

**EXTRAORDINARY SESSION OF THE OIC COUNCIL OF FOREIGN MINISTERS ON THE  
SITUATION OF THE ROHINGYA MUSLIM MINORITY IN MYANMAR**

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Bismillahir rahmanir Rahim.

His Excellency Dato' Seri Dr. Ahmad Zahid Hamidi,

Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia;

His Excellency Dato' Sri Anifah Hj. Aman,

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia,

Chair of the Extraordinary Session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers on the Situation  
of the Rohingya Muslim Minority in Myanmar;

His Excellency Dr Yousef bin Ahmed Al-Othaimeen,

Secretary-General of the OIC;

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalamu'alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh – and good afternoon.

Let me begin by expressing my deep appreciation to all of you for joining us here, in Kuala Lumpur, for this Extraordinary Session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers.

The circumstances that have brought us together are tragic, but it is my hope that this gathering will help find a way to alleviate the suffering of our brothers and sisters, the Rohingya Muslim Minority, in Myanmar.

This is one of the first major meetings being held under the auspices of the OIC since the appointment of His Excellency Dr Yousef bin Ahmed Al-Othaimeen as Secretary General.

Your Excellency; I am delighted you have been able to join us today and am confident that, under your stewardship, this noble organisation will continue to achieve even greater heights in the cause of Islam and the Ummah.

Malaysia has always been amongst the staunchest of supporters of the OIC, as far back as its founding, when our first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, was elected the organisation's first Secretary General.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The humanitarian crisis in Myanmar's Rakhine State is a cause of great and immediate concern to us all. The loss of life cannot be disputed. And in Islam the Right to Life is the first and foremost basic right, as stated in Verse 32 of Surah Al Maidah: "...whoever kills a soul...it is as if he had slain mankind entirely. And whoever saves one – it is as if he had saved mankind entirely..."

Far too many people have lost their lives in Myanmar. Many have suffered appalling deaths, and those that have lived through the atrocities have witnessed or endured unspeakable cruelty. That in itself is a reason why we cannot keep silent.

At the same time, those of us who are based in this region have learned from history. And I believe I speak for all neighbouring countries when I say that we want to avoid a repeat of the 2015 "boat people" crisis.

This not only caused untold suffering to the people who were forced to flee their homes, but had the potential to impact the security and stability of the broader region.

In recent years, Malaysia has been on the frontline when it comes to the irregular movement of people. As it is, we are hosting around 56,000 displaced Rohingya men, women and children who have had to flee from Rakhine State.

The Government, and indeed the people of Malaysia are willing to shoulder the financial and social responsibility of providing shelter and basic necessities to our Rohingya brothers and sisters. It is the morally right thing to do. However, the fact that they have been forced to flee is a tragic indictment of the situation they faced at home.

To make matters worse, the Rohingyas have become easy targets for human trafficking networks. In many cases, they are held for weeks while smugglers extort more money from families back home. During their perilous journeys, they risk abuse by smugglers, and worse, death by drowning.

We fear that if the situation of the Rohingya Muslim minority in Rakhine State is not properly addressed, militant elements could infiltrate and possibly radicalise this oppressed community.

OIC Member States are well aware that terrorist organisations such as Daesh could seek to take advantage of this situation. This should concern the international community as a whole, as the threat of a new home for terrorist groups has the potential to cause death and destruction well beyond this region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Myanmar has no firmer friend than Malaysia. We supported our near neighbours when they were alone and friendless. We fought for their inclusion in ASEAN. We resisted efforts to punish and isolate them.

We did so because we recognised that Myanmar is too large, too important and too significant to be left out in the cold. It is part of our region and a part of our community of nations.

We recognised the unique characteristics that it possesses – its people, its natural resources, and of course its strategic location. Among the member states of ASEAN, it is alone in sharing land borders with both China and India.

