



Remarks by Kofi Annan, Chairman of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State - Press Conference -

Good afternoon.

Today and yesterday, we formally presented the final report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State to the President and to the State Counsellor of Myanmar.

We also met with the Commander in Chief, members of parliament, and the Central Committee for the Implementation of Peace, Stability and Development in Rakhine.

As we prepared our findings and recommendations over the past twelve months, my fellow commissioners and I have consulted widely.

We have engaged with political and religious leaders, civil society organisations and communities across Rakhine State.

We also met with Union ministers and Rakhine State officials, with communities of faith, non-governmental organisations, and with Myanmar's international and regional partners and individual experts.

Those consultations were the basis for the analysis, ideas, concerns and recommendations presented in our final report.

The establishment of the Advisory Commission in 2016 by the State Counsellor was a frank recognition that the situation in Rakhine has become untenable, and that fresh ideas and new approaches are urgently needed to end the recurring cycles of violence, poverty and radicalisation.

The importance of this task was both underscored and complicated by the attacks on security personnel that took place in northern Rakhine State in October 2016, which reinforced our determination to find durable solutions to the instability and insecurity that continue to blight the prospects of Rakhine State.

Tensions remain high and they risk becoming worse. Violence will not bring lasting solutions to the acute problems that afflict Rakhine State.

Nevertheless, the status quo cannot continue.

In that regard, I welcome the initial steps taken by the government to implement the interim recommendations which we issued in March of this year,

This work should be intensified to attenuate the anxieties that currently grip Rakhine State.

In developing our final recommendations, we have endeavoured to listen and learn; to carry out our mandate with rigorous impartiality; and to focus on the future.

If adopted and implemented in the spirit in which they were conceived, I firmly believe that these recommendations, along with those of our interim report, can trace a path to lasting peace in Rakhine State.

Allow me to briefly highlight some of those recommendations.

First, our recommendations address the low levels of socio-economic development in the State, including the limited access to essential basic services. Poverty is pervasive and diminishes everyone's expectation of a better life.

Our recommendations speak to the frustrations of the Muslim population, which feels especially vulnerable because it is deprived of documentation and the freedom of movement.

This is why we have presented ambitious steps on the central questions of citizenship verification, documentation, rights and equality before the law.

Although the Muslim community has legitimate concerns about the verification process, I would urge them to work with the government to address those concerns.

We are well aware that our recommendations on citizenship and freedom of movement touch on profound concerns of the Rakhine population.

Nevertheless, the Commission has chosen to squarely face these sensitive issues because we believe that if they are left to fester, the future of Rakhine State – and indeed Myanmar as a whole - will be irretrievably jeopardized.

This is the reason why we have made several recommendations to enhance intercommunal dialogue and reconciliation to reduce the tension among the communities of Rakhine State. We have also made recommendations aimed at strengthening cooperation between local communities and the State and central Governments.

This is a critical step for Rakhines and Muslims alike. Only in this way can they break out of the hostility that leads to the violence and despair that has blighted their lives for so long.

The report also provides recommendations on border security and bilateral cooperation with Bangladesh, including the pressing challenge of drug trafficking.

The security and economic prospects of both countries will benefit from better relations and cooperation.

With the presentation of our final report, the Advisory Commission on Rakhine has fulfilled its mandate.

Responsibility for the implementation of our recommendations now lies with Myanmar's leaders, institutions and people: the Union and Rakhine State governments; the national and state parliaments; religious and community leaders; and above all, the people of Rakhine.

We have suggested that the Government establish a mechanism to facilitate and track that process.

Guidance from the Union level must be matched by action at the state level, by local authorities, and the security services, whose powers confer upon them the responsibility and capacity to be a force for positive change in Rakhine State.

As we complete our task, I would like to thank the people of Rakhine State who have placed their confidence in us and engaged with us during our visits to the State. First and foremost, this report is for them.

I would also like to acknowledge the great dedication and tireless efforts of my fellow commissioners. They have done much of the work on the ground, including many consultations in Rakhine State.

They have shown commendable resolve. We have worked together in a spirit of frank and open debate with only one objective in mind: the welfare of the people of Rakhine.

I would like especially to express my deep appreciation to the State Counsellor, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi for her leadership in setting up the Commission and her readiness to meet and consult with me whenever needed.

On the occasion of my visits to Myanmar, I was graciously received by the President of the Union U Htin Kyaw who offered the Commission valuable advice.

The armed forces and other security services have a critical role to play in building a better future for Rakhine State.

I was pleased, therefore, that the Commission was able to meet and consult with the Commander-in-Chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and other senior officers of the Tatmadaw on several occasions.

Rakhine State faces complex political, economic and social challenges; they can only be surmounted through a sustained and coordinated effort by the civilian and military authorities - at the Union, State and the local levels.

However, the unfettered participation of all the people of Rakhine in the process of transformation that we set out in our report is indispensable.

They must be convinced of the need for change through an inclusive dialogue that builds trust among the communities of Rakhine State, which is the foundation of lasting progress.

The international community should continue to play a strong, generous and impartial role in support of the national efforts needed to help Rakhine move forward.

There are tensions between the Government and international community over Rakhine-related issues. These should not become a stand-off. It is possible to build a bridge to mutual trust and cooperation.

There is no time to lose. The situation in Rakhine State is becoming more precarious.

So my fervent hope now is that all concerned will follow through on the recommendations of the Commission without delay.

By doing so, they will ensure a peaceful, fair and prosperous future for Rakhine State and its people.

Thank you.