

Thank you very much, as stated I was last here in 2014 in another building and it's very, very good to be back. I do want to thank MISIS for having me back, especially MISIS Chairman Ambassador U Nyunt Maung Shein, as well as esteemed MISIS members Dr. Daw Kyi Kyi Hla, Daw Carole Ann Chit Tha, U Than Tun, and U Ba Hla Aye. I also want to thank MOFA's Strategic Studies and Training Department Director General U Myint Thu for being here, is he here? He was going to be here, okay. I don't have the names right, sorry, very good, and to all current and former MOFA officials, fellow diplomats, other MISIS members, and especially the rectors and students from Yangon, Dagon, and East Yangon universities' international relations departments, I see here on the margins who I look forward to hearing from. Please ask a lot of questions, if it goes past an hour that's fine. Whatever you want to ask, please ask. I just heard that there's interest in US domestic politics which typically I don't want to talk about because it's so messy but, no, I'm confused by it as well, but if you want to ask about US domestic politics, anything, honestly let's have a discussion, it's what these roundtables are for.

I unfortunately have a speech here, which may be for thirty minutes, so please bear with me, but they are reflections on the time I have spent here since July of 2012. I would like to share some of the things that we've achieved, that we've done.

Three weeks from today I will depart Myanmar as the first U.S. ambassador here in more than 20 years. My wife and I have loved it here. It has been the highlight of our lives. We have traveled around the country and gotten to know well the incredible beauty, diversity, integrity, and talent housed in this country; so much talent and so much promise. Everyone knows of the abundant physical resources here, but more importantly it is the remarkable human resources yet to be tapped to its fullest potential that holds the real promise for the future.

It appears Myanmar is on the cusp of unleashing that great human potential. The current moment is one of high expectations and high hopes. Of course, everyone must be realistic about the pace of change, about how fast things will indeed evolve given conditions in the country. However, I enjoy hearing from my friends about how people today are smiling -out of joy not fear - and are hopeful in ways not experienced for decades. That is very promising indeed.

It has also been a great pleasure for me over the past three and a half years that we have been able to begin reconnecting our two countries' partnership after too many years of alienation. The U.S. Embassy has expanded greatly, assisted mostly by the re-establishment of a USAID mission. But we have also added representatives from the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Treasury, and Commerce. We also are laying the foundation for introduction of the Peace Corps, a milestone moment. And in the process, we have hosted two historic visits of a U.S. president, the first ever in history. And I am still recovering from that! Nonetheless, as far as we have come, there is still so much more to achieve and work on together.

The bottom line is the United States continues to have a fundamental interest in this country's success. We look forward to continuing to be partners in reform, whether that means

in political, economic or human development, peace, or in the education, health, and overall well-being of all your people. We seek to support the development of a Myanmar that is a responsible member of the international community; that adheres to international norms of behavior, and serves as a contributor to regional peace, stability and security. Our assistance to and engagement in this country has advanced rapidly over the past few years, and we will continue to build on that foundation going forward. Our assistance has been real and tangible, as I will lay out in a moment.

In the process, we have continually adhered to an important principle: it is not just what we do but how we do it that matters. In a country as diverse and dynamic as this one, we do our best to ensure our engagement is inclusive, informed, and sensitive to local conditions. We understand we must listen and learn before we act, do our due diligence, and be highly attuned to the deeply complex environment here and thus do no harm.

We have focused specifically on five key areas in our engagement; these guide the ways we have operated over the three and a half years of my time in the country.

These five areas are:

1. Promoting National Reconciliation
2. Strengthening Democratic Institutions and promoting Human Rights
3. Supporting Inclusive Economic Development
4. Promoting Resilience in Local Communities
5. Supporting Myanmar's Emergence as a Responsible Regional Partner

Let me reflect on each in turn.

National reconciliation, including bringing about an end to the long-standing ethnic conflict, remains the defining challenge of this country. In recent years, parties to the conflict have made significant progress. Agreement on the text of a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement has been reached. In October 2015, eight ethnic armed groups, the government and the military all signed the NCA. While a number of ethnic armed groups chose not to sign the agreement at that time, they continue to engage in dialogue and peace negotiations.

