



American Baptist News Service
American Baptist Churches USA / Mission Resource Development
P.O. Box 851, Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851
Phone: (610)768-2159 / Fax: (610)768-2320
Bridget Holmstrom, Web Manager/Communication Specialist
Email: abns@abc-usa.org

Board of General Ministries Expresses Concern for Myanmar in Letter to President Obama

VALLEY FORGE, PA (ABNS 11/14/12)—In its final plenary session on November 10, 2012, the Board of General Ministries of American Baptist Churches USA (ABCUSA) affirmed the sending of a letter to President Obama regarding human rights violations in Burma. The letter was written by Board Directors and sent to President Obama as he plans to visit Burma shortly.

The letter was signed by ABC President Ruth Clark and ABCUSA General Secretary Rev. Dr. A. Roy Medley. Copies were sent to the Honorable Hillary Clinton, U.S. secretary of state; the Honorable Suzan Johnson Cook, ambassador-at-large, International Religious Freedom; and Rev. Dr. Neville Callam, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance.

An excerpt of the letter is below. To view the full text of the letter, [Click Here](#).

As the Board of General Ministries of the American Baptist Churches USA, the most culturally diverse denomination in the United States and Puerto Rico with a membership of 1.3 million members and 5,200 congregations, we are writing to you regarding our deep concern for the people and country of Myanmar.

Our ties to Burma date back nearly two centuries to 1813 when Adoniram and Ann Judson landed in Rangoon as the first American missionaries in the country. Their pioneering work has left an enduring legacy. Baptists now constitute the largest Christian group in the country with 1.5 million members convened in 18 language and regional Baptist conventions. We continue to relate to the Myanmar Baptist Convention and support it financially and spiritually through our International Ministries division.

Our General Secretary, along with other denominational leaders, has frequently visited Burma, Thailand and Malaysia. The denomination created a national Burma Refugees Task Force to coordinate our response to the Burmese diaspora including advocacy with the U.S. State Department and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. The congregations of our denomination have been actively participating in the resettlement of over 80,000 refugees from Burma since 2006.

While we are encouraged by some of the political reforms in Myanmar (particularly the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the increased diplomatic relationship between

Ambassadors, the visit from President Thein Sein to the United States, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's visit to Myanmar in 2011), we continue to be gravely concerned by human rights violations, particularly as they pertain to ethnic nationalities.

We hope, in your visit, you will address the following concerns with President Thein Sein, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and other political leaders to urge the new government of Myanmar to:

- End the armed attacks on civilians in the Kachin State and other parts of the country;*
- Cease the military use of rape, forced labor, torture, religious persecution, destruction of churches, razing and burning of villages, confiscation of land, forced displacement and killing of ethnic nationalities;*
- Declare a nationwide ceasefire, release remaining political prisoners, and pursue more vigorously a meaningful peace and political dialogue process with representatives of all the ethnic nationalities and the democracy movement led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other distinguished leaders;*
- Allow internally displaced people, as they desire, to return to their home villages and land with sufficient support and relief in order to re-establish their life with security. We are especially concerned that the land mines be cleared;*
- Allow those who are living as refugees outside of Burma, having fled from violence, to return as desired to their native land or be able to explore alternative living options in a third country.*

The minority people of Burma desire freedom, the right to self-determination and the right to live in peace within their country. Thus, any political and economic engagement without an end to the human rights abuses will be hollow. The minority citizens of Burma will continue to distrust the government.

American Baptist Churches is one of the most diverse Christian denominations today, with over 5,200 local congregations comprised of 1.3 million members, across the United States and Puerto Rico, all engaged in God's mission around the world.