

Transcript

Honorable Eileen Chamberlain Donahoe
U.S. Ambassador to the UN Human Rights Council (UNHCR)

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Ambassador Donahoe: In the case of Burma the Universal Periodic Review, the human rights review is exceedingly important because it is a particularly closed society. And if we did not have this opportunity to undergo this review, there would be no opportunity for actors in the international community, civil society, to interface directly with the newly elected Burmese government on their human rights record. So it is a very significant opportunity.

I do believe that the Human Rights Council review process, the Universal Periodic Review, of Burma can contribute to an improvement in the human rights situation on the ground in Burma, specifically because representatives of the Burmese government will travel here and be required to convey their perspective on their own human rights record and then listen to the deep concerns by all members of the international community as well as civil society with respect to their record. I don't believe there is an equivalent opportunity when they are simply at home and they control the types of conversations they are having on their human rights situation.

Yes, I was able to meet with human rights defenders in December in Bangkok who had come from Burma. I would say that the most significant concern that they raised with me is that the international community not be fooled by certain recent events with respect to the human rights situation in Burma, and in particular the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and the November 7th election. If those two facts are taken at face value, certain members of the international community may think there has been a dramatic shift with respect to human rights in Burma. And they wanted to convey the fact that that is not necessarily the case. The elections were not free and fair. Aung San Suu Kyi's party is still not recognized as a legitimate political party and able to participate fully and able to be prevented from participating in the election fully, and that all of the human rights concerns that they had before the election still really remain to be dealt with after the election.

The United States and many others remain deeply concerned about the human rights situation in Burma.

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