The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement represents a significant step forward; however, much work remains. The goal of the ensuing political dialogue process must be to reach agreement on a new model of federal governance and a political system that reflects the interests and concerns of this country's diverse communities. As this difficult process moves forward, it will be critical that all groups; signatories and non-signatories alike; adhere to the spirit of peace through trust-building, mutual respect, and protection of civilians. That is why recent fighting between the TNLA and the RCSS in Shan State, and new and renewed conflict in Rakhine and

Kachin states, are deeply troubling. It's essential for all parties to restrain from fighting, allow for humanitarian assistance to reach those affected by violence and figure out ways to refrain from clashes in the future.

The U.S. Embassy through USAID has sought to do its part to promote peace. We have increased the access of ethnic leaders to technical assistance and research on issues related to peace. We have worked closely with civil society and community leaders to increase their participation in the peace process; held workshops and discussions that brought them together with government representatives; and increased their access to information critical to a future political dialogue. Increased participation by civil society, including women and youth, will ensure that the process will truly reflect the will and welfare of all the people. This is critical, as the upcoming political dialogue process will be a kind of nation-building exercise. It must include the voices of a wide array of the nation's people if it is ultimately to be embraced and accepted as reflective of a common national vision for the future.

Indeed, as Myanmar's peace process and democratic transition continue forward, the people of this country will need to consider some very hard questions about the fundamental identity of the new Myanmar that is being formed. This too is part of the national reconciliation process. During my time here, for instance, religious affiliation has become increasingly linked to national identity. And yet at the same time I have heard so many of this country's people tell me that equality and peaceful coexistence of people of different religions is a source of deep pride. How will such issues be addressed going forward? How will true unity come about here amidst such enormous religious, racial, and ethnic diversity, and in an environment of profound mistrust created over many years? What will be the concepts or qualities that unite the people here into a single nation?

National reconciliation of course goes even beyond that. It means ensuring equal justice, respect and opportunity for all, regardless of race, religion, gender, ethnicity, disability, or who you love. In that way, true stability, justice and prosperity will be possible in this country. National reconciliation and creating a new, united national identity will not be an easy matter, of course, and will take some time. But perhaps it would be useful to remember that quote from Abraham Lincoln, that "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." In other words if any of us is insecure, then we are all insecure.

It is because of this country's diversity that democracy and human rights protection are so important to the future of the country, and why the United States has placed priority attention on these issues as a second focus of our diplomatic engagement. To reconcile differences, to promote real unity amidst such profound diversity, one can either fight or talk, compel or compromise. This country understands from experience what results when you choose to fight and compel rather than talk and compromise. So U.S. assistance programming has focused on human rights and democratic development in the interest of promoting unity, peace and stability.

Our carefully calibrated engagement of the military here has been in the service of our interest to promote human rights and democratic development in this country. Our engagement has focused on discussing international standards of professional conduct, including accountability and protection of human rights, and civilian control - a central component of democracy. We'll take our cues from the newly elected civilian leadership and listen to others here about the pace and scope of our military engagement going forward. We will continue to be transparent about our engagement. But we are committed to including the military in our democracy and human rights work in this country.

On other fronts, we have partnered with World Learning to run the Institute for Political and Civic Engagement -- iPACE -- which is based at the American Center right here around the corner and at the Jefferson Center in Mandalay. iPACE has trained over 1,000 individuals since late 2012, representing over 400 civil society organizations and 34 political parties. This diverse and growing group of iPACE graduates will strengthen the capacity of political parties, civil society, and general civic education throughout the country. Our Small Grants Program has promoted the development of a vibrant, representative civil society at the local level by supporting local organizations that identify, respond to, and advocate for the needs of their communities, and broaden civilian and citizen participation and democratic governance in the process.

Of course, much of our work over the past year was about doing as much as we could to support the people of Myanmar to hold a credible, transparent and inclusive election in November. Elections are also an excellent opportunity for civic education and to advance democratic practice. To that end, we provided resources and training for more than 11,000 political party members from 84 political parties, including 234 incoming Parliamentarians. The U.S. partnered with more than 300 civil society organizations to support voter education activities. Over 18 million mobile phone users were reached through voter education sent via text message; maybe many of you received those text messages on your phone.

Of special note, we supported Myanmar's first non-partisan, independent, election-observation organization, the People's Alliance for Credible Elections -- PACE -- to observe the entire electoral process, from voter registration through Election Day, building transparency and credibility into the process.

Our assistance also helped the Union Election Commission to revise the electoral framework, and facilitated deeper engagement between the UEC, political parties, and civil society to enhance communication, share concerns, and increase understanding and respect for each other's perspectives, enhancing the credibility of the result. And let me say that observers were deeply impressed by the work of the UEC during last year's election. While the election of course was not without its flaws, the UEC assumed an incredibly difficult task under unfavorable conditions and under intense domestic and international scrutiny, and yet fulfilled its mission

bravely and admirably. We hope the advances made and the lessons learned from last year's election may be built upon for future elections.

