

GW Generation Wave

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To:

U Thein Sein

President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar

February 27, 2015

Subject: Support the Striking Students for the Amendment of the Education Reform Law

Dear Mr. President,

We, Generation Wave, would respectfully like to make suggestions in regards to the above-mentioned matter. We assume that you are aware that Myanmar's education system is so far behind that in neighboring countries due to decades of misguided governance and civil wars.

We are glad to see that the Union Government has tried to make policies towards the development of a modern education system. However, we note that there has not been a meaningful and inclusive process involving the government, civil society and the international community in formulating the national education law, as you, Mr. President, stated would happen in your directives for democratic reforms.

In the process of writing the education law, no regard was given to the advice from the students or from the NNER, which was formed by civil society organizations. Because of this, the students organized protests in order to raise the awareness of the general public about the weaknesses of the education law and build support for amending the law through consultations between the Government, Parliament, civil society organizations and students in order to achieve a better education system.

During the demonstrations, the students have made many sacrifices that are unbearable in this age, such as being absent from their classes, having various illnesses from the long march under the heat, and struggling to deal with various discomforts of daily life including being away from their parents for so many days.

The morale of the students who dare to make such sacrifices for the whole population and for the future of our country is highly commendable. We hope that you, Mr. President, will be honored on behalf of the Union of Myanmar to have such dutiful and responsible students and youths in our country.

We are delightfully glad to see that the Government has recognized the efforts of the students, and agreed in principle to a process of amending the education law through dialogue between the Government, Parliament, NNER and students.

However, the students are hesitant to fully trust the Government after the experiences they encountered in the last failed dialogue with the Ministry of Education in Naypyidaw. At that time, student representatives and NNER were denied accommodation, the number of participants in the dialogue was significantly limited and the dialogue itself was postponed. Furthermore, the statements issued by the Ministry of the Interior, the presence of security forces along the students' march, and the words spoken by some government officials against the student strike, not only threaten the striking students but also increase the students' dedication to continue the march until they accomplish their objectives.

It is especially true that the warning to not allow the march to continue that was issued through state-run television and the obvious tightening of security are creating more negative impacts. It is understandable that the Government may worry that the objectives of the student protest might change and that the students may be joined by other forces in Yangon.

But it is very important to notice that there are no indications from the side of striking students that they will change their demands to anything other than their original educational objectives, as long as the Government is genuinely attempting to quickly pass the education law that is desired by the students and the public. On the other hand, we believe that you, Mr. President, can see that the rallies have been held peacefully according to international human rights norms and the public has been overwhelmingly cheerful and welcoming in every place through which the students have passed.

The general public who are supporting the students and supporting the emergence of a new education system that matches international standards is also encouraging the students not to deviate from their main purpose due to distractions.

In this situation, we humbly believe that it is very important for the Government not to take overly strong precautions and place heavy restrictions on the students. If the Government reacts strongly by blocking and arresting the peacefully protesting students who have only educational objectives, they will also have to deal with the general public that is supporting the students, with potentially unwanted consequences.

Therefore, we sincerely request the Government to consider the following points in its response to the students for the sake of the whole country:

1. Speed up the process of promulgating the education law that is desired by the students and the general public through 4-party dialogue.
2. Protect and safeguard the striking students who are marching with perseverance until a new education law is in place.
3. Prohibit people from speaking ill intentioned and threatening remarks that can escalate tensions and provoke the anger of the students.
4. Encourage the Yangon government to protect the students in their peaceful protest together with the public, if the students arrive in the city.
5. Honor the students who are acting responsibly with bravery and sacrifice with a tribute by the State and the general public.

We earnestly believe that if the Government acts in accordance with the above points there will be not only the reparation of shattered trust and damaged relationship between the Government and the students dating back to 1962, but also a bold step can be taken forward for genuine national reconciliation.

On behalf of the Generation Wave working committee,

Moe Thway
President, Generation Wave

CC:
Chair of Union Parliament
President of National Parliament
Ministries President Office
Presidents of Educational affair Committees in Parliaments
Nationwide Network for Education Reform (NNER)
Democratic Education Movement Committee