



## Crisis in Burma: Can the U.S. Bring About a Peaceful Resolution?

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Testimony before Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment

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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Manzullo, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here today to testify about the ongoing crisis in Burma and our strategy to foster a peaceful transition to democracy in that country and an end to its 40-plus years of repressive military rule. Three weeks have now passed since the start of Burmese military and security forces' brutal crackdown on civilians and Buddhist monks for peacefully expressing their desire for democracy and change.

While the streets of Rangoon are now eerily "calm" and the regime tries to project a return to "normalcy and stability," the situation is anything but normal. The October 13 arrest of "88 Generation Students" activist Htay Kywe and four others illustrates that the regime is continuing its harsh crackdown. It continues to raid monasteries and arrest activists, and is holding hundreds – possibly thousands – of detainees, including "88 Generation" leaders Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Gyi, Htay Kywe, Pyone Cho, Jimmy, and others. Reports continue to flood in that these and other detainees are being held in inhumane conditions and subjected to torture by their interrogators. The death last week of National League for Democracy (NLD) member Win Shwe, who was arrested and tortured by the authorities, is only the most visible and personal manifestation of this cruelty.

Yet despite the regime's incredible brutality, the indomitable spirit of the people of Burma and their yearning for democracy remains unbowed. We and others in the international community will continue to stand with the people of Burma and remain firmly committed to helping them realize their dream and goal of democracy.

Mr. Chairman, our Burma strategy is straight-forward: maintain maximum pressure on the regime, both bilaterally and multilaterally, to end the repression, release the prisoners, and initiate a genuine dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi and the democratic opposition, and with the ethnic minority group, that leads to a peaceful transition to civilian, democratic rule. This is what Aung San Suu Kyi and Burmese democracy activists, both within Burma and without, have said they want. To achieve this, we are working assiduously in concert with others throughout the international community to ensure the success of the United Nations' good offices mission, led by Special Advisor on Burma Ibrahim Gambari. We are also coordinating closely with international partners to tighten sanctions on regime leaders and their cronies as part of a broader effort to build the strongest possible international diplomatic pressure on the regime.

### US-Led Response

Mr. Chairman, I am proud to say that the United States is leading this international effort and response to the crisis in Burma. President Bush, Secretary Rice and other senior administration officials, have forcefully, consistently, and publicly expressed the United States' outrage and condemnation of the regime's brutal crackdown and called for an immediate cessation of the violence and release of all political prisoners. In his remarks to the UN General Assembly in September, President Bush condemned the regime's brutal suppression of pro-democracy activists and announced tightened sanctions against regime leaders and their supporters. Secretary Rice joined with EU Foreign Ministers to issue a toughly worded statement on Burma and expressed our deep concerns about the situation there with ASEAN Foreign Ministers in New York during the UN General Assembly. The First Lady's continued personal attention to the Burma crisis has effectively helped keep the international spotlight on the regime's brutal behavior and the need for peaceful transition now. House and Senate resolutions and letters have also been tremendously helpful.

Another key element of our strategy has been to build international support for Special Advisor Gambari's good offices mission to Burma. The adoption by the UN Security Council of an unprecedented Presidential Statement on Burma on October 11, a huge success and an effort led by the United States, will greatly bolster his mission. It is the clearest direct signal to the junta to date that the international community is united in its calls for the regime to take the steps that will lead to a genuine and inclusive transition to civilian, democratic government in Burma. We are now working with Special Advisor Gambari and others in the region to facilitate his rapid return to Burma in the wake of the regime's announcement of a senior level liaison officer between it and Aung San Suu Kyi. While we remain deeply skeptical about the regime's actual intentions toward a dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi and the ethnic minorities, we intend to pursue vigorously any possible opening. At this point, Special Advisor Gambari is the only one in the international community who has been able to gain access to both the regime leadership and to Aung San Suu Kyi. We and the rest of the international community need to do all we can to support his efforts. Should the regime turn its back on Special Advisor Gambari's proposals, we believe the matter should be referred back to the Security Council for further consideration.

### Sanctions

As the President announced three weeks ago, our strategy also includes strengthening U.S. sanctions directed at regime leaders and their cronies. On September 27, the Treasury Department designated an additional 14 senior officials as subject to Executive Order Executive Order 13310, which authorizes the blocking of assets in U.S. jurisdiction belonging to senior officials and other designated persons. The Department of State also identified additional senior regime officials and their immediate family members – now totaling over 800 names – as potentially subject to the Presidential Proclamation that suspends the entry into the United States of persons who formulate, implement, or benefit from policies that impede Burma's transition to democracy. The administration is now considering additional sanction measures targeting the regime and those who provide financial support to it.

