

Statement of Ms. Kanni Wignaraja, Assistant Secretary-General and Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, UNDP
Rohingya Conference on 22 October 2020

- Thank you DG Vitorino, and to the co-hosts of the conference for inviting UNDP. And thank you to Omar's Film School for sharing their powerful voice. Creating the conditions for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of Rohingya refugees means addressing the systemic root causes of the conflict in Rakhine. And we have heard from them – it means addressing issues of security, politics and identity.
- While Humanitarian actors are providing much needed relief in Rakhine, and to refugee and host communities in Cox's Bazaar, the deeply structural issues on which sustained peace and progress has to be built, will need longer term commitments and investments between and by the parties, and the strong support of the international community. We need to lift our game together.
- To sustain lives and livelihoods with dignity and purpose requires progress on multiple development fronts. The Quick Impact Projects that UNDP and UNHCR have invested in, have helped revive small scale agriculture, skills-building and village-level economic and social infrastructure including rebuilding schools and water supply in Northern Rakhine. In a state where poverty rates are so high, this ongoing effort has directly benefitted over 17,000 people and many more can gain.
- These programmes have shown improvements in living conditions across the local communities as a whole and do so across ethnic and religious lines. Confidence is also being rebuilt. We also know, it is not enough. Whether in Rakhine or in Cox's Bazaar.
- We have begun such integrated areas-based efforts, bringing the strengths of the UN system together to contribute across sectors, centered on a rights-based development approach. These experiences from Central and Southern Rakhine, are models we can replicate and expand across the state. Freedom of movement and access are critical to get this right and go to scale.
- The lessons we have learnt are many and I want to highlight two. The first is land. The access and right to land ownership is a critical factor that is a bridge to both peace and prosperity. No resettlement or return to villages of origin is viable without a political, legal and fiduciary commitment to land and property rights of displaced populations. For with it comes dignity, homes for families, a place to generate a livelihood. And a place to rest safely.
- The second is the additional investments needed to strengthen local governance – that space where public administration and services, meets local business and digital technology, meets civil society engagement and the enlarging of a civic space. This is an essential part of our local development efforts, both in Myanmar and in Bangladesh.
- In closing, let me reiterate that a focus on rights-based development and hence development assistance, is necessary if we want lasting change, (as also emphasized by Filippo Grandi, ED Fiore and others). It absorbs the risk. And it invests in return.
- I want to recognize what governments and partners are doing to assist. UNDP will continue to seize opportunities for both incremental change and step change, together with its partners. There can be no lasting peace and progress if we do not dare move from the short-term to something bigger and more sustainable, as many have referred today.

- Thank you.