



**Beyond the Headlines**  
**January 13, 2012**  
**Washington, DC**

**Lynn Yoshikawa,**  
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***Burma: Political Reforms and the Impacts on Humanitarian Efforts***

**Patricia Ellis:** Good afternoon and welcome everyone, thank you all so much for joining us, it's a great turnout. It's a tribute to our speaker, to the topic. This is our first Beyond the Headlines series event for 2012, and it certainly could not be more timely given recent announcements of the last few days coming out of Burma, a truce with one of the ethnic groups, the Karen, and also today the release of a large number of prominent political prisoners. And we'll hear a lot more from Lynn about some other recent developments too. I'm Patricia Ellis, I'm president of the Women's Foreign Policy Group. We promote women's voices, women's leadership on pressing international issues of the day, and this is one of our favorite series, because it's timely. So we have in recent months covered Afghanistan, Pakistan, Libya, Egypt. And we have another event on Egypt coming up next week, so we hope that you will try to join us, and consider joining the organization for other activities. We have an Author Series, we have an Embassy Series, and we also do mentoring, and we have our big mentoring fairs coming up in DC and in New York in February and we're still looking for mentors, so anyone who is interested in that please contact our office.

We're really lucky to have Lynn Yoshikawa with us today. She's an advocate for Refugees International, she was recently in Burma—she was there in December, during the time of Secretary Clinton's trip and she talked to aid workers and was discussing ongoing conflicts and human rights abuses, and she joined Refugees International in 2010 and her beat, so to say, is Burma and also Afghanistan. Prior to joining Refugees International, she was based in Afghanistan with Oxfam, she previously was an advocate with InterAction—a congressional advocate—and spent a few years on the Thai-Burma border working for Jesuit Refugees. So we're really lucky to have her with us today. She also, in the last year, has visited the region and been in Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Thailand. So, after Lynn speaks, then I will open it up with a few questions, and we have allotted plenty of time for Q&A, so we'll try to get to as many people as possible. We have a huge group, so I just request that people just ask one question, and kind of keep your questions brief. And I'll probably take a group of questions together, because we want to include everyone. We have so much expertise in this room and so I'd now like to turn it over to Lynn Yoshikawa. Please join me in welcoming her. [*Applause.*]

**Lynn Yoshikawa:** Thanks Pat and thanks everyone for turning out today, and for the warm welcome. Just a briefer about what we did on our trip, where we went, and who we talked to. My colleague and I were there for about three weeks in both Bangkok and also inside Burma. We started off in Rangoon and then we also went up far north where there's an emerging conflict in Kachin State near the China border. We also travelled for several days going to the east to Pa-an in Karen State and also to Mawlamyaing in Mon State. So we kind of stuck to the regional capitals for the most part during this trip. And our focus really was on looking at how these political reforms are impacting ethnic communities and ethnic conflicts and if there's been any impact on humanitarian space inside the country. Now things are happening very quickly. Secretary Clinton just announced about an hour ago that the US will be sending an ambassador, so that position will be resumed now, and that the State Department will be looking at additional steps given the latest batch of prisoner release yesterday or today...yesterday. Over 600 prisoners were released and among them included several prominent

student leaders and also ethnic minority leaders, journalists, a famous monk during the Saffron Revolution, and also General Khin Nyunt, so for those who—and some of his former officers, for those who have been following Burma that was kind of a surprise that they have allowed an ex-military, one of their own military leaders, released. I don't think anyone was particularly lobbying for that, and that's quite interesting. As you also may have heard, the KNU signed a ceasefire yesterday, it all seems to be a bit tentative right now, it's unclear whether all of the KNU leadership has agreed to it, but that's out there as well.

