

UN expert's final report: «Prospect of a brighter future for the ethnic groups of Myanmar is real»

GENEVA (17 March 2014) - The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Myanmar, Tomás Ojea Quintana, today presents his final report* to the Human Rights Council prior to the end of his mandate. He reflects on the progress the country has made during his six years on the mandate while highlighting the remaining challenges.

“During the course of my mandate, 1,100 prisoners of conscience have been released, independent news is being reported from within the country, free and fair by-elections have been held, and the Government is close to signing a national ceasefire accord with all the major ethnic armed groups,” Mr. Ojea Quintana says. “I want to acknowledge these achievements while highlighting the ongoing challenges to help keep the reform process on track.”

After a generation of internal armed conflict, the expert's report highlights the progress towards securing peace in Myanmar's ethnic border areas as one of the most significant elements of the transition: “Internal armed conflict accompanied by terrible human rights violations has blighted this country's ethnic border areas for over sixty years. Through improved monitoring of ceasefire agreements and more inclusive political dialogue involving women and the local community, I believe the prospect of a brighter future for the ethnic groups of Myanmar is real.”

Mr. Ojea Quintana looks at the widening space for the media and civil society, and contrasts this to the beginning of his mandate in 2008 when “people spoke to him in fear”. However, he expresses concern over new attempts to restrict these evolving freedoms which reveal the “controlling military mind-set” that remains in many parts of the State.

“We must not forget that Myanmar is only at the beginning of a transition and that more fundamental reforms, including to the Constitution, will be needed to keep the process on track,” he stresses.

The Special Rapporteur flags the release of over 1,100 prisoners of conscience as one of the major achievements since the new Government came to power in 2011, and calls for the Government to continue to work to secure the release of those who remain and continue to be detained, including for protesting land confiscations.

While the human rights expert concludes in his report that the reforms are generally heading in the right direction, he underlines that this is not the case for Rakhine State. Discriminatory restrictions on freedom of movement remain for the 140,000 internally displaced and the 36,000 in crisis affected villages, the vast majority of whom are Rohingyas.

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“Addressing the impunity for human rights violations in Rakhine State together with the marginalisation and discrimination against the Rohingya community remain the two fundamental challenges that the Government seems unwilling to address,” he says.

“A democratic society is not a society where the minority can be discriminated against. A democratic society is where the rule of law prevails and the human rights of all are upheld. This needs to be the destination for Rakhine State and the Government need to start planning a way to get there,” Mr. Ojea Quintana undercores.

A new Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Myanmar will be appointed by the Human Rights Council towards the end of March.

(*) Report can be accessed here:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session25/Pages/ListReports.aspx>

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Mr. Tomás Ojea Quintana (Argentina) was appointed by the United Nations Human Rights Council in May 2008. As Special Rapporteur, he is independent from any government or organization and serves in his individual capacity. He has worked at the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights. He was also the Executive Director of the OHCHR Programme for Protection and Promotion of Human Rights in Bolivia. Most recently, Mr. Ojea Quintana has represented the Argentinean NGO “Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo” in cases concerning child abduction during the military régime. Learn more, log on to: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/SP/CountriesMandates/MM/Pages/SRMyanmar.aspx>

UN Human Rights, country page - Myanmar:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/countries/AsiaRegion/Pages/MMIndex.aspx>

For more information and media requests, please contact Daniel Collinge (+41 22 928 9173 / dcollinge@ohchr.org)

For media inquiries related to other UN independent experts:

Xabier Celaya, UN Human Rights - Media Unit (+ 41 22 917 9383 / xcelaya@ohchr.org)

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