



Nay Pyi Taw, 15 November 2013
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JOINT STATEMENT

**by the co-Chairs EU High Representative Catherine Ashton and
U Soe Thane, Union Minister from the Ministry of the President's
Office, on the EU-Myanmar Task Force**

The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and [...] made today the following statement:

"We are delighted to have launched today the joint EU-Myanmar Task Force as agreed on the occasion of the visit of President H.E. U Thein Sein to Brussels in March of this year.

The Task Force is the most visible expression of the strong partnership between the EU and Myanmar, and our joint commitment to taking forward reform in Myanmar. We will work together for a democratic and prosperous Myanmar in which diversity and respect for human rights contribute to a dynamic and plural society, in which democracy brings inclusion of all political and ethnic groups on an equal footing, and in which an open and stable political community makes Myanmar a magnet for foreign investment and job creation. In this spirit we look together with confidence to the elections in 2015 as an important milestone on road towards the realisation of this vision.

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Over the last two days we have discussed all aspects of transition with leading representatives of Government, business and civil society from the EU and Myanmar. The President of Myanmar, HE U Thein Sein, addressed the opening plenary and a participants list is attached.

Political aspects of transition

The Task Force welcomed the significant progress that has been made in restoring peace and promoting reconciliation among Myanmar's different ethnic groups and stressed the importance of launching an inclusive political dialogue aimed at achieving a lasting peace for the first time in sixty years.

The Task Force underlined its condemnation of all inter-communal violence and expressed its strong support for all efforts aimed at addressing its root causes and at promoting peace and reconciliation. In a more open society, all political leaders and the media have the responsibility to promote greater tolerance. The Task Force underlined the importance of defending human rights and the rule of law for all people living in Myanmar, in the spirit of mutual respect of diversity.

The Task Force supports on-going efforts to transform Myanmar into a modern democracy a key part of which is the constitutional review under way, as well as credible, transparent and inclusive elections in 2015. In line with the President's commitment, the release of all prisoners of conscience by the end of this year will be an important landmark.

Both sides agreed that strong and representative Parliaments are essential for modern democracies and welcomed the open and substantial political dialogue that took place earlier today between representatives of the Hluttaws and the European Parliament. Members of both chambers discussed the role of Parliaments in supporting the transition, promoting reconciliation, and ensuring effective representation and accountability. They also agreed to develop an institutional partnership covering political, policy and administrative issues. Future cooperation will include technical and institutional assistance to enhance the capacity of the Hluttaws to effectively perform their oversight, representation and lawmaking functions.

The Task Force welcomed the contribution made by Civil Society representatives to its discussions, including at the fora in Yangon, and will continue to ensure their voice is heard in the future. The Task Force agreed to launch a Myanmar-EU Human Rights Dialogue early next year, allowing for constructive and open discussions and for the exchange of best practices and expertise on issues of mutual interest and concern, based on equality and cooperation.

As a further demonstration of the EU's commitment to accompany the transition and reforms in Myanmar, the Task Force welcomed the recent upgrading of EU's presence to a full-fledged Delegation. The appointment of a resident Ambassador to Myanmar for the first time, with a substantial increase in Delegation staffing, will greatly strengthen our exchanges and cooperation on the ground.

The Task Force stressed the importance of building-up the country's emergency response and early warning capability and welcomed the joint work on the establishment of the Myanmar Crisis Response Centre with properly-trained personnel.

The Task Force will support Myanmar as it takes over the rotating presidency of ASEAN in 2014 in addition to its full integration in the ASEAN political, economic and socio-cultural communities by 2015.

Economic aspects of transition

The Task Force recalled the recent lifting of sanctions and the reinstatement of GSP trade preferences for exporters as the most visible signals of EU's support for the continuing reform under way in Myanmar. Looking ahead, both sides committed to deepening their economic partnership for mutual benefit.

The Task Force welcomed the progress towards EU joint programming of development aid for Myanmar, with a particular focus on health, education, rural development and food security, trade and private sector development, governance and the peace process. Joint programming by the EU and Member States responds to the commitments undertaken with Myanmar authorities to support the National Development Strategy and endorsed in the Nay Pyi Taw Accord for Effective Development Cooperation of last January.

The fruitful debate held with the donor community, civil society and the private sector as part of the Development Forum confirmed the willingness of the international community and Myanmar stakeholders to join forces and coordinate activities to promote sustainable and comprehensive development in Myanmar over the coming years.

For the coming seven years (2014-2020) Myanmar is expected to be one of the leading beneficiaries of EU development co-operation in Asia. Subject to final programming decisions and EU budgetary approval this should be around 90 million per annum - a 20% increase from current levels.

The Task Force welcomed the agreement in principle to extend the lending operations of the European Investment Bank to Myanmar as of 2014 and looked forward to the conclusion of the Framework Agreement within the next weeks. EIB will focus its activities on infrastructure projects including transport and energy, on environmental projects perhaps including forestry, as well as credit lines to selected local banks for on lending to SMEs. Subject to final legislative approval, lending volumes could fluctuate between €30 - 100 million per year.

The Task Force welcomed the success of the Business Forum and the high turn-out of European companies. More than 100 EU business leaders have come to Myanmar to explore investment opportunities and build economic partnerships. Dedicated sectoral groups in Yangon discussed many specific opportunities for increased trade and co-operation between EU and Myanmar businesses.

The Task Force noted that the Myanmar government's intentions to boost investment in key sectors of the economy, and particularly in infrastructure, will bring new job opportunities for Myanmar and new opportunities for investment from - and joint ventures with - European industry. The Task Force noted the recommendations of European enterprises doing business in Myanmar, or considering doing business in the country, on the need to foster a stable and predictable business environment. To this end, the Task Force agreed on the importance of reducing administrative burdens, improving access to finance, protecting property rights, increasing skills and training capacities, ensuring corporate social responsibility, stabilising electricity supply and on supporting the development of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises in Myanmar.

Looking ahead the Task Force agreed to establish an EU-Myanmar Business Council to advise the Government on ways to facilitate these business links. The Task Force also welcomed the decision to support the initiative of a European Business Support Services Network in Myanmar, which aims to facilitate contacts between businesses and to promote Myanmar as a high-potential trade and investment partner and gateway to the ASEAN regional market among European companies.

Given the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises, tourism and the raw materials / mining sector, the Task Force welcomed the signature of letters on intent in these areas with a view to deepening co-operation between the EU and Myanmar.

The Task Force reiterated the importance of an open and non-discriminatory investment climate and their attachment to a strong system of investment protection. They confirmed their commitment to continue their respective preparatory work towards the launch of negotiations of an investment agreement by the first semester 2014.

The Task force stressed the key role of agriculture in Myanmar. Rural development and food security are essential to ensure safe and secure food for all, but also improve the livelihoods of farmers and provide opportunities for rural communities. Development cooperation assistance will be urgently targeted towards designing agricultural policies and programmes which can deliver on this. This policy dialogue and exchanges of technical know-how will form part of a long term programme, and a first mission of high level agriculture and development experts will take place shortly to launch this process.

Finally, both sides underlined the importance of the ensuring highest standards in measures aimed at countering money laundering and terrorist financing. The EU and Myanmar will work together to address the issues raised in the recent Financial Action Task Force report. The Task Force will convene again in 2014 to confirm delivery of the above commitments and to maintain momentum in the transition."