



Press Conference by
Guest: Hon. Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi
Leader of the National League for Democracy,
Republic of the Union of Myanmar

**“First step towards national reconciliation should be
the establishment of rule of law”**

Japan National Press Club, Tokyo, Japan

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At the invitation of the Japanese government, Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi has visited Japan from April 13 for the first time in 27 years. She spent her time in Tokyo as well as in Kyoto where she had worked as a research fellow in the mid-1980s. She shared her thoughts with attending journalists on issues related to democratization and national reconciliation in her country.

Moderator: Izumi Oguri, member of Planning Committee (NTV)

Main Questioner: Hideya Sugio, member of Planning Committee (TBS)

Japan National Press Club You-tube Channel

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Moderator: [speaks in Japanese] Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for waiting. We will start the press meeting with Hon. Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi. She requires no introduction I am sure but by custom, if I may.

She has come to our country for the first time in 27 years, arriving on last Saturday. In addition to Tokyo, she has visited Kyoto where she spent her time in the mid-1980s as a researcher. In 1988 she established the NLD. From 1989, for a total of three times, for 15 years, she has been under house arrest by the military junta.

In 1991, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. In June of last year, 21 years after the award, she made a speech in Norway, which we all recall. As of November 2010, the house arrest was lifted. In April of last year, after transition to civilian government, she won her seat in the by-election.

She will tell us her impressions about her stay in Japan. She will also talk about the progress of democratization in her country and her activities as a member of the Lower House.

As for the proceedings, first of all there will be an initial brief speech followed by questions and answers. First of all, there will be representative questions followed by direct questions from the floor.

I will serve as the moderator this afternoon. I am a member of this press club's planning committee. My name is Oguri of Nippon TV. Beside Ms. Suu Kyi, Mr. Hideya Sugio from TBS, head of the department of commentators, will ask the initial questions. The floor is yours, Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi.

Guest: Thank you. I'm grateful for this opportunity to meet the members of the press of Japan and I think perhaps the non-press members of the audience. It is a great pleasure for me to be here in Japan today after 27 years. It has been a wonderful experience for me, particularly because the ordinary people of Japan have been so welcoming and so warm in their support for what we have been trying to achieve in Burma over the last 24 years.

I am here mainly to answer questions so I will not take up too much of your time with a long speech. I simply want to say that I welcome this opportunity to exchange ideas with you, to answer any questions that you may have about the situation in our country, what we are trying to achieve and what we hope to achieve, and how Japan and Burma can work together for the promotion of democratic values in our world, not just for what we can do for each other.

So please put any questions that you wish to put to me very openly. I will answer them to the best of my ability. I can't guarantee that you'll always like my answers but at least I hope they will be honest ones. Thank you.

Moderator: [speaks in Japanese] Thank you very much. Mr. Sugio, could you come up with your representative questions?

Sugio: [speaks in Japanese] Over the past years, for over 15 years you have been detained under house arrest, but you really have a very strong spirit to try to promote democratization. I have three questions.

First, you are visiting Japan for the first time in 27 years. When you compare today's Japan to 27 years ago, what is your honest opinion?

The second question, taking your visit to Japan at this time as an opportunity, what is the cooperation or assistance you are expecting from Japan?

Guest: All right. What is the greatest difference? The greatest difference I find is in the young people of Japan. I find that they know a lot more about Burma than they did 27 years ago, and they have been so very warm in their support that I am very touched and very encouraged because I think that this bodes very well for the future of our two countries. So this is the immediate impression I got, that the young people of Japan today are more interested in Burma than they were 27 years ago.

And with regard to the kind of cooperation we expect from Japan, this would be at two levels: one on the level of the government and one on the level of the people of Japan. I always put more importance on people than on governments, but of course we are practical – we would like as much help from the government as possible because they are in a position to give it. And we hope that the aid that is given to my country will be given with the people in mind rather than the government of our country in mind. As I keep trying to remind everybody, governments come and governments go but people go on forever.

Sugio: [speaks in Japanese] Thank you very much. Through democratization economic development is accelerating in your country. At the same time, there are ethnic conflicts or communal conflicts that are expanding and therefore reconciliation is a challenge. Additionally, you have a problem with overseas refugees. In order to promote the return of refugees, how will you be involved in it and what are the actions that you plan to take?

