



Press Release

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110 University Avenue, Kamayut Township, Rangoon, Burma

Testimony of Ambassador-designate to Burma Derek Mitchell

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Special Representative and Policy Coordinator for Burma
Statement Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
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Ambassador-Designate to Burma

Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to Burma, the first in more than two decades. I am humbled by the confidence that President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton have shown in me with this nomination. Mr. Chairman, I know you take a particularly keen personal interest in the situation in Burma, and I commend all you have done during your tenure to advance the relationship between our two countries.

It was almost exactly a year ago that I sat before you and this Committee as the President's nominee to serve as the first Special Representative and Policy Coordinator for Burma. I noted in my testimony then the many challenges facing Burma and our bilateral relationship. No one would have thought possible the remarkable developments that have occurred since a year ago. On-going reform efforts have created an opening for increased engagement between our two countries, and instilled a sense of hope among millions inside and outside Burma who have worked and sacrificed so much for so long for real change.

During my time as the Special Representative and Policy Coordinator for Burma, I traveled to the country many times. The government in Naypyitaw provided excellent hospitality and demonstrated a willingness to have open and candid discussions with me on each occasion. I also want to thank the many other interlocutors – political party officials, civil society representatives, ethnic minority and religious leaders, former political prisoners, business executives, international diplomats and non-governmental representatives, and many local citizens -- for opening their doors to me to discuss a full range of perspectives on the complexity and diversity of Burma.

I have also traveled throughout East Asia and Europe to share ideas and coordinate policy approaches. This included meetings with the many men and women in Thailand who have worked tirelessly along the border with Burma for decades to provide for the humanitarian needs of Burmese migrants and refugees. With so much attention focused on developments inside Burma, we should not forget the work of these committed individuals who help those in need. I am confident that these and many other committed individuals will join ongoing efforts inside the country when conditions are right.

And of course I have spent many hours with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. As we all know, Daw Suu Kyi remains a uniquely iconic figure inside and outside Burma. Upon helping bring her country to this

point, she has now entered the field as an elected politician to help guide its next steps toward a secure, democratic, just, and prosperous future. I look forward to many more opportunities for discussions with her about her country and about how the United States can assist its progress going forward.

Perhaps the most important development of the past year, however, has been the partnership forged between Daw Suu Kyi and President Thein Sein. President Thein Sein has proven to be a remarkable figure. We should never forget to recognize his extraordinary vision and leadership, and for the many reformist steps he and his partners in government have taken over the past year. These actions have clearly reflected the aspirations, indeed sacrifices, of millions of brave Burmese.

At the same time, we have no illusions about the challenges that lie ahead. As Secretary Clinton has observed, reform is not irreversible, and continued democratic change is not inevitable. We remain deeply concerned about the continued detention of hundreds of political prisoners and conditions placed on those previously released. The rule of law requires an independent and effective judiciary. The constitutional role of the military in the nation's affairs is inconsistent with traditional democratic principles of civil-military relations.

Human rights abuses, including military impunity, continue, particularly in ethnic minority areas. Although there may be some hope for an end to the violence and establishment of serious dialogue on fundamental political issues, mutual mistrust between the government and ethnic minority groups runs deep and a long road lies ahead. Recent sectarian violence in Rakhine State demonstrates the divisiveness in Burma cultivated over many decades, if not centuries, that will need to be overcome to realize lasting peace and national reconciliation in the country.

We have been quite consistent and direct in public and private about our continuing concerns about the lack of transparency in Burma's military relationship with North Korea, and specifically that the government must adhere to its obligations under relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions and its other international nonproliferation obligations. If confirmed as Ambassador, I will continue to make this issue of highest priority in my conversations with the government, and be clear that our bilateral relationship can never be fully normalized until we are fully satisfied that any illicit ties to North Korea have ended once and for all.

As the Burmese government has taken steps over the past year, so too has the United States in an action-for-action approach. Each action we have taken in recent months has had as its purpose to benefit the Burmese people and strengthen reform and reformers within the system.

Most recently, Secretary Clinton announced a broad easing of restrictions on new investment and the exportation of U.S. financial services to Burma. As she stated in May, we look forward to working with the business sector as a new partner in our principled engagement approach. If confirmed, I will promote U.S. business interests in Burma while ensuring companies understand the complex environment in which they will be engaging and the important role they can play in promoting American values and interests in the country. It is clear to me from my discussions inside the country that the Burmese people admire U.S. products, standards, and principles; staying true to them promises to serve both our public and private interests going forward.

As the Special Representative and Policy Coordinator for Burma, I made it a priority to provide regular briefings and consultations with Capitol Hill. I also urged the Burmese government to open its doors to Congressional visitors so they may see the changes on the ground for themselves. I believe the Administration and Congress have formed an effective, bi-partisan partnership on Burma policy. It is critical to maintain this partnership going forward. Should I be confirmed, I will make every effort to continue to reach out to interested Members and staffs, and hope to see you all regularly on our doorstep in Rangoon.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, let me conclude by taking this opportunity to extend my utmost appreciation to my many partners within the Executive Branch with whom I have worked over the past year as Special Representative – including at USAID, Treasury, Commerce, DoD, the White House, and State. In particular, I want to commend the excellent career officers, interagency representatives, and locally employed staff members of our Embassy in Rangoon whom I have gotten to know during my visits. This team has proved again and again to me that we have people of the highest quality in Rangoon. They have responded superbly to a rapidly changing tempo of operations in the field, and have done so with professionalism and skill. If confirmed, I will make it my priority to ensure they have the tools and direction necessary to continue serving our interests in Burma in an exemplary fashion and be proud of the work they do for our country every day.

Thank you for considering my nomination.