

Statement on Rohingyas

February 21, 1992

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued the following Press Release on [full text]:

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/show.php?cat=1455&lo=d&sl=0>

Freedom of worship flourishes in Myanmar Naing-Ngan

Attempts to sow discord between Myanmar Naing-Ngan and Bangladesh will fail

Recently foreign broadcasting stations like BBC, VOA and other media have carried exaggerated and fabricated reports that a large number of Myanmar Naing-Ngan Muslims have fled to Bangladesh due to the repression by Myanmar authorities of Muslims in the Rakhine State and Myanmar-Bangladesh border areas. Moreover, attempts are being made to discredit the Myanmar Naing-Ngan using the so-called "Rohingya" problem. Biased and prejudiced personnel, from within and without the country, have enlarged the issue in trying to drive a wedge between Myanmar and Bangladesh as well as between Myanmar and the Muslim Community. Indeed, even broadcasts and news articles to the effect that Myanmar Naing-Ngan was threatening Bangladesh have also appeared.

In actual fact, although there are (135) national races living in Myanmar today, the so-called Rohingya people is not one of them. Historically, there has never been a "Rohingya" race in Myanmar. The very name Rohingya is a creation of a group of insurgents in the Rakhine State. Since the First Anglo-Myanmar War in 1824, people of Muslim faith from the adjacent country illegally entered Myanmar Naing-Ngan, particularly Rakhine State. Being illegal immigrants, they do not hold any immigration papers like the other nationals of the country. With the passage of time, the number of people who entered Myanmar illegally has become greatly inflated. In the present case, people who dare not submit themselves to the routine scrutiny of national registration cards by immigration officials fled back to the neighbouring country. It is not a unique experience for such occurrences regularly took [sic] place when immigration checks are executed. It should be categorically stated that there is no persecution whatever based on religious ground.

From the very first instance, freedom of worship flourished in Myanmar Naing-Ngan and religious persecution did not exist in the past, it is not practised at the moment and will not be done so in the future. Like all other countries of the world, Myanmar exercises its inherent right of self-defence in suppressing insurgents in the country. However, it needs to emphasize that the action has no connection with race or religion, but was undertaken to suppress armed terrorists.

The Union of Myanmar maintains good-neighbourly relations with all the neighbouring countries based on friendship, understanding and goodwill. Myanmar Naing-Ngan has never allowed organizations which have taken up arms against the neighbouring countries to be based on Myanmar territory and will never allow them in the future. Although some terrorist groups who are engaged in armed attacks and destructive activities against the Myanmar government are operating in the neighbouring countries, Myanmar Naing-Ngan has strictly

adhered to norms and principles of international practice. The Tatmadaw, with its noble tradition, does not torture or commit brutal acts against the people and has always scrupulously avoided acts of religious repression.

The Tatmadaw which has been established to protect the independence and sovereignty of the country does not entertain any intention of committing aggression against any other country. The defensive measures undertaken are solely for safeguarding peace and tranquillity of the country and the interests of the people and are not directed at any country.

Myanmar and Bangladesh governments are endeavouring to resolve the issue based on the 1980 bilateral agreement and in the spirit of friendship and understanding. Therefore, no problem of magnitude exists between the two countries. The issue of the incident at the border between the two countries as well as the question of the people who are presently crossing the border are being resolved through diplomatic means. Although the media has spoken of absconders numbering in tens of thousands, to date the official figure conveyed to the Myanmar side by Bangladesh is a little over 4,000.

Therefore no matter how much the unscrupulous elements in the country and abroad tried to deceive, fabricate and magnify the problem, which actually has its roots in the immigration procedures, their endeavours will surely come to naught. Likewise, attempts to sow discord between Myanmar Naing-Ngan and Bangladesh will also end in failure. Efforts to gain advantage by misusing religion will no doubt end in vain.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
YANGON
Dated. 21 February 1992.