Just as significantly, we recognised and continue to recognise the resilience and commitment of the Myanmar people which enabled them to shake off the chains of dictatorship in a peaceful, moderate and mature manner.

The political progress that they have made since then is testimony to our faith in Myanmar, its government and its people. It is a source of pride and hope for all those who believe in peace over violence, and indeed, democracy over dictatorship.

So, as a true and long-standing friend to Myanmar, I say this from the bottom of my heart: It is time to end this crisis.

How should it be resolved?

For a start, the killing must stop.

The burning of houses must stop.

The violation of women and girls must stop.

The persecution of your fellow men and women, simply on the grounds that they are Muslim, must stop.

The denial of basic rights to your fellow human beings must stop.

I say to our friends in Myanmar: Prove yourselves worthy of your great traditions and history again. Be equal to the words your father of independence, General Aung San, delivered in 1946:

“Nowadays, all the world over, we cannot confine the definition of a nationality to the narrow bounds of race, religion and others. Nations are extending their rights of their respective communities even to others who may not belong to them, except by their mere residence amongst them, and their determination to live and be with them...”

Ladies and gentlemen,

While we have been compelled to take a public position on the situation in Myanmar, I wish to make clear that there is no stronger supporter of the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign countries than Malaysia.

Having said that, I wish to emphasise that if the domestic affairs of a country results in instability which affects other countries in the region, they cannot be expected to remain silent, or hope for the best and pray that it does not get worse.

Surely they should be given the latitude to express their concerns effectively and in a manner that would help address the pressing humanitarian situation. Should it not be within the rights of the affected countries to mobilise support from the international community to this end?

ASEAN has every right to raise this issue, and I was therefore glad that this was recognised by the Foreign Ministers meeting on the subject in Yangon last month.

At that meeting, our Foreign Minister, Dato' Sri Anifah Aman, called for an independent group of eminent ASEAN persons to address the crisis, and quite correctly said that we – as ASEAN – must do so collectively.

The ASEAN Human Rights Declaration could not be clearer. It states that every person has an inherent right to life protected by law. A right to personal liberty and security. A right to freedom of religion. A right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

No one could say that these rights are currently being adequately defended in Rakhine State. It is not just about the Rohingyas being Muslim. We want them to live, as Muslims are instructed to do, as a responsible minority, fully respecting the laws of the country, in a non-Muslim state.

But the current situation is a stain on ASEAN itself, and on the Community we declared established at the end of 2015, under Malaysia's chairmanship.

We in ASEAN must live up to what the Community stands for – otherwise it would be a Community in name only, a disgrace to the visionaries who came together to found ASEAN 50 years ago.

We will have failed them if we do not do our utmost to avert the catastrophe that has been unfolding for the Rohingyas.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the same spirit of openness, it is important to note that there have been some positive developments and some efforts by the Government of Myanmar to tackle this issue.

We are encouraged by the establishment of the Ministry of Ethnic Affairs, the Central Committee for the Implementation of Peace, Stability and Development in Rakhine State, and the Rakhine State Advisory Commission.

However, we believe that much more can and needs to be done to resolve the problems in Rakhine State.

We strongly urge the Government of Myanmar to provide unimpeded access for the delivery of humanitarian aid to the affected areas. At the same time, we call on the Government of Myanmar to facilitate the safe and dignified return of refugees to their homes and communities.

The root causes of this problem must be addressed urgently in their entirety, with a view to finding mutually favourable, long-term and comprehensive solutions for all the parties involved.

We call on the Government of Myanmar to cease all discriminatory actions and attacks against the Rohingyas immediately, and for the perpetrators to be brought to justice.

This must happen now. Not in a few months' time, when Kofi Annan's committee is due to report. No people, who are being persecuted, should be expected to endure months of committee meetings before they are afforded protection.

The Government of Myanmar disputes the terms "genocide" and "ethnic cleansing". But whatever the terminology, the Rohingyas CAN NOT wait.

