

**Presentation by H.E. U Linn Myaing at the
Meeting of the Independent Task Force on Burma,
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It is indeed an honor and a pleasure for me to be among such a distinguished company present here this evening. I am also grateful to have this opportunity to say something about the developments taking place in Myanmar.

This past Friday, the day after Thanksgiving, was a holiday for us. Normally, we only take Thanksgiving day off, but by a happy chance this year, Friday coincided with our National Day, which is one of our major holidays. We observe a separate National Day from our Independence Day in January and it is the day to commemorate the student movement of 1920, when there was a boycott by Myanmar University students to protest the restrictive University Act. It was a milestone in the history of the nationalist movement against the colonial powers in Myanmar. We do not take domination by any other country lightly and it seems we would rather undergo hardship than submit to being dictated by others.

I mention this because it brings me to something I feel is very important when outsiders try to understand the Myanmar people. We have great nationalistic pride and it underlines many of the events that have taken place in our long history that has seen three great unifications when the country was under strong kings and which also saw sovereignty taken away and independence lost at a time when the country was weak, the unity and the court were at disarray.

The country went through turbulent times with insurgencies and constitutional crises even after independence. In 1988, the Armed Forces of the Union, born out of our independence movement, and which had since then, saved the Union three times from disintegration, was once again compelled to assume responsibility of the State, when the one-party system in place at that time together with a centrally planned economy failed and the country erupted in chaos and anarchy.

But all that which has taken place in the past has a bearing on our future. Without going through a long history which many of you are aware of already, I would like to ask you to consider four attributes of our country that play a great part in the future direction. The first attribute is that Myanmar has had to fight back for its independence after being under colonial rule for nearly 100 years. The second is that we are a multi-racial society, with 8 major racial groups found scattered in overlapping areas of the country and this points to why a unified country is so important. The third is the problem of insurgency that has plagued us from the time of our independence until recent years and which still exists in pocket area along our eastern border. The fourth is our strategic location between China and India. I cannot stress these attributes enough as they form the background for the formation of any policy.

The present Government managed to restore law and order, peace and stability in the country post-1988 and it is committed to a multiparty democracy and a free market economy. There is no way that we are going to revert back to a one party political system and a centrally planned economy. Nor do the Armed Forces intend to hold on to power longer than necessary. However, taking the four attributes I outlined earlier into consideration, we are making sure that the nation building process evolves steadily and surely instead of haphazardly and hastily. We have seen how rapid transformations in many countries can often lead to anarchy and instability. A situation has been created to further proceed with the national reconciliation process and to work out a home grown political settlement at a pace beneficial to the country and the people.

To that end, many positive developments have been achieved in Myanmar in the recent past, not only due to the conciliatory stand that the Government has taken, but also because of the reliance it places on its own people and resources as well as the understanding shown by the relevant parties.

To cite a few important examples:

- The armed insurrections have practically come to an end, except in a few border areas while the country is experiencing unprecedented peace.

- The political deadlock that once existed between the Government and the leading political party, the NLD, has been overcome and confidence has been restored to a certain degree between the two parties, leading to an improved political situation that no one could even have dreamt of a couple of years back. As contacts and meetings between the Government and the NLD party has proceeded, so has the political climate seen a steady improvement.
- Over 800 detainees and prisoners have been released during the past months in the spirit of reconciliation and on humanitarian grounds and it has been pledged that those who are considered as causing no harm to the community nor threaten the existing peace and stability of the nation will continue to be released.
- The Government has been able to make measurable progress in its efforts for the all round development of the country. In spite of this, the construction of 145 major bridges across numerous rivers, 136 irrigation dams and thousands of miles of roads and railroads, and many other achievements are left unnoticed by many from outside who only want to see and hear only the negative aspects. I myself was surprised by the extent of greening of the central part of Myanmar, traditionally considered the dry zone of our country, when I had the chance to travel there in 1999 after a five year absence and saw the trees and shrubs flanking the roadsides in the countryside.
- Counter narcotics efforts of the Government and the local populace is producing significant results with the decline in opium production for five straight years. The production of opium this year is in fact less than one quarter of that produced six years earlier. I would like to stress that all of this has been achieved with practically no assistance from outside.
- Cooperation with the United Nations has been even more enhanced than it has been. The Government has been working together with the representatives of the Secretary-General, the Human Rights Commission, as well as organizations such as the ICRC, ILO and UNHCR towards the

betterment of the lives of our people. The Government has been especially appreciative of the UN Special Envoy Mr. Razali Ismail's balanced approach, patience and determination in assisting the ongoing dialogue in the national reconciliation process.

On the economic front, necessary foundations for a market economy to function properly have been laid down and the door remains open for more interaction with the outside world. Changes in the economic policy from over 10 years ago have seen opportunities created for the people to participate more in the economic life of the country and many developments can be seen in the economic sector. However, we do not claim that we are achieving all that we had hoped for, or that everything is going smoothly. We have encountered many difficulties and challenges and much still remains ahead to be done. The government has been accused unjustly of neglecting problems but that just is not true. They are finding ways and means around what they are being faced with. There shouldn't be any doubt that the Government really does care about the country and does have the welfare of the people at heart.

Myanmar is a small developing country in transition and if one looks back to the time when the present Government was compelled to take over the state power, it had inherited a rapidly deteriorating economy with very low monetary reserves. The political turmoil in that year left in its wake a completely devastated country in material terms. The whole administrative structure was in complete disarray. And to compound the problem, western countries and multilateral financial institutions suspended official development assistance, loans and grants since 1989. Unilateral sanctions were applied and new foreign investments discouraged. Travel to the country was also discouraged so as to deter tourism, a promising source of income for the people. Plus, even UNDP assistance was limited to HDI projects only.

The Government has had to revitalize the country's economy with its own human and natural resources since 1988, in a situation that is not normal and not conducive for an easy change. In spite of these, we are not heading towards an economic crisis, nor for that matter, a breakdown in the agricultural sector, the mainstay of our economy, that some from outside have been predicting again and again, basing their predictions on statistics gathered randomly outside of the country.

The Government is doing its utmost to make sure that the basic needs of the people are fulfilled and that the economy grows further.

The national reconciliation and nation building process underway in Myanmar will proceed smoothly and at a faster pace if the international community gives us more time and space and display understanding, encouragement and engagement. To believe that applying political and economic pressure is the best means of encouraging a transition to democratic rule in Myanmar can only be counter productive. Exerting undue pressure for change through means such as sanctions and isolation on a proud peoples such as ours will only result in a renewed determination to go on by ourselves. We only ask to be allowed the dignity of working out change and transition in our own way. The international community can best assist by encouraging the process, including a reconciliation that should be home grown.

There has been a lot of controversy over what has been termed the "Asian Way". Whether one agrees with much of what comes under this or not, I think that scholars who have taken the trouble to try and understand Asians recognize that a quiet and discreet approach works better than a loud and demanding tone. And whatever we have achieved so far has mainly been due to the understanding of the international community, and not because of pressure and intimidation.

We are indeed very aware of international norms and expectations and do realize that in this age of globalization, we need interaction not only with our neighbours but also with the whole international community for our development. On our part, we always stand ready to engage with any party who wishes our country well and pursue a further transition process with patience and tolerance. We hope that we will be reciprocated in the same manner for the sake of all the Myanmar people.

Thank you.