

Myanmar: New UN envoy offers to serve 'as a bridge', recognizes 'positive steps' over Rakhine state

Focussing on “listening to all sides” the new United Nations Special Envoy on Myanmar praised “recent positive steps” taken by the government and United Nations to try and ensure the eventual voluntary, safe and dignified return of Rohingya refugees, to their homes in Rakhine state.

In a [press statement to journalists](#) released by the UN [Spokesperson's office](#) on Thursday, as she concluded her first visit to the country, [Christine Schraner Burgener](#) said that in all her discussions with national leaders, she had “underlined the importance of accountability” which was “essential for genuine reconciliation.”

She called for “credible fact-finding measures and highlighted the readiness on the part of the United Nations and the international community to cooperate in this regard,” said the statement.

More than 700,000 Rohingya refugees are sheltering in camps across the border in Bangladesh, after being driven from their homes in northern Myanmar since last August.

In early June, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the government and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in Myanmar. The Special Envoy noted this was a particularly positive step, and expressed hope that the root causes of the refugee crisis could be tackled soon, “in particular ending restrictions on freedom of movement and granting citizenship to those eligible”, allowing safe return.

She also expressed her support for the agreement reached between Bangladesh and Myanmar last November, saying she would visit Bangladesh and the refugee camps soon.

During her visit between 12 and 21 June, Ms. Burgener met State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and Commander-in-Chief of the army, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, as well as conflict-affected communities and families in Rakhine state, together with some IDPs along the border.

She focused on listening to all sides to better understand their diverse perspectives with a view to building trust and confidence, and establishing positive relations – while promoting key UN principles, said the statement to journalists.

In all meetings, she highlighted the need for inclusive solutions that integrated the views and important voices of women.

She expressed “her sincere appreciation to the Government of Myanmar and

other interlocutors for their warm welcome and excellent organization of her visit", said the statement, which added that: "All interlocutors expressed their wish for peace and development in Myanmar, and shared their frank assessment of the challenges that they were facing. They conveyed their willingness to work closely with the Special Envoy and the United Nations."