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Seventy-fourth year

8477th meeting

Thursday, 28 February 2019, 4.30 p.m.

New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Ndong Mba	(Equatorial Guinea)
<i>Members:</i>	Belgium	Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Dominican Republic	Mr. Singer Weisinger
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Germany	Mr. Heusgen
	Indonesia	Mr. Djani
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Peru	Mr. Duclos
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	South Africa	Mr. Van Shalkwyk
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation in Myanmar

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The meeting was called to order at 4.30 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Myanmar

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Bangladesh and Myanmar to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Shahidul Haque, Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Christine Schraner Burgener, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar, to participate in this meeting.

The Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Ms. Schraner Burgener.

Ms. Schraner Burgener: Since I began my assignment, nine months ago, I have visited Myanmar five times and Bangladesh three times and have taken other tours in the region and beyond. Eighteen months have now passed since the recent violence in Rakhine state forced hundreds of thousands of Rohingya and others to flee their homes, including across the border into Bangladesh. In the broader context of Myanmar's democratic transition, military and civilian tensions persist ahead of general elections next year and the peace process remains fragile, while the country struggles with the legacy of decades of rule by the army and, subsequently, fundamental issues relating to the protection of human rights.

With regard to Rakhine, in addition to accountability, I have underlined in my engagements the following steps needed: ending the violence in Rakhine, providing unfettered access to affected people, addressing the root causes and spurring inclusive and equitable development. I have witnessed at first-hand in my two visits to Cox's Bazar refugees living in extremely challenging temporary conditions with little sign of hope. While Bangladesh and host communities have been very generous, we cannot expect that to continue indefinitely. The recently launched United Nations joint response plan for 2019 to benefit both refugees and host communities needs urgent funding.

Meanwhile, I am concerned that the heavy fighting with the Arakan Army will further impact efforts toward the dignified, voluntary and safe return of refugees.

I have appealed to all sides to ensure the protection of civilians and to uphold their responsibilities under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. For refugees in Bangladesh, knowing that the United Nations and its partners are present at their places of origin will be a positive incentive for them to return. In developing durable solutions for those displaced within Myanmar, it is vital that the current positive efforts by Myanmar to draft a national strategy on the closure of camps for internally displaced persons address the underlying issues in Rakhine, including the question of citizenship and that of restoring freedom of movement.

Even prior to the fighting with the Arakan Army, the level of access was a problem. Access in the implementation of the memorandum of understanding between Myanmar and the United Nations Development Programme and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to support the creation of conditions for the return of refugees from Bangladesh was insufficient. That must improve in order to address the fragility of all communities in Rakhine. Any complementarity, especially at the regional level by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, in support of the bilateral efforts between Myanmar and Bangladesh will be crucial.

At the request of both Governments, I will continue my shuttle diplomacy and to engage all other regional stakeholders. I will also continue to encourage Myanmar's greater international cooperation towards the effective and holistic implementation of all the recommendations of the Annan Advisory Commission on Rakhine state. With respect to related key issues, I am in close contact at the highest levels on the steps that authorities are taking with a view to transparent and credible procedures. In my recent visits to Myanmar, I advocated a zero tolerance for discrimination campaign from top down. In addition, I will aim to coordinate and foster greater intercommunal dialogue in Rakhine state through my office in Naypyidaw.

Accountability is essential for combating impunity and fostering genuine reconciliation. Myanmar's independent commission of inquiry has responded positively to my recommendation that it should engage with United Nations human rights entities, such as the

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the fact-finding mission. There needs to be complementarity, including with the most recent Human Rights Council-mandated independent investigative mechanism. But national responsibility and ownership of accountability are also important, not least from the perspective of the victims in Cox's Bazar and throughout Myanmar. In line with the Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law, accountability should not be seen solely in terms of criminal liability. I therefore encourage various initiatives that give victims different kinds of voices and support projects that foster dialogue, as mentioned.

With regard to the peace process, we are witnessing in other areas beyond Rakhine, including Kachin and Shan states, setbacks in the complex peace process. In those areas too, many affected civilians require assistance and access there too has been restricted. Despite some positive steps towards an inclusive and peaceful solution, such as the 21 December unilateral ceasefire declaration by the Tatmadaw, tensions have escalated, including between the Government side and the signatory groups of the October 2015 nationwide ceasefire agreement. It is the responsibility of all parties to exercise restraint and avoid actions that can reverse the important gains of the peace process. I stand ready to help support that process. Some refugees from the camps in Thailand recently returned to Myanmar. It will be important to seize on such important confidence-building measures and to build momentum.

General activities related to the 2020 elections could add to the domestic complexities. In such an environment, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is evidently moving ahead carefully on democratic reform, as highlighted by recent efforts on the constitutional amendment. It will be paramount that reform issues address institutionalized discrimination. I am grateful that the Government of Myanmar agreed to and facilitated the installation of my small four-staff Naypyidaw Office in January, helping to reinforce the constructive cooperation that has been extended to me so far, as reflected in the access I have been able to enjoy.

We must collectively continue to build trust and work in partnership with the Government of Myanmar. I will continue to speak truth and help build bridges and

greater mutual understanding, including in support of the United Nations role in upholding international norms and standards. This requires confidence-building and regular communication with all leaders. While I share concern that progress has been slow, my first five visits to Myanmar have highlighted the enormous challenges that will require tremendous international support.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Schraner Burgener for her briefing.

I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar. It is very good to know that her office in Myanmar is up and running.

At the start, I apologize if I may have to slip away before the meeting is over. I am hosting an event for Brian Urquhart, who turned 100 today. Colleagues will know that Brian Urquhart was one of the original officials of the United Nations, working closely with very many Secretaries-General, and indeed was instrumental in setting up peacekeeping and also the International Atomic Energy Agency. I therefore ask members to forgive me if I need to step away for that event.

The Council has focused great attention on the events in Myanmar and particularly the Rohingya, and I think it is fair to say that it remains one of the most pressing issues before us. The forced displacement of several hundreds of thousands of people across an international border is bound to be something the Council needs to keep before it, and the alleged crimes against humanity committed against the Rohingya also deserve the most serious attention of the Council. I am also very grateful to the Special Envoy for setting out the situation across the country, which I think we also need to have regard to in the Council.

I want to start, if I may, on political developments. The United Kingdom is a long-standing supporter of the Burmese people's efforts to emerge from many decades of military rule and to transition to democratic civilian Government. As did the Special Envoy, we recognize that Burmese democracy is still young and fragile, but the upcoming elections next year will be an important moment and efforts to consolidate the democratic transition are ongoing. This is why it was very good to hear about the constitutional amendments.

As I said, we recognize that conflict continues across Myanmar, and the loss of life and displaced people that we have seen are also of great concern. I think that it is beyond doubt that a nationwide peace settlement that guarantees rights and security for all the peoples of Myanmar is also a very high priority. I think we should be clear about two particular things. It is the Burmese military that is the root cause of these long-standing problems. In our pronouncements, I think that it is very important that the Council make very clear that we, united, are on the side of all those in Myanmar who want peace and democratic change and that we will help them in that.

But I should like to concentrate on the Rohingya for the reasons I have outlined. We are very disappointed that more has not been possible and that there has not been more progress on getting the refugees back. That obviously includes creating the conditions in which the refugees feel able to go back, which is why the proposal concerning the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State became so important. I want to be clear that the United Kingdom is not ideological about the refugees returning home. They need to return home, but they can do so only on the basis of the principles, established by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), that returns are safe, voluntary, dignified and secure. We really want those principles to be upheld.

We know that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has taken a very strong interest in returns, and that is welcome. Possibly the Indonesian Ambassador will be able to say more. We know that the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance has been involved. We know that the Chinese Envoy has been making strenuous efforts. I repeat that we do not mind; from our perspective, we are not dogmatic about who helps the refugees to get back, but we do want to see the UNHCR principles adhered to because they are there for a reason. They are to ensure the safety of ordinary people.

I also want to pay tribute in the presence of His Excellency the Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh and to the generous support that Bangladesh has given and continues to give to the Rohingya in Cox's Bazar and on its territory. Bangladesh has made enormous efforts to help the Rohingya people, and we believe that the international community should continue to support Bangladesh in this.

To our mind, the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State remain the best blueprint for Rakhine. We will be very interested to see the Myanmar Government take three initial steps. We would like the United Nations coordinator's offer to develop a transparent joint implementation plan to be accepted. We would like UNHCR and the United Nations Development Programme to have unconditional and widespread access in Rakhine. They have had some, but it is not enough to make the proper assessments of conditions on the ground that could encourage refugee return. We would also like to see freedom of movement granted to those Rohingya who remain in Rakhine. That would be a good start and enable the international community to have a platform to offer support, and there is a clear will within the international community to do that, as I have said.

