

South African Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu sends a message to Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, saying he looks forward “to join you in your celebrations when you, my sister, are inaugurated as the true, freely elected leader of Burma.”

In a message of encouragement to Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, South African Archbishop Emeritus and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Desmond Tutu said he looks forward to traveling to Rangoon “to join you in your celebrations when you, my sister, are inaugurated as the true, freely elected leader of Burma.”



Tutu addressed his fellow Nobel Peace Prize laureate in an interview with *The Irrawaddy*, in which he also dismissed the planned 2010 general election as a “charade.”

Tutu asked: “How can you claim to hold a free democratic election when the leader of the main opposition which won a landslide victory in the last truly democratic and free election is excluded and where the election commissioners will be handpicked by the junta?”

The full text of *The Irrawaddy's* exclusive interview with Tutu:

QUESTION: *Under President Obama's administration, the US has adopted a direct engagement policy with the Burmese regime. But so far, after numerous meetings, there are no*

signs of progress, only more repression. What are your thoughts on the US engagement policy?

ANSWER: It is just possible that after a tough sanctions policy, a softer approach just might bring about movement. I am somewhat doubtful and it seems Secretary Campbell [Assistant US Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell] has similar doubts. What we want is positive change and [we] will sing 'Alleluia' when Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners are released and democracy is given a real chance, by whatever means. That is the goal.

Q: *You have long advocated a tough sanctions policy on the regime. In 2005, you and former Czech President Vaclav Havel commissioned a report calling for UN Security Council action against the junta. However, Burma's neighbors continue to trade and engage the regime. What are your recommendations to the West, the UN, and neighboring countries, including China, India and the Asean nations?*

A: The aim surely must be to see democracy revived and flourishing in Burma. Remember what happened in South Africa. The apartheid government was intransigent and we called for sanctions. Many Western governments did not heed our plea, including the Reagan administration. But when the US applied those sanctions, apartheid crumbled. Sanctions when applied consistently do work and they are a nonviolent means to end oppression. Governments should ask themselves, on whose side are we? If the opposition calls for sanctions then who are outsiders to say, 'Sanctions hurt the people we want to help?'

Q: *There are consistent reports of human rights violations committed by the Burmese armed forces: rape and religious persecution in ethnic war zones and minority areas and forced recruitment of child soldiers, to name a few. Do you see any way to apply more force/pressure to halt such abuses?*

A: Yes, end the rule of the brutal military junta and impress on them that they are going to be indicted before the International Criminal Court for all their gross violations of human rights and their crimes against humanity.

Q: *The regime will hold an election in 2010 and has just announced the election law. Many people doubt that the election will be free, fair and inclusive. How do you view the election?*

A: This is no free election. It is a charade. How can you claim to hold a free democratic election when the leader of the main opposition which won a landslide victory in the last truly democratic and free election is excluded and where the election commissioners will be handpicked by the

junta? How could they ever be evenhanded? We are more likely to find snow in hell than free democratic elections in Burma under the present dispensation.

Q: *What is your message to Aung San Suu Kyi and more than 2,000 political prisoners, and the millions of oppressed people of Burma who suffer at the hands of the regime?*

Despite the strong support of the international community for Burma's non-violent struggle for democracy, the movement is losing its effectiveness in opposing the regime's authoritarianism. Can you share your experience of non-violent struggle in South Africa?

A: My dear Sister Nobel Laureate, my dear sisters and brothers in Burma, we admire your courage and determination. This is a moral universe. Right and wrong matter. We used to tell our people even in the darkest times in South Africa that the perpetrators of injustice have already lost despite their guns and their military and police might. They have already lost because they are on the side of injustice, oppression and evil.

You are on the winning side. One day we will come to Rangoon to join you in your celebrations when you, my sister, are inaugurated as the true, freely elected leader of Burma just as Nelson Mandela came out of jail and became our leader. The perpetrators of injustice and oppression will bite the dust as sure as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. God bless you all.