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Statement by Adama Dieng, United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide on the situation in northern Rakhine State, Myanmar

(New York, 29 November 2016) The United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, expressed alarm at reports of the deteriorating security, human rights and humanitarian situation in northern Rakhine State, Myanmar. Following attacks by armed assailants against border security posts in October 2016, the response of the military has reportedly been characterized by excessive use of force and other serious human rights violations against civilian population, particularly the Rohingya Muslim population, including allegations of extrajudicial executions, torture, rape and the destruction of religious property. “These allegations must be verified as a matter of urgency”, stated Adama Dieng. “If they are true, the lives of thousands of people are at risk. The reputation of Myanmar, its new Government and its military forces is also at stake in this matter.”

The Special Adviser stressed that “the current restrictions on access to northern Rakhine State, which prevent verification of the allegations, are contributing to suspicion and alarm. Denying the allegations without allowing for their verification is counterproductive.” Mr. Dieng urged the Myanmar Government and the military to heed requests by the United Nations - and many others around the world - to authorise access and an immediate and thorough independent investigation into incidents reported in northern Rakhine state since October 2016. “If the allegations are found to be true, the Government must take immediate steps to stop them, prevent further violations and remedy the situation. Those found responsible for human rights violations must be punished. Failure to do so will only increase the risk of very serious international crimes that Myanmar has an obligation to prevent and punish under international law.”

Adama Dieng reminded the new Government of Myanmar of the trust placed in the Government by the international community as Myanmar transitions to democracy, noting that there have been significant steps forward in that regard. However, the Special Adviser underlined that “Myanmar needs to demonstrate its commitment to the rule of law and to the human rights of all its populations. It cannot expect that such serious allegations are ignored or go unscrutinised. Wherever and whenever these types of allegations are reported in the world, it is the duty of the international community to remind States of their responsibilities to their populations and their obligations under international law. Myanmar is no exception.”

Adama Dieng also took the opportunity to urge the Government of Bangladesh not to close its borders to refugees fleeing Myanmar. “Closing the border, deporting refugees or failing to provide assistance, exposes these populations to further violence that could, in the worst case, constitute international crimes”, the Special Adviser warned.

Adama Dieng concluded by saying that “the current violence did not come out of thin air. It is taking place against a background of very deeply rooted discrimination against specific sectors of the population and a failure to put in place conditions that would support peaceful coexistence among the different communities in Rakhine State. The Government needs, for once and for all,

to find a sustainable solution to the situation of the Rohingya Muslims and other religious and ethnic minorities in Myanmar, a solution that is in full compliance with the international human rights standards that the Government has pledged to respect”.

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For media queries please contact:

Claudia Diaz, Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect
<http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/adviser/>
Phone: +1 917-367-2061; Email: diazc@un.org