Now the challenge that we face at Refugees International is that we do see some changes happening and the international community is encouraging them and quite excited about them; how do these ongoing humanitarian needs and human rights abuses fit the narrative? There is a concern that while praising the reform the international community might be hesitant also in recognizing and calling for action on other key issues that need to be addressed, and particularly for us it's the humanitarian needs. And just to give you a brief picture of some of the needs we're talking about, there are about half a million IDPs [internally displaced persons] estimated inside the country, primarily in the eastern part. Since June we also have a growing conflict in the North, in Kachin State and Northern Shan state, where approximately 60,000 people have been displaced and a number of human rights abuses reported. In the western part of the country, in Northern Rakhine State, there are 800,000 Rohingya, a Muslim minority group that have no citizenship and effectively lack very basic rights that leave them in pretty serious humanitarian conditions. Also in terms of the natural disasters, I mean, Burma's extremely vulnerable to climate change and ongoing natural disasters—Cyclone Nargis illustrated that—about 150,000 people were killed. Also there have been ongoing cyclones, earthquakes, and also drought in some parts of the country. And you also have of course, from continuing deterioration of health and education systems just very high mortality rates from preventable diseases, high infant mortality rates, some of the worst in Asia. Now we did find some reasons to be a bit hopeful, and we're—as Refugees International—we're advocating for more humanitarian assistance to be going into the country, and also for an ease in some of the restrictions on US aid.

Now first of all, we found that humanitarian space is opening up a little bit—we have ministries now that the military is not part of the decision making process of, and that decision making is happening a bit more quickly. So the processing for international agencies, for their memorandums of understandings, for visas for their international staff, for travel permits, they're happening a bit more systematically now, so that's very positive. Now the test, I think, will be as new international agencies do come in if the government is open to a significant number of them, and how they view that. I mean, many of these INGOs have been working there, have been there for decades—Cyclone Nargis brought in a lot more, but that has also helped increase the space. What we also find too is that finally the government is recognizing the existence of displaced communities in the country, and that was notable particularly in Kachin State when the government invited the UN to undertake an assessment of IDPs in September. Since then, they've also helped to facilitate access to areas outside of their control, under control of the group that they are fighting, the Kachin Independence Organization, and that's pretty significant. In the east for example where there is ongoing conflict there has been very little access and most of the aid is coming cross border from Thailand at the moment. We also found that with the decentralization in the government, there are new interlocutors. So for example the chief minister in Kachin State was a key player in facilitating humanitarian access for these agencies. We also heard that in Karen State, the chief minister there has been cooperating quite well with international agency and allowing access to areas—I don't want to say dangerous areas—but areas where there have been historically a lot of conflict. So we do think that that is significant and that that opportunity should be taken.

I'll talk more specifically about the Kachin situation, where we traveled to Myitkyina, which is the main capital, and there are a number of IDPs living there in various churches and monastery compounds, and we visited about half a dozen of those sites, and primarily it is women and children sheltering in large, kind of assembly halls. The conditions were not too bad, mostly organized by community groups. I think another issue that we have always tried to emphasize is the capacity of local organizations in Burma—there are a number of quite impressive groups. They don't always have a lot of funding but

they are pretty well organized and their capacity is growing by the day, so we really do believe that international assistance really does need to go to those groups. They are the future of Burma and they will be there for the long term in the country.

What has happened with the Kachin situation is that since June, fighting has restarted. There are approximately 600,000 IDPs total and most of them are in areas outside of government control, and right now most of them are sort of caught between the warring parties. Even though there was access one time by the UN, but we do hope that that can be sustained, because there are significant needs and the organizations working there, mostly CBOs [community based organizations], are completely out of funds, there has been little international assistance going into those areas and most of the money they have raised has been raised through the diaspora. I'll talk a bit briefly, I think, about the ethnic conflicts as well. As you know, there have been a number of ceasefires signed. Aside from the tentative one with the Kanyu, there's also been one with the Shan State Army South and also with the Chin National Front, and then there are ongoing talks with the National Mon State Party. I think that key in this is that while the ceasefires represent a landmark and an opportunity, there needs to be continued pressure to make sure that these ceasefires aren't like previous ceasefires, that they actually lead to a real dialogue that addresses underlying political issues for ethnic minorities.

We also are advocating for these talks to go far beyond the armed groups. Armed groups don't necessarily represent an ethnic minority as a whole. There are a number of diverse opinions between those who have been living in exile, those who have been living in-country, and among many different subgroups among ethnic minorities. We are urging the international community to support those efforts to bring—to have a national dialogue on these issues. It's going to be a long road ahead, even if the Burmese government is very serious about addressing these, there are going to be your fits and starts, I think. So, I think that the international community really needs to measure its expectations in this regard. And I think, I guess I'll leave it to some questions. I think that's probably just the beginning.

