



PRESS RELEASE

U.S. EMBASSY RANGOON

110 University Avenue, Kamayut Township, Rangoon, Burma

Press Statement
Special Representative and Policy Coordinator for Burma
Ambassador Derek J. Mitchell
September 14, 2011

Minglaba. Good Morning. Let me read a brief prepared statement. I have just completed my first visit to Burma as U.S. Special Representative and Policy Coordinator. I have spent the past five days in intensive consultations with a full spectrum of interlocutors in Nay Pyi Taw and in Rangoon to discuss the situation here and ways in which the United States can support and promote democracy, human rights, development, and national reconciliation in the country in our common interest.

I want to acknowledge the government's excellent hospitality, Chargé d'Affaires Michael Thurston and his outstanding team at the U.S. Embassy for a quick turn around in organizing my visit, and all my interlocutors for their time and candor during our meetings over the past several days.

Being my initial visit, my primary goal was to introduce myself, listen to local perspectives, and establish relationships that I will build on as I proceed to fulfill my mandate and responsibilities for managing U.S. Burma policy.

In Nay Pyi Taw, I met with Union Parliament Speaker Khin Aung Myint, People's Parliament Speaker Thura Shwe Mann, Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin, Labor and Social Welfare Minister Aung Kyi, Border Affairs Minister Lieutenant General Thein Htay, Information Minister Kyaw Hsan, and USDP Secretary General Htay Oo. I also met with a cross section of opposition MPs, including representatives from ethnic minority regions.

I was encouraged by and pleased with the quality and openness of the exchanges, and the constructive and respectful tone of each interaction I had. During these meetings, my government interlocutors repeatedly stated that this country had opened a new chapter to a civilian-led democratic governing structure and expressed that they were sincerely committed to reform in the interest of human rights, democracy, development, and national reconciliation.

I responded that the United States recognized and welcomed recent gestures from Nay Pyi Taw, such as President Thein Sein's meeting with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the establishment of a National Human Rights Commission, public emphasis on dialogue with ethnic minority groups in the interest of national reconciliation, and moderate easing of media censorship. Among both the international community and the Burmese people, it is clear that there are heightened expectations and hopes that change may be on the horizon.

At the same time, I was frank about the many questions the United States – and others – continue to have about implementation and follow-through on these stated goals. I noted that



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many within the international community remain skeptical about the government's commitment to genuine reform and reconciliation, and I urged authorities to prove the skeptics wrong.

To that end, I raised concerns regarding the detention of approximately 2,000 political prisoners, continued hostilities in ethnic minority areas accompanied by reports of serious human rights violations, including against women and children, and the lack of transparency in the government's military relationship with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

I offered respectfully that the government should take concrete actions in a timely fashion to demonstrate its sincerity and genuine commitment to reform and national reconciliation, including by releasing all political prisoners unconditionally, engaging in meaningful outreach to the political opposition, including Aung San Suu Kyi, and engaging in dialogue rather than armed conflict with ethnic minority groups. I affirmed the importance of establishing a legitimate and credible mechanism for investigating reported abuses in ethnic areas as a first step toward building trust and promoting national reconciliation through accountability. I also urged the government to adhere to all of its obligations under UN Security Council Resolutions related to proliferation.

I want to emphasize that our dialogue on these topics was respectful and open, which I greatly appreciated. I noted that progress on these issues will be essential to progress in the bilateral relationship, and that if the government takes genuine and concrete action, the United States will respond in kind.

Here in Rangoon, I continued the conversation on current conditions and trends in the country with a broad cross section of civil society. I consulted with the business and diplomatic communities, and local and international NGOs, including citizens doing heroic and courageous work providing free funeral services for the poor and treating those with HIV/AIDS.

And of course I met with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and leaders of the National League for Democracy to discuss their perspectives on recent developments in the country, the future of their party, and U.S. policy approaches. I was reminded consistently during my visit that Daw Suu remains deeply important to the citizens of this country, Burman and ethnic minority alike, and that any credible reform effort must include her participation. It was also clear that she remains fully committed to the cause of peaceful change through dialogue.

Unfortunately, I was only here for a few days and thus was unable to explore the full breadth and diversity of this beautiful country. However, the courage and commitment of those with whom I met give me great hope for the country's future should genuine reform and reconciliation proceed. I will be following developments closely from afar, and look forward to many return visits here to continue the United State's principled engagement policy. Again, I would like to thank the government for hosting me so warmly for my inaugural visit in my new post, and to all my interlocutors for sharing their valuable insights. I consider this a highly productive visit. I now will take a few questions before I must catch my plane.

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