The Special Envoy touched also on accountability. I think this really goes to the heart of everything. First, it is essential for the refugees to have confidence that they can go home and that they will be secure. It is also essential because it is important to uphold the norms of international justice. I know that this is a difficult concept for some on the Council, but the scale of what has been done to the Rohingya Muslims and the allegations of crimes against humanity really mark this out as one of the most terrible events of this century so far. I think we need to keep that in mind.

I am very grateful to the Special Envoy for all her efforts to encourage complementarity between the different United Nations instruments and the Independent Commission Of Inquiry. I think that the more the Commission and Rosario Manalo can work with the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the better outcomes we will see there. I would like to conclude by saying that we remain committed to finding the way forward as the United Kingdom, and we remain committed to working with our partners on the Council, as well as with Myanmar, Bangladesh and the Special Envoy.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we would like to thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar, Ms. Christine Schraner Burgener, for her briefing to the Security Council. We appreciate her tireless efforts and those of her team with regard to the crisis in Myanmar, especially the Rohingya refugee crisis. We also welcome Mr. Shahidul Haque, Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh.

The Rohingya refugee crisis enters its eighteenth month as we meet today. Those refugees ran for their lives after having been eye witnesses to crimes committed against their relatives and neighbours. We grow increasingly concerned as the crisis persists, particularly because multiple minorities continue to seek refuge from Rakhine state in Bangladesh, given the deteriorating security situation in different parts of Myanmar. That represents a serious threat and might deteriorate further and thus place a greater burden on neighbouring countries, especially Bangladesh, which has generously welcomed more than 1 million refugees in the city of Cox's Bazar.

We are monitoring the developments of this issue and are fully committed to supporting Myanmar and Bangladesh to overcome the crisis. Our diplomacy is based on humanitarian action. That is why we constructively contributed to organizing and carrying out a mission for the Council to Bangladesh and Myanmar, jointly headed by Peru and the United Kingdom at the end of April 2018.

As a member of the Council and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, my country seeks to ensure that Myanmar implements the requirements set forth by the international community. We have noted that the Government of Myanmar has taken a number of steps to solve this humanitarian crisis since the end of the Council's mission, including holding meetings between officials from Bangladesh and Myanmar, signing memorandums of understanding and establishing an investigative mechanism regarding violations of human rights. Those are good, positive steps, but they have yet to be implemented.

The requirements and steps set forth by the Security Council in its presidential statement S/PRST/2017/22, as well as the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, are clear and specific. They aim to address the root causes of the crisis, end the suffering of refugees and ensure their voluntary, safe and dignified return to their homes in Myanmar. The recommendations include closing all internally displaced persons camps; allowing all those in Rakhine state to move freely, safely and unhindered; allowing United Nations agencies and partners unconditional access to all parts of Rakhine state; taking the necessary measures to combat incitement to violence and hatred, while ensuring peace and harmony among all communities under the rule of law; conducting independent and transparent investigations into

crimes and violations committed against the Rohingya minority in Rakhine state; eliminating the root causes of the Rohingya minority crisis without discrimination and regardless of race or religion, while granting them their inherent right to citizenship, as stressed in General Assembly resolution 72/248, which calls for granting full citizenship to the Rohingya minority; and, lastly, starting comprehensive socioeconomic reforms, while making efforts to address the root causes of the Rohingya refugee crisis.

Kuwait stresses the need for the Council to closely monitor this crisis in order to urge and encourage the Government of Myanmar to engage constructively towards reaching a comprehensive, just and definitive solution that would grant the Rohingya minority their right to citizenship, while ensuring their safety and respect for all their human rights. We welcome the efforts made by neighbouring countries in their dialogue with Myanmar. We thank them for those efforts, which complement other efforts by the international community.

As we are moving to informal consultations after this meeting, I will stop at this point and add further comments and enquiries during consultations in the closed meeting. However, before concluding, I sincerely thank you, Mr. President, for presiding over the Council this month. Your presidency has been exceptional. We also wish all the best to France and the French delegation in presiding over the Council during March.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Ms. Schraner Burgener, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar, for her briefing. We commend her efforts. China will continue to support her in working constructively with Myanmar and Bangladesh to achieve progress in the settlement of the issue of Rakhine state.

Thanks to the joint efforts of the countries concerned, countries of the region and the United Nations, we have seen progress recently in the settlement of the Rakhine issue. Myanmar and Bangladesh were visited this year by Special Envoy Schraner Burgener and held in-depth consultations on the issue. The two countries have actively verified voluntary returnees and have made arrangements for the fourth joint working group meeting. The Government of Myanmar has committed to gradually shutting down the Rakhine internally displaced persons camp and issuing legal identity documents to those repatriated.

As prompted by Special Envoy Schraner Burgener, Myanmar has undertaken to simplify the application process for legal documents. The Myanmar Government has continued to implementing the tripartite memorandum of understanding, signed with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme, and approved the quick-impact development projects the two agencies are to carry out in Rakhine state.

Turning to the alleged human rights violations, the independent commission of inquiry on Rakhine state held a sixth meeting at the end of January. The commission decided to officially collect information from the public regarding human rights violations. The Bangladeshi Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Cox's Bazar local Government have registered a total of more than 60,000 people currently seeking refuge and waiting to be repatriated, and they are communicating with Myanmar on their repatriation.

The issue of Rakhine state is a legacy issue. Its resolution lies in tackling both its symptoms and its root causes. The top priority is to enable an early return of those currently stranded in Bangladesh, which is the only realistic and viable way to alleviate the Rakhine state crisis. To that end, China has proposed an approach with three phases, namely, the cessation of violations, repatriation and development. We have twice facilitated informal tripartite meetings between China, Myanmar and Bangladesh, during which three important points of consensus emerged on the issue of repatriation, pushing the two countries to address the matter through dialogue and negotiation. That has been widely acknowledged and supported by the international community, including countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Ambassador Sun Guoxiang, Special Envoy for Asian Affairs of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has visited Myanmar and will visit Bangladesh in early March. He will have in-depth exchanges with the two countries on the issue of Rakhine state with a view to fostering mutual trust between the two countries so that concrete measures can be taken as soon as possible.

China is very concerned about the humanitarian situation of the people in Rakhine state and has actively provided humanitarian assistance to both countries.

A total of 1,100 housing units have been delivered to Myanmar in order to improve local conditions for settling returnees. In addition, China has provided Bangladesh with ¥20 million in food aid. We will continue to do our part to contribute to the settlement of the issue of Rakhine state. The issue of Rakhine state is essentially one that concerns Myanmar and Bangladesh; as such, it is up to those two countries to work out a solution.

Countries of the region, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the United Nations can provide positive and constructive assistance. Late last year, the ASEAN Secretary-General, Mr. Lim Jock Hoi, conducted an inspection tour of northern Rakhine. The ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management recently sent a needs-assessment team to Myanmar to support the repatriation work by the Government. China commends ASEAN for its important role and active efforts in search of a solution to the issue of Rakhine state.

The international community should encourage Myanmar and Bangladesh to strengthen dialogue and achieve early repatriation of the first batch of displaced persons so that all those currently seeking refuge can return to their homes as soon as possible. Issues of interest to the international community in the process of repatriation, such as freedom of movement, citizenship and accountability, need to be addressed gradually and properly. Insisting on setting preconditions for repatriation will only render such solutions out of reach.

Development is the fundamental way to resolve the issue of Rakhine state, which has abundant resources yet its development lags behind. The international community should increase support for investment in Rakhine state to help local communities eliminate poverty and promote development to achieve stability. China supports the United Nations playing a greater role in that regard.

Council members should remain united and avoid applying undue pressure, therefore playing a constructive role in promoting a bilateral settlement of the issue by Myanmar and Bangladesh. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme should step up their coordination with the Myanmar Government and steadily implement the tripartite agreement.

The international community should continue to be patient and create an environment conducive to

the implementation by the two countries of bilateral repatriation agreements and advance the settlement of practical issues with a view to achieving long-term peace, stability and development in Rakhine state.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): It would be remiss of me if I did not express my delegation's appreciation to you, Mr. President, and your team for your excellent leadership of the presidency this month. I must say that I am jealous that you had only 28 days in your position, while I am going to have 31 days later in the year. I would also like to extend a welcome to the French delegation for the forthcoming presidency and to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting.

Allow me to thank Her Excellency Ms. Christine Schraner Burgener, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar, for her briefing today. We know that she has conducted a lot of shuttle diplomacy, as she mentioned, and exerted untiring efforts to try to reach an amicable solution to this very difficult situation. Her briefing today is critical for members of the Security Council to better understand the current situation on the ground. It also serves to update us on the progress of the good offices of the Secretary-General in addressing the situation concerning Myanmar.

As Indonesia has always maintained, it is crucial that the international community extend its full support for a sustainable and comprehensive solution in the country, as outlined in the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, formerly led by Kofi Annan. Against that backdrop, allow me to share three key points regarding our efforts to seek a lasting solution to this critical issue.

