



PRESS RELEASE

U.S. EMBASSY RANGOON

110 University Avenue, Kamayut Township, Rangoon, Burma

January 15, 2013

U.S. Ambassador to Burma Derek J. Mitchell visited Karen State (Hpa-an) and Mon State (Mawlymine) on January 11-13. During his visit, he met with government officials and leaders of political parties, civil society, faith-based institutions and non-state armed groups.

Representatives of civil society and faith-based organizations in Karen and Mon States reported growing space to conduct their work and increased opportunities to engage with Government officials. Representatives noted concerns but some optimism about their ability to register their organizations with the Government, which would build greater mutual understanding and cooperation.

Ambassador Mitchell was encouraged by reports of positive developments in the ceasefire and peace processes in Karen and Mon States, but discussions in both States were a reminder that lasting peace and national reconciliation will take time to achieve after decades of conflict and mistrust. Karen and Mon interlocutors repeatedly noted their concern about the government's military action in Kachin State, and the impact of continued conflict there on trust between ethnic nationality communities and the government.

The United States Government continues to work with and provide assistance to the peoples of Karen and Mon States through local NGOs and international organizations. To date, such activities have focused on health promotion, particularly HIV prevention, as well as reducing risks from natural disasters and empowering local leaders. Local representatives requested the United States work with the international community to empower local leaders when considering development priorities, and to ensure the early and ongoing participation of local communities in the design and implementation of assistance.

Ambassador Mitchell was joined during his visit by his wife, Min. In Hpa-an, Ambassador and Mrs. Mitchell were pleased to join Karen New Year celebrations with the people of Karen State on January 12.

-###-