Guest: Reconciliation has always been a very important issue in our country. Burma is made up of many ethnic nationalities, and since independence there has never been a time when we have had complete peace throughout our land. This is something we have yet to achieve. Economic development, economic success we achieved for a certain extent before the military regime took over in 1962, and I am confident that we are capable of once again achieving economic success. But basic to that, of course, is unity in our country – peace and unity. Without peace and without unity we cannot really expect to get economic success that can be sustained.

For sustainable development, whether it's economic, political or social, we need peace and unity. This is a very, very difficult thing to achieve, and I, as the chairperson of the Committee for Rule of Law in my country – and I'm chair of the rule of law because I believe strongly in the importance of rule of law – I believe that this is the way forward for our country. We must establish rule of law so that everybody in our country will feel secure. Unless there is security, we will not be able to achieve national reconciliation. People cannot talk to one another and exchange views and try to find a harmonious solution until they feel safe with one another, until they feel safe in our country.

So I think the first step towards national reconciliation in our country should be the establishment of rule of law.

Sugio: [speaks in Japanese] Amongst the minority groups, some are expecting you to become even more forthcoming and positive in promoting the movement.

Guest: I'm not quite sure what they mean by more positive and forceful in promoting the movement. What movement? Everybody expects that their movement, their stand, should be looked upon as the only right one. I do not think this is the way to achieve reconciliation.

We have to recognize the validity of everybody's hopes and aspirations and sort out the differences. I think, I was asked earlier at an interview why I have not been speaking much about ethnic nationalities since my release. In fact, I have been speaking all the time about ethnic nationalities, but the point was that my statements were not colorful enough to please everybody. Actually, I'm not very keen on colorful statements. I tend to make statements which I think are necessary and which I consider an honest reflection of how I think and how I feel because for me the most important thing in politics is to be honest with the public. The public may not always like what I say, but at least they cannot accuse me of having deceived them in any way.

And I'm sorry if people do not find my comments interesting enough to acknowledge them, but I've been speaking a lot about ethnic nationalities and the problems of national reconciliation in our country, except that I speak in a way which I suppose most people consider slightly boring. I talk about the importance of rule of law. I talk about the necessity to respect different points of views. I speak about the possibility of building unity out of diversity, provided you are prepared to be open-minded and you are prepared to accept that others' views may be as valid as your own.

Sugio: [speaks in Japanese] Well, thank you. Aspiring to become president, there are references you have made to such prospects during your stay in Japan. By being president what might be the goals that you wish to achieve? By 2015 for the next general election, amendment of the constitution is required for you to become president. In order to achieve your goals, what might be the path that you envision?

Guest: I find that people are very interested in the fact that I said that I would like to be president, and yet I would quite like to meet the leader of any political party who doesn't really want to be the head of government. I do not understand why they make themselves heads of political parties if they don't really want to become the head of government or of the state.

So I wonder whether there isn't a lot of false modesty around in politics everywhere in the world. And I know that many, many press people are surprised when I say quite frankly, yes, I want to be president because that way I can get to implement all the policies in which I believe.

Of course, as you very rightly pointed out, there are certain parts of the constitution which I think were deliberately included to stop me from becoming president. Now I do not think any constitution anywhere should be written with one person in mind, either to keep that person out of a certain position or to keep a person in a certain position. That is not how the constitution of a country should be written, which is why I object to it, not mainly because it is aimed against me, but because it is most unconstitutional to aim at one person. A constitution should be about a whole country.

The only way in which our constitution can be amended as it stands is by a majority of more than 75 percent agreeing to change. This is not with regard to every part of the constitution, but to the most important parts of the constitution change can be achieved only if more than 75 percent of the members of the legislature agree to change. And as 25 percent of the members of the legislature are representatives of the army, nominated by the commander in chief, it means that I always say that we'll need at least one brave soldier plus all the civilian representatives in order to amend the bits of the constitution that we want amended.

So it means that we will have to amend the constitution through agreement with the military, and that is how I want it. I want changes in our country to be achieved through agreement between different forces in our country. That is what I mean by national reconciliation, the ability to talk to one another and to sort out our differences and to come to a harmonious settlement.

