

No one in Myanmar should be left behind on the path to a better future, stresses UN official

Protecting the most vulnerable people in Myanmar – whatever their ethnicity or religion – must be at the heart of the response to the humanitarian crisis in the region, the deputy United Nations aid chief has said.

“Regardless of their ethnicity, religion and citizenship status, we need to [...] ensure that [no vulnerable conflict-affected people are deprived](#) of safe and sustained access to humanitarian protection and assistance,” Ursula Mueller, the UN Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, said on Sunday at the end of a six-day visit to Myanmar.

The international community’s humanitarian response must be focused on protecting the most vulnerable people in Myanmar, she said, must be at the heart of the humanitarian response by the international community, national aid organizations and the Government.”

At the outside of her mission, the senior UN relief official met with State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi where they discussed the importance of ending conflict and to strengthen peace and reconciliation efforts in Myanmar.

Ms. Mueller also met with a number of senior Government officials where discussions focused on humanitarian challenges in Rakhine, Kachin, and Shan states.

‘Humanitarian crisis on both sides of Bangladesh-Myanmar border’

Ms. Mueller, also the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, visited Rakhine state – where widespread violence last year forced hundreds of thousands of minority Muslim Rohingyas to flee their homes for safety, with most [finding refuge](#) in neighbouring Bangladesh.

In Maungdaw township, located near the Myanmar-Bangladesh border, she met with local communities affected by the violence; visited a refugee return transit site that the Government of Myanmar is constructing, some new housing projects; and witnessed areas where villages had been burned down or bulldozed.

“There is a humanitarian crisis on both sides of the Bangladesh-Myanmar border that is affecting the world’s largest group of stateless people,” said Ms. Mueller, noting that while the crisis in Cox’s Bazar (Bangladesh) has captured the world’s attention, over 400,000 still living in Rakhine state continue to face a life of hardship and marginalization due to movement restrictions.

“These restrictions severely compromise their rights and obstruct their access to health, livelihoods, protection, education, and other essential services,” she stressed.

Humanitarian workers also face access restrictions in different parts of Rakhine.

Furthermore, the situation in Myanmar’s Kachin (far north) and Shan (east) states has also deteriorated since the beginning of this year, with some 100,000 people displaced as a result of conflict between the military and armed groups.

“The conflict in Kachin is one the world’s longest running, yet it is a forgotten humanitarian crisis,” said Ms. Mueller, calling on all sides to ensure the protection of all civilians in line with international law.

Implement recommendations of Rakhine panel ‘in the spirit’ they were written in

Ms. Mueller also underscored the need for the holistic and impartial implementation of [recommendations](#) made by the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State “in the spirit that they were written.”

That panel, headed by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, outlined long-term solutions to help end the violence and marginalization for all communities in Rakhine. It also focused on issues of citizenship and freedom of movement.

The senior UN aid official also reminded that the conditions for the dignified, voluntary, and sustainable return of refugees as well as positive outcomes for internally displaced people in camps can only be reached if the critical issues of freedom of movement, social cohesion, livelihoods, and access to services are addressed.

“The lives of the poorest and most vulnerable communities of Rakhine state, whether they are ethnic Rakhine, Muslim, or from other minority groups, will be profoundly transformed if each recommendation is genuinely addressed and implemented,” she said.