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Transcript of Press Encounter by Special Advisor Ibrahim Gambari after meeting the Foreign Minister of Thailand, Bangkok, 15 October 2007

First I have a statement to make. Then I would be delighted to answer your questions.

Let me start by expressing my gratitude to the Thai Government for the hospitality it has extended to me and to members of my delegation. I have just had a very constructive, very detailed, very productive meeting with the Foreign Minister, Nitya Pibulsonggram, and will meet later this afternoon with the Prime Minister to whom I have a special message to deliver on behalf of the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

As you know, I made a visit to Myanmar from 29 September to 2 October at the height of the crisis there. My mission was undertaken with the full support of the international community, including Myanmar's neighbours, ASEAN countries and the Security Council of the United Nations. I have since reported to the Secretary-General and briefed the President of the General Assembly and the Security Council on the findings of my mission.

The President of the General Assembly issued a strong statement of endorsement of the mission that I undertook to Myanmar and the recommendations from my report to the United Nations. And on 11 October, the Security Council for the first time took action on the issue of Myanmar in the form of a statement, in which it deplored the recent incidents in Myanmar, expressed its support for the Secretary-General's good offices and for my mission, and called on Myanmar to cooperate with our efforts, with the support of ASEAN and the regional countries.

The Secretary-General is also about to submit his annual report on Myanmar to the General Assembly which entrusted him with the good offices mandate for Myanmar. In follow-up to my mission, the Secretary-General has instructed me to visit the region once again to discuss with the regional leaders how to create the necessary political atmosphere so that I'll be able to return to Myanmar shortly.

Bangkok is the first stop of my trip, to be followed by Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, New Delhi, Beijing and Tokyo.

The objectives of my visit are threefold:

First, to raise with Myanmar's neighbours and regional partners the UN's serious concerns at the continuing reports of human rights violations in the wake of the recent demonstrations. Although we have taken note of the initial steps taken by the authorities to de-escalate tensions -- e.g. further limitations of the curfew, reduction of visible military presence in the streets, restoration of internet access -- the reports of arrests of the remaining student leaders, interrogations and acts of intimidation are extremely disturbing and run counter to the spirit of mutual engagement between the United Nations and Myanmar. These actions must stop at once. Let me reiterate here the UN's call on the Myanmar Government to release all political detainees, including those arrested during the demonstrations, and to allow access by the ICRC to those in detention.

Second, to consult with and seek the active support of regional partners on the next steps in the implementation of the Secretary-General's good offices, with a view to

returning to Myanmar as soon as possible in order to offer our assistance to any efforts at dialogue and national reconciliation that is all inclusive in nature.

The third aspect of my current mission is to discuss with regional partners any efforts or initiatives complementary to ours at the UN which they may be taking in their own right, and coordinate accordingly.

The United Nations is committed to doing everything it can to promote a peaceful resolution to the crisis and help Myanmar address the political and economic challenges underlying the recent unrest. Any efforts by the United Nations will require working closely with Myanmar's neighbours and ASEAN partners. The sustained and active support of the region, through the strong voice and engagement of regional partners, has to be there in order for Myanmar to move forward.

I would be delighted to take some of your questions.

Q: The EU Foreign Ministers are meeting today to discuss possible measures for Myanmar to move into democratic path and they will discuss tightening sanctions. Do you agree with that and would economic incentives be a better idea to push Burma into a democratic path?

A: What the member states -- such as the EU or individual countries -- whatever measures they take, that will be in their own hands. I am encouraged today by an article written in the International Herald Tribune by the Foreign Ministers of the United Kingdom and France suggesting that the approach to Myanmar needs to be broader than the issue of sanctions. There have to be some economic incentives so that, working with the government of Myanmar, we can address some of the underlying causes of the unrest.

Q: Your itinerary does not mention any trip to Myanmar. What exactly is the status of your trip there? And what are you going to say when you get there?

A: Well I've just got back from Myanmar. My hope is that soon after this mission, I will be able to go to Myanmar. I have an invitation to return there by the middle of November. The visit has been confirmed by the government. And I hope that I can go there sooner than that.

Q: The Chinese government made it clear that it is opposed to any formal actions against the generals. How concerned are you that this whole process of going around the region and talking to people is just empty rhetoric?

A: Well, the purpose of the Secretary General's good offices role is to change the behaviour of the regime and we believe that all those who have influence in that process ought to be engaged. I have had very good discussions with the Foreign Minister this morning. When received by the Prime Minister, I will deliver a written message from the Secretary General. Thailand is doing what it could, we are working closely together and we believe that if we pool all our efforts, we could move the situation in Myanmar in the right direction.

Q: Are you concerned about the recent directives suggesting that the government is not really acting in good faith? On the one hand, they say they are willing to talk to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi; but on the other hand they are really showing no signs of easing their crackdown.

A: Well, that's why we have expressed very strongly the concerns of the Secretary General and of the international community that they should go along the path that they have started, which is to reduce the number of hours of the curfew with a view to lifting it completely. We welcome the fact that they have appointed a liaison officer to start dialogue. We believe that the earlier a dialogue starts the better -- a dialogue that should

lead to national reconciliation that is all the more inclusive. We welcome the removal of the military from the streets. But certainly all these will be damaged by all the continued reports of actions that are detrimental to national reconciliation and to overall long-lasting peace and prosperity in Myanmar.

Q: Do you think the Thai government is doing enough as Myanmar's neighbour in restoring peace and prosperity in the country?

A: I believe so. But we can always do better – all of us. Not just Thailand, but all the countries that I will be visiting -- India, China, Malaysia and Indonesia -- and the United Nations, we could do more. We are doing the best under the circumstances. But we will not rest until the goals that we all care, that is peace and prosperity, democratization and full respect for human rights, is attained in Myanmar.

Q: What concretely do you think the neighbouring countries should do?

A: It's up to them to decide. That's why I'm here. I want to listen, and to encourage and to promote coordination and cooperation because if we all concert our efforts, I believe we can get our objectives. I guess one or maybe two more questions.

Q: What time frame do you have to achieve these objectives?

A: I think the earlier the better. To stop actions that are a setback to democracy and to full respect for human rights, and to move in the direction of dialogue with a view to national reconciliation that is all the more inclusive.

Q: How do you see the potential of Myanmar's government moving towards democracy?

A: Well I don't see much alternative because the situation in Myanmar has changed over the years. The posture of ASEAN has changed. The posture of the international community has changed. For the first time the Security Council is on record as taking action, adopting a statement for the first time which has three elements. One, condemning some of the actions taken by the government, calling for restraint by all sides, particularly the government; supporting the good offices role of the Secretary General; and also supporting the commencement of dialogue as the only way to really address the underlying challenges facing Myanmar.

Q: You have two days in Bangkok, two days in Kuala Lumpur. Why spending five days in Jakarta? Is there something important there?

A: Don't read too much into it. We had wanted to go to China early. But as you know, they are busy with their [Communist Party] Congress.

Q: Are you concerned by the message on Myanmar's state television on Friday night saying that the UN Security Council should not have made a statement about the situation?

A: I'm more concerned about what they do – not what they say.

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