

**Myanmar Convenes ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat in Yangon Monday - Anifah
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PUTRAJAYA, Dec 17 (Bernama) -- Come Monday, the Myanmar Government, at the behest of its State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, will convene an ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat in Yangon, says Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman.

He said the retreat session would provide ASEAN Foreign Ministers the opportunity to exchange views and deliberate on finding a just, expeditious and durable solution to the problem affecting areas in the Northern Rakhine State.

During the Retreat, he added, Suu Kyi had promised to brief ASEAN Foreign Ministers on recent developments in the situation there.

"This is what the Malaysian Government has pushed for in recent weeks - an acknowledgement of the problem and the meeting of minds for its resolution.

"Even though this is only the first step in resolving the problem, it is nevertheless, a positive step in the right direction," he said in a statement here today.

Anifah said, on Nov 27, he had proposed for an ASEAN Foreign Ministers meeting to be convened urgently to discuss the situation in the Northern Rakhine State.

He said the worrying condition and the dire humanitarian situation on the ground, coupled with the wider implication of the crisis to neighbouring ASEAN countries, made it imperative for the matter to be discussed within ASEAN.

He added that Myanmar initially rejected Malaysia's appeal, but constant pressure from both the international community, as well as Malaysia, had led to the Retreat to be held.

"This Dec 19 meeting will give me the opportunity to unequivocally state Malaysia's strong position on this issue.

"I fully expect to be able to seize this opening to highlight the fact that Malaysia has consistently condemned the escalation of violence in the Northern Rakhine State since the outbreak on Oct 9, 2016" he said.

Anifah said the loss of innocent lives and the displacement of people was unacceptable and Malaysia would further call on all parties involved to refrain from taking any action that would further aggravate the situation.

As founding member of ASEAN, he said Malaysia was fully cognisant of the principles upon which ASEAN was built, in particular, the non-interference principle that bound all ASEAN member countries.

"However, we also believe that ASEAN member states are bound by international principles on the promotion and protection of human rights, which are also enshrined in the ASEAN Charter and the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration," he added.

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