

Letter to the Editor

Building Bridges to the Myanmar Government

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The Washington Post

The Aug. 30 editorial "Courage in Burma" ignored the efforts deployed by the U.N. secretary general through his "good offices mandate" to promote national reconciliation, the restoration of democracy and respect for human rights in Myanmar.

Far from being "missing in action" as the secretary general's special envoy, I have been the only international actor to maintain face-to-face dialogue with Myanmar's leaders about the need for democracy and human rights. In that context, I have been able to advance the international community's concerns directly with Myanmar's senior leadership and with Aung San Suu Kyi each time I have visited Myanmar.

Since U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki Moon appointed me three months ago to continue this work on his behalf, no effort has been spared to rally international support behind the mandate. As a result, for the first time, all key interested countries, including China, India, Russia and Myanmar's Association of Southeast Asian Nations neighbors, are mobilized to encourage the country to make progress.

The government's response to recent demonstrations is all the more disappointing, as it runs counter to the spirit of the good offices mandate. The secretary general immediately expressed his concern, calling for dialogue instead of confrontation. We cannot, however, let such incidents weaken our determination to work with and for the people of Myanmar. Equipped with broad international support, it is time for us to reengage with all the relevant parties in Myanmar to build on the recent openness and potential for progress in a number of areas. Engagement is not an end in itself: Process must translate into real progress. But let us not forget that until recently, there was no opening for dialogue between Myanmar and the international community.

Expectations are high that the Myanmar government will continue to cooperate. In this regard, it is essential that the authorities refrain from actions that undermine the process of national reconciliation through an all-inclusive dialogue.

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