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*For immediate release*

**Statement by Adama Dieng, Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, and Jennifer Welsh, Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect, on the upcoming elections in Myanmar.**

(New York, 4 November 2015) The Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, and the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, Jennifer Welsh, called on the Government of Myanmar to take all possible measures to ensure that the upcoming elections of 8 November are held in a peaceful environment.

The Special Advisers expressed concern at the politicization of ethnicity and religion during electoral campaigning in violation of Article 364 of the 2008 Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. “The promotion of a political agenda that is based primarily on the protection of a particular religion or ethnic group is dangerous, particularly in a country as richly diverse as Myanmar”, said the Special Advisers. They raised alarm at reports of increased advocacy of religious hatred against Muslim minorities by religious groups and leaders, as well as by members of political parties, noting that such advocacy may constitute incitement to violence and is prohibited under international law.

While recognizing the importance of the elections for the democratization of Myanmar, the Special Advisers voiced concerns that the electoral process has resulted in further marginalisation of religious minorities, in particular Muslim Rohingya. In the last few months, the Rohingya have been stripped of their right to vote; their freedom of association has been curtailed, impeding them from forming or joining political parties, and their representatives are no longer eligible to stand as candidates for seats in Parliament. The Special Advisers stated that “silencing the voice of one sector of the population brings into question the integrity of any electoral process.”

They underlined that the Muslim Rohingya population has been subjected to decades of institutionalized discrimination in law, policies and practice. More recently, four pieces of legislation, also known as the *Protection of Race and Religion Bills*, have been adopted in what the Special Advisers qualified as a clear step backwards for the protection of fundamental rights in Myanmar, in particular the right to freedom of religion and belief and women’s rights. According to the Special Advisers, “these bills discriminate against religious minorities and strengthen a rising Buddhist ultra-nationalist movement that is likely to take advantage of this opportunity to advance their platform against Muslims. This is unacceptable in the new Myanmar.”

The Special Advisers concluded: “We would like to make three requests. The first is to the current Government of Myanmar, to take all possible measures to guarantee that the elections take place in a climate of freedom, mutual respect and peace. To this end, we urge the Government to publicly condemn and counter any discourse that incites the population to discrimination, hostility and violence based on religion or ethnicity, and to take measures against those responsible. Our second request is to the people of Myanmar: we urge you to use these elections to show the potential of Myanmar to be a nation of tolerance and peace. Finally, our third request is to the leaders who will form the new Government of Myanmar.

We call on you to show a commitment to democracy, the rule of law and human rights. This includes addressing the communal tensions in Rakhine State and developing sustainable solutions that respond to the concerns and needs of all communities, or face the risk of further violence and potentially, more serious crimes. Religious minorities, including the Rohingya, are a part of Myanmar. Building an inclusive and tolerant society is essential for democracy and long-term peace in the country.”

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