

Second Myanmar Development Cooperation Forum Respondent Points

Strengthening a Culture of Democracy and National Harmony

Strengthening National Harmony and Development of Peace Process (remarks by Dr. Kyaw Yin Hlaing)

Strengthening Culture of Democracy and Civil Society Participation (remarks by U Tin Htut Oo)

Thanks: Dr. Kyaw Yin Hlaing, U Tin Htut Oo. Appreciation to U Aung Min.

I think you have done an outstanding job in your presentations of capturing the idea of creating a culture of democracy and national harmony. We should put a lot of these theories about national harmony into practice.

I want to say a few things about national harmony. National harmony, as noted, is not simply the absence of military conflict. It's in fact, not the absence of any conflict in society, or the notion that society will always agree on everything all of the time.

Harmony comes when government and society work together sincerely and in partnership, when diverse people with mutual respect and common vision for the future. Only then will there be true justice in a society. It means all voices and opinions are shared openly. Some will be reasonable, some will be constructive and some will be unreasonable and irresponsible at times. But the appearance of more voices in the mix does not suggest instability though sometimes it can look like it, it actually suggests greater stability.

And a culture of democracy is not just a single act or single event. It is a way of thinking. It is a mindset.

It is not just about the government allowing a voice to be heard it is about protecting the right of people to have voices. And we will be looking for that, I think the people will be looking for not just whether their voices may be heard but whether in institutions their voices are protected, their rights are protected.

Only way to achieve peace and harmony, national harmony, is gradually, step by step, in good faith, rebuilding trust every single day through countless individual

and communal interactions, and from the mutual recognition of the benefits to one's community and to the national interest of taking this course. It means dealing with issues, allowing voices on issues that may be uncomfortable for those in power, or those with power.

And those who seek to contribute to democracy in this country, at every level, have to understand that democracy is not just about the freedom to speak, everybody now wants to speak – they haven't been able to speak for a long time – but it's about the responsibility to listen. To compromise. To seek to understand others' points of view, to put oneself in other's shoes, to take differences not as treason but as part of a conversation. To see all humanity as equal.

And live out the central creed of the Buddhist faith, which we all have such respect for, to show true loving-kindness and respect for all beings equally.

In fact, I can't think of anything more democratic – more fundamental to a culture of true democracy than that.

Or alternatively anything more dangerous to democracy than people treating anyone differently according to their background, faith, ethnicity, or place of origin, without due process or dialogue. It would be tragic that after 65 years of war, we emerge, only to plunge into new civil conflict. That is the culture this country must end if it is to have a chance to develop, grow, and prosper to reach its full potential.

Over the last few years, we have noted many remarkable changes. It included the President's outreach to civil society, and dialogue between the government and civil society to draft key legislation such as the Association Registration Law.

That is only the beginning but those are very, very important steps. In the coming year it will be very important to build on all of this. We will be looking for the answers to several questions: will there be more government-civil society cooperation on legislation; will the government enshrine the rights of civil society to organize, to assemble, to demonstrate? Will the peace process move past conversations between those who bear arms to embrace farmers, women, and average citizens at the local level who have always said they wanted peace, to live their lives normally, grow their families, educate their kids....will that comprehensive dialogue begin in this next year on their community's and their country's future? Will dialogue and debate overcome violence and summary justice as a way of dealing with differences?

We all will be watching, all of us here – we will all be watching this, all of us as donors, very closely. In fact, so will our businesses. They will be wondering, where are things going to move in the next year, the next two years? Is it stable enough to invest large amounts of money in the country, to create the jobs and the rest of the foundation for true stability and true development of the country. So we will be watching.

In the end, a culture of democracy is not measured in a single event, though events are important. It is not just about passing laws and building institutions, though those are absolutely critical if people are to feel confident that this is truly a new day.

Creating a new culture of democracy means changing the fundamental way that people interact and think about their place in society. After 50 years of suspicion, alienation, mistrust and dictatorship, after all that the development of that new culture will take some time. We must manage our expectations. We all recognize that this will take some time. But it is ultimately essential for democracy's success.

That means every person – whether in government, media, civil society, everyone has a responsibility, not just rights, in this process.

Finally, we are the donors. We have responsibilities. That includes us. As development partners, we have to remember a central tenant: that it's not just what we do, but how we do it that is extremely important to the success of this transition.

That means we must consult. We must work together, both with the government and with local communities, seeking out the views and guidance of those who have been working on the ground and know this country, know the communities better than us. We must respect that consultation, and in the process we must model the transparency, accountability, respect, and that consultation that we ask from those in this country.

And we must coordinate our efforts; we have been doing that to a degree but we can do better

We must listen and learn before we rush forward and throw money around. We must win the trust of locals in conducting our work.

We must do our best to ensure that our engagement is inclusive, informed and sensitive to local conditions.

We all know that while there has been enormous progress, in this country in recent years, considerable challenges still remain. People throughout the country, including the government, are aware and open about these challenges. Change of mindsets is going to be slow but we must consider how we may contribute to that evolution in the way we conduct our work, remembering as President Obama reminded us when he was here 14 months ago that the more important job in a democracy is not president, it is not politician, it is citizen. We must take the lead from the voice of the citizen, we must respect that.

The development of civil society is central to building that culture of democracy and for the health, well-being and stability of this society.

I am confident when I say that the international community and that the donors gathered here today are strongly committed to support this country as the people of this country tackle the difficult task that lies ahead, to build a culture of democracy and create national harmony in the coming weeks, months, and years to come. Thank you.