

2 November 2009

To: Kurt M. Campbell
Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs

CC:

1. Hillary Rodham Clinton, U.S. Secretary of State
2. Scot Marciel, Deputy Assistant Secretary, East Asia and Pacific Bureau and Ambassador for ASEAN Affairs
3. Larry M. Dinger, U.S. Charge d'Affaires in Burma

Open Letter from Civil Society from Burma and Asia Concerning U.S. Fact-finding Mission and Ongoing Efforts for Peace and Democracy in Burma

Dear Secretary Campbell,

As civil society representatives from Burma and Asia supportive to the cause of human rights and democracy in Burma, we want to express our appreciation of the U.S.'s efforts, past and present, to promote democracy, peace, and national reconciliation in Burma. In your upcoming fact-finding visit to Burma, and in any future efforts, we urge you to follow the lead of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and other pro-democracy and ethnic opposition leaders, who continue to express their genuine will for substantive dialogue, without wavering on the key principles and concerns of the people of Burma. **We urge the U.S. and others in the international community to accept nothing less than the regime's fulfillment of key benchmarks before the 2010 elections: the release of Daw Aung San Su Kyi and all political prisoners, the cessation of hostilities against ethnic groups, and inclusive dialogue, including review of the 2008 Constitution.**

We want to emphasize that the new U.S. policy of pursuing political engagement while maintaining sanctions is very much in line with the position taken by the National League for Democracy and other pro-democracy groups. The NLD's Shwegondaing Declaration as well as the Movement for Democracy and Rights of Ethnic Nationalities' Proposal for National Reconciliation are representative of consistent calls not for isolation of the regime, but for critical political engagement and substantive dialogue. Of course, any sort of political engagement with a regime like the SPDC is wrought with danger.

As we saw with Senator Jim Webb, naïve attempts at diplomacy—in his case, premature calls for recognizing the undemocratic 2010 elections and lifting economic sanctions—hold the danger of emboldening the regime to continue its brutal actions and empty rhetoric, without taking any real steps towards democratization. We have already observed the dangerous misinterpretation by some key players in ASEAN that the new U.S. policy aims to follow ASEAN's highly problematic brand of constructive engagement. In this key time before the 2010 elections, we urge you to take the path of *critical* political engagement, while maintaining pressure on the regime.

Some international observers, particularly Burma's neighbors, see next year's elections as an opportunity for change, but under the rules laid out in the military's 2008 Constitution, and with the regime's diehard measures to silence opposition, the showcase elections will serve only to cloak the regime in false legitimacy.

We reaffirm the U.S.'s priorities for Burma, as stated in your recent congressional testimony, including “the unconditional release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners; an end to conflicts with ethnic minority groups; accountability of those responsible for human rights violations; and the initiation of a

genuine dialogue among the Burmese government, the democratic opposition, and the ethnic minorities on a shared vision for the way forward in Burma.”

We urge you to reiterate these priorities to the regime and to governments in the region as critical benchmarks *before* the 2010 elections. Without the key benchmarks of (1) the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners and (2) an end to attacks against ethnic groups and (3) inclusive dialogue, including a review of the 2008 constitution, the international community cannot accept the result of the elections as a true expression of the will of Burma’s people.

Your recent testimony suggested that the upcoming trip may also address “initial positive steps” the regime could take in “areas of mutual benefit” such as counter-narcotics, health, and environmental protection. Past experience has shown that the SPDC’s so-called attempts at environmental protection often lead to further human rights abuses and the denial of local and ethnic communities’ rights to the sustainable management of natural resources. We urge you to keep in mind that these “areas of mutual benefit” are not isolated concerns, but symptomatic of a regime with no regard for its own people. In recent months, in a move to reclaim control of its border areas before the elections, the SPDC has combined both divide-and-rule and scorched earth tactics, resulting in massive displacement of ethnic civilians and contributing to regional instability. These actions are a continuation of long-held policies, which have destroyed over 3,300 villages in the ethnic states of Burma in the last ten years.

We support your concerted efforts to meet with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, NLD, and ethnic leaders. We urge you to meet with them in their offices instead of government “guest houses.” **There are many activists working for the development of democracy, human rights, and environmental protection based inside Burma and on the border, who can provide valuable information and insight into the country’s myriad problems. We urge you to meet with representatives from both areas during and after this trip.**

We also want to draw particular attention to **the case of American citizen Kyaw Zaw Lwin** (a.k.a Nyi Nyi Aung), who continues to be detained in Insein Prison. We are concerned for his safety due to reports of torture, and urge you to do all that you can to secure his release.

We continue to seek further opportunities to engage with you and your office in our parallel efforts towards peace and democracy in Burma.

Signed,

1. Alternative Asean Network on Burma (Altsean Burma)
2. Asia Pacific Solidarity Coalition
3. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
4. Assistant Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)
5. Association of Protection for Refugee Children in Burma
6. Backpack Health Workers Team
7. Burma Centre Delhi
8. Burma Information Team
9. Burma Lawyers’ Council
10. Burma Lusei Union
11. Burma Medical Association
12. Burma Partnership
13. Chin Human Rights Organization
14. Chin Students and Youth Federation

15. Chin Youth Association
16. Chin Youth Conference
17. Falam Chin Women Development
18. Forum for Democracy in Burma
19. Foundation for Media Alternatives (Philippines)
20. Free Burma Campaign (Korea)
21. Free Burma Coalition-Philippines
22. Friends of Burma (Chiang Mai)
23. Hong Kong Coalition for a Free Burma
24. Human Rights Education Institute of Burma
25. Indonesia Solidarity for Burma (Solidaritas Indonesia Untuk Burma)
26. Karen Environmental and Social Action Network
27. Karen State Education Assistance Group
28. Karenni National Progressive Party
29. Mae Tao Clinic
30. Mara Thylia Py (MTP)
31. National League for Democracy-Liberated Area
32. Nationalities Youth Forum
33. Network for Environment and Economic Development (Burma)
34. Nonviolence International Southeast Asia
35. Patriotic War Veterans of Burma
36. People's Forum on Burma (Japan)
37. Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception- Philippines (SFIC)
38. Shwe Gas Movement
39. Solidarity for Asian People's Advocacy (SAPA) Task Force on ASEAN
40. South East Asian Press Alliance
41. Students and Youth Congress of Burma
42. Task Force Detainees of the Philippines
43. Thai Action Committee for Democracy in Burma
44. Thai Labor Campaign
45. The Karen Teacher Working Group
46. Task Force on ASEAN and Burma
47. Women's League of Burma
48. Zanniat Youth Organisation
49. Zomi National Congress
50. Zomi Women's Union