

Today I'm looking forward to continuing to build on the strong partnership between ASEAN and the United States that already exists. President Thein Sein, I want to thank you for your hospitality and for bringing together this excellent summit. I think Myanmar has done a tremendous job chairing ASEAN this year and has shown solid leadership on issues of critical importance to the entire region.

As has already been noted in the EAS that we just attended, ASEAN is at the heart of Asia's rapid growth. Its people are ambitious and energetic and talented, and I'm looking forward to spending time tomorrow with young leaders from across Southeast Asia. And as a strong relationship between the United States and ASEAN is essential to realizing our shared vision for the future of the Asia-Pacific, I intend to continue to invest in these efforts not only during our summits, but more importantly, on a day-to-day basis.

During the past 6 years, we've made great strides in elevating and expanding this partnership, but I think we all agree we can still do

more. And that's why the United States is committed to strengthening ASEAN, both as an institution and as a community of nations bound by our shared interests and values. And so, whether we are working on economic issues, social issues, security issues, disaster relief, enhancing educational opportunities for all the young people of the region, strengthening our public health infrastructure to ensure that we can handle an outbreak of disease—in each and every one of these cases, I believe that we are going to be stronger together than when we act individually. And we are very much invested in building the capacity not just of individual nations, but between nations so that together we can become stronger, more capable partners to each other and meet the regional and global challenges ahead. So thank you very much, Mr. President, and I look forward to hearing the remarks from our fellow leaders.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:45 p.m. at the Myanmar International Convention Center.

Remarks Following a Roundtable Discussion on Political Reform in Nay Pyi Taw

November 13, 2014

Well, I just had an excellent roundtable discussion with Members of Parliament as well as the Speaker of the lower and upper chamber—I may not be describing the term properly—as well as Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who I will have an opportunity to visit later tomorrow.

It was an excellent discussion about this transition process that's taking place here in Myanmar around consolidating some of the gains that have already been made, but also pushing further to institute a genuine democracy here in this country that can serve the needs of all people. I've been very impressed by not only the quality of the Members of Parliament, but also their determination to move forward. And they represent different parties, but they're unified in wanting to see a better life for the people of this country.

And I want to thank the National Democratic Institute, NDI, as well as the work that we're doing through USAID to try to provide some of the technical skills and resources necessary for what is a new experience for many people, and that is running a democratic process and having a Parliament. And I'm very proud of the work that the United States is doing in partnering with this country in advancing some of these goals.

There were a lot of discussions that I think would be familiar with every country. How do we make sure that we're protecting minority rights? What's the balance between decentralization and centralization? How do majority parties and opposition parties work together for the good of the country, but how do you prevent the kind of acrimony or institutional entrenchment that over time erodes democracy?

There are certain unique circumstances involved in this transition. The large number of ethnic groups in the country, the existing armed conflicts that have gone on for many years between some of the ethnic groups and the Government, and the fact that the military is still a very powerful institution and managing how it transitions to greater civilian participation—these are all questions that we've seen in many other countries both in the region and around the world. And in the United States, we've had to wrestle with many of these questions as well, both in our founding and over the course of our democracy.

But what I'm encouraged by is the commitment of all the individuals here to try to make this work. And I think that if with strong leadership and commitment the attitude that I've heard today continues in the years to come, then I'm confident that what we will see is a completely new day for Myanmar. But the work is not yet done, and the goal of the United States here is to be a strong partner in the process. Like every good friend, we will praise what works. There will be times where we offer constructive criticism about the lack of progress in certain areas or where reform efforts have stalled.

Remarks Following a Meeting With President Thein Sein of Burma in Nay Pyi Taw *November 13, 2014*

Well, I want to thank once again President Thein Sein for welcoming us, not only for the excellent arrangements that were made for the EAS and the U.S.-ASEAN summit, but also the opportunity to exchange ideas face to face.

In part because of President Sein's leadership, the democratization process in Myanmar is real, and we can point to specific changes that are making a difference. Domestically, we've seen political prisoners that have been released. We have seen an effort to end the practice of children being recruited into the army. There is a genuine prospect for a cease-

fire between some of the armed groups that have been fighting in Myanmar for decades. But our consistent aim and goal will be to see that this transition is completed so that it delivers concrete benefits for the people, whether that's improved incomes for ordinary people; whether it means that farmers have greater access to productive lands; whether it means young people are getting a high-quality education; whether it means that religious minorities are adequately protected. The test in the end will be is it making people's lives better. These aren't abstract conversations, and I think all Members of Parliament here recognize that.

So I very much appreciate all of you sharing this moment with me, and it will inform my conversations with President Thein Sein this evening as well as my meetings with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi tomorrow when I travel down to Yangon. All right?

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:49 p.m. at the National Democratic Institute's Parliamentary Resource Center. In his remarks, he referred to Speaker of the Lower House of Parliament Thura Shwe Mann, Speaker of the Upper House of Parliament Khin Aung Myint, and Member of Parliament and National League for Democracy Leader Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma.

fire between some of the armed groups that have been fighting in Myanmar for decades.

But in our discussions, we recognized that this process is still incomplete. So, specifically, we had the opportunity to discuss elections that are scheduled for next year and the need for those elections to be fair, inclusive, transparent, and that the constitutional amendment process that has begun needs to reflect the ability of all voices in Myanmar's society to participate.

We also discussed the specific situation in Rakhine State and the need to work towards a situation in which the Muslim minority there is