First, and most important, we wish to highlight the humanitarian crisis. I wish to take a moment to commend Bangladesh for its efforts and generosity in providing humanitarian assistance for the refugees. Nonetheless, it is really of grave concern that we are yet to see significant improvement on this matter. One and a half years since the crisis escalated, hundreds of thousands of refugees are still in the camp awaiting our assistance.

We must therefore make sure that the pressing humanitarian crisis faced by the refugees in Cox's Bazar and in internally displaced persons camps remains our guiding compass and top priority. We should prioritize and step up our efforts to ensure the voluntary, safe and dignified return of the refugees. That will require the commitment and support of all to create a conducive

and enabling environment, including the provision of security guarantees, freedom of movement and access to basic services for the people so that there is confidence to return. Those are all important factors.

It is also imperative to create inclusive and sustainable economic development in Rakhine state in order to ensure the sustainability of the solution. Investment and other assistance would certainly help as well. In that context, we urge the effective implementation of the framework for cooperation as agreed by Myanmar, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme.

Secondly, we wish to highlight the importance of constructive engagement. Indonesia is fully aware that these undertakings require close engagement with all stakeholders. For that reason, Indonesia's Foreign Minister, Mrs. Retno Lestari Priansari Marsudi, has conducted a series of meetings with key interlocutors in the region. Just a few weeks ago, as part of that process, the Foreign Minister travelled to Bangladesh to meet with her counterpart, where they agreed that the focus will be on repatriation. A meeting was also held with senior officials from Myanmar, which focused on the important role to be played by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the repatriation process. The Foreign Minister also communicated with the Special Envoy following her series of meetings with Bangladesh and Myanmar. In short, all those endeavours are intended to build trust and confidence between all parties and to find durable solution to the problem. Trust is the missing link.

Thirdly, we wish to highlight the role of ASEAN. Indonesia strongly believes that ASEAN's involvement is important for achieving a sustainable solution in Rakhine state. Pursuant to the decision of the ASEAN leaders at their most recent summit, a number of visits by the ASEAN secretariat was conducted to Myanmar, in preparation for the involvement of ASEAN and its Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management. We hope that ASEAN's involvement will enable us to develop a clear picture of the humanitarian needs in Rakhine state so as to assist Myanmar in its efforts to solve the difficult situation on the ground, and that it will also help nurture confidence among all stakeholders. That certainly deserves the support of the international community. I have heard the call of many in the Council for ASEAN to play a key role. We appreciate that.

We are hopeful that progress is being made. One thing for sure, however, is that a durable solution to this issue requires a gradual and continuing process. We should prioritize the humanitarian aspect. No one, including ASEAN, will be able to succeed on its own in realizing that goal. It needs the support of all stakeholders, including those in the Council, the relevant United Nations agencies and the broader international community. As we have always stated, what is at stake is the well-being of the people concerned — and that should be our top priority.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): Allow me, first of all, to thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Ms. Christine Schraner Burgener, for her enlightening briefing to the Security Council, as well as for her commitment and untiring work to find a lasting solution to the crisis in Rakhine state. I would also like to welcome the presence among us of the Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh.

France remains very concerned about the situation of the Rohingya, whether they are still in Rakhine state or living as refugees in camps in Bangladesh. Despite some announcements, which are first steps, the actions of the Myanmar authorities on the ground remain insufficient. France hopes for more progress, particularly in three priority areas.

The first priority is humanitarian support for the Rohingyas and the internally displaced persons still in Arakan and for refugees in camps in Bangladesh. The Burmese authorities must immediately establish safe, full and unhindered humanitarian access to Rakhine state for the United Nations and all humanitarian actors. While the renewed tensions observed in early January following the attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army certainly illustrates the complexity of the situation, it remains essential to work on ways to establish permanent humanitarian access in order to assist the people still in Rakhine state. Rohingya internally displaced persons must be allowed total freedom of movement and full access, without discrimination, to basic services. Those essential conditions for the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of the Rohingya refugees have thus far not been met. We commend the exceptional generosity of the authorities and the people of Bangladesh, as well as the outstanding work done by United Nations agencies and humanitarian organizations.

The second priority continues to be the fight against impunity. We still have no guarantee that the commission of inquiry set up last summer is truly able to carry out independent, credible and impartial investigations. That is what we are seeking. The conclusions of the fact-finding mission, presented to the Council in October (see S/PV.8381) are unambiguous. We must act accordingly by cooperating fully with the International Criminal Court and the investigation mechanism created by the Human Rights Council. Serious violations against civilians, including women and children, cannot go unpunished. In that regard, we hope that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, will soon be able to report back to the Security Council on her recent visit to Burma. It is also essential that the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict be able to adopt conclusions on Burma and the other situations on the Security Council's agenda, and that the Council's recommendations be followed up with concrete action to benefit children and the fight against impunity.

Finally, the third priority concerns the recommendations of the Annan Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, in particular those on citizenship and equal rights. Despite the establishment of a committee to implement those recommendations, there has thus far been no tangible improvement in the situation of the most vulnerable communities. The Burmese authorities must demonstrate, through concrete measures, their willingness to restore trust between communities and provide a lasting solution to the crisis. Those measures should include effective access to public, health-care and education services for all persons belonging to the Rohingya community and freedom of movement for all communities.

For all those reasons, and echoing the remarks of previous speakers, particularly my British colleague and friend, France believes that the Security Council must remain fully mobilized to ensure close monitoring of the implementation of its presidential statement of November 2017 (S/PRST/2017/22). The dialogue established between the United Nations and the Burmese authorities, particularly since the arrival of Special Envoy eight months ago, must now be translated into a concrete improvement in the situation of the affected populations. In that regard, France reiterates its full support for the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General in the pursuit of her mandate.

In conclusion, I would like to express to you, Mr. President, and your team, our most heartfelt thanks and congratulations on your excellent presidency throughout the month of February.

Mr. Singer Weisinger (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): Since this is the last public meeting of your country's presidency of the Security Council, Sir, my delegation wishes to thank your delegation. It was an honour to have your Foreign Minister participate throughout the month. The debates that you organized had a great impact. I truly congratulate you. It was the second Council presidency in 2019 that was led in Spanish. As a result, many ambassadors have now learned the language.

We would first like to thank Ms. Christine Schraner Burgener for her detailed briefing on the situation in Myanmar and the latest developments on the ground.

The Rohingya crisis continues to affect nearly 1 million refugees in Bangladesh and the remaining Muslim Rohingyas in Rakhine state, who suffer from segregation and limited access to essential services. Ethnic conflicts are on the rise, the peace process is on the verge of collapse and insecurity has intensified, creating opportunities for armed groups to engage in illicit drug production and human trafficking. This human catastrophe on both sides of the border represents a threat to international peace and security and has generated numerous situations that require the immediate attention of the international community.

In that regard, the Dominican Republic reiterates its strong condemnation of the serious human rights violations and horrendous crimes that have affected the Rohingya community in Myanmar and recognizes the Council's responsibility to address the crisis and respond appropriately to it. The Council to date has addressed this issue on several occasions and in different formats. However, there are no clear indications of a sustainable and lasting solution that would allow the Rohingyas a dignified, secure and voluntary return to their territories.

According to published data, the current displaced and refugee population totals nearly 1 million people. The displacement has been generated by what is described as ethnic cleansing, genocide and atrocity crimes. Such strong and regrettable descriptions require action commensurate with their severity. The Security Council seems paralysed and inert, but the time has come for us to mobilize and act to prevent

further atrocities, protect vulnerable populations and ensure that perpetrators are held accountable for their actions. However, collective responsibility begins with individual responsibility.

It is also time for the Government of Myanmar to assume its responsibility to protect its citizens on its territory. We urgently call upon the Government to implement the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, which include, among other issues, the implementation of strategies for socioeconomic development, citizenship, freedom of movement, community participation and representation, intercommunal cohesion and the security of all communities.

It is also essential to fully comply with the memorandum of understanding, which will allow Rohingya communities a dignified and sustainable return that adheres to human rights standards and will ensure unrestricted access of humanitarian assistance to all displaced people. That will enable us to effectively mitigate the impact of this regrettable human and humanitarian crisis. The responsibility to ensure the dignified return of refugees lies with the Government of Myanmar, which must create the necessary conditions for the return of refugees with the cooperation of the international community, particularly United Nations agencies. We must remember that a solution is possible and that we must prevent a repetition of the failures of the past. Human rights and humanitarian principles cannot be applied selectively, watered down or disregarded.

I would now like to refer to another aspect of this crisis — the attribution of responsibilities for perpetrators of atrocities committed against the Rohingya population. There has been no type of investigation to date or access allowed for fact-finding. Access for the Special Rapporteur has been rescinded and journalists have been arrested for investigating and verifying crimes committed. In short, there has been no process of accountability.