**Ms. Ellis:** Terrific, well thank you so much Lynn. I'm just going to start off with the big picture on recent events, and I'd just like to get your reflection on why things are moving so quickly at this time. How much of it is international pressure, desire to get sanctions lifted, Burma's going to chair ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] in 2014, they have now put on some requirements, the visit of Secretary Hillary Clinton—what do you think that it's all about, and how quickly do you think the international community including the UN can respond?

**Ms. Yoshikawa:** We've been talking to a number of different groups, civil society activists in Burma about "why now?" And even though internationally we've only seen the change happen over the past year or even less than a year—things have kind of, we've been told by those who have contacts within the government that things have been kind of simmering for quite a while. I think since the Saffron Revolution in 2007, followed by the devastation of Cyclone Nargis, I think that started to—people told us—that that started to really penetrate in through the generals' entourage, that this is not a sustainable situation. The growing anti-Chinese sentiment because of all the number of investments have also been building pressure, and that there's a possibility that this will not hold. So in November 2010 we saw a flawed election, we also saw the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, and then in March, that's when the government came into power. And there are ongoing tensions between what we would call some of the reformists, particularly led by President Thein Sein and some of the remaining hardliners. So it's kind of always trying to keep this balance and check is difficult. And what we're asking for is more support to the reformists to fulfill their agenda, because then that will further marginalize the hardliners, it will prove them wrong. To demonstrate that this openness with the international community is not dangerous, that there will be benefits to people. So I think that that is a big part of, it that's why we see things moving so quickly, yet I think there is also another danger that if the government can't keep up with the reforms, in terms of implementation, then that could be a further destabilizing factor. So there's a lot of great rhetoric, I think, out there about tackling poverty, addressing systemic economic issues, addressing land reforms, but they're going to be very difficult to tackle. So that is also what we've been

arguing for—more capacity in the government for these reforms to actually make a difference on the ground.

**Ms. Ellis:** Do you think the elections are going to be a key factor in determining the response from the outside world? I read a recent interview by Aung San Suu Kyi and she said the rule of law is absolutely going to be totally crucial, because not just governments but private investors will not come in unless they can be assured that they can be protected.

**Ms. Yoshikawa:** Yeah, that's absolutely true. I think the international community is looking to the April by-elections which Aung San Suu Kyi will be running in as a kind of the next benchmark, really, to demonstrate that the government really is willing to—I mean, everyone asks, are these reversible, and I think, given the history in Burma, yes, it all can be reversed—so this will be another step forward, but I think things do remain fragile.

**Ms. Ellis:** Okay, my last question, then we'll open it up. Can you talk a little bit about the role of neighbors such as India and China? They have invested heavily, they have a lot of clout there, what are they doing or not doing?

**Ms. Yoshikawa:** Well, as you might know, in September, President Thein Sein suspended a development of \$3.6 billion USD dam project called the Myitsone. And this was a Chinese project, a hydropower project, and I think that's really shaken the confidence of the Chinese government as well as investors. And I think, not just Chinese investors, but also in the region with the ties they have a number of large projects, the Indians, the South Koreans, et cetera. I think it's also forcing many of them that they need to take another look at how they're doing these things. They need to be conducting proper impact assessments on the social impacts, the environmental impacts and consulting better with communities. I think with the pipeline back in the 90s the Nyata pipeline, I think that some companies have learned some lessons, but at the same time I don't think the government in their agreements with these companies have required these assessments to take place. So hopefully that will be something that is changing. I think another factor that is changing is really the growth of civil society over the last ten years, I think it is young but it is very strong. I think there's a lot of involvement of youth and ethnic minorities and they're going to be a significant voice in the way forward and they were very instrumental also in the suspension of the dam project.

**Ms. Ellis:** Okay, well let's open it up. And will you—is it okay to take a few questions together?

**Question:** My name is Reiko Niimi, and I've been with the UN, I went to Myanmar after Cyclone Nargis as part of the UN mission. My question is about decentralization. If you could explain a little bit more about what's happening on decentralization and how that affects different decisions and also the foreign currency because it's such a sham, and in terms of attracting investors, one of our analyses in 2008, was that foreigners—foreign organizations were being allowed in, in order to—in order for Burma to get more money, in terms of humanitarian aid.