The U.S. Embassy continues its work to strengthen democracy by providing research materials and resources through the USAID-funded Parliamentary Resource Center. The Parliamentary Resource Center has become a center of gravity for many Parliamentarians not only to better represent their constituencies by becoming more knowledgeable about relevant issues, but to receive support for legislative research, gain access to the internet, and meet together with other Parliamentarians and members of civil society.

Of course democracy must deliver, which is why our third primary focus has been promoting economic development here. Economic opportunity is essential to creating space for democratic reforms to continue. We have supported the development of policies and institutions in key sectors such as finance and agriculture. We have promoted more inclusive, transparent, and effective approaches to economic development that apply the lessons from successful examples elsewhere, particularly in this region.

US assistance has advanced reforms in intellectual property rights, trade, consumer protection, revenue collection, and information and communications technology. Supporting these activities lays the foundation for a transparent, well-functioning economic and financial system that will instill confidence in international investors, enhance the prospects of domestic businesses, and, most importantly, enable the average Myanmar citizen to benefit over time from broad-based growth and better services.

U.S. assistance is also empowering small and medium-sized enterprises to take advantage of opportunities brought about by economic reforms. USAID has supported a series of competitions for young entrepreneurs that resulted in the formation of new businesses and the creation of hundreds of new jobs. Moreover, we have established an ICT Council for Myanmar whose members include Microsoft, Google, Cisco, Qualcomm, and HP -- you may heard of some of these organizations! They are working together in the ICT Council to engage civil society to develop skills, and the government to protect internet freedoms and improve availability of the internet.

Meanwhile, we remain committed to supporting rural development to alleviate poverty and economic inequality. Agriculture and aquaculture can establish the foundation of broad-based development here as it has in several other successful countries in this region. U.S. assistance funded field tests and improved technologies in rice seed and fertilizer, improving overall productivity. We have assisted the resiliency of rice farmers to better withstand shocks caused by natural disasters. Last year's devastating floods -- the worst in decades -- affected over 1.6 million people and more than 1.4 million acres of farmland. In response, we rapidly deployed more than nine metric tons of locally-adapted short-cycle rice seed to hundreds of farmers who had lost their crop, allowing them to regain their livelihood for the season.

Over the last four years, we have substantially eased restrictions on U.S. business engagement with Myanmar. We will continue to examine remaining restrictions to ensure they promote rather than obstruct continued reform and broad-based growth, and act accordingly as the democratic transition continues. We will also continue to listen and consult closely with the people of this country, including the incoming government, as we review our economic engagement policy.

U.S. companies meanwhile will continue to bring international best practices to the economy here through responsible investment. Our companies help raise business and labor standards, serve as models of transparency, and demonstrate the highest level of corporate social responsibility. And consistent with their way of operating everywhere, they will invest in, not extract from this country -- through job creation, through job training, and through community building. In short, I believe strongly that the U.S. way of investment as reflected in U.S. business practice is good for Myanmar.

Nearly 150 U.S. companies are now members of the Myanmar Chapter of the American Chamber of Commerce based in Thailand. I meet with them on a regular basis. They are monitoring the situation here closely. Those who have not yet made the investment leap are eager for the moment when the climate is right to do so, and the United States government will encourage it.

At the same time, the United States recognizes the importance of not only laying the foundation for inclusive economic development but also providing local communities the tools they need to improve health and education standards, and become more resilient. Thus our fourth priority focus – promoting so-called resilient communities.

On the health front, USAID has begun support for Myanmar's first-ever demographic and health survey, which will take place in all 14 states and regions of this country. This first-of-its-kind nationwide survey will provide timely and reliable data upon which future health policies and programs will be made for the benefit of people throughout this country. Our health assistance work to date has focused on direct community engagement, and building the capacity of community based groups.

We have focused in particular on preventing the spread of infectious diseases, improving the health of mothers, newborns, and children, and addressing the malaria burden in Myanmar which is the highest among all of the six countries of the Greater Mekong Sub-region. President Obama's Malaria Initiative has made possible the procurement and distribution of insecticidal nets, rapid diagnostic tests, and anti-malaria drug treatment courses, empowering more than 1,000 community-based health providers in Tanintharyi, Southern Rakhine, Kayin, Kayah, and East Bago, reaching more than 1 million people. Prevalence and incidence of tuberculosis (TB) here is also among the highest in the world. U.S. assistance has enabled care and support to more than 1,100 patients, resulting in a preliminary treatment success rate of nearly 82 percent.

