

STATEMENT BY DEREK MITCHELL
Ambassador-designate, U.S. Special Representative and Policy Coordinator for Burma
BEFORE THE U.S. SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
JUNE 29, 2011

Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee to serve as the Special Representative and Policy Coordinator for Burma with the rank of Ambassador. I appreciate the confidence that President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton have shown in me by this nomination.

As you are well aware, Burma is a nation rich in history, rich in culture, and rich in possibility. At the crossroads of South and Southeast Asia, Burma sits on sea lanes, natural resources, and fertile soil that create the conditions for potentially unlimited development.

It is therefore particularly unfortunate that while much of Southeast Asia has become more free, prosperous, and globally interconnected in recent decades, Burma has been the outlier. Burma remains a country at war with itself and distrustful of others. With a government that has chosen for several decades to distance itself from the outside world, Burma now is the poorest country in Southeast Asia and a source of great concern and potential instability in the region. Although rich in natural and human resources, nearly a third of Burma's population lives in poverty. Hundreds of thousands of its citizens are internally displaced and thousands more continue to seek refuge and asylum in neighboring countries largely due to the central authority's longstanding conflicts with and systematic repression of the country's ethnic minority populations. Over 2,000 political prisoners languish in detention, while Burma's military continues to routinely violate international human rights.

Overall, the average Burmese citizen lacks fundamental freedoms and civil rights. Although the Burmese government has claimed a successful transition to a "disciplined, flourishing democracy," a political system that exhibits anything close to recognizable standards of representative democracy remains to be seen. I am encouraged that the new President of Burma speaks of reform and change, but the pathway to real national reconciliation, unity among its diverse peoples, and sustainable development requires concrete action to protect human rights and to promote representative and responsive governance.

As a result, U.S. relations with Burma have been strained. Over the past two decades, international policies of either pressure or engagement alone have not produced the change in Burma that we and the rest of the international community seek. In 2008, Congress directed the establishment of a Special Representative and Policy Coordinator for Burma to enable more focused, sustained, and coordinated attention on Burma by the U.S. government. Consistent with this directive, in September 2009, the Obama Administration completed its Burma policy review and announced its intention to pursue a more flexible U.S. policy approach that integrated both sanctions and engagement to achieve results in Burma. This dual-track approach is fully consistent with President Obama's call for "principled engagement" with nations around the world.

Although U.S. policy toward Burma has evolved, our overriding objective has not: the United States still seeks a peaceful, prosperous, open, and democratic Burma that respects the rights of all its citizens and adheres to its international obligations. The United States remains prepared to establish a positive relationship, based on mutual respect and mutual benefit, with a Burmese leadership that advances these principles.

If I am confirmed, my role as “Special Representative and Policy Coordinator” will be to work closely with and build upon the excellent foundation established by Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Joseph Yun in implementing Burma policy. I will seek opportunities for direct and candid dialogue with the regime concerning a path forward for Burma that promotes our values and broader national interests, and contributes to Burma’s own development as a secure and prosperous nation. Of course, engagement is not an end in itself or the single measure of success: engagement must be time-bound, results-based, and accompanied by meaningful progress. If confirmed, I will report regularly to the White House, Secretary of State Clinton, and the U.S. Congress on the results of our dialogue and evidence of such progress so we may calibrate our dual-track policy appropriately. I believe we should be prepared to respond flexibly and with agility to opportunities available in Burma and according to evolving conditions on the ground.

If confirmed, I will also conduct extensive consultations with key stakeholders both inside and outside government, at home and abroad. My objective will be to implement U.S. law faithfully and coordinate efforts to advance the common international objectives of bringing about in Burma the unconditional release of all political prisoners, respect for human rights, an inclusive dialogue between the regime and the political opposition, including Aung San Suu Kyi, and ethnic groups that would lead to national reconciliation, and Burma’s adherence to its international obligations, including all UN Security Council resolutions on nonproliferation. To date, in my view, the inability of key members of the international community to coordinate their approach to Burma has undermined the effective realization of our shared objectives.

Mr. Chairman, I believe I have the right mix of skills, experience, and regional expertise to carry out fully the congressional mandate for this position. My first job in Washington was in the foreign policy office of the late Senator Ted Kennedy, where I learned the importance of congressional oversight, particularly on international issues of unique interest to Members and the American people. I have more than 20 years of experience studying and working on Asia from various perspectives both inside and outside of government, from within the United States and in Asia itself. For eight years, I led the Asia division at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) International Security Program and established CSIS’ Southeast Asia Initiative. I currently serve as the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Affairs, where I have been responsible for overseeing U.S. security policy and strategy throughout East, Southeast, South, and Central Asia.

My first visit to Burma was in 1995, when I traveled to Rangoon with the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and met with government officials, international NGO representatives, and political party leaders, including the remarkable Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. I made subsequent visits, which solidified my appreciation for the richness of the country’s history and culture as well as the tragic limitations of its political and economic development. I

retained a keen interest in Burma's affairs in the years since, and co-wrote an article in the journal *Foreign Affairs* in 2007 that outlines a new U.S. policy approach to the country not dissimilar to results of the Obama Administration's 2009 policy review.

Mr. Chairman, I know you take a particularly keen personal interest in the situation in Burma, as do many others in Congress, throughout our country, and around the world. It is a country of unique interest to me as well. It would be a great privilege to serve my country as the first Special Representative and Policy Coordinator for Burma. If confirmed, I will bring the full weight of my diverse experience, personal contacts, understanding of Asia, and strategic instincts to this position. I will consult closely with you and other Members of this Committee and in the Congress to fulfill the mandate of this position in the interest of the United States and toward the betterment of the people of Burma.

Thank you for considering my nomination. I look forward to your questions.