Above all, we are concerned about the victims of gender-based violence, the degrading and cruel acts of sexual assault that have been committed against women and girls. Those levels of brutality and violence indicate a clear trend of using those crimes as a strategy to intimidate and punish the civil population. We urgently call for the launching of relevant investigations to identify those responsible for those horrendous acts,

so that they are brought to justice and we can avoid a situation of impunity with regard to these atrocity crimes, which constitute a serious violation of human rights and international law. It is imperative that significant actions be taken for these purposes.

According to the report of the United Nations fact-finding mission on Myanmar (A/HRC/39/64), the judicial system in Myanmar cannot conduct a just and independent investigation—a process that undoubtedly will have to be led by the international community. All options should be considered, including a referral to the International Criminal Court. It is imperative that a clear signal be sent to other Governments that might be tempted to follow that path of military brutality and violation of rights.

The Council must assume its responsibility and agree to a constructive and coordinated process and use all the tools at its disposal in the interest of achieving tangible progress and a lasting settlement of this crisis, a process that links with the Government of Myanmar and with continued support for a process of accountability. That link is essential. The isolation of the Government does not produce positive effects in the eradication of the root causes of this crisis. On the contrary, it could exacerbate the underlying factors of the crisis.

Last but not least, the Dominican Republic would like to acknowledge the efforts undertaken by the Government of Bangladesh. We call on the international community, especially Council members, to continue to support Bangladesh in that task.

Myanmar is a cruel reality that represents an affront to the international community, which, because of a lack of consensus, to date has not taken action. The Rohingyas, the entire population of Myanmar and the whole world is watching us. The time for action has arrived.

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytsverve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Special Envoy, Ms. Schraner Burgener, for the information she provided and assure her of our full support for her work.

I would like to convey three messages: first, the urgency of full humanitarian access; secondly, the crucial importance of justice for lasting peace; and, thirdly, the need to tackle the root causes of the conflict.

First, we urge the Myanmar authorities to grant full humanitarian access to the relevant United Nations

agencies. Almost a year has passed since the signing of the memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Development Programme and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the progress unfortunately remains too slow. We call on the United Nations and other humanitarian partners to pay particular attention to the specific needs of women and girls in all assessments and in the planning and delivery of humanitarian assistance and to make specialized medical and psychosocial services available to victims of sexual violence. We commend the region for the initiatives undertaken. Belgium congratulates the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in particular for establishing the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance. That comprehensive mechanism builds upon multilateral efforts, in particular those of the Council and the specialized United Nations agencies. I would also like to express my gratitude for the solidarity shown by Bangladesh to the Rohingya refugees.

Secondly, with regard to the fight against impunity, just a few months ago, the Chairperson of the independent international fact-finding mission on Myanmar mission in this Chamber described the situation in Rakhine state as ongoing “genocide” (see S/PV.8381). The disproportionate actions of the Tatmadaw in August 2017 could constitute the most serious crimes under international law. Those crimes cannot go unpunished. These events took place in a climate of extreme discrimination against the Rohingya and should be credibly investigated and prosecuted without delay by the competent authorities of Myanmar. I wish to recall the fact that the Council has the authority to refer these events to the International Criminal Court. If justice is not delivered, then sooner or later the matter will be on our table. How can we expect refugees to return to a region where criminals hold on to their positions and enjoy total impunity?

Thirdly, Belgium stresses the need to tackle the deep roots of the conflict so that refugees can return in a safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable manner. The recommendations of Kofi Annan’s report provide clear guidance in that regard. We call for their urgent implementation. A peaceful and fair situation is one in which human rights are protected, without discrimination, including the freedom of movement. It is also a situation where access to basic services is guaranteed.

Finally, it is also a situation where equal access to full citizenship is upheld. We welcome the signing of the joint communiqué on the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence and call on the Government to implement the commitments it has undertaken. I would also like to stress the importance of the freedom of expression and call for the release of the two Reuters journalists.

Belgium will continue to closely monitor developments on the ground. We encourage the Myanmar authorities to take the actions expected of them to facilitate peaceful coexistence in Myanmar.

(spoke in Spanish)

Before I conclude, I would also like to congratulate and thank you, Mr. President, for your excellent presidency of the Security Council this month.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): Allow me to start with words of appreciation, since this is the last open discussion in this Chamber under your leadership, Mr. President. I would like to express my appreciation to you, Sir, and your team. I commend you personally, as well as your colleagues, for your leadership, creativity and professionalism. It has been a pleasure to work with Equatorial Guinea during this very busy month.

Allow me also to thank our guest, Special Envoy Christine Schraner Burgener, for her informative briefing. She can count on our support. We appreciate her efforts to find a durable solution to the crisis in Rakhine state. Again, we are very pleased.

I would also like to very warmly welcome Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque and commend the authorities of Bangladesh for the generosity extended to the refugees from Rakhine state.

Poland believes that our primary goal as members of the Security Council should be to seek comprehensive and durable solutions that address the root causes of the problems in Myanmar, including the elimination of statelessness, discrimination and underdevelopment, as outlined in the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State. The ongoing Rohingya crisis requires close cooperation among all relevant actors, with special responsibility falling on the Government of Myanmar.

We repeatedly underline the need to establish conditions conducive to the safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return and reintegration of displaced

persons to Rakhine state. We hope that the Government will proceed with easing restrictions on freedom of movement in order to facilitate access for all communities to livelihood opportunities, education, health care and other services. We have not forgotten the responsibility of the Myanmar military to ensure the protection of all civilians without discrimination and to fully observe its international human rights obligations.

There are legitimate concerns that the Myanmar authorities are backtracking on their commitments to addressing the Rohingya refugee crisis. Just a couple of days ago, we were able to learn through media reports that the highest-ranked officer in the Myanmar military denies the fact that the army systematically persecuted the Rohingya Muslim minority, claiming that any allegation in that respect is an insult to his country's honour. If this man refuses to believe the eyewitness testimony of thousands of raped women and orphaned children who fled for their lives and found shelter in Cox's Bazaar, how can we believe official Government rhetoric on bringing perpetrators to justice? Is there any hope left for any scraps of accountability? We call upon the Government of Myanmar and the security forces to ensure that security, rule of law and accountability prevail in the country, including in Rakhine, Kachin and Shan states. In this manner we also hope that the postponed visit of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Mr. Filippo Grandi, to Rakhine will finally take place immediately after the conditions on the ground are assessed as enabling such visit.

We further reiterate the call on the Myanmar Government to take all measures to defuse tensions between communities and grant full, safe and unconditional humanitarian access without delay. In this regard, we look forward to any progress in the implementation of the arrangement between Myanmar and Bangladesh on the return of displaced persons from Rakhine state and the memorandum of understanding signed by Myanmar, the UNHCR and the United Nations Development Programme. We have not forgotten about the two Reuters journalists jailed and sentenced for investigating the killing of Rohingya villagers in Rakhine state and call on officials for their immediate and unconditional release.

In conclusion, I wish to underline that we have not forgotten that Myanmar remains a country with a fragile economy and prone to natural disasters and that its internal capabilities need to be further developed. We are aware that rebuilding Rakhine will be a long

process. We therefore offer our support and call on the international community to focus on developing a long-term strategy to assist Myanmar in a rebuilding process.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Like the speakers who have preceded me, and as this is the last public meeting over which you preside, Mr. President, I should like first of all to express to you and your team the warm congratulations of my delegation on the dexterity and wisdom with which you have conducted the work of the Security Council throughout the month of February. I would also like to congratulate Ms. Christine Schraner Burgener, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Myanmar, for her informative briefing, which once again challenges the Council on the situation in that country.

The issues of Rohingya internally displaced persons and refugees and of human rights, particularly in Rakhine state, remain a source of concern for the international community. Indeed, the precarious security situation in the north of the state makes humanitarian access and refugee return difficult. In this regard, Côte d'Ivoire calls for the effective implementation of the tripartite agreement signed on 6 June 2018 with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Development Programme. This agreement is a necessary step towards establishing a framework for cooperation between the United Nations and the Government in order to create conditions conducive to the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable repatriation of refugees and to help create improved and resilient livelihoods for all communities living in Rakhine state. Similarly, Côte d'Ivoire invites the Government of Myanmar to strengthen its cooperation with Bangladesh on the repatriation of refugees.

My country would like to commend the mobilization of the international community in support of vulnerable and affected communities. This mobilization has resulted in the campaign launched in recent weeks in Geneva upon the initiative of UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration, the World Food Programme and non-governmental organizations, in order to raise the necessary funds to provide assistance to more than 900,000 refugees from Myanmar and 300,000 people in host communities in Bangladesh. It is appropriate to commend the efforts of the Government of Japan, which recently decided, in coordination with eight United Nations agencies, to fund emergency assistance,

protection, confidence-building and crisis resilience projects in Shan, Kachin and Rakhine States.