I've always said that a country is poor in the culture of negotiated compromise, but it is something towards which we must work and towards which I am working as best I can.

Moderator: Amongst the answers that you have just mentioned, I want to come up with one follow-up question. You talked about cooperation from Japan and you wanted such cooperation to be based on the people of your country and not the government because there is a military-centered government still existing in your country. After you have become a politician, what do you see the largest obstacle in your country?

Guest: The largest obstacle is of course the mindset of those who are used to a military dictatorship. I've often said that it's not a military mindset that worries me. A military mindset is a disciplined mind.

It's a mind that accepts a chain of command. But a military dictatorship mindset is something altogether different. And the great majority of the members of the government at present were part of the military government three years ago, so there is much that needs to be changed with regard to the mindset of those who are now ruling Burma.

And I'm not saying that help to Burma should be people-centered rather than government-centered because of the present government. I think that as a matter of principle help to countries like ours should always be people-centered. Even when we become the government, I would rather that help is people-centered rather than government-centered, but of course a government that is truly representative of the people will have interests which are the same as the interests of the people.

Moderator: [speaks in Japanese] Thank you very much. Then we would like to invite questions from the floor.

Question (TBS): [speaks in Japanese] TBS. My name is Kako. [speaks in English] I want to deliver a direct message to you. I'd like to ask you about Japan's support toward Myanmar. Japan has been financially supporting Myanmar even when the other Western countries were working on sanctions to your military government. How did you see that while under house arrest? And plus, even after Myanmar declared its democratization, Japan restarted 50 billion yen of international loans to the government, but do you think it will work out in a good way for realizing democratization, and what do you expect the most in Japan's support from now on?

Guest: The way in which many countries in the world approach the question of military dictatorship in my country differed from one country to the other; and although the Western countries instituted sanctions against Burma, it is true that Japan continued to help Burma.

But as I said, I was always most concerned that the help should go to the people rather than help to shore up the power of the government, and I think much of the support that Japan gave to Burma did go to the people, but I think we need to be more careful about it. We need to make sure that the help that is given to my country is actually what is needed by our people, and for this I would like the government of Japan to consult not just the executives, that is to say not just the government but the legislature and we who represent the opposition as well.

Unless there is equal engagement with the government, that is to say the executive and the legislature and the opposition, there is always a possibility that the help given in my country may not go in the right way.

Question (Asahi Shimbun): [speaks in Japanese] Shibata from Asahi Shimbun. Two years ago, after the Thein Sein administration was formed, Daw Aung Sun Suu Kyi, you had a meeting with President Thein Sein and there was rapid progress in terms of reform. Reviewing the past two years of the Thein Sein administration, what is your assessment? As a reformer, what is your evaluation on him?

Guest: I usually do not assess politicians as individuals; I only assess them in terms of what they do. So let me just assess the record of the Thein Sein government with regard to reform.

I've always said that the great weakness of this reform process is that it has no structure. There does not seem to be a definite reform policy. There has been no proper sequencing or the establishment of priorities with regard to what is needed for our country at the moment. It's not enough to say any aid is welcome. It's not enough to think that the more you get the better. It does not work like that. You have to first of all decide what is most necessary in our country and how those needs should be met. I find that weakness with this present government.

With regard to the legislature, of which I am a member, I have been pleasantly surprised by how much we have been able to achieve because I think I must remind you, as I have been reminding other

people, that there are only 45 members of the NLD in this legislature or which numbers over 620. So we are a very, very small opposition group, although we are still the biggest opposition group.

As I think a lot of you know, the ruling party won by over 82 percent back in 2010. In spite of the fact that we are very small in number, we have been able to achieve quite a lot. We have been able to get some of our motions adopted, and this is because of the cooperation of members of other parties, including the ruling party, the USDP, and because of the even hand of the speakers of our two houses of the legislature.

The legislature has been increasing in transparency and in democratic processes over the last year. I like to think it has something to do with the fact that we have entered the legislature, but I think in all fairness I must admit that we owe a lot of this to the speaker of our Lower House who has been particularly enthusiastic about democratic processes and practices, and I am confident that this will increase with time.

