

Deputy Secretary Antony Blinken
Transcript
Press Conference
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DEPUTY SECRETARY BLINKEN: Thank you all very much for being here. I'm very pleased to be here in Myanmar once again. I was here in May and it is very good to be back, and also to see the extraordinary events and progress just in that short period of time.

I want to begin this afternoon by offering our congratulations on your recent elections and commending all those who worked together to hold a peaceful and successful poll.

For the first time since 1990, the voices of citizens from every part of this country were heard, and this time they are being respected. The elections were a significant step forward in the journey to democracy in Myanmar that respects the rights of all.

I also want to offer my congratulations to the National League for Democracy. The results are testament to the decades-long commitment of Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD to the north star of democracy. They validate the sacrifices made by many brave Burmese in the years when even dreaming of this day was dangerous. And they reflect the Government of Myanmar's commitment to a democratic transition.

So, this is a moment of great opportunity—a moment for all of Myanmar's political leaders to work together to form a new government and address differences through dialogue.

We welcome the positive statements from President Thein Sein and from the leadership of the military congratulating the NLD and pledging to respect the result of the elections. It is also encouraging that Aung San Suu Kyi has met with President Thein Sein, Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing to discuss the upcoming political transition.

At the same time, the coming transition is but one milestone on the road to full democracy. We know there are still many challenges ahead. Broad-based economic growth must be nurtured and it must be sustained. The national reconciliation process must continue. Remaining political prisoners must be released and human rights protected for all, no matter their ethnicity or religion.

Reforms need to continue until an elected civilian government is truly sovereign and all the country's institutions answer to the people. The United States will work in close partnership with the new government to support its efforts to achieve these goals.

This morning, during my meetings with President Thein Sein, with Aung San Suu Kyi, and Vice Senior General Soe Win we discussed the progress that Myanmar has made as well as the work ahead.

We discussed Myanmar's economic challenges, including the incoming government's focus on improving conditions for those who live and work off the land. The United States will continue to promote responsible investment by our companies in Myanmar, which we believe is strengthening new local businesses and industries and building human capital, not just extracting resources.

We talked about the peace process and political dialogue between the government and ethnic nationalities. The United States will do whatever the stakeholders in this historic effort believe will be helpful to aid in its success. Meanwhile, we urge an end to offensive military operations and unfettered humanitarian access to civilians in need.

I also reaffirmed the message that President Obama delivered when he was here last year, something I think the vast majority of the people of Myanmar believe—that diversity is one of its greatest strengths, and turning people against each other because of their religion or race threatens democracy, peace, and progress.

In this context, I shared our strong concern about discrimination and violence experienced by ethnic and religious minorities, including the Rohingya population in Rakhine State. As Aung San Suu Kyi has stressed, the solution is rule of law—equally applied to all—ensuring protection from violence, freedom of movement, access to livelihoods, education and health, and an equal chance for everyone to participate in the democratic life of their country.

We will do everything we can to help the new government as it plans a course forward. As progress is made, we hope that the focus in Rakhine State can turn to overcoming challenges, underdevelopment, and social division that are holding back all the people in the state.

We remain committed to standing with the people of Myanmar in their pursuit of democracy, development, and national reconciliation. Since 2012, we have provided more than \$500 million in support of Myanmar's reform process, including implementation of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement and efforts to increase the participation of civil society and women in the peace process. More broadly, civil society helped bring Myanmar to this point, and it will be a critical component in all the work ahead.

Ultimately, it is up to the people of Myanmar to build the durable, democratic institutions and practices that advance a secure, prosperous, peaceful future for all of its people. In this journey, the United States will continue to be a full and committed partner.

So let me once again, offer my deepest congratulations to the people of Myanmar for your historic election. Thank you very much.