

**Remarks by Ambassador Derek Mitchell
at the 239th Anniversary of the United States of America
(as prepared)**

- Mr. Vice President, Madam, Venerable Ashins, excellencies, distinguished guests, friends, ladies and gentlemen. *Alone Mingalaba kh'mya!* Welcome to you all.
- Thank you so much for braving the rain and the traffic to join my wife Min and me, as well as my colleagues from the U.S. Embassy, in celebrating the 239th birthday of the United States of America.
- I hope you've enjoyed the food so far. Tonight you'll see we decided to forego the fancy stuff and serve classic American July 4 picnic food – hamburgers, hot dogs, potato salad, barbecue.
- And we've decided to make the food available *before* the speeches rather than opening things up after, thereby violating the first rule of how to keep people at an event like this. I hope that wasn't a mistake.
- I have a number of thank you's to offer.
- I want to offer first a special thank you to Vice President U Nyan Tun and his wife, Daw Khin Aye Myint, for honoring us with their presence. Thank you for being here.
- Minister U Soe Thane, Deputy Minister Thant Kyaw, thank you both for being here as always.
- I want to make special note of the American corporate sponsors who helped underwrite tonight's event. They are listed on the banner there. I am especially grateful for their partnership over the past year, and proud of their outstanding work investing in this country's future, modeling the best of responsible corporate citizenship.
- Thanks to my staff who did all the outstanding preparations: Our Management chief Lisa Povolni, who right now is doubling as my acting DCM.
- Erin McCoy, Arthur Dymond, Kat Ravetz, Rowdy Spuesens – for working all the details. Kyaw Kyaw Naing (K2), Myo Htut Oo (Mohawk), and all the Facilities folks who put up this tent, put up all the lights out front late into the night last night, and set up all the stalls. And thanks to Mya Thanda Win (Thanda) and her hardworking team for arranging the decorations and interior set-up. You and your colleagues do a great job year-round. Thank you.
- Thank you Marines for your contributions today and every day to help keep us safe and secure.
- American Center teachers, who do such great work with the youth of this country. Thank you.

- While I'm at it, thank you to the Germans – German ambassador? -- for letting our women get through to the Soccer World Cup finals.
- Kudos to my Residence staff whom you all will see behind the scenes making this event work tonight. That includes the incomparable Kevin, who prepared all the food. And Residence manager Ye Htun for all the interior decorations as well as the special red, white, and blue July 4 cocktail drinks you may have already been served.
- I also want to note the attendance tonight of a special individual – U Ant Gyi. U Ant Gyi is 92 years old. In 1971, U Ant Gyi played with a visiting Count Basie when the jazz artist came here as part of a Jazz Ambassadors program. A picture of the two of them together hangs in the front of our embassy. I am pleased U Ant Gyi can be here with us tonight; he is someone who personifies the great legacy of relations between our two countries that we are just now rediscovering and reviving.
- The past year has been eventful as usual for my Embassy and the U.S.-Myanmar bilateral relationship. After more than 200 years where no U.S. president had ever set foot in this country, we welcomed last November the second visit in three years of President Obama. In addition, our companies have expanded their presence, and the Embassy has continued to assist the country's comprehensive development – everything from land use to health system reform, agricultural to ICT development, civil society and government capacity-building, peace support to election support, as well as youth and women's empowerment, just to name a few examples.
- During President Obama's visit, we also announced our intention to establish the first-ever Peace Corps mission to this country. Ms. Penny Fields, the Country Director for the new mission, 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-to-people ties between our countries. Penny has strategically set up a table dedicated to the Peace Corps next to the dessert table. I encourage you all to stop by to learn more about the program.
- Now again the purpose of this event this evening is to celebrate American Independence Day. To me, this day marks the establishment not only of the United States of America but also many essential founding principles of my country. Principles outlined in our Declaration of Independence.
- The principle that “all are created equal” in deserving rights of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” That governments are responsible for protecting those rights. And that government power is only legitimate if acquired through explicit – not assumed -- consent of the people.
- These are principles we share; principles fundamental to any democracy. For that reason, I consider our Independence Day to be a day to celebrate the core values of democracy and human rights not just in the United States but everywhere.

