

**Key highlights from the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar Noeleen Heyzer's remarks at the ISEAS seminar: "In Conversation with the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Myanmar Noeleen Heyzer"**

5 September 2022

- Immediately after taking up my appointment in mid-December, I have held extensive and regular consultations with Myanmar's key stakeholders, focusing on early discussions with key figures of the National League for Democracy (NLD), the top leadership of the National Unity Government (NUG) and of key Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs).
- I then continued my engagement with the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) comprising elected parliamentarians; diverse civil society organisations and leaders, including women's groups and human rights activists; humanitarian organisations, such as the Myanmar Local Humanitarian Network; refugee representatives from diverse ethnic groups; Rohingya representatives; and youth.
- These wide-ranging discussions have been regular, constant and ongoing into the present day, which has been absolutely essential to stay informed about the situation on the ground, and to amplify the realities, priorities and voices of the people, especially of women, youth, and displaced persons.
- Affected communities across the country shared their first-hand accounts of the deteriorating ground situation, as military operations and atrocities have intensified, including aerial and artillery attacks. Many of the most vulnerable people, particularly women and children, have been forced to flee, some seeking refuge across borders to neighbouring countries.
- Amid these painful accounts of suffering, I have also been inspired by the courage, democratic aspirations and leadership of so many, including people from diverse ethnic communities, women and youth, as agents of change.
- Extensive consultations – the most important part of my all-stakeholder approach – are explicitly called for in the Special Envoy's mandate, which has seen consistent and broad support by Member States in the Security Council and General Assembly urging me to continue playing a bridging role and actively engage with key stakeholders in Myanmar, in the region and the international community.
- As distrust among stakeholders has only deepened, there is little space to advocate for the de-escalation of violence or to engage in "talks about talks" to address the political and multidimensional crises. Amid this backdrop and "zero-sum" calculation, armed

resistance has proliferated. The military continues its disproportionate use of force and has intensified its attack on civilians and increased operations against resistance forces, using militias and aerial bombings. Civilian buildings and villages have been destroyed by fire and internally displaced populations have been attacked.

- Building on relations with regional leaders, I have managed over the past months to strengthen cooperation with ASEAN and its Special Envoy. UN-ASEAN “complementarity” has been central to my efforts, highlighted in an unprecedented statement in the ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ retreat in February and most recently echoed at the US-ASEAN Special Summit in May.
- My close and regular consultations with ASEAN leaders, including its Chair and Cambodian Prime Minister, ASEAN Special Envoy, and all ASEAN Foreign Ministers have reinforced the importance of such synergy, as ASEAN leaders have welcomed my inclusive engagement with all stakeholders and the assessment of the ground situation based on first-hand accounts that affected communities across the country have shared with me.
- I continue to focus on the possibility of an UN-ASEAN cooperation umbrella for unhindered and safe delivery of humanitarian aid through all available channels. I have stressed that this depends on building a stronger, more equal and meaningful partnership with local humanitarian networks, including in border areas, to ensure aid is delivered without discrimination through greater access, localized and flexible funding, including for protection needs, and safety and security of humanitarian actors. These points were reinforced during my visits to the border area with Thailand, where I met many local actors working on cross-border aid, often the only ones who can go the final mile to ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable.
- I have repeatedly called for the immediate cessation of aerial bombings and a humanitarian pause in targeted areas to allow for effective and safe access, and the urgent delivery of assistance through all existing channels to address the multiple humanitarian needs and vulnerabilities.
- Reflective of increasing unity forming across ethnic and democratic lines, the EAOs and the NUG came together in an appeal for me to establish an “ASEAN PLUS” inclusive platform for engagement and problem solving, focusing initially on the emergency humanitarian situation that is a direct result of the political crisis.
- As I was continuing to meet with these diverse stakeholders, the conflict and violence were worsening, which made engagement with the SAC as a key party to the conflict and my visit to Nay Pyi Taw all the more important.

- My visit to Nay Pyi Taw meeting with the Senior General and his senior advisers was to convey the serious concerns of the United Nations and propose concrete steps needed to immediately reduce the conflict and the suffering of the people. My visit was part of broader efforts by the United Nations to urgently support an effective and peaceful Myanmar-led political pathway to return to civilian rule based on the will and the needs of the people, based on my mandate as an impartial actor to engage with all stakeholders in Myanmar, the region and globally, consistent with the principles of the United Nations.
- In response to my request to meet State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, the Senior General indicated the possibility of a meeting eventually. I am now very concerned about her health and well-being, and condemn her sentencing to hard labour.
- Immediately after the mission to Nay Pyi Taw, I travelled to Bangladesh for consultations with Prime Minister H.E. Sheikh Hasina and other senior Government Ministers, and to visit the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar. During my visit to the camps, I saw firsthand the resilience and determination of the Rohingya. The visit helped to reinforce international attention and solidarity with the Rohingya, heeding their direct request for me to engage with them and helping to ensure they do not become a "forgotten people".
- In recognition of the tragic reality that large numbers of people will be forced to flee Myanmar to seek international protection I will continue to call for greater urgency and responsibility sharing by the international community, including scaling up humanitarian assistance and durable solutions for refugees from Myanmar. I will also urge ASEAN Member States specifically to develop a regional framework for refugee protection as part of this responsibility sharing.
- In my recent visit to Malaysia in July, I had very constructive meetings with Prime Minister H.E. Ismail Sabri Yaakob, including on the importance of keeping international and regional focus on Rohingya issues...Soon after my visit, the Prime Minister made the very welcome announcement that refugees are now considered officially as a 'vulnerable group' by the Government of Malaysia, a very significant development given that Malaysia like many countries in the region has not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention. In addition, I continue to support the Malaysian Government in advancing refugee education globally and regionally, including through the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and the UN Secretary General's Transforming Education Summit later this month.

- While in Malaysia, I also had the opportunity to meet with representatives of several refugee communities from Myanmar, including Chin, Kachin, Mon, Rakhine, Myanmar Muslim and Rohingya. They shared with me the challenges of living without legal documentation, how every aspect of their lives is affected including access to healthcare, education and legal employment.
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- I wish that I could say that there was a clear way forward. But the reality is that there is no clear path out of this crisis and that there will be no easy solutions. While I will continue to do what is possible within my mandate, the limitations of the United Nations and the international community are also clear, and continued differences in positioning among Member States of the UN is also a fact. It is also true that political solutions ultimately cannot be imposed from the outside. Thus, I will continue to appeal to all governments, regional organisations and other key stakeholders, to listen to the will of people and be guided by that will.
- We cannot wait. A multidimensional catastrophe will emerge in the heart of ASEAN unless we as a regional and international community come together to seriously find new ways to support this Myanmar-led process towards an inclusive society and democratic future.
- If I ever visit Myanmar again, it will only be if I can meet with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.