

**The Government of Myanmar Urges the United States to Be Honest and Accurate
when Reporting about Other Countries**

The Government of Myanmar noted with dismay the negative and erroneous remarks made by the U.S. State Department recently, following the successful reconvening of the National Convention in Myanmar.

On May 14, 2004 a press statement released by the U.S. State Department mentioned that "The United Nationalities Alliance (UNA), a group comprised of eight ethnic-based political parties that participated in 1990 elections," will not participate in the National Convention.

The State Department seems to be unaware of the fact that the so-called ethnic-based political party, the UNA does not exist at all. This name appears to be unofficially created by the Shan National League for Democracy party, being a partner-party of the National League for Democracy refusing any participation and cooperation in the National Convention. This so-called ethnic-based party, the UNA was not registered as a political entity during 1988 when permission to form political parties were granted by the Government. It also did not contest in the 1990 elections and never participated in the 1993 National Convention. Most importantly, this so-called ethnic-based party does not represent any nationality groups. Furthermore, according to the rules and regulations prevailing in the country for formation of organizations and parties, it is against the law to assume a name of any ethnic nationality without actually representing that nationality. It is a mechanism established to avoid unnecessary ethnic problems from arising and to prevent political exploitation from taking place.

Again on 21 May, the State Department Spokesman said: "U.S. regrets the failure of the Burmese Leadership to take action that would have allowed all elements of society, including all democratic representatives and ethnic groups to participate in the ongoing constitutional convention"

The State Department Spokesman appears to be unaware of the fact that all political parties, ethnic nationalities including armed ethnic groups in cease-fire agreement were invited to participate in the National Convention. Altogether 1076 delegates from 8 stratas of Myanmar society which comprise of (a) political parties delegates (b) representatives-elect (c) nationalities delegates (d) peasants delegates (e) workers delegates (f) intellectuals and intelligentsia delegates (g) state service delegates (h) other invited delegates have attended the opening ceremony on Monday 17 May 2004 in Yangon accounting for 98.9 percent. The Convention is in full swing now and is a week old. According to Dr. Manan Tu Ja, the Vice President of the cease-fire group (Kachin Independent Organization) and a delegate to the Convention, the Government indicated that all principles will be opened for discussion during the Convention but not outside or prior to it.

According to Dr. Saw Simon Thar, a Kayin Christian and a medical doctor from the group of "other invited delegates," he will strive for the good of citizens for public health, for the benefit of the Kayin people and for his faith, also pinpointing that 50 Kayins of various categories are participating in the Convention.

One ethnic representative from the cease-fire or peace group recently commented on NLD's position as such "staying on the sidelines will in no way help the political actors in the country to be assured of their rights, responsibility and obligations.

A long-time Myanmar watcher Professor Robert Taylor from England commented that the NLD probably had demanded too much at one time, finally ending up with nothing.

Another representative from an ethnic party also remarked that, " In a democratic exercise, one cannot expect to get all what one wants and it is a matter of compromise, negotiation and diplomacy". Yet one retired ambassador and veteran politician commented that, "this National Convention should be seen as a step towards a more democratic future".

The Government has encouraged all political parties and national groups to join in the National Convention and build Myanmar's democratic future together. The National Convention is being represented by the people of Myanmar, and will lay the foundation for elections and for a stable, democratic, and representative nation. It will be a Government of the Myanmar people, by the Myanmar people, and for the Myanmar people. The success of the Convention is crucial for the future of Myanmar. The opportunity to maintain peace, security and stability in Myanmar will be brought about by the people of Myanmar and must be home grown. The recent developments in Iraq and Afghanistan are the classic examples of how wrong things could end up when the respective political histories, cultures, and security needs of a country are being ignored in making a transition to democracy by forces from outside.

The United States is learning more and more a variety and a series of impressive lessons in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world how difficult it is as it attempts to lead in transforming certain countries in becoming peaceful, stable and sustainable democracies but ending up creating more chaos, more violence and more instability in those countries.

However, the U.S. Government's statement of 21 May did mention the fact that Myanmar's neighbouring countries in the region have expressed their support for democratic reform in Myanmar. The opening ceremony of the National Convention was attended by the members of the Diplomatic Corps in Yangon including representatives from ASEAN countries, China, Russia, Japan, Korea, India, Egypt, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Australia, Serbia & Montenegro, Nepal and Pakistan and from the U.N. agencies as well. The ceremony was also attended and the news being covered by 19 members of the Foreign Correspondent Club in Yangon including major western news agencies such as AP, Reuters and AFP. An interview with the Deputy Foreign Minister was also granted to CNN in Yangon on that day. Nevertheless, it is regretful to learn that some western media have portrayed the ceremony in a very negative light going as far as stating that journalists were barred from the ceremony and some even mentioned that those journalists who were invited were not allowed to bring cameras and tape recorders. The State Radio and Television has been reporting on a daily basis of the development of the National Convention in detail but Reuters News Agency's report on 19 May stated that, "there has been no reports so far on the State Radio and Television".

Furthermore, the United States regrettably has lost its credibility in reporting about other countries in a balanced and accurate way.

A White House press release on May 17 surprisingly stated that Myanmar poses an "unusual and extraordinary threat to American national security" but Washington offered no evidence of this "threat to American national security" nor did it explain how imposing sanctions on a small and peaceful nation help maintain the stability of the United States. Myanmar is a responsible member of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and many other international organizations. Its people are primarily farmers living in harmony with its neighbours. It has no weapons of mass destruction, no terrorist organizations, no missile programs, no expansionist ambitions, and no animosity towards the United States, and its per capita GDP is only 1/100 that of the United States. Also the Myanmar people are primarily Buddhists, a religion notable for peacefulness and tolerance towards others.

So it is quite odd to hear that we pose an "extraordinary threat" to the most powerful nation on earth. Our goals are very simple: to develop our country economically and politically while maintaining its hard won peace and stability. In this regard, we would like to encourage the United States to abandon its practice of crying wolf and we urge the United States to join the world community in the achievement of our common agenda of peace, development and freedom for all the people of the world by being honest and accurate.