

Liangying has said: “Human nature is universal and needs to pursue freedom and equality.”

Ultimately, only China can decide what course it will follow. America and our partners are realistic, and we’re prepared for any possibility. I’m optimistic about China’s future. Young people who grow up with the freedom to trade goods will ultimately demand the freedom to trade ideas, especially on an unrestricted Internet. Change in China will arrive on its own terms and in keeping with its own history and its own traditions. Yet, change will arrive. And it will be clear for all to see that those who aspire to speak their conscience and worship their God are no threat to the future of China. They’re the people who will make China a great nation in the 21st century.

This is my last trip to East Asia as President. I have great confidence that Asia will continue to grow in opportunity and achievement and influence. I’m confident because I know the creative and enterprising spirit of this region’s people. I’m confident because the forces of freedom and hope that unleashed the transformation of Asia can never be turned back. And I’m confident because I know the bonds between America and our friends in Asia will never be broken.

When forces from Imperial Japan entered Thailand during World War II, the Thai Ambassador in Washington was directed to declare war on the United States. He bravely refused to deliver the declaration. In turn, America refused to recognize Thailand as our enemy. Instead, we helped Thais in America band together in a movement called Seri Thai. They deployed across the Pacific, infiltrated behind enemy lines, and gathered intelligence that helped speed the liberation of this great land.

Several members of the Seri Thai movement are still with us—here. And I’m honored you all are here, and I appreciate your presence more than you can possibly know. You’ve earned the lasting gratitude of the American people. And all in this region can count on a solemn promise from the United States: America stood with the free people of Asia in the past; America stands with the free people of Asia today. And we will stand

with the free people of Asia long into your bright future.

Thank you for your time. May God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:30 a.m. at the Queen Sirikit National Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to King Phumiphon Adunyadet and Queen Sirikit of Thailand; former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan; and Aung San Suu Kyi, 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?

Lawy Aye Nang. My name is Lawy 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.

Lawy 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.

Lawy Aye Nang. —to the United States.

The President. Right.

Lawy 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.

Lawy 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.

Lawy 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.

Lawy 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 [*inaudible*] prison. I was tortured there; then after that, I left Burma. I started the Irrawaddy Magazine, which I started documenting 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—[*inaudible*].

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 Lawy 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 Kayw 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 this mission of saying to the Burmese people: You have friends, and you're not alone; and the United States cares about you.

So, I want to thank you for giving me the chance to answer your questions, and I'll be glad to do so now. Why don't we just go around the table?

Q. Mr. President, it's an honor to be with you, and many thanks, giving a chance to—this roundtable discussion.

The President. Thank you.

Q. My name is Thein Htike Oo, from Voice of America; Toe Zaw Latt from Democratic Voice of Burma; and Soe Win Than from BBC. We have one lady here from Radio Free Asia, May Pyone Aung.

The President. Good, thank you. Welcome.

U.S. Aid to Burma

Q. I would like to start a couple questions about the relief aid policy of United States.

The President. Yes.

Q. Recent relief operation, the Burmese regime didn't allow the U.S. Navy ship aid through the Pacific come, and international community, the U.S. obviously was really frustrated. I would like to know, if Burma faced another catastrophe or disaster, are you going to try to help, or are you going to—[inaudible]—Burmese regime again?

The President. Well, absolutely. But first of all, we care about the human condition, human suffering. And there's no question, there was huge human suffering when the cyclone came through. I can remember the

day it hit. I was told that this was going to be a major disaster for the people, and so I ordered our Navy ships in the area to be prepared to sail toward the Burmese area to provide aid and logistics and management. We're very good about dealing with major emergencies. And interestingly enough, we were involved with a military mission in the area, so we were prepared to send a robust package in.

Unfortunately, the Government, the military leader chose not to allow for there to be immediate help. No telling how many lives could have been saved, or how much human suffering could have been dealt with more effectively had there not been the slow response of the military dictator.

But now our aid, along with other people—other countries' aid, is beginning to move. In answer to your question, yes, our Government will respond if there's another catastrophe. And hopefully, the military people have learned a lesson: That there needs to be truthfulness at the highest levels of government. People have got to understand and listen to reality and understand that nations and people want to help when there's suffering. And so, we will respond. In the meantime, we're going to keep pushing for freedom.

Burmese Government's Acceptance of Foreign Aid

Q. During the time, a lot of Burmese people, they were expecting a sort of humanitarian intervention, even though the Burmese regime didn't allow the aid. So why it didn't happen, or what is the reason—

The President. We chose to go through the normal routes. We wanted to basically say, here's your opportunity to receive aid. I'm disappointed that the military dictator chose not to allow the aid in quickly. But I don't think it would have been helpful for the Burmese people had there been a conflict over the delivery of aid. What we don't want to do is compound a terrible situation. In other words, if we just sent in—sent people in, our military in without visas or permission from the Government, there's no telling what the reaction would have been. And so therefore, we were trying to make the problem better, not worse.