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Department of Trade and Industry



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

London SW1A 2AH

5 July 2006

H.E. Nyan Win  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Union of Myanmar

*Dee U Nyan Win,*

I am writing to you as Minister of State at the Foreign Office, responsible for the UK's relations with Asia and for human rights.

I have closely followed developments in your country over many years, as an active trade unionist and member of the Labour Party. Like many individuals in this country, I have been dismayed by the deteriorating political, economic and human rights situation in Myanmar.

I set out the Government's concerns to Ambassador U Nay Win when I called him to the Foreign Office on 15 June. I am writing to you to reinforce that message.

There are several matters of concern to which I want to draw your attention. The detention of more than 1,150 political activists and trade unionists is not only an infringement of universal human rights, but also a major impediment to the process of political reform and national reconciliation your government purports to support. I encourage you to release these individuals, and in particular the leader of the National League for Democracy, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, so they can all play their rightful role in the reconstruction of the country.



I also encourage your government to launch a genuine dialogue that includes representatives of all ethnic groups.

I note that you have launched the 7-step roadmap to democracy, the first step of which is to write and agree a constitution. But for this process to have any credibility and durability, it should be an inclusive and transparent process. The National Convention has thus far failed to meet these requirements. The roadmap and the National Convention could have formed the basis of an authentic process of political reform. But the process is flawed. It is clear the Convention will not produce the viable and credible solution to Myanmar's democratic deficit and ethnic conflicts.

A number of international observers, including UN Special Rapporteur Sergio Pinheiro, have documented the sustained and large-scale human rights abuses inflicted on the people of Myanmar, notably those living in ethnic-majority areas. In this context, I was disturbed by the reliable reports emanating from Myanmar that the latest military offensive in Kayin State has forced more than 16,000 civilians from their homes. By targeting innocent civilians, your government is violating international humanitarian principles. I urge you to implement an immediate cease-fire and to re-open negotiations with the KNU.

Myanmar's future development as a unitary, prosperous and peaceful state requires the consent and participation of the country's various ethnic minority groups. It is therefore a backward step for your government to continue its suppression of legitimate political expression. I urge you to reconsider the sentences passed on the responsible Shan leaders who were arrested and condemned on fabricated charges last year and whose appeals were summarily dismissed on 31 May.

Myanmar's future also requires trade unions to be allowed to operate freely. Trade unions are the building blocks to democracy. I recently learned that 9 individuals were condemned to prison terms of up to 25 years simply for having had contact with the Federation of Trade Unions of Burma. I urge you to release jailed trade unionists and allow the free organisation of Trade Unions in your country.



The International Labour Organisation is working to eliminate forced labour around the world. I urge your government, as member of the ILO, to assist their efforts. I urge you to release those who have legitimately reported incidences of forced labour. The recent announcement of Su Su Nwe's release was welcome – but her detention was unjustified and a number of other individuals have been imprisoned for lodging similar reports.

There are a number of other areas in which the government of Myanmar is failing to meet internationally accepted human rights standards. These include:

- **Prison Conditions:** We are concerned by recent reports that extremely harsh and abusive conditions are prevalent in prison labour camps. We call on your government to improve conditions across the prison system.
- **Torture:** There are clear indications that the use of torture is widespread in prison facilities across Myanmar. We are very concerned to learn that at least 10 democracy activists have died in detention as a result of torture and harsh conditions over the last year.
- **Child rights:** Independent observers have expressed concern over the failure to protect children's rights across Myanmar. There are particular concerns over trafficking, child labour, sexual exploitation, and the lack of access to education. We also call on your government – and armed ethnic groups – to cease recruiting and using child soldiers in the Armed Forces. This remains a particularly acute problem in the ethnic minority areas.
- **Sexual violence:** We call on the government to cease sanctioning the use of sexual violence against women by members of the armed forces. We are particularly disappointed by the government's failure investigate the systematic sexual violence taking place in Shan State, despite calls from the Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Burma to do so.
- **Religious freedom:** The freedom to express religious belief, including the freedom to build mosques and churches, is a fundamental human right. We urge you to allow the citizens of Myanmar to exercise that right.



- Freedom of Expression: Similarly, freedom of expression should also be respected and we call on the government to promote an independent media, free from censorship. Jailed journalists who have been punished simply for expressing an opinion – such as U Win Tin – should be released.

The issues I have raised in this letter are not new. All these concerns have been spelt out on a number of occasions in successive UN General Assembly and Human Rights Resolutions, by the Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Myanmar and by a range of respected and independent organisations.

On behalf of the British Government, I encourage you to reconsider your policies. It is not too late for your government to engage on a path of political reform and genuine national reconciliation, leading to democracy, national integrity, prosperity and peace for the people of Myanmar. Many of your neighbours, who increasingly share our concerns, have chosen a similar path and are now reaping the benefits of growth and stability.

I look forward to hearing your response on the issues I have set out in this letter. We stand ready to support all efforts to create a peaceful and stable future for all your citizens.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian McCartney'.

Rt Hon Ian McCartney  
Minister for Trade, Investment and Foreign Affairs