The judiciary is a big problem, a problem for me as a chair of the Rule of Law Party, but more a problem for our country. Our judiciary is not free from interference by the executive. In fact, I would say that it is totally dependent on the executive and that is a very dangerous situation.

I have said earlier how necessary rule of law is for our country, and unless we have an independent and fair judiciary we will not be able to establish genuine rule of law, and this is something that we have to work towards as much as possible.

Question (Sky TG24) : Pio D'Emilia from Italy, Sky TG24. You may remember me. We met last time in NLD, headquarters, one year ago maybe, one-and-a-half years ago.

At that time I remember very well that you were much more skeptical than now. You look very much more optimistic now. And I remember that you were still deciding whether to candidate yourself or not for the elections, and you said that two main issues would be the freedom of all political prisoners and the end of the repressive actions, military actions, against the minorities.

Now is your optimism due to the fact that these two issues have been somehow solved or there are still prisoners, political prisoners, in Burma and still violent actions against the minorities?

And when you talk about national reconciliation, we have in history many cases of national reconciliation. Do you have more in mind a Mandela solution, a state commission for admitting responsibility but immunity, or the Argentine situation where the generals were eventually persecuted and jailed.

Guest: The reason why I'm more optimistic, I think I answered just now, is that the legislature has turned out to be far more democratic than I had expected and that we have been able to achieve much more as a minority group within the legislature than I had expected. I also said just now that I was not happy, entirely happy, about either the executive or the judiciary.

And as to the two issues that you mentioned, the release of political prisoners and the problems with the ethnic nationalities, I do not think that these have yet been resolved. We still have political prisoners in Burma. The NLD has calculated that we have, there are still about 200 remaining in prisons whom we would, whom we would deem to be prisoners of conscience.

As to peace with the ethnic minorities, ethnic nationalities, that has not yet been achieved, and one of the necessities for the achievement of national reconciliation, which for me is much broader than just peace with the ethnic nationality, it also means peace between the civilian population and the military, building of confidence and trust and good will between all the different forces, political forces, within our country, and that we have not yet achieved.

And as to the solutions you talked about, Argentine or Mandela, that is to say, Argentina or South Africa, I think we must look for a Burmese situation, a Burmese solution. And of course the Burmese who do not suffer from false modesty would believe that our solution will probably be better than the other two.

Question (Nikkei): [speaks in Japanese] Suzuki from Nikkei. I have a question concerning the economy. You said you would lead your economy to a sustainable growth path. The current Burmese economy is dependent on natural resources, such as natural gas. For the economy to move on to a sustainable growth path, what kind of industries and what kind of infrastructure will become necessary for Burma?

Guest: We always have to remember that Burma is a predominantly agriculture society. More than 60 percent of our people live in the rural areas and their living is dependent on agricultural work. Because of that, we need to develop our agriculture sector in the right way if development is to be sustainable.

I am a little concerned that the view most people take of agriculture is somewhat old-fashioned and I am always trying to persuade people to take a new look at agriculture, to think of agriculture in terms of the need for food security in our century rather than in terms of the 20th century trend towards big conglomerates and monoculture. I am not particularly keen on the idea of monoculture taking over our agricultural sector.

There is much that needs to be done, but first and foremost, what we need to make our economy look up is job creation. There is very high unemployment in our country, particularly among the young, and I've said again and again, this is a very dangerous situation. Unemployed youth is a danger for the future of our country. I keep repeating that it's not joblessness that worries me; it's the possibility of hopelessness among our youth. Once our youth have lost hope in the future and lost confidence in the ability of their society to allow them to live as dignified human beings, it will be very problematic for us to build a strong and sustainable society.

So I would like economic aid to my country to keep in mind the need for job creation, particularly for the young and particularly in the rural areas as well as in the cities.

Question (Freelance): [speaks in Japanese] Tamura. I am a freelance member of the press club. Ms. Akie Abe, the wife of the current prime minister, is campaigning to create schools in your country. What I have heard is in your country there are temple-based schools where monks provide literacy education to children. Despite being a poor country, the literacy rate is above 90 percent, and therefore temple schools play a very big role.

Going forward, in order to enhance the level of the population, in order to pull up the intellectual levels of the people, I would like to seek your views about education. Thank you.

