Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 6, 2015

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary, U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry,

We are concerned about key aspects of the upcoming election and human rights in Burma and urge the United States to asses this election by taking into account all of the realities of what is happening on the ground in Burma.

This week Burma will hold an election which may succeed with respect to a number of technical issues. It is our considered view that regardless of how well the elections are executed, they cannot be deemed free and fair because of the "cheating" that has occurred up front and in plain sight through the structural limitations put in place by the authorities.

The United States has long called on Burma to hold democratic elections. While the polls scheduled for November 8 present a theoretical opportunity for unity and change, with 25% of the seats in parliament automatically reserved for the military, the ruling party aligned with the military enjoys a significant electoral advantage even before the first vote will be cast. As a result, opposition parties may need to win as many as 67% of the remaining three-quarters of the seats up for consideration in order to lead in forming the next government. This is neither fair nor democratic, and has inevitably warped the electoral playing field.

We are similarly concerned that the National League for Democracy's preferred presidential candidate, who was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal by the United States Congress as well as the Presidential Medal of Freedom, is barred from serving as president. Perceptions of the future role of individual candidates can matter a great deal to voters and can be important in electoral wins or losses. In contrast, the ruling party's most visible leader *is* eligible.

We are also concerned about the use of religious extremism to influence the election. We were deeply disappointed by President Thein Sein's government's effort to institutionalize hatred of Muslim minorities through the race and religion laws, and we note the Holocaust Museum's stark warnings on the potential of genocide against Burma's Rohingya minority. In addition, the government's willingness to incarcerate those who criticize the country's military, even slightly, demonstrates the severe limitations on free speech.

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Taken together, these impediments unfairly skew the election in favor of the ruling authorities. Burma's elections, while a historic opportunity on some accounts, are plagued with structural problems and restrictions that should not be present in the first place. We believe these realities should heavily factor into the United States' assessment of any election outcome.

Sincerely,

Joseph Crowley
Member of Congress

Steve Chabot
Member of Congress

Matt Salmon
Member of Congress

Eliot L. Engel
Member of Congress

Joseph R. Pitts
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress