long for their homes, for safety and a future for their children.

Their immense suffering is intolerable and a challenge not only for Bangladesh and Myanmar, but for the whole international community. No human being can ignore the horrible stories, told by surviving children, orphans, widows, rape victims.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Equality Myanmar is our longstanding partner. Thank you for organising this special day.

You are Myanmar's human rights defenders. You are the voice of the voice-less, a line of defence for the defence-less.

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As human rights defenders, you are the last hope of the weak, those without voice, means, representation or legal status. As human rights defender s, I know you consider all human life sacred, irrespective of ethnicity and religion. The Call for equality must be universal; our quest must be for indivisible human rights.

Myanmar needs unity, and as your friends, we must help to preserve it. It is so much easier to divide and polarise. Europe knows that. We have seen the catastrophic consequences ourselves, in wars and persecution.

In Europe, 85 years ago, we allowed hate speech to go unchallenged. As the saying goes: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing."

You are these good men and women. We support you speaking up for everyone, and most of all those who have no-one else. Let us not allow hate speech to spread like a cancer!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The European Union will support Myanmar's aspirations for democracy and respect for human rights.

After decades of isolation, Myanmar is opening up to the world, under the stewardship of a democratically elected government, with dozens of former political prisoners and human rights activists in parliament and in the administration.

We know your leaders feel strongly about democracy, and human rights. I would simply like to emphasise how much depends on your ability to stay the course with unwavering commitment.

For justice, unity and harmony.

For peace, and respect for ethnic minorities and their rights.

For trade and economic development, decent jobs and eradication of poverty.

For future generations.

So let's join your efforts to stand up for human rights!

You can rely on the European Union. We will not look away, we will not walk away, and we will not give up no matter how difficult things may look. This country knows about perseverance, so I am sure you will also prove your perseverance on standing up for human rights for all!