The State Department and USAID have provided over \$50 million of humanitarian assistance funding to Myanmar. We have focused on vulnerable populations along the Thai-Myanmar border, in disaster-prone areas, and in impoverished communities country-wide. We have provided emergency relief for victims of conflict, including shelter, food rations, clean drinking water and sanitation facilities, and protection services and coordination support for humanitarian relief agencies.

Resilient communities are also required to confront the growing drug problem in this country, an issue that is not discussed much publicly but as I travel around I hear more and more about. The production and trafficking of illicit drugs poses significant challenges throughout the region. But Myanmar, as the region's largest drug producer, has also begun to experience a palpable increase in domestic drug use and addiction in recent years, threatening to destroy families and communities, and may I say the youth of this country, all around the country.

As the drug problem is complex, so too must Myanmar's response be tailored to address the full spectrum of related issues: from drug awareness campaigns to job creation and educational opportunities to prevent kids from starting to take drugs in the first place; to providing alternative crops and infrastructure development for farmers so they don't have the incentive to grow poppy; to enhancing the capacity of law enforcement and justice officials to investigate and prosecute traffickers; to ensuring drug treatment professionals are able to properly care for those who are already suffering from drug addiction.

Job creation and educational opportunities will also be essential to prevent the frustration and hopelessness that often leads to drug consumption. To this end, the United States has provided specialized training for Myanmar's narcotics police to enhance their investigative capacity, trained front-line drug addiction treatment professionals, and provided community-based drug prevention and awareness programming. We will do more and we are strategizing within the embassy on how to do more working with the incoming government on this essential question.

In the area of education, our English Access Micro-scholarship Program has expanded across the country in recent years. The program has trained ethnically- and religiously-diverse disadvantaged youth in nine states and regions in English language, teambuilding, civic engagement, and other job skills.

And we look forward, as mentioned earlier, to Myanmar becoming the 141st country to host American Peace Corps Volunteers. These Peace Corps Volunteers will partner with the people of this country to strengthen local capacity, facilitate cultural exchanges, and build friendships that last a lifetime. They will work side by side with local Myanmar teachers of English to strengthen teaching practices and provide quality English language instruction to students. There is no better way for the U.S. to demonstrate its commitment to Myanmar than through people-to-people connections at a grassroots level through the Peace Corps.

Indeed, a variety of new people-to-people exchanges established over the past few years promise to serve as the foundation of strong U.S.-Myanmar relations over generations. Our Fulbright and Humphrey fellowships, and International Visitor Leadership Program, among others, have exposed future Myanmar leaders from diverse fields to U.S. educational experiences and US educators. One of President Obama's favorite programs - the Young Southeast Asian Leadership Initiative, or YSEALI, links together currently 4,000 dedicated, action-oriented young people representing every state and division in this country, connecting them to each other and to their counterparts from around the region. Such an initiative promises to be extremely valuable to the future development of not only the U.S. relationship with ASEAN but also the ASEAN Community itself given that nearly two-thirds of those in this region, and two-thirds of those in this country, are under 35 years old. Indeed, the town hall event with YSEALI that President Obama convened during his second visit here in 2014 remains a highlight of that visit and of my time here.

I have also been proud to bring resources to this country to help preserve its great heritage, and spotlight our own deep connections to this country over the years. Under the U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation, we have been able to bring together local craftspeople, monks, students, and government officials to research and restore the Shwe Nandaw Kyaung in Mandalay. I could not be prouder of my association with ensuring that national treasure remains safe for future generations to enjoy. That same Fund has enabled us to begin work with local stakeholders to restore the First Baptist Church in Mawlamyine. That church was founded by American missionary Adoniram Judson in the 19th century as a place to bring together people of many different ethnic backgrounds to worship together.

Indeed as the first U.S. ambassador in memory, perhaps the first U.S. ambassador ever, to travel to Chin State and Puta-O in northern Kachin State over the past year, I was reminded of the deep historical connection my country has had with yours over the past two centuries through a combination of religious practice, culture, and common interest during wartime. Such bonds do not break easily, but to the contrary are reaffirmed anew through resumed people-to-people contact even after they have been suspended for decades.

