

leader of the National League of Democracy in Burma.

Remarks Prior to a Lunch With Burmese Activists in Bangkok August 7, 2008

The President. Thank you all for joining me. I'm looking forward to my lunch with men and women who care deeply about the human condition in Burma.

Unfortunately, my wife is not here. She's on the Thai-Burmese border talking about the same thing that we're going to be talking about. I want you to know and want the people of your country to know the American people care deeply about the people of Burma, and we dream for the day in which people will be free. And part of my reason for asking you for lunch is not only to hear your own stories—hear your stories, but for you to give me advice about what you think America ought to be doing.

I've just been briefed on the response to the typhoon. And I'm pleased that our Government was so generous. And I'm pleased that a lot of the aid that we paid for is actually getting to the people themselves. One of my questions is not how much money you give, but is it actually making a significant difference in people's lives, and was told it is. I was told the stories about U.S. money going to buy seed and fertilizer so farmers in the delta can get their crops in the ground and feed their families and, hopefully, feed people in their communities.

I'm always inspired by acts of courage, and I'm having lunch with courageous people. So I want to thank you for coming. I have a couple of comments, and then we'll eat some food.

Do you want to start, please? What's your name?

Lway Aye Nang. My name is Lway Aye Nang. I'm the Palaung ethnic. I also belong

to the Women's League of Burma, a Burma women's organization comprised of 12 women's organizations based on different ethnicities of Burma. And we are working to empower women and to be able to participate in peaceful reconciliations in Burma, and also raising awareness about Burma, about the gross human rights violations in Burma that are committed by the military regime. And the international community can help with this work.

And the military regime, if they are continuing to deploy their troops along the ethnic areas, and their soldiers continue to commit systematic human rights violations against the ethnic nationality, which includes also rapes—this has been used—long used as a weapon of war in Burma.

The President. Yes.

Lway Aye Nang. And we advocate to get the support—with the support from the international community, and we are very lucky and very fortunate to have the United States Government to support us in different means and different ways. And especially, we would like to give—I would like to give our gratitude to the United States for the new sanctions in blocking the import of Burmese jade—

The President. Jade, right.

Lway Aye Nang. —to the United States.

The President. Right.

Lway Aye Nang. And this is really hitting the regime and—the regime and their associates who have been destroying the country's natural resources for their own benefit and leaving ordinary citizens in extremely poverty.

And secondly, we are also very glad—grateful to have the—our American friends and helping the Cyclone Nargis survivors—

The President. Yes, yes.

Lway Aye Nang. —the victims. And we also would like to inform the United States Government here, and there is still restrictions of aid to the Cyclone Nargis victims by the military regime. And we'd like to also request that the United States Government to put pressure—to continue to pressure on the regime to hinder the—to give the access by the locals and international community to the victims of the Nargis Cyclone survivors.

The President. Thank you.

Lway Aye Nang. And because we are really concerned at the women's organization here, our women and children who are in the Cyclone Nargis affected area are—

The President. Yes.

Lway Aye Nang. —vulnerable to the sexual exploitations.

And thank you so much.

The President. Good job.

Yes, sir.

Aung Zaw. My name is Aung Zaw. I was a student activist in 1988, and I was briefly detained. I spent a week in a notorious military prison. I was tortured there; then after that, I left Burma. I started the Irrawaddy Magazine, which I started document the human rights violations, and I

started collecting information from Burma. So we have a stringer who works inside the country, send us information to us. And from here—that we release the information from here. We use information from him. We also promote an independent person's participation on Burma—in Burma.

And I think we are very pleased that we have this lunch meeting. And this was a very, I think, not only a symbolic meeting, but also send a strong signal to some ASEAN nations, and also to China, in particular, who continue to defend and protect the Burmese military Government.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:06 p.m. at the U.S. Ambassador to Burma's residence. Participating in the lunch were Lway Aye Nang, joint general secretary, Women's League of Burma; Aung Zaw, editor, Irrawaddy Magazine; Aung Naing Oo, senior associate, Vahu Development Institute, Chiang Mai University; Lian Sakhong, general secretary, Ethnic Nationalities Council; Win Min, lecturer, Chiang Mai and Payap Universities; political analyst Bo Kyaw Nyein; Bo Kyi, head, Assistance Association for Political Prisoners; Naing Aung, general secretary, Forum for Democracy; and Kyaw Kyaw, director, Political Defiance Committee of the National Council of the Union of Burma.

Interview With Foreign Radio Journalists in Bangkok August 7, 2008

The President. I am in Bangkok, and one of the reasons I've come is not only to pay my respects to the Government and the people of Thailand, but also to be in a position to speak about freedom in Burma. I just had lunch with some people that are deeply concerned about the future

of Burma, people that were involved in the student marches of '88, people involved with humanitarian assistance. I was regretful that my wife couldn't join us, because she's an articulate spokesman for the people of Burma; but she's on the border on