

Statement

by

Ambassador Rajiv Bhatia

Director General, ICWA

at

Interactive Meeting

with

Aung San Suu Kyi

Chairperson of National League for Democracy of Myanmar

at

Hyderabad House

November 15, 2012

Note: Ministry of External Affairs arranged an Interactive Meeting with Mme Aung San Suu Kyi, Chairperson of National League for Democracy of Myanmar, where a cross-section of important people from all walks of life were present. The meeting was chaired by Sri Salman Khurshid, Minister of External Affairs. Discussions at the Meeting were moderated by Ambassador Bhatia. His opening statement follows.

Esteemed Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Chairperson of the National League for Democracy and Member of Parliament,

Sri Salman Khurshid, Minister of External Affairs,

Distinguished guests and friends,

We all are conscious that this is a historic occasion, a rare opportunity to meet and interact with a world personality of your stature, vision, commitment and courage. You will notice, Madame, that I am trying to avoid 'icon' - the word you dislike, convinced that icons do not do anything, whereas you work very, very hard.

It is a great honour and pleasure to welcome you, Daw Suu, here tonight. When we met last time at your home by the lakeside a few years back, an event such as this looked very distant, if not impossible.

Your friends and admirers assembled here, a real galaxy of important figures, have followed the story of your struggle, sacrifice and triumph with a blend of admiration and empathy.

You have served your nation exceptionally well, making incredible sacrifices, but without ever losing hope for your people. And they have expressed their limitless love for you whenever they had an opportunity. But, you belong to Asia and the world. As an eminent Asian leader, you are most welcome in India, the second Asian country you have chosen to visit since your release.

You have incredibly high standards of integrity and ethics in the domain of politics. To you, values are more important than narrow interests. Your love for India, your Buddhist faith,

and your deep ideological affinity with Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru have continued to endear yourself and your cause to the people of India.

India's relations with Burma/Myanmar are progressing well. Nevertheless, we know that our societies as a whole need to exert more. Besides the governments, people of the kind gathered here and their counterparts in your country need to connect better, more deeply and indeed more frequently.

There is a sharp realization that Myanmar has been changing, but it still faces formidable challenges and constraints. Expressing 'cautious optimism,' you have urged the world 'to distinguish between genuine progress and what is just progress on the surface.' The people's struggle is incomplete, but there is hope, nay confidence, that you and other leaders will secure the goal of ushering genuine democracy in your country.

We look forward to listening to your views on where your country is heading now; what the main challenges and opportunities are; and how informed people of this country can contribute to your cause of democracy and development as well as stronger friendship between our countries.

May I now request the External Affairs Minister and our gracious host to address you all.