**Question:** My name is Michael Bodakowski from Georgetown University. I know after Cyclone Nargis the Buddhist temples and the churches and the religious communities were active in leading the initial relief efforts. Have you seen their activities recently—can you tell a little bit what they are doing?

**Question:** Stacy Swanson from Patton Boggs. My question is more related to human rights, and what is your perception of how human rights are reported, outside of the country—to say, the State Department.

**Ms. Yoshikawa:** First in terms of decentralization, I think what is particularly new are the regional and state government structures. I mean, they are still appointed by the president, so they are still quite centralized, but they have very ambiguous mandates as well, there are also state and regional parliaments. So there are new decision makers, but the clear issue, I think, is that they don't really

know—their capacity is low, their links to the government are often weak and determined by personalities. I think that some of the progress we've seen with a couple of the chief ministers and working with the international community is still largely personality driven, you don't see this across the board, but I do think it's still an opportunity. There is also, with the regional parliaments, there is a lack of clarity on whether they would be able to do—make laws, basically. And enforce those rules of laws. But those questions are still far away because those issues haven't been fully defined, their role hasn't been defined, their capacity is very weak.

I mean they haven't had democratic structures for the last 50 years, so most people in Burma haven't lived with any kind of democratic institutions, their ideas of how they as a constituent should be, how their elected members are accountable to them. So I think all of these things are being figured out and there is a quote in our report that one UN official told us that this government is a newborn. There are a lot of—there are some people that are very excited and quite progressive but they still don't have the capacity to undertake these things and make sure that it is implemented throughout the government, so it is still quite young. And they do—as we argue—they do need more support in figuring out what their role is, how they can work with other political parties, how they can expand their spheres of influence and those sorts of things, so there is still a lot of space, really. At the moment a lot of the progress that we did talk about—they are limited in that they are certain people, they're not institutions.

In terms of currency exchanges, we're really surprised. Burma for a long time has had—the government has had—these FECs [Foreign Exchange Certificates] so the official rate is something like 6 Kyat to a Dollar, when on the black market it's really about 800 Kyat to a Dollar. So, often they would require—previously they would require tourists to exchange a certain amount of money using that system which obviously would benefit them very much. We were shocked when we arrived at the airport there was an official currency booth in the airport using the—had the best rates in the country, and our fixer said, "Okay, do it here, don't do it at the hotel, you'll get an even better rate here." So there are some changes happening, I think that the economic issues are—the economic policies have been disastrous and mismanaged for so long, there's no real banking system in country. In terms of what the—whether the government is benefitting from INGOs, I would say no because at this time they are using—many international agencies are either bringing in cash in their suitcases, by themselves. Or they're also using a certain banking system too where—to transfer money in country through a private system. So there are ways certainly to get around it, but it seems like the government is trying to address some of these issues, and there's not the requirement to exchange the FECs anymore, so that's also a promising sign.

In terms of some of the religious groups and what they're doing. You know, Cyclone Nargis was such a catalyst for civil society and for many of these loose associations of religious groups, businessmen, I mean many of them have continued on to start their own organizations and often they're partnering with international NGOs, partnering with UN agencies, so I think—they do remain very active. I read in one report there are about—I think it was about 200,000 estimated associations, used very loose, kind of volunteer organizations. And when we were up in Kachin State too, all of the church compounds that have been transformed into these IDP camps are being run by such groups. They're all volunteers, they're being trained by UNHCR on managing camps, on protection issues for women and children. They're playing a very key role, and we do hope that moving forward, you know, no doubt assistance is going to be increasing. Maybe not from the US, we hope it does, but definitely from other donors, and we hope that they're working with these groups, building their capacity and really kind of allowing them to play a transformative role. And then the last question also was about human rights and how that is reported from the outside. And I guess, can I ask for clarification on reporting by the US government, or reporting from international groups?

**Question:** Stacey Swanson, reporting from international groups to say, the US government or other organizations outside.

