



## Interview With Veronica Pedrosa of Al-Jazeera English

**Scot Marciel, U.S. Ambassador for ASEAN Affairs**

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**PEDROSA:** Joining us now in the studio is Scot Marciel. He's the first U.S. Ambassador ever appointed for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Thank you very much indeed for coming in. Let's talk about Myanmar. First, it's a controversial member, of course, of ASEAN. As we just heard there in that report from Nick Spicer, it seems that there are limits to humanitarianism in the way that people are interpreting the United States' offer of help to the country. "Yes, we'll give you this much money, but we need a U.S. disaster team." Can you explain why that is?

**AMBASSADOR MARCIEL:** Actually, we're not conditioning our assistance on having a U.S. disaster team going in. The President announced \$3 million on top of the \$250,000 we'd announced earlier. And we said we would like to be able to send in our Disaster Assistance Relief Team to assess the conditions and make sure that the assistance got to where it needs to go. But we're not conditioning our offer on that.

We do hope that the Burmese authorities will let in international experts -- international humanitarian organizations -- to make sure that the assistance does get to the people who need it.

**PEDROSA:** So, it's because of a lack of trust, or is it because of expertise that you feel that outside experts are needed?

**AMBASSADOR MARCIEL:** Well, I think on a disaster of this scale -- this terrible disaster -- virtually any government would be overwhelmed, and it would be very normal and important for the international community to come in and assist. There's lots of expertise in the United Nations -- the U.S. has, NGOs have -- to assist and help first assess the needs and also make sure the assistance gets to the people who need it.

**PEDROSA:** But there's no denying that there is a lack of trust between the U.S. and Myanmar. There have been new sanctions, I believe announced only just last week, against the generals. Now this. Does it change the thinking of the United States? How does it kind of fashion the United States policy towards the country?

**AMBASSADOR MARCIEL:** I don't think it changes our overall policy, which is to try to encourage the sort of dialogue and political transition in Burma that we think would help the country begin to address its long-term challenges.

But what we're talking about here is this enormous disaster, and our focus right now is doing what we can to get assistance to the people of Burma. As you know, their needs are urgent, and that's really our focus.

**PEDROSA:** I've been to Myanmar, and spoke to government officials. They are deeply, deeply suspicious to the point of paranoia about U.S. involvement and U.S. attempts to change their regime. They think what's happening with the U.S. policy in Myanmar is akin to U.S. policy in Iraq. What's your response?

**AMBASSADOR MARCIEL:** Our response is that what we've always said is that we're asking the regime to talk to its own people -- to talk to the opposition, to talk to Aung San Suu Kyi, to talk to the ethnic minority groups -- and for them to have a dialogue that allows them to chart a course toward a government that has some support, some credibility, and can begin to address the country's issues.

And this isn't just a U.S. issue. The United Nations has said the same thing; the United Nations Security Council has said very much the same thing. So we're very much in line with the international community in trying to encourage movement toward a better government that will help Burma move ahead.

**PEDROSA:** Last one before we move off the subject of the catastrophe in Myanmar. You say that there's no conditionality. Do you have an idea about how soon aid could therefore arrive in Myanmar?

**AMBASSADOR MARCIEL:** Well, we've already offered money through NGOs and the United Nations. In terms of U.S. assistance directly into the country, we would of course need the approval of the Burmese authorities to bring it in directly.

**PEDROSA:** So that's all that's being waited for?

**AMBASSADOR MARCIEL:** Yes, that's right.

**PEDROSA:** So at this point, it's the Myanmar bureaucracy as it were -- or apparent bureaucracy -- that's holding things up, as far as you're concerned?

**AMBASSADOR MARCIEL:** That's right, in terms of the United States, yes.

**PEDROSA:** All right. Now, as I mentioned earlier, you are the first United States Ambassador to ASEAN that's ever been appointed. Why has this been deemed necessary?

**AMBASSADOR MARCIEL:** Well, we see ASEAN playing a growing role -- an important role -- in Southeast Asia. We have an interest in a Southeast Asia that's strong and prosperous and doing well, and we think a strong ASEAN contributes to that. As we see ASEAN moving ahead to strengthen itself -- especially, for example, signing the charter last year -- we think it's time to step up our own engagement. We already have a lot of cooperation with ASEAN, and we want to do more. We want to expand the cooperation, and we want to make sure we highlight what we are doing.

**PEDROSA:** Can you go into more detail about the importance of ASEAN to U.S. national interests, because it seems that the focus of U.S. foreign policy in this region has been very much on the north, on Northeast Asia -- on the economic giants of China, Japan, and even India. But, sort of, Southeast Asia is this kind of forgotten corner that's rather poor and very diverse. What is it? It's home to us. What is it to the United States?

**AMBASSADOR MARCIEL:** Well we see it as very dynamic and very important -- almost 600 million people who, together, are our 4<sup>th</sup> largest export market, a huge market. We have about 4 times more direct U.S. investment in the ASEAN region than we do in China. So, commercially it's hugely important. Politically it's important; diplomatically it's important. Two ASEAN countries are on the U.N. Security Council. So we have tremendous relations, a lot of areas to work with ASEAN on, and the ASEAN nations, and it's been important to us for a long time. And now that ASEAN itself as an institution is taking on a greater role, we want to engage more with

ASEAN.

**PEDROSA:** All right, we're going to leave it there for now. Thank you very much for sparing the time; I know you've got a busy schedule. Scot Marciel is the U.S. Ambassador to ASEAN.

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