



Bergen April 26th 2017

Honorable Daw Aung San Suu Kyi
State Counsellor, Myanmar

Dear Daw Aung San Suu Kyi,

The Rafto Foundation would like to express our solidarity with the people of Myanmar, and declare our continuous support for the democratic process in the country. The personal sacrifices you have made through decades, and your principled and courageous struggle for human rights and democracy, will always be deeply admired.

Since the establishment of the Rafto Foundation, the family of Rafto Laureates has grown to count 32 prominent human rights defenders from 28 countries. Along with the other Rafto Laureates you have inspired millions of human rights defenders throughout the world by symbolizing the values that represent the best of humanity.

We appreciate the positive steps that have been taken to bring Myanmar from a system of military dictatorship, and we acknowledge the complexity of the situation and the many dilemmas that NLD faces in trying to protect the people of Myanmar from human rights abuses while at the same time promoting democratization and rule of law. However, the Government of Myanmar bears the formal responsibility of protecting the rights of every individual residing in your country, regardless of their ethnic background, and it is our duty as a human rights organization to call upon you to use every means available to protect and fulfil the human rights of all the peoples of Myanmar without discrimination.

The situation for the Rohingyas is especially disturbing. Reports by credible sources, such as the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, demonstrate that the Rohingyas are systematically deprived of their basic rights. Deep-rooted and widespread discrimination supported by the majority of the population appear to have been systematically implemented by the state for a long time. Attitudes among Buddhist nationalists and a general climate of hatred and mistrust seem to make the task of protecting the Rohingyas and other Muslims very difficult. International reports show that the army has committed grave crimes against the Rohingyas and other Muslims. It is alarming that an OHCHR- report concludes that the widespread violations against the Rohingya population indicate that crimes against humanity have taken place.

Also alarming is the conflict in the northern Kachin and Shan States, where human rights abuses committed by the Myanmar Army against civilians continue and show signs of increasing. Operating with impunity, the military reportedly commits acts of torture, rape and murder against men, women and even children. We strongly condemn these acts, including the use of attack helicopters and fighter jets by the military harming civilians.

Given the power sharing between civilian and military authorities enshrined in the 2008 Constitution, The Rafto Foundation holds Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing as the primary responsible for the grave human rights violations against the Myanmar people. The military

exercises sovereign power with regard to security and border affairs, including control over the respective ministries. Hence the military should be the main target of condemnation both by the civilian Government, and by the international society.

We recognize the efforts you make to reverse abusive and authoritarian laws after 50 years of military rule. Also, we understand that it is a nearly impossible task to balance the many different concerns that you face every day, and we are aware of the strong currents of nationalism that makes it even more difficult to facilitate reconciliation. Nevertheless, we have noted your public silence with regard to the atrocities against the Rohingyas and other Muslims.

The principle of the universality and indivisibility of human rights should define the agenda of any Government. Thus the Rafto Foundation calls on you, as State Counsellor, to publicly condemn all abuses committed against any member of the Myanmar society, Rohingyas and other Muslims included, and to clearly allocate the responsibility where it belongs. Keeping silent about alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the military undermines the fundamental human rights of the entire Myanmar people.

We are relieved by the news that the military security operations in the north of Rakhine have ceased. Also, we highly welcome your statement that your government will investigate the allegations in the OHCHR-report. Despite these positive developments, there are still reasons to be deeply concerned about the situation for the Rohingyas and other vulnerable groups. Hence, we urge you to use every possible means to exert pressure on the military and the security services to end repression and abusive means of control in various parts of Myanmar.

We observe with satisfaction that the civil society in Myanmar is flourishing, and the competences for democracy developing, however slowly. The Rafto Foundation continues to morally support the democratization process in Myanmar, and we are looking forward to see a continued process.

We would much appreciate if you could share your views on the positions we have expressed in this letter with us. If you want to keep our conversation on these matters private, we will of course respect that. I would also be willing to visit Myanmar for a further dialogue with you on these issues.

We wish you the best of luck with your work in these difficult times, and hope we will be able to meet again, one day.

Yours Sincerely



Jostein Hole Kobbeltvedt

Executive Director
Rafto Foundation for Human Rights