**Ms. Yoshikawa:** Well, I think a lot of the human rights groups have played a key role in many of the places where international agencies just haven't been able to reach out to, but I would say too what we've found in country is that there are still kind of weak documentation practices happening. Some groups are certainly more advanced than others. And I think we talk a bit about this, is that, often there's a lot of mistrust between the UN and kind of your local organizations and CBOs, because there's always a perception that these CBOs are tied to an ex-armed group, or they have these political agendas. That's not the—you can't make a blanket statement about that. I mean there's a lot of groups that are working very independently, very trustworthy, very reliable and I think it's a matter of finding the reliable ones, the ones that have the capacity that are documenting things properly. There are things that happen—terrible things that do happen—there are systemic gross human rights violations that happen in country. There have been, we've heard the accusations of some groups taking it too far and inflating numbers and whatnot. I mean, we're not necessarily in a position to judge, because we don't have the access that some of them have. And I think that many of them have been historically—their information has been verified by other groups, some of them are partnering with international NGOs, they're getting human rights training, so I think it really just varies. You know, I think for most of the human rights reports I've read from the State Department they have been confirmed by groups that we've met inside Burma and also on the border. Others, not necessarily. But not necessarily from the State Department. But when we talk with certain staff members on the Hill for example, they get their sources from other groups, I would say, that perhaps are more questionable.

**Question:** Hi I'm Jen Leonard with International Crisis Group and since you've just referenced the Hill and I see your policy recommendations, can you talk about the reception that you've received on the heels of your report and your field visit? Senator McConnell has announced that he's going out this weekend, so that's the beginning of more on the ground exposure. But can you talk about the role that Congress can and should play?

**Question:** My name is Graziella Reyes. I am the former representative of Uruguay to the Organization of American States and my question is related to this opportunity to expand humanitarian space by the UN, by the United Kingdom, the United States, and the humanitarian organizations. How can you make this compatible with the sovereignty of the country, that is to say, do they agree, do they ask for that help, and how is that trend going?

**Question:** I'm Linda Yarr with Partnerships for International Strategies in Asia at George Washington University, and I was wondering in view of the need for emerging leaders and capacity of people to come up within the ranks of the government...what is the status of the—have you any sense of what university and higher education is like at the moment?

**Ms. Yoshikawa:** Great, thanks. Good question about Congress. We don't have explicit recommendations targeted to Congress, which I think—that's one issue. When we've taken this, our report, around to USAID, to State Department, I mean, many people say, "yeah we agree with all these things, we're not..."—this document is also not here so much to convince them as to convince Congress, because they really hold the key to Burma policy and particularly Senator McConnell. And we are—we very much welcome his visit and I think Representative Crowley is also there or just probably leaving the country now. They are key. How have we been welcomed? I think it varies very much from the House to the Senate in terms of their position. I mean, one concern that we already have regarding funding just outside of policy is that the US government is obviously in a financial crisis. We're not asking for huge amounts of money, and we're certainly not asking for an Afghanistan surge, for example. And there is limited absorption capacity anyways, so I think that large amounts of money could be harmful to the situation. So we do hope that the US will take this opportunity to—basically we have so far a relatively peaceful transition, given US experiences over the last decade—that should be rewarded.

There is a need for peace dividends—if these ceasefires do take hold, and if the US can help support it—to lead to some of the greater political dialogue, greater trust between ethnic minorities and the

government. I think that's all very legitimate. So we're trying to focus our efforts on the Hill, on moving that discussion. You know with Senator McConnell I think that a lot of the policy has been tied to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and of course she is respected by pretty much almost everyone we spoke to in Burma. But there is some concern that when it comes to some of the ethnic issues she's not necessarily—she doesn't fully understand all of the concerns, all of the grievances. So we do hope that she can play a key role in it, in bringing people together, convening people, but I think in terms of actually solving the problem it must go beyond her. It must include affected communities—it must include the Burman majority as well. It's a lot broader. So we do hope that US policy can move along, going beyond one person. If we do support democracy, than that needs to include everybody, and not just one voice.

**Question:** Linda Yarr, can I just ask a clarifying point? When you say there is concern among many that she may not be sensitized to the issues, the many you refer to is in-country conversations you've had?

