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Situation in Rakhine State in Myanmar of grave concern – the region must be on high alert.

Mass displacement inevitable if violence continues to escalate.

The co-conveners of the Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration (ADFM) view with serious concern the increasing reports of violence against the people who identify themselves as the Rohingya in Rakhine State, Myanmar.

Myanmar security forces have the right and responsibility to ensure national security and prevent violent extremism. However, reported direct action against a group of Rakhine residents, including women and children, as well as the blocking of international humanitarian assistance, will not help resolve the long-standing interethnic conflicts or contribute to the conditions necessary for such a resolution.

If anything, these actions, and if reports of alleged atrocities are true, are likely to make the problem more unstable and intractable, thereby undermining the security of Rakhine State and the Myanmar nation. As can be seen from other recent sub-regional conflicts around the world, the situation now is more, not less, likely to escalate. Persecuted groups that are left without political options and hope will inevitably see some turning to violence in their desperation.

The developments in Rakhine State also do not help cement Myanmar's diplomatic image as a fast-emerging, modern and democratic nation in the eyes of the international community. The legitimacy and effectiveness of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, chaired by former United Nations Secretary General Mr Kofi Annan, is likely to be undermined by the reported actions of the military against civilians. The basis for any form of resolution will require not only law and order but also justice, trust and confidence.

As demonstrated in recent years, most recently by the Andaman Sea Crisis of May 2015, instability in Rakhine State affects neighbouring Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia and surrounding states. Many of these states already house large numbers of Rohingya asylum seekers. Dimming prospects for peace and eventual resettlement, along with the threat of new flows, mean that the region as a whole cannot remain casual and indifferent observers.

The co-conveners of the ADFM believe that the best way to stabilise the current situation from further deteriorating is to:

- (a) Cease all hostilities against civilian populations in order not to compound the humanitarian crisis and fuel further discontent and violent extremism;
- (b) Allow trusted humanitarian assistance agencies to operate without restriction in Rakhine State in line with national religious beliefs, universal norms and international law; and
- (c) Continue to adopt a constructive, peaceful and legitimate approach by facilitating and relying on Kofi Annan's Advisory Commission on Rakhine State.

The ADFM's concern is for holistic, humane and effective cooperation and action on forced migration in the region, one which preserves the sovereignty and dignity of Myanmar but also those people who self-identify as Rohingya.

The ADFM is jointly convened by the Centre for Policy Development, Australia; the Institute for Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University, Thailand; the Indonesian Institute of Sciences; and the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia. For further information please contact CPD on +61409010818 or ISIS Malaysia on +60123817288.