

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 7, 2014

The Honorable John F. Kerry  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

As you visit Burma in the coming days, we write to express our concern about that country's trajectory. We are particularly concerned that the reform process the United States has sought to support by easing financial sanctions has stalled, and in some important cases, been reversed.

The Burmese Government has failed to follow through on many of President Thein Sein's November 2012 commitments to President Obama. Fresh arrests of journalists for simply doing their jobs and problems renewing visas for Burmese journalists with foreign passports have sent a chill through the press corps. Civil society groups report difficulty obtaining office space, as landlords face pressure not to rent to them. National League for Democracy (NLD) legislators report difficulties getting access to information from the government, and face massive disparities in resources.

The ruling party has opposed constitutional changes that would level the playing field heading into the 2015 elections, including restrictions on Aung San Suu Kyi's ability to run for president and the military's control over key levers of authority. The military controls access to all significant constitutional change, an arrangement that cannot be acceptable in any society that aspires to democracy.

Things are not better with efforts to resolve Burma's long-running federalism challenges. While formal government-led peace negotiations lumber on, the Burmese military, or Tatmadaw, remains on the offensive in the Kachin state and continues to terrorize citizens in other ethnic nationalities' homelands. Ethnic civil society reports government efforts to buy off their leadership with development projects. New reports of rape as a weapon of war and other targeting of civilians show that the much-vaunted reforms remain shallow and largely limited to urban central Burma.

But the most urgent issue challenging Burma's hoped-for transition is the metastasizing communal violence, both in the context of the humanitarian and human rights disaster in the Rakhine State and the national phenomenon of anti-Muslim violence that is rooted in a narrative of Buddhist grievance. The government's continued failure to stop violence at the community level and address the regional and national environments fueled by intolerance and xenophobia is unacceptable. Efforts to pass a law banning interfaith marriage enjoys support within the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party, and there are persistent rumors of ties between current and former military leaders and the most virulent anti-Muslim and anti-Rohingya hate groups.

To that end, we request that you spend at least as much time during your visit talking to civil society groups, representatives of political ethnic nationalities, and non-state armed groups as you do with government officials. We also urge you to make absolutely clear to your official interlocutors that the status quo in Burma is unacceptable and that meaningful and irreversible progress on these issues is necessary to further advance our bilateral interest in normalizing relations.

A true democratic transformation in Burma is something we all hope for. As the President said in his West Point speech, "if Burma succeeds, we have gained a new partner without firing a shot." But, as he also noted, "Progress could be reversed." We fear that we are seeing such a reversal play out in front of our eyes and urge you to address these issues during your visit.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio  
United States Senator



Mark Kirk  
United States Senator