

RELEASE IN FULL

From: Mills, Cheryl D <MillsCD@state.gov>
Sent: Monday, January 16, 2012 4:33 PM
To: H
Subject: Fw: MLK and Burma

----- Original Message -----

From: Posner, Michael H
Sent: Monday, January 16, 2012 04:01 PM
To: Mills, Cheryl D; Sullivan, Jacob J
Subject: Fw: MLK and Burma

This is a note I sent out today to everyone in DRL - thought you would like seeing it

Hope the Africa trip is going well. See you soon.

Mp

----- Original Message -----

From: Posner, Michael H
Sent: Monday, January 16, 2012 03:26 PM
To: DRL-Users-DL
Subject: MLK and Burma

The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice Martin Luther King -- 1968

This weekend we commemorate the birthday of Martin Luther King Jr. and his leadership in the struggle for human rights in this country. As we celebrate Dr. King's unique role in our own history, we are reminded of his constant reference to the links between our struggles for civil rights and social justice and the global pursuit of human rights, and the mutually beneficial lessons to be learned from such comparisons.

For those of us in DRL, last week's extra-ordinary release of about 300 political prisoners in Burma is the latest in a series of dramatic human rights developments now taking place in that country. Though hundreds of political prisoners have yet to be released, the releases of scores of high profile political prisoners, including a number who had been detained for two decades or more, is a remarkable and very welcome development. Among those who were released are : Min Ko Naing, a leader of the Generation 88 student movement, who was arrested in August 2007 for leading a peaceful walking demonstration in Rangoon, and sentenced to 65 years in jail; Nilar Thein, a woman student leader from the Generation 88 movement who also was arrested in the fall of 2007 and sentenced to 65 years in jail; and U Gambira a monk and leader of the All Burma Monks Alliance, who also was arrested in the fall of 2007 for his leadership role in the so-called Saffron revolution and sentenced to 68 years in jail.

I am very proud of DRL's role in this recent chapter and want to thank everyone in the bureau that played a role in this extraordinary effort. Our close engagement started last spring when Stacey May was doing a stint with EAPs Burma desk and had the opportunity to visit Burma. Following her visit Stacey met with me and with Sarah Buckley-Moore, Susan O'Sullivan, Dan Baer and the DRL-EAP office. She raised the possibility of our focusing more concerted and detailed

attention on the prisoner issue. This was at a moment when there was a lively debate within the building, and outside, about the prospect for the UN Human Rights Council appointing a Commission of Inquiry to examine past abuses by the Burmese government. While we remained involved in those discussions, following Stacey and Sarah's lead, we opted to make prisoner releases our focal point.

In August Stacey got the prisoner list from an exile group called the AAPP and our team went to work vetting that list and building our own.

Sarah, along with Max Harrington, a graduate student at Georgetown who had lived in Burma for three years worked day and night building the most accurate and detailed list available. They filled in key details such as the charges against each prisoner, the length of their sentences where they were being held.

In September, at UNGA, Sarah, Dan and I handed over our list to Burmese officials and asked them to set up a process for reviewing these and future cases. Interestingly the government came right back to us with their own list of more than 500 "security detainees". In October I met with Burma's foreign Minister when he visited Washington and asked permission to visit Burma to pursue a more detailed exchange on the prisoner issues. Several weeks later he invited me to visit the country, In November Sarah and I visited Rangoon and Naypyidaw with Derek Mitchell. During that visit we met with a number of senior officials including the Minister of Home Affairs, whose portfolio includes prisoner issues. We gave him an updated list (then around 1050 names) and set up a point of contact in the Ministry. We also discussed this issue with a range of people outside the government, including Aung San Suu Kyi and with a group of former political prisoners and activists in Burma working on prisoner issues.

In December I accompanied Secretary Clinton during her historic visit to Burma, and encouraged a continued focus on the prisoner issue. We resubmitted our list, now with about 1100 names. Secretary Clinton made repeated references to the prisoner issue and our list, both in private meetings with the President and other government officials and in her various public statements. I have no doubt that her active engagement on this issue made a dramatic difference. So did our follow-up and reaction when the government failed to release a significant number of prisoners on January 4, despite indications that they would use their national holiday as the occasion for a major prisoner release.

And finally last Friday the government announced the release of over 600 prisoners, approximately 300 of whom were on our list of political prisoners. Though Stacey and Max are still combing through the lists, two things are clear. First, as I noted at the outset these releases are extremely significant and include most of the most high profile political prisoners the government had been holding. So this is a major accomplishment. But secondly there is still more work to be done to ensure that the remaining political prisoners also are released. We intend to stay the course in pursuing that mission and will keep you all informed as we make further progress on this issue.

Again I want to thank everyone involved in this extraordinary and very successful effort. It is a wonderful example of people in DRL identifying an opportunity and then seizing the initiative and making a tangible difference in people's lives. Please join me in congratulating Dan, Susan, Stacey, Sarah, Max, Michael and the EAP team for this historic accomplishment.

Finally let me close where I began, with another quote from Martin Luther King Jr. In 1963 he was imprisoned in Birmingham Alabama for bringing his participation in the civil rights struggle there. Accused of being an "outsider" whose presence was "unwise and untimely", Dr King wrote an open letter from his Birmingham jail cell in which he said:

"I cannot sit in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

So here's to DRL -- pursuing justice everywhere and making a difference.

Best wishes for this MLK holiday.

Mike