Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

November 15, 2012

Dear Mr. President,

As Senators and Members of Congress, we would like to address your upcoming Southeast Asia three-country tour from November 17-20, 2012, that includes Burma (Myanmar) and meetings with President Thein Sein and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

In light of Aung Suu Kyi's recent visit to the U.S., discussions about democratic reforms in Burma are underway. Burma's government has taken modest steps toward democratization by releasing hundreds of political prisoners, relaxing media censorship, and permitting Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy to participate in the political process. However, the U.S. must continue to aggressively identify and underscore other atrocities that threaten future peace and stability. Burma stands at a critical turning point but additional reforms must still take place. As Aung Sang Suu Kyi recently said, "The world need[s] to understand that Myanmar is just at the beginning of the road to democracy, and that its present Constitution does not make the road smooth."

As the U.S. continues to work closely with the Burmese government on reforms, we must ensure that legitimate ethnic and democracy leaders are included in negotiations. Comprehensive and effective dialogue cannot be conducted without these leaders. Moreover, the U.S. must be careful to take no action that could be interpreted as endorsement of any misconduct or human rights lapses by the Burmese government or President Thein Sein, particularly while the Burmese government is still dominated by the military with a very brutal past.

Serious political dialogue within the framework of a robust peace process must take place to resolve the ongoing conflicts among Burma's ethnic and religious groups. The plight of the Kachin is often overlooked by the international community and humanitarian conditions are seriously deteriorating in Kachin State and Kachin refugee camps. Since the Burma Army broke the ceasefire agreement in Kachin State in June 2011, at least 70,000 civilians have been displaced from their villages. The atrocities committed against the Kachin by the Burma Army may amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity and should be thoroughly investigated and prosecuted as the evidence warrants. We urgently recommend you call for a withdrawal of Burmese troops and the establishment of meaningful political dialogue and a peace process that will result in a political solution for the conflict in Kachin State.

Violence by the Burma Army against the Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State also continues with impunity and the Burmese government has failed to end what increasingly appears to be a campaign to forcibly displace thousands of Rohingya. Moreover, recent reports indicate how Burmese security forces are complicit with Rakhine Buddhists in carrying out brutal attacks against the Rohingya people. Within the past few weeks alone, thousands of homes in Rakhine

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State have been destroyed, hundreds of people slaughtered, and over 100,000 displaced. Indeed, now is the time to ensure the plight of the vulnerable Rohingya are not forgotten and stress that this crisis against Burma's Muslim population will threaten future democracy measures.

In the immediate future, humanitarian aid for both the Rohingya and Kachin is desperately needed. The U.S. must call for unhindered access to aid for all victims of violence, regardless of religion or race, in Rakhine and Kachin States. United Nation agencies and international nongovernmental organizations should be granted unrestricted access to the affected areas. The U.S. should not ignore state-sponsored persecution of these ethnic and religious minorities, especially during a high-profile Presidential visit, and indeed raise these ongoing issues with the highest levels of the Burmese government as roadblocks to true peace and progress in a democratic and free Burma.

Violence against Chin Christians also deserves U.S. attention and escalation to the highest levels of the Burmese government. Chin is the poorest state in all of Burma and, for several decades, Chin communities have suffered institutionalized discrimination on the basis of both ethnicity and religion which has led to thousands of Chin refugees fleeing to neighboring India. Previously, successive military regimes viewed Christianity as a threat to homogenous national identity within Burma. However, Burmese nationalist resentment and discrimination continues against the Chin. Religious freedom and human rights atrocities have long been utilized against the Chin and include forced labor and conversion, torture, rape, restrictions on construction of Christian infrastructure, violations of peaceful religious assembly, and threats of intimidation and harassment of pastors and missionaries. We must see an end to attacks on churches and civilians. Additionally, the Burma Army uses rape against ethnic and religious minorities, including the Chin, and the U.S. must call for an end to this violence against the vulnerable.

Burma still has a very long road ahead and the U.S. must continue to advocate for the full inclusion of ethnic and religious groups within Burmese society and within the political process. Mr. President, your visit to Burma signifies our developing bilateral relationship and desire to encourage U.S. business investment in the country. With the additional credibility and validation that a Presidential visit gives to the Burmese government, specific reform agenda items should be on the table, including the cessation of violence against the Kachin, Rohingya, and Chin people. We urge you to ensure these minority groups, among others, are engaged in meaningful political dialogues and have fair opportunities for participation in the political process.

We look forward to hearing an update about your meetings in Burma and the progress of these discussions with the Burmese government.

Sincerely,

TRENT FRANKS
Co-Chair, Int'l Religious Freedom Caucus

HEATH SHULER
Co-Chair, Int'l Religious Freedom Caucus

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U.S. Senator

RON WYDEN
U.S. Senator

MARK KIRK
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RUSH HOLT
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ZOE LOFGREN
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JOHN SARBANES
U.S. Member of Congress

Cc'd: The Honorable Hillary Clinton, United States Secretary of State