On the strength of its commitment to the respect and protection of human rights, my country would like to commend the efforts made by the stakeholders to implement the findings of the fact-finding mission, including the establishment of the Independent Commission of Enquiry. In this regard, it calls on the international community to take the necessary measures to bring to justice the perpetrators of human rights violations committed, in particular against women and children, before the competent courts.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its support for Ms. Christine Schraner Burgener and urges the international community to increase its assistance to refugees through adequate funding of the United Nations joint response plan.

Mr. Van Shalkwyk (South Africa) We would like to thank the Special Envoy, Ms. Christine Schraner Burgener, for her informative briefing following her recent visit to the region. We also wish to commend Ms. Burgener for her continued efforts aimed at finding solutions to this crisis, including through engagement with all parties. We would also like to acknowledge the presence of the Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh and again extend our thanks to his Government for the sterling work they are doing in hosting the refugees in his country. We also acknowledge the presence of the representative of Myanmar.

At the outset, South Africa condemns the deadly attacks and violence that took place in Rakhine state in January 2019. It is of paramount importance that the parties immediately cease all acts of violence that can only serve to further perpetuate the crisis and prolong and worsen the unbearable human suffering that it has brought about. On this point, South Africa remains deeply concerned by the serious humanitarian crisis that persists, affecting inter alia almost 1 million Rohingya refugees, including women and children.

South Africa commends the efforts of the Government of Bangladesh and host communities in Bangladesh in assisting these vulnerable persons, and calls on the Government of Myanmar to work with all relevant actors including the United Nations to urgently facilitate the conditions that will allow a voluntary return of displaced persons to take place in conditions of safety and dignity.

We appreciate the positive developments reported to us by Ms. Schraner Burgener, which, in summary were that, first, she has been given permission to open an office in the capital, Naypyidaw; secondly, there are processes under way to discuss constitutional amendments; thirdly, the verification process has been shortened from two years to five months; and, fourthly, the Myanmar authorities have allowed Ms. Schraner Burgener to have more access to all parties and travel more freely around Myanmar. We must also express our appreciation for the efforts of China, India and Japan and their contributions to the construction of transit camps.

It is evident from the Special Envoy's briefing and reports that the humanitarian crisis is being perpetuated by the lack of access to life-saving humanitarian assistance, including restrictions on access to health care, education and other essential services, as well as on ways to make a decent living and live a full life. In that regard, South Africa encourages the Government of Myanmar to fully implement the memorandum of understanding signed on 6 June 2018 with the United Nations Development Programme and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to address those challenges. In that regard, it is also critical that those agencies receive the necessary resources to allow them to address the humanitarian crisis.

The Council should also take on board the views of India, China, Japan, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, as well as all other interested parties, across religious lines, to facilitate unity among the people of Myanmar. We should also pay attention to the plight of other ethnic minorities.

In conclusion, we wish to reiterate that the only sustainable solution to the crisis is a negotiated, inclusive, fair political settlement, which puts the interests and well-being of all communities, including the Rohingya people, front and centre, and allows for the essential processes of truth, justice and reconciliation, towards lasting peace and healing.

Lastly, we would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Equatorial Guinea for its excellent presidency and the manner in which it has elevated the interests of our continent during the past month. Sir, you have made us proud and inspired us with your commitment and the vigour with which you have undertaken your work and conducted yourself. It has been a pleasure and honour to work under your guidance.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): Let me too start by expressing my gratitude for the briefing the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar. I commend her for all her efforts over the past month. As I said earlier today, with regard to the new Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Syria (see S/PV.8475), it is so important that he be in contact with all of the parties involved. From what has been said and what we have heard, I congratulate Ms. Schraner Burgener on building the necessary contacts to open her Office in the capital of Myanmar. As we know, Myanmar is a rather reclusive country. Entering the country and being accepted as a partner is very important.

I would also like to recognize the positive steps that have been taken. However, I would like to again touch on remarks made by my Kuwaiti colleague in his intervention. He recalled the trip that the Security Council made last year to see at first hand the conflict, the suffering of the people and the situation in Cox's Bazar. We must admit that almost one year later, we have made hardly any progress. I would also echo those who have expressed gratitude to Bangladesh. I would like to thank Bangladesh, through its Foreign Secretary. Bangladesh has a number of challenges in hosting the refugees and the fact that it continues to do so warrants our gratitude.

We are afraid that, perhaps in a year or two or three, we will still be meeting to discuss the refugees in Cox's Bazar. We have heard that the situation there is extremely dire. The risk is that those in the camps will radicalize and become more extreme. Under such circumstances, providing proper education to the many children living there is quite a challenge. If they are not educated, they will become radicalized. What kind of generation will grow up there? There are no jobs. We must therefore do everything possible to allow the refugees to return. When I say that we must do everything possible, it means we must have the proper conditions. There can be no alternative to the safe, voluntary and dignified return of the refugees. They must have their legal documents, including those that prove their citizenship, and they must also be able to move around freely.

I would like to touch upon one of the activities underlined by the Special Envoy — one which I believe is key — and that is taking into consideration the many ethnic groups in the country in order to establish a sustained intercommunal dialogue. We must strengthen mutual understanding among the various ethnic groups.

The Rohingya must be accepted on an equal basis with the other population groups. The hatred that the majority of the population has expressed towards the Rohingya must cease. I come back to what I said earlier today about accountability in Syria. There is no need for me to go into detail.

My colleagues from Belgium, the Dominican Republic and the United Kingdom have all stressed the importance of accountability. Those responsible for the terrible crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity must be brought to justice, including the military responsible for them. We have to make progress on the issue. The mechanism must be complementary. In that context and because women were especially targeted in such crimes, I fully support the proposal made by our French colleague to have Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, brief the Council on what is being done to alleviate the suffering of the victims.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my colleague from Indonesia, a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), for all of ASEAN's efforts. I think it is wonderful that ASEAN is active and plays a key role. I would also like to commend ASEAN's neighbours, in particular China, its largest neighbour, for their role. The representative of China said no pressure should be brought to bear. I would say that China should do its utmost to encourage the Government of Myanmar to do the homework the international community expects it to do.

I would like to thank the President of the Council and his team. I will not be long because we would like to go to your party later, Sir. You leave big shoes for the French and German presidencies to fill in March and April.

Mr. Duclos (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank you, Sir, for convening today's meeting and Ms. Christine Schraner Burgener for her briefing on her progress in addressing the serious plight of Rohingya refugees and in promoting justice, accountability and reconciliation in Myanmar. We also welcome the presence of Mr. Haque, Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh, as well as the Permanent Representative of Myanmar.

We note with concern the clashes that have taken place in Rakhine state between the Myanmar police and the so-called "Arakan Army". We condemn such attacks and regret the deaths, while at the same time deeming it

important to avoid any disproportionate military action that could lead to an escalation of violence.

Peru believes that we must not lose sight of the fact that the main objective of our efforts must be the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable repatriation of the more than 1 million Rohingya refugees by addressing the structural causes of the situation, which have made that community one of the most discriminated against in the world.

In that regard, we wish to reiterate our appreciation to Bangladesh for its solidarity and to the international community for its important contribution in supporting refugees and host communities. We believe it crucial that Bangladesh and Myanmar maintain an ongoing dialogue to prevent situations of distrust and a possible escalation of tensions.

I would like to mention three elements that we believe to be key. First, we must reiterate the importance of effectively implementing the memorandum of understanding signed with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme. A few months before the expiration of the memorandum, we must regret the limited results seen mainly due to bureaucratic obstacles and, recently, the new limitations on access to Rakhine state.

We recognize the efforts of the Special Envoy during her most recent visit to address the situation of the Rohingya who are in internally displaced persons camps. In that regard, we welcome the initiative of the Government of Myanmar to develop a national strategy to close those camps, whose effective implementation would send a positive message to the Rohingya who are in Bangladesh.

Secondly, the sustainability of those efforts depends mainly on the ability of the Government to bring about the profound changes that would make it possible to establish a truly democratic and inclusive society. To that end, the full implementation of the recommendations of the Annan Commission for the development of Rakhine state remains the main frame of reference.

Among the various recommendations, we stress the urgency of removing the restrictions on the freedom of movement of the approximately 300,000 Rohingya who remain in Myanmar and who cannot access adequate means of subsistence and basic services. We hope

that in the short term that will contribute to resolving the issue of citizenship. We recognize the regulatory efforts in that regard but we believe that greater and deeper changes are required.

Thirdly, we underline the need to carry out investigations into the human rights violations that have occurred since 25 August 2017. We hope that the efforts of the independent commission of inquiry, as well as those of the investigative mechanism of the Human Rights Council, contribute to the goal of achieving justice in that territory.

