

Brussels, 25 November 2020

Dear colleagues,

As Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN) members and civil society organisations working on Myanmar, we are writing to express our concern regarding the lack of transparency and consultation regarding the 6th human rights dialogue with Myanmar held on 14 October 2020.

We were surprised and disappointed to find out about the dialogue only after it had taken place. Given our organisations' long-standing engagement with the European External Action Service (EEAS) on the human rights situation in Myanmar, we expect to be informed and consulted ahead of key meetings with the country's authorities. We are also disappointed by the EEAS' failure to inform some of our individual organisations and the wider HRDN network of the dialogue and to invite us to participate in prior consultations. This failure flies in the face of our long-established and positive exchanges to date, and goes against the principle of holding open civil society consultations (as opposed to the institutions picking and choosing their interlocutors).

Upon reading the [Joint Press Release](#) issued at the end of the dialogue, we were struck by the obvious disconnect between its content and the reality of the situation in Myanmar. In our view, the tone of the press release reflects the lack of adequate consultation, as we are convinced the EEAS would not have agreed to endorse such joint position, had it engaged in constructive exchanges with civil society ahead of the dialogue. It would have been crucial to include the following points:

- **A call on Myanmar to promptly act for the protection of Rohingya through compliance with the provisional measures requested by the International Court of Justice and the creation of the necessary conditions for the safe, voluntary, sustainable and dignified return of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh to Myanmar.**
- **A firmer call to action on accountability for crimes under international law and other serious human rights violations, which did occur and are ongoing and well documented, not “alleged” as stated in the joint press release.**
- **An expression of deep concern over the human rights situation in Rakhine State, where armed conflict between the Myanmar military and Arakan Army continues to escalate, and civilians — including Rohingya, Rakhine and Chin ethnic women, men and children — are being killed, maimed and injured by indiscriminate airstrikes, shelling, crossfire and landmines.**
- **A call for unfettered humanitarian access to at-risk populations, both registered and unregistered, inside Rakhine, Chin, Kachin, and northern Shan States**
- **A call for the release of all political prisoners.**
- **A call to immediately cease the ongoing attacks and harassment against human rights defenders and to amend the repressive laws that continue to be used to target activists, human rights defenders, trade union leaders, journalists, and members of ethnic minorities.**
- **An expression of concern over reports that the authorities have used COVID-19 as a pretext to repress the legitimate exercise of the rights to freedom of expression,**

association and peaceful assembly, as well as the criminalisation of trade union activities.

Unfortunately, the case of Myanmar is not our only cause for concern. Over the past months, we have been worried to see a growing number of instances where the EEAS has either given extremely short notice for civil society consultation or failed to organise consultations ahead of dialogues altogether. In a global context where human rights, democracy, and the rule of law are increasingly under threat, it is essential that the EU upholds its long-standing practice of meaningful engagement with civil society, and delivers on its commitment in the [Guidelines on Human Rights Dialogues](#) to “give the human rights dialogues a genuine transparency vis-à-vis civil society”. While we are sensitive to difficulties sometimes encountered in the planning of these dialogues, in particular in the context of the pandemic, we would also like to underline the crucial importance of preserving these spaces for constructive exchange with civil society at Brussels and in Myanmar.

In light of these concerns, we kindly request a debriefing on the human rights dialogue with Myanmar. This would give civil society, including HRDN members, the opportunity to discuss key concerns regarding the human rights situation in the country and the joint position promoted in the press release.

We remain available for further clarifications and exchanges.

Sincerely,

Amnesty International
Athan - Freedom of Expression Activist Organization
Civil Rights Defenders
Clean Clothes Campaign
CSW (Christian Solidarity Worldwide)
FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights)
Progressive Voice
Women's Peace Network