

**Remarks by Ambassador Derek Mitchell at the 239th Anniversary of the  
United States of America**

**June 23rd, 2015, Jefferson Center, Mandalay**

**(Remarks as Prepared)**

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. *Alone Mingalaba kh'mya!* Welcome to you all. Thank you so much for joining my wife Min, and me, and my colleagues from the Jefferson Center and U.S. Embassy, to celebrate the 239<sup>th</sup> birthday of the United States of America.

Thank you to Ko Saw Kyin Sein, the Jefferson Center and U.S. Embassy staff and volunteers, who did a tremendous amount of work to put this event together. Ko Htoo Chun Win from Sky Engineering did a fantastic job setting up this space for this event. I want to welcome Mandalay Division Parliament President U Win Maung, Mandalay Region Government Social Affair Minister H.E Dr. Win Hlaing and Mandalay Region Police Chief Colonel Han Tun. We're grateful for your attendance. I also want to thank our corporate sponsors. Without their support this event would not be possible.

Last year we help an Independence Day event at the Jefferson Center for the first time in more than 30 years. We had great time at a memorable event and I've very happy to be back. The Jefferson Center in Mandalay is a very special place. It is the hub for connecting the people of Upper Myanmar to resources at the American Center in Yangon and throughout the world.

Specifically, I am pleased to announce that we are bringing an English language program to the Jefferson Center to better prepare students for using English in the classroom and in their daily lives. To ensure that students in Mandalay have access to further educational opportunities, we have also designated the Jefferson Center as an official TOEFL testing center. Students here will no longer have to travel to Rangoon just to sit for a test in order to qualify for international opportunities. Recognizing the importance of the Jefferson Center, we will provide more resources and equipment upgrades at the center this fiscal year. The Jefferson Center was named one of the top 10 American Spaces in Asia, and among the top 60 in the world.

Ms. Penny Fields, the Country Director for the new Peace Corps mission to Myanmar, is here with us tonight. The Peace Corps will bring American

volunteers to live in rural communities, support local education and health initiatives; and help build strong and lasting people-people ties.

The Jefferson Center is of course a particularly appropriate venue to celebrate America's Independence Day. As you know, this center is named after Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson had a remarkable political career. He was governor of the state of Virginia, our first secretary of state, and our third president. But despite all that, he asked that none of this be listed on his tombstone when he died. Not governor, secretary of state, even president. What he did ask to be listed on his tombstone tells you all you need to know about Jefferson's view of his life and about democracy.

First, he listed "Father of the University of Virginia." Now, I'm partial to this one because I went to the University of Virginia, or UVA, as we call it. He was proud to found UVA because he believed – he knew – the centrality of education to a healthy democracy. That democracy required an educated citizenry who not only knew facts but knew how to analyze facts and make independent judgments for themselves.

Second, on his tombstone he listed "Author of Virginia's Statute for Religious Freedom." This surprises even many Americans when they learn this was chosen by Jefferson himself as one of his three most important achievements. Jefferson believed strongly in the importance of freedom of religion and prevention of discrimination based on religion or any other factor. He knew that allowing religious intolerance to fester in our new country would undermine America's stability, security, growth and development over the long run. He was right.

Third, and why we're here today, he listed "Author of the Declaration of American Independence." The Declaration of Independence was formally adopted and signed on July 4, 1776, our Independence Day. The Declaration as many of you know included the famous principles that "all are created equal," that everyone deserves basic human rights, that governments must protect those rights, and that legitimate governments acquire their powers only through explicit – not assumed -- consent of the people. These are all fundamental democratic principles. For that reason, I consider our Independence Day to be not only a day honoring the founding of the United States but also a day to celebrate important values for human beings and democracies everywhere.

The upcoming elections offer an opportunity for all citizens to test and further develop your emerging democracy. We like to say in the United States that

democracy is not a spectator sport. Democracy is not something you watch or observe from a distance. It's something you must grab, own, participate in yourself if it is to function effectively.

We will try to do our part in support. Through resources like the Jefferson Center, the United States will remain committed to supporting dialogue, free and open debate, information sharing, and voter education in this country, without favor to any specific party or person. To be successful, these critical elections must be free and fair, transparent and inclusive, available to all, free from violence or coercion to ensure everyone's voice is heard, regardless of race, religion, gender, or disability. Only then will there be a chance of unity, only then will there be a chance at re-building trust, creating stability, and promoting reconciliation among your country's diverse people, and only then will peace and development have a chance to take root in this country.

The road ahead will not be easy. Indeed the United States itself continues to work on achieving unity from its great diversity. But the principles of our Declaration of Independence offer a vision to aspire to, of equal rights, justice, and democracy. And not just for the United States but for all wherever they live.

So let me conclude by again thanking you for joining this evening to celebrate U.S. Independence Day. And by quoting not Jefferson but someone closer to home. A great teacher, patriot, and martyr who came from and gave so much back to this great city of Mandalay in the first half of last century: "Sayagi" U Razak.

U Razak famously said: "The fight for liberty is the fight for peace. And like peace, liberty is indivisible." In other words, liberty cannot be divided up and granted to some but not others if you want peace. I cannot think of better words to do justice to the meaning of my country's Independence Day than Sayagi's. So let me conclude there.

Thank you for joining us and showing your respect for my country. Please enjoy yourselves tonight.