- On that point, it has been interesting to me that this year of 2015 is a year of many meaningful anniversaries that remind us of the struggle for democracy and human rights around the world through the centuries.
- This year, for instance, marks the 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta, the “Great Charter” of Great Britain, which enshrined the rights of freedom of speech, religion, and assembly, and set the stage for constitutional government.
- 2015 marks the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, which among other things heralded the beginning of the end of colonialism in Asia, including in this country.
- In my own country, this year we marked exactly 150 years since the end of our bloody and divisive civil war. A war essentially fought over the very identity of the United States as embodied in the Declaration of Independence. Whether indeed all are created equal as human beings, and thus deserving to be released from inhuman bondage.
- Anyone reading the headlines will know that the United States still struggles with the issue of race and the legacy of that civil war. Creating a “more perfect Union,” as the U.S. Constitution says, has not been easy for my country, or any country.
- But amidst those challenges of the past year, the last few weeks have reaffirmed my faith in my country and the eternal promise of America’s founding principles to guide continued progress.
- Last week, our Supreme Court affirmed once and for all that no matter whom you love, you deserve equal dignity and an equal right to the pursuit of happiness under law.
- And when evil entered a church a few weeks ago in Charleston, South Carolina, to kill Americans just because of their race, the families of the victims responded not with anger or bitterness but with amazing grace.
- And the American people mourned together as one to affirm that this hate is not who we are, that we will not let the few who act out of fear and hatred triumph over the many who believe in an America of hope and love and unity amidst our diversity.
- In the end, no law can change the human heart or prevent evil in the world. The question is how a nation and a people decide to address such challenges when they arise. At those times the soul of a country is tested.
- Which leads to perhaps the most relevant anniversary to note this year, particularly in this country. The 100th anniversary of Bogyoke Aung San’s birth.
- As a new era for this country dawned after World War II, Aung San recognized the requirement of leaders to offer a new founding vision for their country. And specifically to define a national identity that takes into account this country’s enormous diversity and division.

- To that end, Aung San said: “We cannot confine the definition of a nationality to the narrow bounds of race, religion, etc.”
- “Every nation in the world, being a [mix] of races and religions,” he added, “should develop such a nationalism as is compatible with the welfare of one and all, irrespective of race or religion or class or sex. This is my nationalism,” he said.
- Aung San’s colleague at the time, and ultimately fellow martyr, U Razak added his own thoughts: “The fight for liberty,” he said, “is the fight for peace. And like peace, liberty is indivisible.” In other words, if you want national peace and stability, human rights cannot be granted to some but not others.
- Indeed, it is a principle of the United States that by ensuring the freedom of all we secure our own freedom. That by protecting the rights of all equally, we ensure our own rights are protected. And in so doing, we become more stable, secure and strong societies.
- So it is now up to the people of this country to determine what the core values, the soul, of the “new Myanmar” will be. You are making history as founders, in essence, of a new country, although your country has a long and great heritage.
- 2015 could be a landmark year in defining that new country’s future. Whether it will be one marked by unity, peace, justice, and democratic practice, or something else.
- I know everyone in this room is working hard in support of this country’s success. It has been one of the great honors of my life to be part of this moment in history over the past three-plus years. At the same time, we all know the future here is deeply uncertain.
- However, as Abraham Lincoln said, “The best way to predict your future is to create it.”
- So Mr. Vice President, Madam, excellencies, colleagues, everyone here, thank you for honoring my country on its 239th birthday. And as we celebrate the vision of my country’s founders, let’s raise our glasses to the people of this magnificent country, and to their ability to create a future for themselves and their families worthy of the vision of their founders.
- Everyone please enjoy yourselves tonight. Alo-chay-su-tim-ba-de, kh’mya. Thank you.