Opening remarks by UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator ai Knut Ostby at Human Rights Day event organized by the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission
10 December 2018
Yangon, Myanmar

Ministers, Chairperson of the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission, Representative of the Myanmar National Committee for Women’s affairs, Representative of the Myanmar Press Council (members of the diplomatic community), ladies and gentlemen.

First of all, I want to thank the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission, in particular Chairperson U Win Mra for inviting me to this important event.

Before making some more personal remarks, I would like to take the opportunity to read the message from the UN Secretary-General for Human Rights Day:

“For 70 years, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been a global beacon – shining a light for dignity, equality and well-being … and bringing hope to dark places.

The rights proclaimed in the Declaration apply to everyone -- no matter our race, belief, location or other distinction of any kind.

Human rights are universal and eternal.

They are also indivisible. One cannot pick and choose among civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

Today we also honour the human rights defenders risking their lives to protect people in the face of rising hatred, racism, intolerance and repression.

Indeed, human rights are under siege around the world.
Universal values are being eroded. The rule of law is being undermined.

Now more than ever, our shared duty is clear:

Let us stand up for human rights -- for everyone, everywhere.

Thank you."

This concludes Secretary-General’s message.

Allow me please to add a few remarks.

This year’s commemoration of Human Rights Day marks the end of a year-long celebration of 70 years since the adoption of the Declaration.

This year-long commemoration reminds us that every day is a Human Rights Day.

I commend the work of national human rights organizations and defenders who guard the rights of everyone, every day.

Their work is highly appreciated and critical to Myanmar’s political, social, economic and peace transitions.

I also recognize the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission for their determination to review its capacity so that they can become even more significant.

We are pleased to support that process and we are committed to continue to assist Myanmar in upholding the Declaration.

The Declaration is as relevant today as it was 70 years ago.

It bestows on us freedom of expression but not a permission to spread hatred.
It promotes diversity which fosters tolerance, cooperation and compassion.

The proliferation of hate speech erodes the values of the Declaration.

I therefore welcome the government’s work towards a draft bill on hate speech prevention and prohibition.

This law, and other national and international initiatives, will help the Government address hate speech.

The UN in Myanmar is ready to support the Government in responding to hate speech.

We will also continue to support human rights initiatives, human rights defenders and causes.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Human rights are at the core of everything we do. Human rights connect our development, peace and humanitarian work.

Many of you have the same mission: build a peaceful, democratic and prosperous Myanmar where everyone’s rights are respected.

There is a lot that needs to be done and I look forward to working with you.

Thank you.