Guest: First of all, I think I must say that literacy in our country is not over 90 percent. Literacy has been defined in a very narrow fashion, and according to that definition it's over 90 percent, but if we think of literacy in terms of the ability of the people to read, to understand what they are reading, such as simple instructions on a bottle of medicine, then literacy in Burma certainly is not as high as 90 percent.

With regard to the monastic schools, yes, they've always played a very important role in our country, and our legislature is trying to make it possible for the monastic schools to play a bigger role in the education of our young children by trying to provide salaries for teachers who teach at these monastic schools.

The teachers in the monastic schools are paid by the community; they are not paid by the government.

So we want to try to change that, the legislature is taking steps to change that so our monastic schools can play a greater part in the education of our children.

I would also like to mention that my party has set up a network of free schools because all the education by the government is supposed to be free, that is to say although the children do not formally have to give fees, have to give school fees, they are asked to make so many different kinds of contributions to the school that many poor people cannot afford to keep on sending their children to school. So there are a number of issues of serious concern with regard to our education system, and we are working very hard to change the situation.

The legislature is working on a national education plan, which is very necessary, and once that has been drafted we can discuss the needs of our society with regard to education in a more detailed manner.

Question (RTL France) : In France where you have many, many admirers and it's a pleasure to see you so well.

I've been working 20 years on Burma, as many of my colleagues, and when I came to Burma 20 years ago, and in the border I have seen so many problems of sovereignty, and sovereignty for your country has been a crucial issue in history. How do you perceive and what would you like to perceive in the future for the sovereignty of your country with such powerful neighbors you have, such as China and other forces in Southeast Asia? Thank you.

Guest: It has never particularly worried me that we have very large and powerful neighbors. Of course it is not something that we can ignore. It's very difficult to ignore the presence of either India or China. But you must remember that when Burma became independent in 1948 we were already next to India and China; our geographical situation has not changed.

But in those days, as a very young democracy suffering from many problems, because there were many insurgencies all over the country and we were also suffering from the after-effects of the Second World War, we still managed to maintain very good relations with different countries all over the world.

Throughout the Cold War we managed to keep neutral. We had perfectly good, before the military regime took over, we had perfectly good relations with the Western countries, with China, and with India. In fact, Burma was one of the very first countries in the world to recognize the Communist government of China, although we were a practicing, if not a perfect, democracy, and although we had very close relations with the West and with India to our west.

So it does not worry me because we do not live in an age where a big country can simply walk into a small country. I think we have got beyond that age of basic political savagery. And I'm very confident that we will be able to establish good relations with both our large neighbors and with countries farther away from us, such as France.

Question (Reuters) : Antoni Slodkowski from Reuters. As you mentioned at the beginning of the press conference, some international observers have perhaps criticized you for not being outspoken enough about the violence that has been perpetrated against Muslims in the Rakhine State and now in the central heartland of Myanmar.

Muslims are major supporters of the NLD and I wonder what sort of message you have to Muslim citizens in Myanmar, particularly at the time of this religious conflict where many of them perhaps fear for their lives.

And if I may slide a second question, do you consider Rohingya people citizens of Myanmar? Thank

you.

Guest: With regard to violence, I object to violence committed by anybody against anybody. It does not matter whether the violence is committed by Buddhists or by Muslims or by Christians – I object to it entirely. I've always been against violence, especially in politics. And I'm sorry that our people are not able to settle their differences across the table by talking to one another rather than by resorting to violence. I have said this very clearly that any violation of human rights and any acts of violence are inimical to a united and peaceful society. And I stand by that.

With regard to whether or not the Rohingya are citizens of the country, that depends very much on whether or not they meet the requirements of the citizenship laws as they now exist. There are those who say that the Burmese citizenship laws, which are based on the 1982 law, are not fair. Now that is a different question.

At the present what we have to find out is whether all those who are entitled to citizenship under the present law have been given citizenship. And once they've been given citizenship, have they been given all the rights of citizens? That has to be established first. And then we must go on to assess this citizenship law to find out whether it is in line with international standards.

I think every country is entitled to say that they will work in accordance with existing laws, but at the same time, every country has the responsibility to consider the possibility that the laws are not in keeping with international standards, and this, the Burmese government, should have the courage to do, to face the issue of citizenship fairly.