Among those efforts, we would also like to acknowledge the recent visit of Ms. Pramila Patten and the signing of a communiqué between the United Nations and the Government of Myanmar to prevent and respond to sexual violence in conflict. In that regard, we join the call of the Special Representative to adopt a law on the prevention of violence against women in accordance with international norms.

We also highlight the role of regional and subregional organizations, in particular the involvement of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, including through the Centre for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance, to address the situation. We believe that such efforts could be complemented by the United Nations.

Finally, I underline the need for our efforts to be translated into concrete progress on the ground. To that end, we reiterate the importance of the Council continuing its close attention to the situation and its full support for the work of the Special Envoy.

Before concluding, Peru would also like to congratulate you, Mr. President, and your team on having efficiently led our work in the month of February and to wish the delegation of France every success during its presidency of the Council, which begins tomorrow.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): I congratulate you, Mr. President, on Equatorial Guinea completing its presidency of the Council. I thank Special Envoy Schraner Burgener for her briefing and for her important work on Myanmar. I welcome the Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh and thank him for joining us and for all that his country has done for the Rohingya people.

The United States remains deeply concerned about the situation in Myanmar, especially in Rakhine

state. Progress on the ground has been limited. As our Vice-President said in his meeting with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, the violence and persecution by the military and vigilantes that resulted in driving 700,000 Rohingya to Bangladesh are without excuse. We agree with the assessment of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) that conditions in Myanmar are not yet conducive for voluntary returns and that the responsibility to improve those conditions rests with Myanmar.

The return of refugees and internally displaced persons must be voluntary, safe, dignified, sustainable and consistent with international principles. Returns should be based on reliable information about the conditions in the relevant areas of Myanmar. Unhindered access for humanitarian assistance, media and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is necessary to understand conditions in areas of return and to allow refugees and internally displaced persons to make informed choices.

We continue to urge the Government of Myanmar to create conditions for voluntary repatriation and to address the root causes of the crisis in Rakhine state. That requires improving the living conditions for those ethnic Rohingya remaining in Rakhine state, including a transparent and efficient citizenship verification process, freedom of movement, access to livelihoods, security reform, ensuring accountability and other key recommendations of the Annan Commission.

In addition, the Government of Myanmar's memorandums of understanding with UNHCR and the United Nations Development Programme expire in June. It is imperative that the work streams outlined in those documents be implemented. The international community is willing to help but must be allowed to do so with unhindered humanitarian, media and NGO access. We urge Myanmar to play a constructive role in resolving this crisis, including by ensuring accountability for those responsible for human rights violations and abuses.

The United States supports the multiple efforts and mechanisms at the United Nations to foster accountability for human rights abuses in Myanmar, including in northern Rakhine state. In addition to the Special Envoy's role, we strongly support the United Nations fact-finding mission on Myanmar.

We have monitored the expeditious operationalization of the independent investigative

mechanism for Myanmar, whose mandate is to collect, consolidate, preserve and analyse evidence of the most serious crimes. In addition, we have also called upon the authorities in Myanmar to resume cooperation with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar. This year we look forward to working with Member States on a General Assembly resolution that addresses the human rights situation in Myanmar.

For the 1 million ethnic Rohingya who fled the violence to Bangladesh, the situation is urgent. We applaud Bangladesh's generosity in continuing to host 1 million Rohingya refugees, and we will continue to seek creative ways to increase access to education, livelihoods and durable shelters for Rohingya refugees, while maintaining pressure on Myanmar to create the conditions necessary for voluntary repatriation.

The international community cannot ignore the world's largest refugee camp. We can and must take steps to effect change on the ground and to resolve this humanitarian crisis.

We again thank Special Envoy Schraner Burgener for her briefing, and we look forward to further discussions on these issues. We sincerely hope the democratic reforms and humanitarian efforts that the United States has supported in Myanmar will ultimately result in a peaceful, successful civil society and a new beginning for all the people of Myanmar.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We wish to thank Ms. Christine Schraner Burgener, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar, for her thorough briefing on the situation in the country. On the whole, we agree with her assessment and support the desire to continue shuttle diplomacy. We remain of the view that seeking to resolve the situation, including by ensuring the return of internally displaced persons and humanitarian assistance, must be done in a constructive and non-politicized way, above all bilaterally between Bangladesh and Myanmar.

We note that international assistance must be provided to both Bangladesh and Myanmar impartially, while respecting the sovereignty of both countries. We express the hope that dialogue will continue between Myanmar and Bangladesh, including with the assistance of the Special Envoy, all constructive-minded parties and the entire United Nations system, in line with their mandates. We note with satisfaction that the recent visit to the region by the Special Envoy was overall carried out constructively. Ms. Schraner Burgener is absolutely

right that it is necessary to build bridges, not burn them. She can count on our full support in that, as well as in building confidence and supporting direct dialogue between Dhaka and Naypyidaw.

We welcome Myanmar's attitude to developing constructive cooperation with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). We believe that regional organization can play a very positive role. A delegation from ASEAN's secretariat and its Coordination Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management visited Rakhine state at the beginning of February. The ASEAN Emergency Response and Assessment Team has begun its work, and we support those efforts. The activity of the independent commission established by Naypyidaw to investigate human rights violations in Rakhine is gradually gaining momentum. The foreign members of the commission visited Myanmar again at the end of January. We are glad that the commission has not refused to engage in dialogue with international bodies, as the Special Envoy just noted. The ceasefire announced on 21 December of last year by the military command is continuing until 30 April. As far as we know, the authorities are willing to hold a peaceful dialogue with the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army if it refrains from violence and separatist demands.

Issues relating to the peaceful coexistence in Rakhine of members of the various ethnic and religious groups, including questions regarding the granting of citizenship, freedom of movement, access to social benefits and so forth, should be resolved in the spirit of the recommendations of the Annan Advisory Commission on Rakhine State and should also take Myanmar's national legislation into account. For our part, we have consistently supported taking a balanced and non-confrontational approach to discussing the situation in this country and finding ways to normalize the humanitarian situation in Rakhine state, including solving the problem of displaced persons. We want to point out the systematic efforts that the Myanmar authorities have made to implement the Annan Commission's recommendations with a view to achieving a comprehensive settlement of the crisis. We would like to take advantage of the presence in the Chamber today of the Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh to once again pay tribute to the hospitality and patience of Bangladesh's authorities and ordinary Bangladeshis, whose efforts to provide the refugees with everything they need we should all support as actively as possible.

We greatly appreciate the steps that have been taken to establish the infrastructure needed in Rakhine state for receiving and accommodating future returnees.

We believe firmly that the key to resolving the refugee issue is to be found in the relations between the two neighbouring States involved. In our view, the legal framework agreed on by the parties and the existing coordination mechanisms between Myanmar and Bangladesh enable immediate practical steps to be taken on the issue. In our view it is counterproductive to delay the start of the repatriation process artificially and we do not support attempts to politicize the subject, which do not bring us any closer to resolving the problem of the Rohingya's return to Myanmar. We call on the United Nations staff on the ground to remember this. A great deal depends on their professionalism and impartiality.

At this point we consider it a priority to ensure international assistance in mitigating the worst humanitarian consequences of the crisis. We also urge the Council to remember that the underlying problems in Rakhine state are multifaceted and complex. They can be resolved only through peaceful political and diplomatic methods and by fostering a dialogue between the Naypyidaw and Dhaka authorities and representatives of all nationalities and faiths involved. We are ready to continue to assist the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh in resolving the situation regarding Rakhine in a spirit of equality and mutual respect. We once again urge all our colleagues in the Council and the States of the region to act responsibly and with restraint in order to avoid relapses into an escalation of the situation.

In conclusion, we would like to thank our friends from Equatorial Guinea, whose presidency ends today and who have worked very hard and productively this month, and we wish our French friends, who will take over tomorrow, every success.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I will now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Equatorial Guinea.

I thank Ms. Christine Schraner Burgener, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, for the concise updates she has given us on her trip to Myanmar and Bangladesh at the end of January. I also thank the delegations of the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Belgium, Poland, Kuwait, Peru, the Dominican Republic and the United States for requesting this important meeting.

We are concerned about the information in Ms. Schraner Burgener's important report on the continuing protracted delays in the voluntary return to Myanmar of the Rohingya refugees who have been in camps in Cox's Bazar and other parts of Bangladesh for more than a year. Despite all the support they have received internationally and from Myanmar's neighbour Bangladesh, the serious challenges presented by the living conditions in refugee camps mean that life there cannot be compared to a normal existence, and yet the refugees still resist returning to their places of origin. Another cause for concern is the very poor implementation of the memorandum of understanding signed on 18 May 2018 between the Government of Myanmar, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Barely two months after we joined the Security Council in January of last year, the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh, on the basis of their friendly relations and good-neighbourliness, signed an agreement on repatriating the people who had been displaced from Rakhine state. We believe it was an important step, but we were all in agreement that the return was voluntary, and that as the refugees' country of origin, the Government of Myanmar had to deal with certain issues in order to ensure their healthy, dignified and safe return. We also thought the signing of the memorandum of understanding between the Government of Myanmar, UNHCR and UNDP was important as a first essential step in establishing a framework for cooperation between the United Nations and the Government with the aim of creating the conditions for the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable repatriation of the refugees in Bangladesh and helping to improve the livelihoods and resilience of all communities in Rakhine state.

