



General Assembly

Distr.: General
2 June 2016

English only

Human Rights Council

Thirty-second session

Agenda item 9

**Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related
forms of intolerance, follow-up and implementation
of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action**

Written statement* submitted by the Maarij Foundation for Peace and Development, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 May 2016]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE.16-08913(E)



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Myanmar Measures to Erase Rohingya Identity

Maarij Foundation for Peace and Development welcomes the first signs of the international community's resistance to efforts by authorities in Myanmar to mislead the world over the true status of the oppressed Rohingya community. Thanks to a timely rebuff from the United States the new US ambassador in Yangon has declared that his office will continue to use the term Rohingya for Myanmar's Muslim citizens, despite objections from the Myanmar government. We are reminded that representation against continued use of the term was led by no one less than Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel Peace Prize winner and the leader of the National League for Democracy. The NDL recently won a landslide victory in Myanmar's elections, a historic event that sadly was overshadowed by the exclusion of Rohingya for taking part in those elections.

In normal circumstances, the election would have raised expectations everywhere that Myanmar was on way to democratic reform and restoration of its citizens' rights. Instead, the barring of Myanmar's Muslim citizens from those elections made the event a shocking travesty.

This optimism was found to be further misplaced, as events demonstrate, when Ms Aung San Suu Kyi herself took the initiative to continue efforts to erase Rohingya identity. Her intervention in this bogus initiative is a huge disappointment to all those concerned with Myanmar's democratic development and welfare of its Muslim community. It is evident that this Nobel Peace prizewinner is not interested in upholding any of the ideals enshrined in that prize, the honour that it bestows on recipients and the expectation of continued honorable conduct that it implies. The developing row between Myanmar and the United States does not benefit anyone and threatens to polarize opinions and reflect on relations between the two countries. Instead, the emphasis should be on dialogue to calm nationalism fervor in Myanmar that threatens to derail the democratic process in the country.

Rohingya representatives have already taken the initiative to encourage dialogue. Rohingya representatives met the UN Rapporteur, Ms. Yanghee Lee, in Geneva during the 31st session of the UN Human Rights Council a day after she presented her new report to UNHRC. Rohingya representatives welcomed the report in which the Rapporteur calls upon the new Government "to take steps to put an end to highly discriminatory policies and practices against the Rohingya and other Muslim communities in Rakhine State. In practice, these policies deny affected populations some of their most fundamental rights. Of particular importance is the need to restore freedom of movement for all, which in turn could facilitate the process of return and reintegration of communities. On-going discriminatory restrictions to freedom of movement are largely used to control the Rohingya population."

Rohingya representatives have also outlined four key steps that the NLD-led government needs to take to start addressing the Rohingya crisis. These are: action against hate-speech and extremists, ensure humanitarian access, reform or repeal of the 1982 Citizenship Law, and justice and accountability, including an investigation into human rights violations against Rohingya in Rakhine State. In view of those proposals, it is disturbing to see Aung San Suu Kyi taking the junta's line in order to remain on the good side of the nationalists.

It is to be hoped that sanity will prevail and the Myanmar government will take adequate measures to rectify the situation and certainly refrain from offending influential and friendly governments, such as the United States. Picking quarrels with major powers such as the United States can only spell trouble for Yangon and further complicate efforts towards full restoration of Rohingya rights