**Ms. Yoshikawa:** Ethnic minority leaders, yeah. Both in-country and based in Thailand.

On humanitarian assistance and sovereignty: certainly humanitarian assistance provided in-country needs to be done with the approval of the government. And what we're seeing is that the government is actually asking for it. In the Kachin crisis they requested the UN to undertake this assessment. They've been allowing issues. So we don't think, we don't believe in forcing humanitarian assistance, we're not—I think they tried that right just after Cyclone Nargis by sending the warships just off the coast of Burma. That does not work and that can make the situation much worse in some cases. But what we have heard is that a lot of NGOs, international and also UN agencies, they've carved out a good dialogue and they've built trust over the years with the government. So for example, Cyclone Nargis also served to strengthen the humanitarian space at a period when it had been very low previously. So I think that some of these agencies like UNICEF, Save the Children, they've been in-country for decades now, and they've learned how to kind of navigate many of these systems. So it needs to be that kind of gradual expansion. It's not gonna happen overnight. We would like—you know it would be great for humanitarians if access was always unconditional but I can't think of any country in the world or crisis in the world where that actually happens. So I think there's room to negotiate.

**Question:** Graziella Reyes, do they ever tell you that you're getting into political fields inside the country with your activities?

**Ms. Yoshikawa:** For humanitarians?

**Question:** Yes.

**Ms. Yoshikawa:** We didn't hear that accusation too much, and I think that many humanitarians there find ways to put potentially difficult issues and relabeling things, but conducting the same activity. For example, there are many child protection programs and they do address political issues such as the recruitment of child soldiers and they've been able to carry forward, so sometimes it's just a simple matter of language and relabeling things.

Lastly, there's a question about emerging leaders and what capacity there is at universities. Since 1988 a lot of the universities have been shut down, they've been transformed to distance learning education. The education system is deteriorated a lot and of course, there has been a massive brain drain, too. So that is very weak. But we have heard though, we've heard some of the universities in Thailand and even the Kennedy School at Harvard are starting to start up some programs in-country and not so much targeting existing academics there but trying to find ways to work with some government officials, people that work with NGOs offering degrees, certificates, various capacity building programs. So there is a great need for the whole education system, really, to be reformed. If the government is serious about undertaking these reforms they'll need much better capacity. At the moment, because a lot of the

sanctions have cut out government workers from attending trainings or workshops, we're getting very uneven capacity, so actually civil society often has much better skills than the government. And what's interesting is that the civil society is taking this opportunity not to compete, but actually to also bring government along with them. So that should be encouraged as well.

**Ms. Ellis:** Okay, we had some other questions on this side. Okay, we have one here, one there, and there.

**Question:** Dina Morad, Save the Children. Just quick question on after Cyclone Nargis, I know that disaster risk reduction was a platform of advocacy for many of us. What kind of efforts have you seen since then or any efforts moving forward?

**Question:** Hi, I'm Christina Fink and I teach at George Washington University. You talked about the fact that there is now a federal structure in place in Burma although the regional governments have had very little power and that's in the constitution. I'm wondering if you see the peace process and the creation of a durable peace as dependent on changing the constitution in order to give more power to regional bodies or whether you think that this can be resolved without changing the constitution

**Question:** I'm Kimberly Crichton. I wanted to ask you about your point that civil society has been developing over ten years and what you mean by that?

**Ms. Yoshikawa:** For disaster risk reduction post-Nargis I think that's a major opportunity that was highlighted. Of course, when we talk about humanitarian needs addressing the natural disaster, those caused by natural disasters are much easier than addressing some of the conflict-related ones. I think another opportunity—well, the government has been sensitized to the impact obviously of natural disasters now. They're interested in finding ways to prevent it. And I think another part of that interest stems from some of the steps that ASEAN is taking. They've set up—they're setting up this regional network on disaster preparedness and mitigation. And since they will be taking on that chair, they have shown great interest in that. So I think that that's really one of those no-brainers, really, for the international community to be supporting. What we've also heard is that Burma is going to be getting more and more cyclones, more severe too, as some of the cyclone path is changing, no longer hitting Bangladesh as much but actually hitting their western coast. So in 2010 there was cyclone Giri, which was pretty devastating as well, it didn't have—not nearly as close as Cyclone Nargis, so I think that that is reemphasizing that message that they need to take care of—they need to address this. And it's also very cost-effective solution to many of these problems.