In a letter to the President of the Security Council dated 27 June, the Permanent Representative of Myanmar updated the Council on the progress that had been made and the measures taken to address a number of issues, as the Council had requested in May. In another letter, of 20 July, he again listed the developments and the Government's initiatives in the three main areas that the Security Council had identified, that is, humanitarian access, responsibility for human rights abuses and the implementation of the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State.

What we want is for all the essential basic requirements for the Rohingya's successful return to be addressed and ensured in a reasonable time, keeping in mind that hundreds of thousands of people from that ethnic group have been living for more than a year in very insecure conditions. If they have to remain in that situation any longer it will jeopardize the future of their children, who, like the rest of us in this world, deserve to grow up in decent conditions. In that regard, and without discounting the important steps that Myanmar has taken so far, including the agreements it has already signed and the written updates we have had from its Permanent Representative in New York, I want to urge the Government of Myanmar once again to redouble its efforts to ensure a full settlement of the problem in Rakhine state.

In the same way, we call on the countries of the region such as China, regional organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the United Nations and the international community to spare no effort in their support for Myanmar and Bangladesh so that we can at last ensure the normal and unhindered flow of humanitarian aid to the vulnerable population of Rohingya refugees, as well as their return to Myanmar, their country of origin, under humane and dignified conditions and with the necessary security guarantees to avoid any return to the previous situation that led to their displacement to Bangladesh.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Myanmar.

Mr. Suan (Myanmar): I would like to congratulate you for chairing this important meeting and for Equatorial Guinea's successful and commendable presidency of the Council for the month of February.

I thank Ambassador Christine Schraner Burgener for the objective and comprehensive briefing this afternoon and I would also like to acknowledge and welcome the presence among us of Mr. Shahidul Haque, Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh.

In the spirit of cooperation with the United Nations and as a demonstration of our desire to addressing the issue of Rakhine, we agreed to the appointment of the Special Envoy. We have provided her with all necessary support in discharging her mandate. We appreciate her tireless efforts and dedication in undertaking her mandate with objectivity and impartiality. The Special

Envoy has made five official visits to Myanmar in the nine months since her appointment. Her office in Naypyidaw is now fully functioning. We will continue to work closely with her in our effort to resolve the issues relating to the situation in Rakhine state.

Soon after assuming its state responsibilities, the National League for Democracy Government has placed a high priority on bringing sustainable peace, stability and development to Rakhine. We have been implementing most of the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, formerly led by the late Mr. Kofi Annan, which was set up by the Government voluntarily even before the humanitarian crisis took place as a result of Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) terrorist attacks. In the process of implementation, we identified five priority areas: citizenship, freedom of movement, closure of displaced persons camps, education and health. We are also finalizing a strategy for closure of the remaining displaced persons camps.

Some delegations previously alluded to the question of freedom of movement. The national verification card is the necessary step in the citizenship application process and also provides proof of residency in Rakhine state and facilitates freedom of movement. This requires the cooperation of people to apply for such cards, which is a totally voluntary process. Concerning humanitarian access, due to the present security situation in northern Rakhine state, access has been limited to certain areas, however humanitarian supplies can be delivered through the International Red Cross or through the Rakhine state Government.

The most urgent task of the Government at hand is to commence the repatriation process as soon as possible to resolve the humanitarian situation. We are ready to receive verified returnees in a voluntary, safe and dignified manner, in accordance with the bilateral agreements and arrangements with Bangladesh. We have proposed recently to Bangladesh that the joint working group resume its meetings in April. We are confident that we can make the repatriation plan a success if we both act strictly in compliance with the agreements.

On the other hand, we have been working with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to create conducive conditions in accordance with the trilateral memorandum

of understanding. We have agreed to implement 35 quick impact projects as soon as the security conditions permit. Another 36 quick-impact projects are under consideration. The project assessments will also be extended to other designated villages in northern Rakhine.

Moreover, we are also working with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to facilitate the repatriation process. We have invited ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management to dispatch a needs assessment team to identify possible areas of cooperation in Rakhine state to assist with repatriation. The terms of reference of the needs assessment team were agreed during the visit of the ASEAN Secretary-General to Myanmar in December last year. The ASEAN Emergency Response and Assessment Team will be sent to Rakhine as soon as possible. The presence of the ASEAN assessment team in the repatriation process will enhance trust and confidence of the returnees.

While we are engaging constructively with the United Nations in our efforts to resolve the multitude of challenges we are facing as a nascent democracy, some groups and countries in the United Nations system continue to exploit various United Nations mechanisms to exert discriminatory and illegitimate political pressures on Myanmar with malicious intent.

One vivid example, among many others, is the establishment of the Independent Investigative Mechanism on Myanmar by the Human Rights Council. That action is yet another step in a series of unprecedented discriminatory examinations of a member State. We strongly objected to the establishment of the Mechanism. The reasons are simple. The Mechanism was set up beyond the Council's mandate. It represents selectivity and a discriminatory and double-standard practice on the part of the United Nations human rights body. In addition, its terms of reference are very intrusive to a sovereign country's domestic jurisdiction. The Mechanism will only serve the political purposes of those who wish to exploit the Human Rights Council for their political agenda. Such intrusive measures, without the consent of the country concerned, will only further polarize different communities and exacerbate tensions.

Some members of the Council in this Chamber have just made reference to the report of the Human Rights Council fact-finding mission in connection

with accountability issues. In that respect, I would like to reiterate our firm position, as I did before in this Chamber on 24 October last year, that Myanmar has categorically objected to the fact-finding mission since its establishment. We also reject its narrative-based report.

The report of the fact-finding mission was totally biased and one-sided. Its investigation targeted only Myanmar security forces and excluded the violations committed by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). The report was prepared mainly on the basis of interviews and information gathered from non-governmental organizations and human rights groups. Moreover, the report fully authenticates the stories of Muslim displaced persons while rejecting any contradictory evidence. The fact-finding mission has ignored reports revealing massacres by the ARSA and has discounted its atrocities. Most importantly, the conclusions of the report are politically motivated and aim to inflict maximum damage on the image of Myanmar and its leadership.

The ARSA is alive and active. On 25 February, news media reported the death of one of the top ARSA military commanders, Nurul Alam, in a gunfight with Bangladesh Rapid Action Battalion at Muchuni camp in Cox's Bazar. Bangladesh local media also reported recently on abductions, murders, disappearances and rape committed by members of ARSA in 30 camps of Ukhia and Teknaf, in the district of Cox's Bazar. They are also threatening people who wanted to go back to Rakhine.

The Government of Myanmar has repeatedly stated that it will not condone human rights violations and will take action against perpetrators according to the law if the allegations are supported by sufficient evidence. Therefore, the Government of Myanmar has established an Independent Commission of Enquiry to investigate all allegations of human rights violations following ARSA terrorists attacks in August 2017 in northern Rakhine. The mandate of the Commission is to seek accountability and reconciliation. The Commission is carrying out its mandate with independence, impartiality and objectivity.

The Commission is also requesting access to the refugees camps in Cox's Bazar, in Bangladesh. We urge the Government of Bangladesh to facilitate the Commission's visit to the camps and to meet with the alleged victims of abuse. The Commission's work

will be evidence based. Therefore, the international community should support the work of the Commission.

The Government of Myanmar is willing and able to address the issue of accountability. Therefore, we strongly reject any move to bring the issue to the international judicial system. With this firm commitment and in the spirit of cooperation with the United Nations, the Government of Myanmar has signed a joint communiqué with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict to prevent and address conflict-related sexual violence. The Government of Myanmar has recently facilitated the visit of Special Representative Patten.

We have also been working very closely with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Gamba. The Government is now in the process of forming a ministerial committee on the prevention of the six grave violations affecting children. We conducted training on the six grave violations in December 2018. We have been cooperating closely with Special Representative Gamba.

The issue of Rakhine is not one of religious persecution, as wrongfully portrayed in the massive media campaign against Myanmar. Myanmar is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country where different faiths, including the majority of the Muslim population, have lived in harmony across the country for centuries. The issue of Rakhine state is a political and economic issue involving prolonged cross-border illegal migration since colonial times, poverty, a lack of rule of law and national security. The issue of northern Rakhine state is not a threat to international peace and security. The recent outbreak of fighting in north Rakhine state, ignited by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army's attacks against three police outposts, has further complicated the situation. It has also highlighted the urgent need to achieve a nationwide ceasefire agreement under the ongoing national peace process.

