

Myanmar: UK national statement after Security Council closed VTC

The UK welcomes the briefing on the situation in Myanmar that Special Envoy Christine Schraner Burgener provided Security Council members today. The UK requested this meeting because we are concerned by the recent escalation of conflict between the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army in Rakhine and Chin States, and the heavy toll this is taking on civilians at the time of a global Covid-19 crisis.

The conflict has already led to a spike in internal displacement, additional restrictions on humanitarian access, and an increased number of civilian casualties, including the killing of World Health Organisation employee U Pyae Sone Win Maung on 20 April. All this comes at a time when the Covid-19 pandemic puts vulnerable populations at risk of a humanitarian emergency, especially refugees, IDPs, and the Rohingya community who face additional restrictions.

The UK recognises that Myanmar is taking steps to address the pandemic. These include measures to slow the spread of the virus; a public awareness campaign led by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi; a Covid-19 Economic Relief Plan to alleviate some of the economic hardships; and a joint commission between the Government of Myanmar and ethnic armed organisations to coordinate efforts against Covid-19 across the whole country.

The UK supports these initial positive steps. However, while conflict continues in Rakhine and Chin States, vulnerable people there are at even greater risk than elsewhere from Covid-19. The conflict also makes it more challenging to address the long-term underlying causes of conflict in Rakhine and to create conditions conducive to the safe, voluntary, and dignified repatriation of Rohingya refugees, which remains an important and urgent priority. In this light, the UK expresses concern about refugees risking perilous boat journeys in the Bay of Bengal where a regional solution is essential.

Therefore:

1. Noting the Tatmadaw's announcement of a unilateral ceasefire on 9 May, the UK urges the Tatmadaw to extend this to include an immediate cessation of hostilities in Rakhine and Chin States.
2. The UK encourages the Myanmar authorities and all other actors to ensure unhindered humanitarian access to allow for safe and independent delivery of humanitarian supplies to all parts of Rakhine and Chin States, including IDP camps.
3. Noting the steps taken across Myanmar to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic,

the UK urges the lifting of restrictions on internet access and action to ensure freedom of movement and equitable access to healthcare for all communities in Rakhine State, including conflict-affected populations, IDPs, and the Rohingya community.

4. Noting the National Strategy on Resettlement of IDPs and Closure of IDP Camps and recognising the challenges to its implementation created by Covid-19, the UK encourages Myanmar to ensure that any work to find durable and dignified solutions for IDPs is carried out in consistency with international best practice and the standards set out in the national strategy including on consultation.

The UK continues to appreciate the efforts of the UN, ASEAN and many donor countries in the support they are giving to Myanmar at this time, and underscores also its appreciation towards Bangladesh for its efforts providing protection and assistance to refugees until they are able to return to Myanmar.