Finally, as Myanmar's reform process continues forward, it is important that the country becomes a partner in addressing shared challenges facing this dynamic region. That includes addressing challenges of drug, wildlife and human trafficking, child soldiers, environmental degradation, and non-proliferation. Myanmar's commitment to the region was never more apparent than in 2014 when your government took on the complicated challenge of chairing ASEAN, including organizing dozens of meetings and hosting dozens of the world's leaders at the East Asia Summit. And did an excellent job. Continuing to help integrate this country into regional institutions and initiatives, whether ASEAN or the Lower Mekong Initiative, will remain important to U.S. regional interests going forward.

So there are obviously an overwhelming number of issues that will require the priority attention of Myanmar's people and new leadership. I have listed many of them. But let me spotlight just two more that I consider priorities, if I may.

The first involves dealing with the legacy of the past. This legacy is apparent in the political prisoners who remain in prison for peacefully exercising their democratic rights to assembly and speech. It is also apparent in the trauma suffered by so many individuals and their families who languished in prison or otherwise felt abused during long years of repression. I can't offer any magic prescription for dealing with this legacy. The US has had its own experience dealing with legacy issues from its past. There are successful examples to learn from, but every country must handle such things in its own way. But at a minimum, the new government must use its executive and legislative power to put an end to the laws and practices that created this trauma in the first place, and work with the Myanmar people to consider how to begin the healing process. To take account of the past even as the focus must be on the future.

The second issue is Rakhine State. Developments in Rakhine State over the past three and a half years have been a dark spot during my time here. The state has regressed to the point that conditions in Rakhine State threaten not only the tremendous development potential of the State but also the success of the country as a whole. The responsibility to adhere to accepted international principles and standards of human rights, humanitarian access and protection, and equal rights under the law for all people, regardless of their race, religion, gender, or citizenship status is essential and uncompromisable. These principles are informed by the lessons of history and affirmed in numerous international resolutions and covenants. The protection of such standards and principles will remain important to the international community -- and the country's adherence to them for all people will continue to garner keen international attention.

At the same time, we must also recognize the profound concerns of the Rakhine people and urgent development needs of Rakhine State. The state has the highest poverty rate of any state or region in Myanmar, according to the World Bank. The people of Rakhine State have suffered from poor governance, lack of rule of law, and ineffective economic policies for many years, and feel a profound sense of insecurity for a number of reasons. Providing justice, dignity, security, and opportunity for all people in Rakhine State is required to put the state on the right track, and the United States stands ready to assist.

In conclusion, the political transition underway in this country right now is unprecedented. The country is in uncharted territory, and it is a sensitive moment. The situation therefore requires patience on all sides to allow trust to be established among political forces, and between the incoming government and the military. Amidst high expectations, we must recognize the structural constraints to quick success and remain steadfast in our commitment despite the bumpy road ahead. What is essential is not quick solutions to all problems but continued measurable progress.

Meanwhile the people of this country must avoid falling into old traps, for instance responding to calls to fear and division. Calls to fear and division are destructive to a nation's security and stability. Where that road leads is well known as it has held this country back for decades.

And a democratic society must remember that democracy does not just mean the right to speak, but the responsibility to listen. That means a commitment to dialogue and compromise in order to build mutual understanding and trust, and forge a common future together. There is no alternative as this country, as all countries, will rise or fall together.

In the process, U.S. policy will remain steadfast. Going forward we will continue to listen to the people of this country, and keep close track of this country's dynamic conditions and complex context in order to make fully informed judgments about how best to contribute constructively to this critical moment of change and opportunity.

Indeed, all great international powers in this region and beyond must show due respect for the reform process, for the sovereignty and political independence of this country. That means acting in ways that respect the people's voice and rights; that respect values of justice, transparency, and accountability in all that we do. And to not exacerbate the substantial internal challenges this country faces. Above all, we all should abide by the principle to "do no harm". As we engage, we larger powers should consider the interests not only of ourselves but of the people here, and engage accordingly. Only in that way will we truly promote lasting stability and security here, be partners in reform, and be trusted friends of this country. And indeed the United States looks forward to being partners in reform in the challenging days ahead as we have over the many years past.

My wife and I will never forget these past three-and-a-half years. We will never forget the warmth, the strength, and the generosity of spirit of the great people here. This is a special place at a special time. I have been proud to serve my country during this historic period, and to help reestablish the foundations of a strong, lasting U.S.-Myanmar relationship, one that will forever associate me with such wonderful people. For that privilege I will be forever grateful. Thank you all for listening.