

## CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Statement by Ms. Wai Wai Nu**  
**UN Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security**  
**24 October 2024**

President, Excellencies, civil society colleagues,

I am honored to brief you at this year's open debate on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). I am Wai Wai Nu, the Founder and Executive Director of [Women's Peace Network](http://www.womenpeacesecurity.org), advocating for peace and equality in Myanmar.

The theme of today's debate is welcome given the dire state of women's rights in conflicts and crises across the world, and unacceptably low levels of women's participation in peace processes, both of which the WPS agenda was meant to address. We are seeing record levels of armed conflict, for instance, in Gaza and Ukraine; the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan; and unprecedented humanitarian crises in Sudan, Syria, Yemen and across conflicts around the world. Women have been disproportionately exposed to conflict-related sexual violence,<sup>1</sup> femicide,<sup>2</sup> gender apartheid,<sup>3</sup> gender persecution<sup>4</sup> and other targeted atrocities. We are today also confronted by an alarming global backlash against gender and women's rights.<sup>5</sup> All these conditions undermine our collective ability to meaningfully participate in peacemaking and, in doing so, threaten our very hopes for peace.

24 years ago, feminist movements around the world reminded the international community of our potential for ensuring an equal, just and peaceful future. The Council heeded these calls by adopting Resolution 1325 (2000). Yet, today, we are a long way from its promise of equality.

As a human rights defender and former political prisoner, hope for change has long guided my activism. I am not alone. In Myanmar today, women across the country are resisting the Myanmar military and its 2021 attempted coup, and risking their lives to defy all forms of oppression, including patriarchy, homophobia and transphobia.<sup>6</sup> As frontline responders and human rights defenders,<sup>7</sup> we are doing everything in our power not to return to the pre-coup status quo — but to build a new future where we can fully participate regardless of our gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or other differences.<sup>8</sup>

But the Myanmar military's nationwide campaign of terror is preventing us from achieving our goal. This is the same military that, according to the UN, has committed war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.<sup>9</sup> Since the attempted coup, the military has launched air strikes against civilians;<sup>10</sup> targeted homes, schools, hospitals and places of worship;<sup>11</sup> and displaced millions.<sup>12</sup> Gender-based violence has increased dramatically in Myanmar since the attempted coup, primarily by the military, and other armed groups.<sup>13</sup> Further, the military has killed and arbitrarily arrested thousands of women,<sup>14</sup> who face torture, sexual violence and denial of medical care in detention.<sup>15</sup> Since February, the military has forcibly recruited civilians, including young women and internally displaced people (IDPs), to become cannon fodder and human shields.<sup>16</sup> The military has created a humanitarian disaster, and continues to block and weaponize aid<sup>17</sup> to over 18 million people, more than half of whom are women and girls.<sup>18</sup> Hundreds of thousands have fled Myanmar in search of protection in neighboring countries,<sup>19</sup> risking detention and forced deportation.<sup>20</sup>

Excellencies,

Addressing the root causes of conflict is vital for ensuring women's full participation in Myanmar's future. And when the key perpetrators of decades of atrocities remain unpunished — like in Myanmar — impunity is the root cause. Just as in Afghanistan, Sudan, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and many other contexts, impunity in Myanmar is contagious: it emboldens perpetrators and shows others that they are free to brutalize groups they deem inferior — especially women. As Resolution 1325 makes clear, accountability and respect for international

law are critical for protecting women's rights, not only in Myanmar but in other conflicts across the world. Women cannot meaningfully participate in any sphere of life if they are being attacked, without consequences, on a daily basis.<sup>21</sup>

Nowhere is this impunity more apparent than in Rakhine State, where the military and the Arakan Army (AA) have been targeting the Rohingya with escalating atrocities.<sup>22</sup> Since November 2023, the AA has burned down Rohingya homes and villages, and massacred, abducted, tortured, raped and forcibly displaced the Rohingya.<sup>23</sup> Armed violence, starvation<sup>24</sup> and lack of water, shelter and medical care have forced at least 40,000 to flee to Bangladesh.<sup>25</sup> Almost one million are still living in overcrowded camps in Cox's Bazar, where violence has worsened in recent months.<sup>26</sup> According to the UN, last year was the deadliest year for Rohingya fleeing over land and sea — with women and girls facing horrific forms of sexual violence.<sup>27</sup> This year will likely be worse,<sup>28</sup> further delaying my community's voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return to their homes in Myanmar.<sup>29</sup>

Excellencies,

Myanmar is an example of both an extreme violation of the key principles of the WPS agenda, and an illustration of why they are so important. I urge you to uphold all pillars of the WPS agenda. Member States should demand women's participation in all peace and security decision-making, and call on the UN to make women's participation a requirement in any peace process it supports.<sup>30</sup> But it is not enough to express support for women's participation if the conditions for their participation do not exist. Conflict prevention, protection of human rights and accountability<sup>31</sup> are essential if women are to take their rightful place at the peace table. I further urge you to support and fund women's organizations and human rights defenders, and take all necessary measures to protect them from attacks and reprisals.

On Myanmar, I urge the Council to hold an emergency, open briefing to discuss the situation, prevent further mass atrocities, especially in Rakhine State, and build on Resolution 2669 (2022) with stronger action, including a new resolution.<sup>32</sup> This Council should demand the military cease all acts of conflict-related sexual violence. I further urge you to end all supplies of arms, ammunition and aviation fuel; impose targeted economic sanctions on the military; enable cross-border aid and unfettered humanitarian access; and reject the military's so-called "census"<sup>33</sup> and efforts to hold sham elections.<sup>34</sup> The Council must refer the situation to the International Criminal Court, or support the creation of an ad-hoc tribunal, and discuss the non-compliance of the provisional measures imposed on Myanmar by the International Court of Justice, which designated the Rohingya as a "protected group."<sup>35</sup> This Council should explicitly call for women's full, equal, meaningful and safe participation in decision-making about our country's future.

Excellencies,

Today, I speak before you as one of the few women from Myanmar to address the Council about the unspeakable suffering of my people. This is despite more than half a century of conflict in my country, the decades-long genocide against the Rohingya, and the determined efforts of my fellow women to end our plight. Women in Myanmar and across the globe are watching today to see if your words will be matched by action.

Thank you.

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<sup>8</sup> Michelle Onello & Akila Radhakrishnan, “Reversing the Coup is No Solution for Myanmar,” The Diplomat, 13 May 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/05/reversing-the-coup-is-no-solution-for-myanmar/>.

<sup>9</sup> Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, “Sexual and gender-based violence in Myanmar and the gendered impact of its ethnic conflicts,” ¶254-255, 22 August 2019, A/HRC/42/CRP.4, [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/FFM-Myanmar/sexualviolence/A\\_HRC\\_CRP\\_4.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/FFM-Myanmar/sexualviolence/A_HRC_CRP_4.pdf); “Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on Myanmar,” ¶83-89, 12 September 2018, A/HRC/39/64, [undocs.org/a/hrc/39/64](https://undocs.org/a/hrc/39/64).

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