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One Hundred Nineteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
www.foreignaffairs.house.gov

April 15, 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio:

We write to express our alarm at the United States' failure to respond effectively to the devastating earthquake in Burma on March 28. We are further concerned that the Administration's unlawful shuttering of USAID and gutting of U.S. foreign assistance programs has compromised America's ability to respond to this crisis.

The United States has long been a leader in humanitarian assistance and disaster response globally, including in Asia after the 2005 Indian Ocean tsunami. These efforts have enhanced America's reputation, bolstered our diplomatic influence, and strengthened our military-to-military cooperation and bilateral relationships with nations in the region. The Trump Administration's disastrous response to the earthquake in Burma severely undercuts that leadership, and, unless corrected, will damage our influence and interests in the region.

The 7.7 magnitude earthquake near Mandalay damaged buildings as far away as Bangkok, Thailand. The Burmese government estimates more than 3,300 people have died and more than 4,800 were wounded, while the U.S. Geological Survey estimates the death toll could be higher than 10,000 people given the impact on heavily populated areas.¹ Countless buildings, bridges and homes were destroyed in Burma, with hospitals overwhelmed. To make matters worse, the horrific Burmese military continued to bomb its citizens in the aftermath of the earthquake.

President Trump initially confirmed to reporters after the quake that the U.S. would be rushing assistance to the region. Instead, public reporting suggests that the United States has been missing in action. In stark contrast to USAID's typical work to mobilize dozens of expert American first responders for early life-or-death recovery efforts, the Administration waited several days to send a small response team of three personnel to the region to assess the damage—and then dismissed them from their roles two days later. The United States initially agreed to send \$2 million dollars in relief funding—later increasing it to \$9 million after public criticism, but still a pittance compared to past U.S. humanitarian and disaster response efforts and the assistance pledged by other nations.

The United States' scant and chaotic response to this crisis created a vacuum that other nations are exploiting to boost their own influence. The People's Republic of China (PRC), in particular, has filled the gap by pledging \$14 million for relief efforts and sending 600 rescue workers to the impacted region. So, instead of seeing American relief workers wearing the USAID logo, crisis-affected populations in Southeast Asia are seeing images and videos of PRC rescue workers pulling people out of rubble, helping the sick, providing life-saving food and medicine, and building credibility with local governments.

USAID's Regional Development Mission for Asia was based in Bangkok and could have mobilized to lead the relief efforts if the Trump Administration had not unilaterally gutted it in the weeks prior. Tragically, many USAID staff who had been stationed in the region and could have rushed to the scene instead received termination notices on the day of the earthquake. The way they and the three members of the short-lived response team were treated is unprofessional and insulting and underscores the negligent way this Administration has handled this crisis and stewarded U.S. government personnel and resources.

Moreover, at a time when people in the affected region would ordinarily turn to Voice of America (VOA) Burmese and Radio Free Asia to get critical updates, the Administration's dismantling of the U.S. Agency for Global Media have forced both to go silent. VOA Burmese was critical in getting information out during the 2009 Cyclone Nargis crisis, while RFA played a vital role in closely covering Cyclone Mocha and its devastating aftermath in 2023. Now, VOA staff are on administrative leave and RFA has furloughed of most of its journalists and staff.

If the Administration does not act quickly to turn things around on its response to the current disaster in Southeast Asia, U.S. credibility risks being severely damaged within ASEAN and the broader region. Your statement last week that “we are not the government of the world” and have “other needs” and “other priorities” burns friendships we have built and commitments we have made in the region—including with treaty allies and through bilateral security cooperation

¹ “What Maps Show of the Myanmar Quake's Destruction,” *The New York Times*, April 3, 2025.
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/03/28/world/asia/myanmar-earthquake-tracker.html>

agreements that anchor humanitarian and disaster response as shared national security priorities. This will only encourage our partners and allies to look to and work with China instead.

Notwithstanding the gravity of this emergency, the State Department has provided little information to House Foreign Affairs Committee staff despite several requests. So, we reiterate here our request for the Administration to brief the Committee this month on its response to the Southeast Asia quake, and we request a written response from you by April 22 with answers to the following questions:

1. Why did the United States not deploy a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) to Southeast Asia after this quake and what is the present capacity to deploy DARTs at all?
2. Is there currently any active U.S. humanitarian response team on the ground supporting relief efforts in Southeast Asia? If so, what is the makeup of the team and what are its objectives?
3. What was the makeup of the three-person USAID response team that was initially sent to the region?
4. Who made the decision to terminate the three U.S. personnel initially sent to the region to assess the damage from the Burma earthquake? Why were they terminated two days after traveling to the region and before their work was done? When will their employment contracts end?
5. What direct requests for emergency post-quake assistance has the Administration received from local authorities and governments?
6. How much money has the United States pledged and disbursed thus far to support quake recovery efforts in Burma and in Thailand?
7. How is the Administration ensuring that any humanitarian assistance it is providing is flowing through international organizations and NGOs and not the Burmese military junta? What monitoring capabilities are in place to ensure proper oversight of resources and safeguard against diversion?

The U.S. response thus far has betrayed our moral leadership and U.S. national security interests. We seek answers to the questions above so that we can partner with you to remedy the damage and restore the U.S. foreign assistance tools we need to be a global leader.

Sincerely,



Gregory W. Meeks
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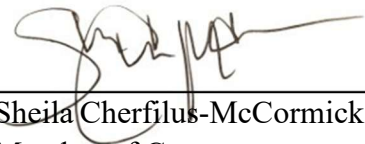
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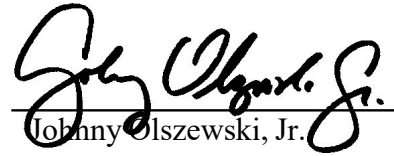
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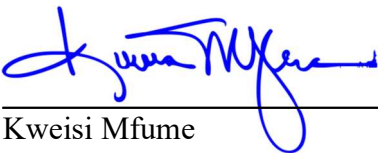
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