In terms of the peace process and the constitution...I think that's a—that's a big question and we don't have the answer to that. We heard from some groups that it needs to be changed. We heard some groups that said it can be changed later on, but there's some space, let's explore that space. But I think that ultimately it will be an issue for all these groups—if there are ceasefires all around, to start debating this issue. I'm not a constitutional expert, but many people did tell us that there's a lot of ambiguity, so I'm not sure if that ambiguity could really address some of the key issues for the ethnic minorities. I would welcome other opinions on that.

For the development of civil society in the last ten years—I mean, I could say that probably even goes back a little further really, the various ceasefires in the 1990s really started off an opportunity for some groups to start more development projects. It's—civil society, I think, is one that maybe has been ignored, at least, prior to Cyclone Nargis, but it has been kind of growing pretty steadily. There are of course some so-called civil societies that are actually just government sponsored entities, but there's certainly one that is growing and I think that they see their role growing even more now that the government is opening up. I think some of the landmarks for—some of the ceasefires in the 1990s followed and then probably bookended by Cyclone Nargis in 2008. So there's kind of been a steady increase, I mean we—in 2007 I think there's one study of civil society groups that counted about 270 NGOs but again, when we talk about more informal community based organizations, those probably



number in the thousands. Particularly among kind of the religious bodies, Buddhist, Christian, and also Muslim, too.

**Question:** Hi, Willow Darsie, independent consultant. I wanted to ask you two questions, first one is—you touched on some of the players/entities, some of the more established players, some of the UN agencies, and some of your peers, but I'm just curious if you wouldn't mind painting the landscape for us on who are the established folks, and who are the emerging INGOs who are looking to be more active in Burma as opportunities arise. And then my second question is on the topic of human trafficking in Burma, and if you wouldn't mind sharing your thoughts on that based on your recent trip.

**Ms. Yoshikawa:** In terms of the key international players, I mean, I guess I could start with donors and some of the significant ones. The UK and the EU are the largest international donors—now that Japan, I think, is lifting restrictions they will probably also be one. Australia is growing, they were actually one of the first Western countries to change their policies and go beyond basic humanitarian assistance. INGOs—you know there are a number that have been in country for quite a while and built up a number of networks now, I mean, Save the Children, I think, is definitely one and CARE as well. There are a lot of newcomers too, especially post-Nargis. There are a couple of them—UN agencies, OCHA is new, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance. But I think that they are—they came at the right moment and they—they seem to be building their relationship with the authorities in a fairly productive manner so far. Hopefully they will be able to continue on that path.

UNDP right now, despite the number of restrictions they have on it, they're trying to kind of redefine their scope of work with the government. Their board has a restriction that they cannot provide any assistance that quote unquote "benefits the government" so they've taken a pretty strict interpretation of that but it seems that that will shift. And hopefully they will be able to shift from an implementing partner to more of a player in the policymaking and addressing poverty issues. In terms of some of the regional players it would be very interesting to see how Indonesia's role is going to be changing. Indonesia with being—agreeing to give Burma the chair in 2014 with ASEAN. We've also heard that behind the scenes they are talking to the Burmese government about transitioning from military to civilian rule and also addressing some of the ethnic crises. But I think that we'll find that anything the ASEAN players do will be fairly quiet. And that anything they will do will be in private. But they do play an important role.

And for human trafficking, it has come up a little bit, but it is a major issue in Burma. And there are a couple of UN agencies that have been working on it. Actually a lot of NGOs, local NGOs too that have been trying to work at the community level to address it. The US focal point for trafficking is on the latest trip to Burma with Special Envoy Derek Mitchell. I'm not sure what's being addressed there, actually. There obviously is a lot more progress to be made. While we were there they had broken up and arrested several military officers that were operating trafficking rings. But you know, that's just a small step.

**Ms. Ellis:** I also wanted to mention that Lynn brought copies of her report that is about her last field visit but is also on Refugees Internationals' website. Are there any last minute questions? Well, if there are not, I just want to thank you all for coming, and Lynn, thank you so much. It was great, and I know we all learned a lot and good luck. [*Applause.*]