

**Statement by Charles Cardinal Bo, Archbishop of Yangon, Myanmar**  
(as received by email from the Cardinal)

26 June 2017

Dear Friends,

Greetings.

I am a pastor. I am not a professional in politics or international law. The terms and laws discussed by the international community are beyond my mandate. I am moved by human suffering. Moved by my faith vision of justice with compassion, I have been raising voice against all kinds of oppression in this country.

This nation has a great potential to provide a great future to her sons and daughters. But millions are now in poverty, millions in unsafe migration, forced into modern forms of slavery. Conflicts and displacements. I have never compromised on the rights of any people to their dignity. My faith has inspired me to raise my voice at a great personal risk. Even when many voices were muted, I have raised my voices against religious extremism, the plight of IDPs, treatment of minorities. I have opposed all the anti-minority laws.

The sad and the pestering <sup>1</sup> suffering of the people in Rakhine State has been one of my great concerns. This concern is shared by Pope Francis who has raised his voice on behalf of the Muslims known as 'Rohingyas'.

We continue to raise our voice on behalf of them. When as boat people they were perishing in the seas, I have pointed out the inhuman root causes of this tragedy. At the UN in March 2016 and again in the British Parliament in May 2016 I described the horrific persecution of 'Rohingyas' as an appalling scar on the conscience of my country. Recently when the report of the UN on the treatment of 'Rohingyas' we have appealed to the government to "Let the devastating report serve as a wake-up call for all".

Again, it is for legal scholars, and human rights experts, to determine how to categorise egregious human rights violations in Rakhine State, Kachin State and northern Shan State, and indeed throughout Myanmar. Even experts like Mr. Kofi Annan, the former UN Secretary General, advised all groups to be careful in use of terms. Allegations of 'ethnic cleansing', war crimes and crimes against humanity should be fully and independently investigated. The warnings of potential genocide need to be heeded. Therefore, I called "on the government of Myanmar to work with the international community to investigate the crimes reported by the United Nations, in a truly independent way that results in justice and accountability."

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<sup>1</sup> As received. This might be a typographical or syntactic error for "festering" - Network Myanmar

Myanmar as a nation faces many challenges. We are anxious that all parties pursue the path of peace. Democracy is not perfect but we are eager that **extreme positions and words** do not force a relapse into days when no one had any rights. Myanmar cannot live through another such spell.

The world is increasingly judging the government on how the IDPs and the minorities are treated in Rakhine. Myanmar government must move away from positions that are not conducive to peace and its good name in the international community. Those who support 'Rohingyas' are right in condemning all human rights violations but they too need to move forward maximizing peace based on justice at every opportunity. **Intransigent positions and words** may not further the cause of the victims for whom all of us continue to raise our voice. Continued pressure coupled with an openness to engage all parties is the way forward.

Myanmar is moving, not fast as the international community and human rights groups wish, but changes are happening. Peace Conferences are held where all stakeholders sit for dialogue. Inter-religious peace gatherings are gaining strength, side-lining the extremist elements. These steps are not perfect but encouraging signs. Let not words and categories stall the rebuilding process.

We need to bring all parties together in unity, not divide at this moment.

Let our actions and words help to strengthen the consensus building processes without sacrificing our commitment to the refugees, IDPs and persecuted people like known as 'Rohingyas'.

**Peace is possible – Peace is the only way**