We are fully aware of the urgent need to solve the humanitarian problems, but we want to seek the Council's understanding of the practicality and possibilities on the ground. There are huge physical and psychological barriers that hinder the implementation of the repatriation, building peace and stability and development efforts. It takes time and patience, as well as courage, to build trust and confidence among

different communities in Rakhine. We want to resolve the issue as quickly as anyone.

While the primary responsibility to address the situation in Rakhine rests with the Government and the people of Myanmar, the objective and constructive contribution and support of the international community will be crucial to the success of Myanmar's national efforts. I wish to express our sincere appreciation to all our friends who are helping and supporting us in various ways to resolve the challenges in Rakhine at this critical juncture. We shall continue to work in good faith with the United Nations and with all our friends to end the suffering of the people of Rakhine and rebuild the state into a land of peace, harmony and prosperity for all communities.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh.

Mr. Haque (Bangladesh): We thank you, Mr. President, for giving us the opportunity to deliver a statement to the Council. We appreciate in particular the efforts of nine Council members in organizing this briefing. We also thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar for her briefing.

We appreciate the willingness of the international community, in particular the members of the Security Council, to resolve this protracted humanitarian and human rights crisis. At the same time, we cannot hesitate to express our frustration as nothing concrete has happened so far to convince us or the Rohingyas living in camps in Bangladesh that there will be an early resolution of the crisis, including the safe, dignified, voluntary and sustainable return of the Rohingyas to their homeland. Is there anything more disappointing than discovering that despite our wholehearted efforts, the repatriation cannot start due to non-conducive conditions in Rakhine state of Myanmar? Is Bangladesh being made to pay the price for being responsive and responsible in showing empathy to a persecuted minority group of a neighbouring country?

Bangladesh does not have any agenda or ulterior motive to support terrorism anywhere, in particular in Myanmar. We are successfully implementing our zero-tolerance policy towards terrorism and violent extremism. In fact, the problem of the Rohingyas is an outcome of a multidimensional and multi-layered geopolitical construct, with its genesis in Myanmar. It is the result of the decades-long state practice of deprivation, disenfranchisement and atrocities. Its

solution therefore has to be found in Myanmar and by Myanmar. It is most unfortunate that the Myanmar authorities are now accusing us of harbouring terrorists, which is a clear attempt to shift the blame on Bangladesh.

The Permanent Representative of Myanmar referred to certain incidents, concerning which we will report to the Council after the necessary verification at our end. In the face of such ridiculous allegations, we cannot but reiterate that our Government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, is firmly committed to not allowing any group from any other country to use our soil or resources for terrorism. The high level of alertness and effective prevention measures undertaken by law enforcement agencies, in line with our zero-tolerance policy, render it absolutely impossible for any terrorist outfit to be present in Bangladesh. In fact, Bangladesh has been providing enormous support to Myanmar over the past few years and conducted many combing operations against the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army. We have always reminded Myanmar of the potential risks of fanning the fire of extremism and stoking nationalist feelings to demonize the Rohingyas in Rakhine.

It is not only Rohingyas who are suffering; our own people, the host community, are also suffering through no fault of their own. The prolonged presence of the Rohingyas in Bangladesh has been posing formidable challenges and adversely impacting our economy, environment, social fabric and security. We are also faced with the threats of human and drug trafficking and radicalization, with further ramifications for the region and beyond. In order to inform the Council of what the local communities are thinking, let me refer to a January 2019 report of Ground Truth Solutions, an international non-governmental organization supported by Switzerland and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development that researches the views of people in crises. The report says:

“Their attitudes have shifted from the start of the crisis, where they felt much more supportive and welcoming of Rohingya but now are much less so, feeling that Rohingya have ‘been here too long.’”

The idea of the long-term hosting of Rohingyas by Bangladesh is not at all a viable proposition. Even if the repatriation started today, it would take another 12 years, based on the estimation that 300 Rohingyas would return per day.

In diplomacy, there is no such thing as an exhaustive list. Yet, I must mention that we have tried everything bilaterally with Myanmar for the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of Rohingyas and are now continuing our bilateral engagements despite Myanmar’s hollow promises and various obstructionist approaches. We have also engaged with regional partners. Yet, not a single Rohingya has volunteered to return to Rakhine due to the absence of a conducive environment there.

As to our friends in the international community who advocate a bilateral approach to the repatriation of Rohingyas, we would like to reassure them of our goodwill and genuine intent to resolve this crisis, following that path. But they must also fulfil their part of the commitment, as agreed by Bangladesh and Myanmar, on the scope and role of “interested international partners” in the return and reintegration process. Investing in Rakhine without guaranteeing the return of Rohingyas with basic human rights, is not likely to produce any result. The policy of appeasement is clearly not working here, just as it has not worked anywhere in the past.

Regrettably, as far as repatriation is concerned, the situation has gone from bad to worse. In a press release of 18 January, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Ms. Yanghee, Lee expressed alarm over escalating violence in northern and central Rakhine state and in Chin state. According to her statement, since November 2018 the Myanmar military has been engaged in heavy fighting, resulting in deaths and injuries to civilians and the renewed displacement of people. As a result, we have had an influx even of Rakhine Buddhists into Bangladesh. These developments only serve to corroborate what we have been saying from the very beginning of the crisis — it is about repression of all the ethnic minorities in the Rakhine state, not just Muslim Rohingyas, who have been the traditional focus of atrocity crimes. The Rakhine state Government has prohibited the humanitarian activities of international agencies in several areas, which has made the prospects of return by Rohingyas more uncertain.

I regret to inform the Council that Bangladesh will no longer be in a position to accommodate more people from Myanmar. Our priority is nothing but the safe, voluntary, sustainable and dignified return of the Rohingyas. This requires building confidence among them about returning. Some specific measures

on the part of Myanmar, demonstrating its sincerity about return, may be helpful in the short term. Let me mention a few.

First, Myanmar should address the accountability issue. Myanmar's own investigation processes seem to have failed time and again. Therefore, the existing United Nations mechanisms need to be operationalized.

Secondly, we must ensure the full implementation of the memorandum of understanding between the Myanmar Government, the United Nations Development Programme and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as well as of the recommendations of the Kofi Annan Advisory Commission on Rakhine State. We have been hearing that most of the recommendations contained in the report of the Annan Commission have already been implemented. Had that been so, I can assure the Council that the situation on the ground would have improved vastly. It is therefore very natural for one to ask why the Rohingyas are not willing to return voluntarily and why we are still seeing fresh arrivals up to this very day.

Thirdly, the existing camps for internally displaced persons must be dismantled. In these ghettos inside Rakhine, some 130,000 Muslim inmates have been detained for over the past six years in inhuman conditions. The several thousand Rohingyas languishing in the so-called zero line of the Bangladesh-Myanmar border must be taken back.

Although we expect the Security Council to maintain its custodianship so as to ensure Myanmar's compliance with the agreed provisions of bilateral arrangements for return with Bangladesh, the Council's pronouncements thus far have had no impact on improving the situation on the ground. Circumstances now necessitate concrete actions on the part of the Council before the situation spins out of control. In that context, we would like to make three specific proposals for the Council's consideration.

First, a new draft resolution must be negotiated to set out a regular reporting cycle as an oversight mechanism on the implementation of the recommendations of the Advisory Commission and progress in investigations of human rights violations.

Secondly, a select group of Council members, if not the full Council, should again visit the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar and Rakhine state to assess the

developments since their visit to the region in April and May 2018.

Thirdly, civilian-run safe zones must be created in the conflict-affected areas in Myanmar in order to ensure the safety and security of all civilians, irrespective of their ethnic or religious identity, as proposed by our Honourable Prime Minister in the general debate of seventy-second session of the General Assembly (see A/72/PV.14). The safe zones may be non-military and civilian in nature, administered by humanitarian and human rights actors, including from the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. If the Council agrees, we can provide further ideas in that regard.

As for the Special Envoy, we expect her to further intensify her efforts to attain her mandated goals, particularly the safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of Rohingyas to their areas of origin. We should not allow Myanmar to turn the clock backward on any grounds, and therefore we urge the Council to act in a decisive manner.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

Before adjourning the meeting, as this is the last scheduled meeting of the Council for the month of February, I would like to express the sincere appreciation of the delegation of Equatorial Guinea to the members of the Council, especially my colleagues the Permanent Representatives, their respective staff and the Secretariat of the Council for all the support they have given to us. Indeed, it has been a busy month, and one in which we have rallied to consensus on several important issues within our purview. We could not have done it alone or without the hard work, support and positive contributions of every delegation and the representatives of the Secretariat, including the conference service officers, interpreters, translators, verbatim reporters and security staff. It has been a very enriching experience for us and we apologize for any difficulties that may have arisen

As we end our presidency, I know I speak on behalf of the Council in wishing good luck to the delegations of France and Germany during their joint presidency in the months of March and April.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 6.40 p.m.