

Ambassador Mitchell's Remarks
Human Rights Human Dignity International Film Festival
June 19, 2014 – 4:30 p.m.
Sule Shrangrila Hotel (Traders)

- Mingalaba kh'mya. Hello and welcome.
- I'm honored to be back at the Human Rights Human Dignity International Film Festival.
- Congratulations to Min Htin Ko Ko Gyi and the other festival organizers. Once again done an incredible job with the festival this year to showcase films focused on human rights here and around the world.
- Happy Birthday to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Min Ko Naing. Having awards at this festival named after them is appropriate as they both are personal embodiments of commitment to human rights and human dignity.
- And U Win Tin – an icon for human rights and dignity who is greatly missed but will be always remembered.
- The U.S. Embassy and USAID are proud sponsors of this event – along with several other programs to promote the film industry in this country over the past year -- because we recognize the potential power of film to heal and to teach.
- Story telling is a fundamental part of the human experience. The freedom to tell stories is perhaps the original human right and emblem of human dignity.
- What documentary films, and all stories, demonstrate is how universal our experiences are as human beings. How a story about a family in Malaysia or Madrid is fully recognizable to someone in Myitkyina, Mandalay, and Michigan.
- The surroundings may look different, the subject may be of a different nationality, ethnicity, religion, or gender. But the best documentaries take you somewhere different while reminding us of the common humanity that binds us.
- We all have learned from bitter experience that it is fear and ignorance that create division and hatred between people. Understanding, empathy and compassion for others is the best antidote to these worst instincts in us all.

- In that way, we must deeply thank and honor **all** the brave filmmakers who have brought to our attention their stories -- for enhancing our understanding, and deepening our sense of empathy and compassion for others.
- At the same time, of course, we must never forget that such courage as these filmmakers have shown often comes at a cost.
- There will always be those less courageous people who feel threatened by speech they do not like, or a story that does not conform with their own prejudices.
- This mindset may reside in governments and citizens alike.
- These days, such mindsets unfortunately often show themselves on social media – through hate speech or threats of violence from people unwilling to advance their ideas through dialogue over facts, or even unwilling to reveal their own names.
- The fact that these attempts at intimidation often come from such shadowy sources tells us all something about the difference between the courageous voices here willing to put their names to their work and those who oppose them.
- This narrow, fearful mindset runs contrary to everything this festival is about. Everyone who values the meaning of this event must oppose the use of threat and intimidation to suppress speech and censor artists.
- This is a pivotal period in this country's history, and an equally challenging one.
- Given the remarkable moment here, it is my profound hope that events like this festival continue on;
- That filmmakers here and abroad continue to tell their stories without fear;
- And that the celebration and protection of human rights and human dignity – for everyone, regardless of gender, race, nationality, religion, etc. – continues to be promoted.
- Congratulations again to organizers. Thank you.