Not when they and their families risk being burned alive in their own homes.

Not when their wives and daughters are being violated.

Not when their communities are being destroyed, their people left destitute and dispersed.

Not when the future of their young people – their education, and what should be the hopeful dawn of their adult lives – is being destroyed before their very eyes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Malaysia has consistently voiced its concern about the plight of the Rohingyas.

Furthermore, we have and will continue to provide humanitarian assistance through our NGOs, as well as temporary shelter for Rohingya migrants currently in Malaysia, pending their resettlement by UNHCR or eventual return to Myanmar.

And our assistance in Myanmar is not only for Muslims, but for all who need it in the affected areas.

Presently, MERCY Malaysia has successfully established static and mobile clinics in Sittwe, Rakhine State, in collaboration with local NGOs, as part of its ongoing efforts to render healthcare services to Internally Displaced Persons in Myanmar.

I am also pleased to be able to announce that Malaysia will contribute a sum of 10 million ringgit to assist in humanitarian efforts and social rehabilitation projects in Rakhine State.

The fund will be used to build infrastructure, such as educational and medical institutions, that will contribute to development there and improve the quality of life of its people.

Malaysia will also continue to extend our support to human resource development through the Malaysia Technical Cooperation Programme (MTCP). Currently, Myanmar is the largest recipient of the MTCP among ASEAN countries, and the capacity-building initiatives it provides are an important part of striving for a viable long-term solution.

I encourage and welcome any pledges of assistance from other Member States.

Indeed, I call on the OIC, in the name and spirit of Islamic solidarity, to recognise that it is our collective responsibility to assist our brothers and sisters in Rakhine State.

It is incumbent upon us to do all we can to save them from the humanitarian tragedy they are suffering; and to help provide them with a future that is safe, sustainable, and characterised by the dignity that should be the birth right of every human being.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Malaysia has always subscribed to the concept of wasatiyya, or moderation, which espouses the values of mutual respect, understanding and tolerance. In line with this, we believe that any discord should be resolved peacefully, in accordance with the principles of Islamic teachings.

As a multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation, we hold on to these values dearly, as we have done throughout our journey of nationhood. We believe that wasatiyya can and should contribute to building a more peaceful, secure and equitable world.

Accordingly, we call on the Government of Myanmar to promote interreligious and intercultural dialogue to stem the spread of discrimination and prejudice against Muslims, and members of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities across the country.

I hope that, through our deliberations in these halls, we will collectively be able to propose actions and measures to address the situation of the Rohingya Muslim minority in Myanmar.

It is the duty of the OIC to keep the international community focused on the plight of the Rohingyas, and I thank you all for accepting Malaysia's invitation to urgently discuss this today.

Ladies and Gentleman,

We fight for the rights of the Rohingyas, just as we continue to do so for our Palestinian brothers and sisters. The adoption of Resolution 2334, which was promoted and co-sponsored by Malaysia at the United Nations Security Council, echoed around the world.

Although Malaysia's term as a non-permanent member of the Security Council has ended, Malaysia will continue to play an active role as a UN member state in efforts towards finding a peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

We will continue to support the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people for an independent State of Palestine with the realisation of two states, Palestine and Israel, living side by side, based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, we have a new struggle that we must all come together to support – for the Rohingyas, and for an end to the pain, deprivation and death they have suffered for too long.

We cannot stand by and do nothing. We represent 57 countries and a combined population of over 1.6 billion.

Our charter enjoins us specifically “to assist Muslim minorities and communities outside the Member States to preserve their dignity, cultural and religious identity”.

We must be equal to this challenge. We must show that this organisation is truly the friend and guarantor of Muslims everywhere. We must show that while we may have our differences, the Ummah will come together in defence of our brothers and sisters in their time of need.

Let us hope that Allah will bless our noble endeavour – for the sake of the Rohingyas, for the sake of the Ummah, and for the sake of all humanity.

Thank you.

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