**Transcript FFM on Myanmar interview – 4 August 2019**

**Answer1:**

**Chris Sidoti:**

The Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar recommended in its major report last September that States and private sector corporations and international financial institutions as well like the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund disengage economically from the Myanmar military.

We made that recommendation at the time because we saw the military as the basic problem in Myanmar. It was at the heart of all of the very serious human rights violations, the very grave crimes under international law.

And so, the transformation of the military in its current form as a dominant political and economic actor is essential for change to occur in Myanmar and for these human rights violations to end.

In this report we have taken this recommendation further or rather we have tried to give it substance by highlighting the areas in which the military is most active economically and the steps that need to be taken in economic disengagement.

**Radhika Coomaraswamy:**

Our purpose is not a sanction against Myanmar. We would be very happy if the rest of the society and economic interests of the rest of the society flourish. Our only interest is that the army be a professional army and be limited to military functions and not get involved in economic life, not avoid civilian oversight and in that sense not exploit the economic resources of Myanmar for their own interest and not an interest of their people.

**Marzuki Darusman:**

What drew us into this was a number of factors. And it turns out that this is sourced to the Tatmadaw business empire which is based primarily, on the extraction of precious gems. Primarily jades and rubies. And therefore, in terms of the accountability context, there is an urgent need to scrutinize the origins of jades and rubies, which at this stage, at this point, risk becoming known as genocide gems akin to the Blood Diamonds, the infamous Blood Diamonds.

**Answer 2**

**Chris Sidoti:**

Our findings, firstly, indicate that the military is economically active through two major groups of corporations, in almost all sectors of the Myanmar economy. It’s particularly active in the jade and ruby mining area, but other areas of mining as well, in construction, banking, and insurance, tourism, timber industry and so on.

But the second finding is a very significant one. Its dominance is not as great as it was twenty years ago. It’s now possible to be involved financially, economically in Myanmar, without having to be involved with the military. And so an important part of what we are doing in this report is identifying those corporations and other businesses active in Myanmar that are military related, and so should be avoided. And areas where people can invest or do business in confidence but they are not dealing with these human rights violators.

**Radhika Coomaraswamy:**

So the purpose of this report is to analyse and put forward the economic interest of the Tatmadaw, mainly because one, we want to show the economic independence where there is no civilian oversight, so they are allowed to function freely without ever being held in place as an army should be in the modern world. And secondly, the nature of some of those holdings are truly exploitative of the areas that they operate in.

**Answer 3**

**Crhis Sidoti:**

The money that the military makes through its economic controls, enables it to operate outside of parliamentary scrutiny. It’s essential in any democracy that military forces be subject to control by civilian governments and be funded through normal parliamentary appropriations.

When the military has its own economic base and is not dependent upon the civilian government and the parliament to provide the money, then it’s not a national defense force it’s a private militia. And this is essentially what the Myanmar military has become – a private militia. Funding itself outside parliamentary scrutiny and control.

It’s necessary to cut off those accesses, those sources of private funding, so that proper parliamentary and civilian government oversight on the military can be imposed. And that’s key to the transition of Myanmar into a proper inclusive, modern, democratic State.

**Answer 4**

**Chris Sitodi:**

We’ve started the process of mapping the military’s economic interests. And we’ve done that so that states, financial institutions and the private sector can act on our recommendation from last year to disengage economically from the military.

Essentially, we have to cut them off from their sources of funding. And so that’s what we’re recommending and we’re helping people to do that by identifying those sectors in the economy and those corporate vehicles that the military uses to make its money.

We would like to see international, financial institutions like the International Finance Corporation not providing any money to any projects that these corporations run. We would like to see the private sector not entering into joint ventures. We would like to see governments not providing any financial support, investment, development assistance through these military vehicles.

**Radhika Coomaraswamy:**

So the linkage is between the Tatmadaw and the human rights violations and our believe that in preventing that in having sanctions against that, we can actually help the situation by getting the Tatmadaw to reform dramatically.

**Marzuki Darusman:**

We are now appealing also to the general public that we share a responsibility in doing something that will fundamentally change the situation, whereby accountability can be pursued with effective actions, on the basis of a complete exposure of the range, the scale and the depths of the Tatmadaw business empire.

**Answer 5**

**Chris Sidoti:**

We have identified in our report a number of states and state-owned enterprises that continue to provide military support to the military in Myanmar, Tatmadaw.

We know that there are a number of countries that have imposed arms and arms related embargos, but there are still countries that are trading. Again, these ties need to be cut.

The military now as a seventy-year track record of grave human rights violations, including the responsibility for some of the most serious crimes under the international law.

Anyone who continues to provide military arms to such a military force is supporting these kinds of historic and present-day activities. And so, the arms have to be cut off, so that the human rights violations are not committed.

END.