While sanctions alone certainly will not bring change to Burma, they are a critical part of the effort to bring international pressure to bear on the regime. Some countries, including EU member states and Australia, have joined us in implementing sanctions against Burma. Other countries, however, are reluctant to do so. We continue to engage those nations to emphasize that tough economic measures are necessary and perhaps the only way of getting the regime's attention and convincing it of the necessity to cooperate with the UN's good offices mission led by Special Advisor Gambari.

As we tighten sanctions, we are concurrently increasing our support to those seeking a transition to democracy. We have submitted a Congressional notification to expand funding for programs that help build the capacity of the Burmese people to participate effectively in an inclusive dialogue with the regime. The Broadcasting Board of Governors has doubled Burmese language programming on Voice of America and Radio Free Asia. We continue to seek ways to support efforts to restore democracy in Burma.

### How Are We and Others Doing?

Mr. Chairman, while our strategy is relatively simple and straight-forward, obviously it is the results that count. In that regard, I would be less than truthful if I told you there is an easy solution to solving Burma's political problems and putting it on a path to genuine democracy. The key obstacle is that we are dealing with a military entrenched in power for over four decades that will not easily or willingly give up the absolute power and perquisites it enjoys. The Burmese military has forcefully insinuated itself over four decades into every fiber of the country and runs a parallel economic and social system that enriches it while impoverishing the rest of Burma. Our challenge is to break this grip and get the military to see the wisdom of pursuing genuine dialogue leading to a peaceful political transition.

Meeting this challenge will require a concerted international effort, especially from those countries in the region with the most extensive ties and leverage with the regime. We have been extraordinarily active, in Washington, New York, and through our Embassies in Asia and Europe, in encouraging other countries not only to support Special Advisor Gambari, but also to use every means at their disposal to press, prod and cajole the regime.

The British, French, and other like-minded partners, in close coordination with us, have been equally forceful in their condemnation of the regime's actions and have encouraged the EU and others to take stronger measures. On October 15, EU Foreign Ministers imposed additional sanctions banning the export of logging and mining equipment to Burma, barring the import from Burma of such products, and prohibiting investment in these sectors in Burma. The Government of Australia also announced its intention to implement targeted financial sanctions against regime figures and supporters.

ASEAN has stepped up too. Building on the unprecedented statement by ASEAN Foreign Ministers three weeks ago directly criticizing the regime and calling for restraint and urging the kinds of political reforms we have been seeking, we are actively engaging key members to press the regime directly, to support the Gambari mission, and to take a hard look at economic measures they can take.

We have urged the Government of Japan to review its assistance to Burma to ensure that it does not benefit the regime, and it is considering doing so. We appreciate Japan's recent public calls for restraint and public support for the UN Security Council's October 11 Presidential Statement.

India's public posture with respect to Burma has improved over the past few weeks, with calls for restraint and expressions of concern. The Government of India stated that it would be "helpful" if the regime released Aung San Suu Kyi and advocated a broad-based and inclusive process of national reconciliation. However, India's message and support for U.S. efforts in the United Nations is undercut by actions, such as its announcement to invest over \$100 million in a transportation development project in western Burma, which is adjacent to recently explored offshore gas fields. India can and should do more given its stature as the world's largest democracy; its voice and actions, at this time, are critical.

China has the most influence on the regime and its policies. China facilitated UN Special Advisor Gambari's September 29 – October 2 visit to Burma by urging the regime to allow him to meet with Senior General Than Shwe and Aung San Suu Kyi. Significantly, China also joined the international consensus to speak out about the situation in Burma by supporting the UN Security Council's October 11 Presidential Statement on Burma. We appreciate these constructive actions by China. Nonetheless, we believe China can and must do more, and we will continue to press Beijing to do so. Specifically, we are asking that China support an early return visit by Special Advisor Gambari to Burma, and that China use whatever influence it has with the regime to secure the release of detainees and the initiation of a genuine dialogue between the regime and pro-democracy leaders and ethnic minority representatives. We will continue to encourage China to step up to the challenge in a way commensurate with its emerging status as a global power.

### Summary

In summary, Mr. Chairman, I can assure you that the Administration remains committed at the highest levels to ensure that democracy is realized in Burma. We are intensifying our bilateral actions to pressure the regime. We are actively engaging the key regional partners (e.g., China, India, Japan, ASEAN) and employing all appropriate measures to gain their support in pressing the regime for a democratic transition. We will continue and expand our longstanding assistance to the thousands of Burmese who are standing up for the rights of their people. We also will continue to coordinate closely with like-minded partners in Europe and elsewhere. We will vigorously support Special Advisor Gambari's good offices mission to promote dialogue and national reconciliation and urge others to do the same. We will also press for appropriate actions by the UN Security Council to help bring about the kind of changes we and the Burmese people seek.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee this afternoon. I am pleased to answer your questions.

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