



4.6.16

## **BURMA | Government Called to Act to End Rohingya Crisis**

*Statement by members of the European Burma Network*

Members of the European Burma Network (EBN) call upon the new government of Burma to act swiftly to start to address the Rohingya crisis in Burma/Myanmar.

The past five years have seen a dramatic escalation of human rights abuses, repression, discrimination and violence against the Rohingya. Around 150,000 people have been displaced and are living in camps which have been described by senior United Nations officials as having some of the worst conditions in the world. Well over 100,000 Rohingya, more than 10 percent of the population, have fled the country in the face of increasing repression. Thousands are believed to have drowned fleeing by boat.

Human Rights Watch and Fortify Rights have documented human rights abuses which meet the legal definition of ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. Experts on genocide have also warned of the dangers of genocide against the Rohingya. Most Rohingya were stripped of their right to vote in last year's election, were excluded from the recent national census, and continue to be denied their legal right to citizenship.

For decades, the military government of Burma has pursued a twin track policy of repression and impoverishment in an attempt to drive the Rohingya ethnic group out of the country. The new NLD led government faces enormous challenges in addressing this legacy. However, given the seriousness of the humanitarian and human rights crisis, bold and decisive action is needed immediately to start to address this issue.

Members of the European Burma Network endorse the four action steps proposed by the Burmese Rohingya Organization UK which the NLD could implement to start to address the Rohingya crisis. These are:

*Action against hate-speech and extremists* – Take action to prevent hate speech and incitement

of violence, and demonstrate moral leadership, with Aung San Suu Kyi and other NLD leaders personally and specifically speaking out against prejudice and hatred, and challenging the extreme nationalist narrative.

*Ensure humanitarian access* – Immediately lift all restrictions on the operations of international aid agencies and also start to devote more government resources to assisting IDPs and isolated villagers. Ensure safe return for all those displaced in Rakhine state.

*Reform or repeal of the 1982 Citizenship Law* – The lack of full citizenship lies at the root of most of the discrimination faced by the Rohingya. There is no way this issue can be avoided, and it is much better that an NLD-led government bite the bullet and deal with it at the start of its period in government when it has a new and strong mandate, strong party unity, and elections are years away. It will have to be addressed at some point. Better it is done while the NLD-led government is strongest.

*Justice and accountability* – An NLD-led government should set up a credible independent investigation with international experts to investigate these crimes and propose action. If the NLD government fails to do so, the United Nations should establish its own Commission of Inquiry.

Implementing these steps immediately not only makes sense on human rights and humanitarian grounds, but also politically. The NLD-led government, with its new and overwhelming mandate, will be at its strongest in its first year and more able to withstand any short-term controversy over unpopular but necessary measures. Failure to address the crisis will lead to continued suffering, human rights violations and deaths, much of which could have been avoided, and may also be more potentially destabilizing to the government in the long term.

In many areas, the ability of the NLD-led government to act to address key problems faces difficulties created by the limitations on its power in the military drafted constitution. Acting to implement these four steps is within the power of the government, if it chooses to act.

As organizations which responded to the call of the NLD and democracy activists in Burma/Myanmar for international support, we remain committed to helping to promote human rights for everyone in Burma/Myanmar, regardless of race or religion. We trust that now that you are in a position to act to promote human rights, you will do so.

*Signed by:* Actions Birmanie (Belgium), Association Suisse-Birmanie, Burma Action Ireland, Burma Campaign UK, Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Info Birmanie (France), Society for Threatened Peoples, Swedish Burma Committee