

Speech Excerpts

Instructions: Read the following excerpts from the September 19, 2017 speech by the leader of Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi. As you read, circle any words you do not know. If you notice any statements that conflict with the news article or the personal accounts, underline them.

Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of Myanmar, represents the political party the National League for Democracy. She won Myanmar's elections as the country transitioned to democracy in 2015. Before Myanmar's transition to democracy, the military government placed Suu Kyi under house arrest for a total of more than a decade because it saw her as a threat. Suu Kyi also won a Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 for her leadership in Myanmar.

“When our people voted...in the elections of 2015, they, in fact, entrusted to us the task of carrying out three responsibilities: democratic transition, peace and stability, and development. None of these challenges are easy or simple. Transition for us is a transition to democracy after half a century or more of authoritarian rule, and now we are in the process of nurturing our nascent and yet imperfect democracy. Peace and stability was something that we had to achieve after nearly seventy years of internal conflict that started on the day of our independence back in 1948....

“Burma is a complex nation, as all of you know, and its complexities are compounded by the fact that people expect us to overcome all these challenges in as short a time as possible. I think it is only fitting that I should remind you that today our government has not yet been in power for even eighteen months.... Eighteen months is a very short time in which to expect us to meet and overcome all the challenges....

“I’m aware of the fact that the world’s attention is focused on the situation in Rakhine State, and... as a responsible member of the community of nations, Myanmar does not fear international scrutiny, and we are committed to a sustainable solution that would lead to peace, stability, and development for all communities within that state....

“Unhappily, on 9th October [2016], eighteen days after the delivery of my address at the General Assembly, three police outposts were attacked by armed Muslim groups. There were further attacks on 11th October and 12th November, and these clashes resulted in loss of lives, injuries, burning of villages, and the displacement of peoples in the affected areas. Many Muslims fled to Bangladesh. Since then, the government has been making every effort to restore peace and stability and to promote harmony between the Muslim and Rakhine communities....

“But, in spite of all these efforts, we were not able to prevent the conflicts from taking place. Still, throughout the last year, we have continued with our program of development and the establishment of peace and harmony.

“After several months of seemingly quiet and peace, on the twenty-fifth of August, thirty police outposts as well as the regimental headquarters...were attacked by armed groups....

“There has been much concern around the world with regard to the situation in Rakhine. It is not the intention of the Myanmar government to apportion blame or to abnegate responsibility. We condemn all human rights violations and unlawful violence. We are committed to the restoration of peace, stability, and rule of law throughout the state.

“The security forces have been instructed to adhere strictly to the code of conduct in carrying out security operations, to exercise all due restraint, and to take full measures to avoid collateral damage and the harming of innocent civilians. Human rights violations and all other acts that impair stability and harmony and undermine the rule of law will be addressed in accordance with strict norms of justice.

“We feel deeply for the suffering of all the people who have been caught up...in the the conflict. Those who have had to flee their homes are many. Not just Muslims and Rakhines, but also small minority groups...of whose presence most of the world is totally unaware....

“Since the 5th of September, there have been no armed clashes.... Nevertheless, we are concerned to hear that numbers of Muslims are fleeing across the border to Bangladesh. We want to find out why this exodus is happening. We would like to talk to those who have fled as well as to those who have stayed.

“I think it is very little known that the great majority of Muslims in the Rakhine State have not joined the exodus. More than 50 percent of the villages of Muslims are intact. They are as they were before the attacks took place, and, we would like to know why. This is what I think we have to work towards, not just looking at the problems but also looking at those areas where there are no problems....

“And for this reason, we would like to invite the members of our diplomatic community to join us in our endeavor to learn more from the Muslims who have integrated successfully into the Rakhine State. If you are interested in joining us in our endeavors, please let us know. We can arrange for you to visit these areas and to ask them for yourself why they have not fled, why they have chosen to remain in their villages, even at a time when everything around them seems to be in a state of turmoil.

“Apart from what we are doing in the matter of allaying the fears of our people, I would like to say that we have been continuing with our socio-economic development programs in Rakhine....

“With regard to IDPs, three camps have been closed and the necessary assistance provided including the building of new houses. There is more to do in that area. We are aware of the challenges, and we are facing them.

“With regard to citizenship, a strategy with [a] specific timeline has been developed to move forward the national verification process.... In some Muslim communities, their leaders have decided that they are not to join in the verification process. We would appreciate it if all friends could persuade them to join in the process because they have nothing to lose by it....

“The government is working hard to enhance existing relations of Bangladesh....

“There has been a call for the repatriation of refugees who have fled from Myanmar to Bangladesh. We are prepared to start the verification process at any time.... And those who have been verified as refugees from this country will be accepted without any problems and with full assurance of their security and their access to humanitarian aid.

“I understand that many of our friends throughout the world are concerned by reports of villages [that have] been burnt and of hoards of refugees fleeing. As I said earlier, there have been no conflicts since the 5th of September.... We too are concerned. We want to find out what the real problems are.

“There have been allegations and counter allegations, and we have to listen to all of them. And we have to make sure that these allegations are based on solid evidence before we take action. Action will be taken against all peoples regardless of their religion, race, or political position who go against the laws of the land and who violate human rights as accepted by our international community....

“As we concentrate on problems in the Rakhine State, I would also like to take the opportunity to remind you that there are problems as serious, for us, as what is happening in the west of our country. We have been trying to build peace out of internal strife. A peace that must be lasting and that must be accompanied by sustainable and equitable development....

And as we go forward in our efforts to redress the ills of this nation, I would like to ask our friends who understand and sympathize with both our aspirations and our problems to join us. We

would like [you] to join us in a positive, constructive way to find new paths towards peace and stability, towards harmony. We would like you to think of our country as a whole, not just as little, afflicted areas. It is as a whole only that we can make progress....

“We all have to join together. I accept that the real responsibility lies with us, the people of this country. All the people of Myanmar, from the government to each and every single individual within this country, has a responsibility for the development and the progress of this country. But, we would like our friends to join us in our great endeavor....

“It is sad that in meeting our diplomatic community, I am obliged to focus just on a very few of our problems when there are so many which I think we could resolve together. That is why I am opening the door to all of you who wish to join us in our endeavors. We invite you to join us, to talk to us, to discuss with us, to go with us to the troubled areas.... See for yourself what is happening, and think for yourself: What can we do to remove these problems? And also, I want you to take special care to study the peaceful areas. How have they managed to keep the peace? How have they managed to preserve harmony? Why are they not at each other’s throats in these particular areas? This is the answer that we need. It is not just a matter of removing ills, but also of promoting what is positive....

“But we also have to work together, because we belong to one nation. And as we belong to one nation, we also belong to this world. It is for this reason that we put great importance on the role of the United Nations as an assembly of nations which was created to promote peace and harmony, to ensure that our world should not ever again in [the] future fall into the suffering that we all experienced during the Second World War. It was with the intention of putting an end to wars....that the United Nations was established, and I would like to think that what we are doing here today may be the beginning of a truly strong and effective movement to bring an end to all the conflicts within Myanmar....

“Hate and fear are the main scourges of our world. All conflicts arise either out of hate or out of fear. It is only by removing the sources of hate and fear that we shall be able to remove conflict from our country and from our world.

“As you know, there are many allegations and counter-allegations. I have not gone into any of them because it is not my purpose to promote and encourage conflict, whether of ideas or of arms, but to try to promote harmony and understanding. I hope you will understand us and join us in our endeavor....”