With regard to the Muslims of Burma, I met some of the leaders, some Muslim leaders of Burma, recently, just before I came to Japan, and we talked about all these communal problems, and it was very sad because none of them had ever known any other country except this one, that is to say except Burma, and they did not feel that they belonged anywhere else and it was sad for them that they were made to feel they did not belong in our country either. And this is a very sad state of affairs.

We must learn to accommodate those with different views from ours. But as I said earlier, if we want our people to sort out their differences, we must give them security, we must make them feel secure enough to talk to one another. If you don't feel secure enough to go out of your house, if you're afraid that every time you go out of the house you might be attacked by somebody from a different community, how can you expect them to sit down and sort out their differences? Which is why I put so much emphasis to rule of law. And this is why people find my attitude so boring because rule of law is not exciting. But it is very necessary.

Question (Freelance): [speaks in Japanese] Hirobuchi Masuhiko, I'm a freelance journalist. A most important question about the name of your country. You have been referring to your country as Burma consistently. A few years ago when the country name was changed to Myanmar, some Japanese journalists have referred to Myanmar as the name of the country which was established by the military regime so we have to use the name of Myanmar, and some Western country journalists have also taken that stance. However, one of the former ambassadors in Burma has said that the country name of Burma does not have a long history. It is the British colonialists who have actually named the country Burma. And about six months ago I had an interview with the British Ambassador here in Japan and I named the country as Myanmar and in his answer he always referred to Burma.

So Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, I have a question. In your mind, the country name of Myanmar is not desirable. Do you feel that Burma is actually the correct name of your country? That is my question.

Guest: The reason why I've always referred to Burma as Burma is because previously when they changed, when the military regime changed the name, the English name, the international name of the country, of course Myanmar is our name for Burma, as Nihon is your name for Japan, and so in

Burma we've always referred to Burma as Myanmar; that's in our language. But since independence and before that, we have referred to Burma as Burma outside our country.

The name was changed by the military regime. Suddenly, one day it was announced that our country would be known as Myanmar from now on and there was no reference to the will of the people, and that is my main objection to the name, that it was chosen by the military regime without any reference to the will of the people, without asking whether the people found it acceptable or not. That is one reason.

And the second reason is that they explained the name in terms which were not factually correct. They said that Myanmar referred to all the ethnic nationalities of Burma, whereas Burma, which is based on the word Bamar, referred only to the Burmese ethnic group. This is not true. Myanmar is a literary form of Bamar, so Myanmar also refers only to the Burmese ethnic group. So the reason given for the change was not correct either.

Now with regard to what the Japanese call Burma, I would say that you pronounce Biruma so much more nicely than you pronounce Myanmar. It sounds so much nicer, Biruma, than Myanmar pronounced by the Japanese and by other foreigners who find it very difficult. When you hear a Westerner say Myanmar, it doesn't sound quite right, but they can manage Biruma very well and they can manage Burma very well. It sounds much better.

And then as for the explanation that Burma was the name given to the country by the colonialists, that is to say by foreigners, well, Japan is not exactly the name given to this country by the Japanese, but we like it very well and the Japanese people I think have enough confidence in their achievements to accept that name.

I think the reason why the military government rejected the name Burma was because they did not have the confidence to accept it. Think of the biggest, the most powerful countries in Asia – China, India, Japan – these are all names given by the Westerners. These are not native names. But because they have confidence in their own country, in the achievements of their civilization and of their modern history, they can stay, they can live with those names. Why can't we live with the name Burma?

But on the other hand, I don't insist on it. What I object to is that people should try to force me to say Myanmar if I wish to say Burma. There is no law in my country that says that I cannot refer to my country as Burma if I please, and I shall go on referring to my country as Burma as long as I please. Thank you. [applause]

Moderator: [speaks in Japanese] Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, it is time for us to conclude the questions and answers.

This is the guestbook. In the waiting room she has kindly written down in this way, "Looking forward to years of cooperation with Japan". She has added "Burmese New Year's Day" because it happens to be that day today.

Thank you very much for your very kind message. This is a present from the club. This is a very special traditional wrapping cloth of Japan. [applause]

Thank you very much indeed. [applause]