

KIM DAE-JUNG PEACE FOUNDATION
Seoul, South Korea

THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY
Supporting Democratization in Burma

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Former President and Nobel Peace laureate, Dr Kim Dae-jung, Mr Speaker, Mr Prime Minister, Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, I cannot adequately express how I feel to be asked to participate in this event. It is indeed a great honour. I remember very well when Dr Kim Dae-jung founded the Forum of Democratic Leaders in Asia Pacific to promote democracy and human rights. It was such an encouragement. I believe that tonight we are embarking on a similar journey but a journey that will actually help bring about change in Burma. Dr Kim Dae-jung, thank you for using the 7th anniversary of your receiving the Nobel Peace Prize to promote democracy in Burma. It is very kind of you and much appreciated. I am sure Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the people of Burma will also appreciate it. Thank you also for using your freedom to promote the freedom of the people of Burma, as Daw Aung San Suu Kyi requested.

I have been asked to speak about “How can the international community support democratization in Burma?” On the surface, it seems quite simple. The people of Burma want democracy, so the international community should help. The question becomes complicated when we ask how?

Some feel so outraged by what happened in September that they want to punish the generals. They want the Burmese generals to be brought before the International Criminal Court in the Hague. Others are calling for more sanctions against Burma. They want Burma expelled from ASEAN. Others want the world to boycott the Beijing Olympics. Still others want the United Nations or the United States to intervene militarily. They want the UN Security Council to pass a resolution against Burma. They feel that what the UN is doing is not enough.

It is right to be outraged but it is not enough to be angry. We need to think about how to change the situation. Will taking the generals to court make them want to give up power? I do not believe so. It will only make them more determined not to give up power. Will more sanctions make the generals more willing to change? If Burma were expelled from ASEAN, the generals can just forget its neighbours. What about boycotting the Olympics? You can boycott the Olympics but the Burmese generals will not listen to China if it means giving up their power. What about military intervention? Do you really want foreign troops in Burma? I do not. In a modern war like in Iraq or Afghanistan, the main casualties are unarmed civilians, women and children. You all know very well what happened to Korea in the 1950's. I would welcome a Security Council resolution but will it actually solve the problem? How many resolutions has the Security Council made on the issue of Palestine? Is the problem solved? So, if the international situation does not look encouraging, what about the domestic situation?

It is true that the people are fed up and the Buddhist monks will not give up easily. It is also true that the economic problems will get worse. But it does not necessarily mean that there will be a

country-wide uprising to topple the regime. We have seen how the military is prepared to use extreme force. Another factor is that Burma's neighbours are extremely concerned about instability. If there is an uprising and if there is no viable alternate government, the neighbours will support another dictator to take control. That is what happened in 1988. If that is the case, some may ask "Is there a possibility of an internal split and a coup?" Given the way the Burma Army is organized and how loyalty is rewarded, the likelihood of a coup is very slim. What about the ethnic forces? They will continue to be an irritant to the regime for many years to come but they are not in a position to use force to bring about change in Burma.

What then are the options for change then? The Burmese military does not intend to give up power but it is definitely feeling the pressure. The fact that the international community is now united has also forced the generals to begin talking with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. It is likely only a cosmetic move to ease the pressure, but there is no other realistic option for the democracy movement or the Burmese military. Without a dialogue there is no possibility of change, and there will be no role for the international community. The democracy movement, the UN and Burma's neighbours must somehow use the dialogue to force the military to concede minor points, and slowly build a momentum for change. To achieve this, I would like to suggest that -

1. The democracy movement engage the military in a dialogue and explore areas of common concern where they can cooperate fully;
2. The international community fully support the mediation efforts of the UN Secretary-General's Special Advisor for Myanmar (Ibrahim Gambari);
3. The UN Security Council fully support Gambari's efforts;
4. The international community not use the UN Security Council as the sole instrument to move the dialogue. It will lose its effectiveness and backfire if the veto is used again.
5. A more permanent and coordinated international effort to bring about change in Burma is instituted. A multi-party talk along the lines of the Six Party Talks for North Korea would be ideal. This was rejected by the SPDC. But this could be revived in the future.

Dr KimDae-jung initiated the Sunshine Policy towards North Korea, You are all well aware how difficult it has been and how much time and patience it has required. And it has still not succeeded. It is still a work in progress. All these diplomatic moves in Burma will also take time.

The dialogue between Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the Burmese generals will not result in a breakthrough immediately. What can we do in the meanwhile? No lasting democracy can be built without an educated and active population. I would like to suggest that we take a longer-term approach and start building civil society at the grassroots level in Burma.

In addition to humanitarian aid and building civil society in Burma, education opportunities for the people of Burma must also be provided either in Burma, in neighbouring countries or overseas. In this respect, I would like to make a special appeal to the people and government of South Korea. You have in your midst about 3,000 Burmese. Many of them are illegal and do not

have an opportunity to study or improve their life. Please recognize their plight officially and allow them to work and study. We will need people like them in a future democratic Burma – people who have work experience and an education. Please help us to build human resources for Burma and I am sure they will also in return contribute fully to Korean society.

With the help of the Korean people, Dr Kim Dae-jung and the Kim Dae-jung Peace Centre, I am sure we can make a difference for the people of Burma. Thank you.