RELEASE IN PART B5

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January 6, 2012

NOTE FOR THE SECRETARY

FROM:

Ambassador Derek Mitchell

Special Representative and Policy Coordinator for Burma

SUBJECT:

My January 9-12 Trip to Burma and Northern Thailand

Political Situation

Burmese authorities have sent mixed signals early in the new year. Failure to release significant political prisoners, and persistent conflict with ethnic minorities, has energized skeptics about the credibility of change, although it is too early to draw conclusions. The government has continued strong reformist rhetoric, granted visas to many "blacklisted" critics, allowed UN access to some conflicts zones, and permitted further space for civic activity.

There is clear evidence of an on-going debate within the government about the pace of reform. We may be seeing a slowing down based on conservative concerns after a rapid run over the past four months. The role of the military, and former regime chief Than Shwe in turn, has come under greater scrutiny in recent weeks. President Thein Sein issued a direct order to cease hostilities in Kachin State, but it was ignored. It is nonetheless evident that commitment to reform remains strong among many key figures, including the president.

ASSK for her part has counseled patience and has registered her party as she drives forward toward April 1 by-elections. However, she will be under increasing pressure from political prisoner families and others should the government fail to meet expectations. She runs the risk of losing their confidence, along with ethnic groups in border areas due to continuing violence there, should she appear to collude with a government that has not made any of the fundamental reforms necessary to prove sincerity.

Engagement

I return to Burma on January 9 to discuss our vision for the next six months, including implementation of initiatives you announced in December. I will preview upcoming CODELs (Senators McConnell, McCain, Lieberman, Whitehouse and Ayotte; and Congressman Crowley) and a plethora of USG visits

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(ISN A/S Countryman in particular, who will visit to discuss North Korea). I will seek to encourage continuation of the momentum and mutually reinforcing dynamic that has served us well over the past several months. In Naypyitaw, I have asked for meetings with the President, 1st Vice President, Defense Minister, Commander in Chief, Foreign Minister, and Railways Minister (who doubles as a key figure in ethnic dialogues). G/TIP's Amb CdeBaca will be in-country at the same time and joining some of my meetings. His visit is important to start the process of moving Burma off TIP Tier 3 status, which leads to the most rigid legal constraints on multilateral engagement.

In Rangoon, I will meet with ASSK to discuss follow-up to your visit, and get her take on developments both within her party and in the country writ large. I intend to have similar conversations with other key civil society stakeholders. I will also travel up-country, to inspect micro-finance projects and show appreciation for a broader sector of Burmese society, as well as to northern Thailand where refugee assistance groups along the border are at risk of declining attention given positive trends inside the country. My intention is to send a message that we will not forget them, as well as to have quiet meetings with key ethnic leaders from both inside and outside Burma to gauge how we can best play a role in national reconciliation.

Programming

Together with EAP, I have been working with USAID and others in the interagency to conduct a February scoping mission to Burma to assess conditions on the ground, to inform development of a new USG assistance strategy, and to shape how others internationally will set their engagement priorities. Our effort will comprise a "core team" to conduct the mission itself, as well as an "extended field team" and "informal advisory board" made up of U.S. and international specialists to assist the study.

I will raise the notion of a USG scoping mission with interlocutors in Naypyitaw next week to seek their cooperation and participation. The results of our efforts will be a central inject to an eventual international coordination meeting we hope you can host, when and if conditions permit. ASSK has expressed strong support for such a USG-led coordination event, and even signaled her desire to come to the United States to take part personally.

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