



Toespraak

Toespraak voor President van Republiek der Unie van Myanmar, Z.E. dhr. Thein Sein

Maandag 8 september 2014, 17.15 uur

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In his Gettysburg Address in November 1863 the President of the United States Abraham Lincoln, spoke of "*government of the people, by the people, for the people*". To me, this should be the ultimate ambition of all democracies, one that each democracy should keep working on, and always can keep working on. Because: however young or old the democracy, there always remains work to be done.

Your Excellency,

Also, on behalf of the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the members of parliament present here today: welcome to the States General of the Netherlands. It is an honour to meet you, the first civilian head of state of Myanmar in almost 50 years, the person leading the transition in Myanmar, the person leading reform and change.

The States General exists 550 years this year and has existed in its current form since 1815. Next year we will celebrate our bicentenary. In the Netherlands we have a bicameral parliamentary system consisting of a total of 225 members: 75 in the Senate, 150 in the House of Representatives. Our plenary hall is the oldest of its kind in the world in which debates are still being held. It dates back to 1650. I hope to show it to you after the meeting. The room in which you are now is called the Minutes Room. This room contains written reports of every word that was ever spoken in both houses of parliament since 1815.

Your Excellency,

The democracy of Myanmar is young and fragile. It is impossible to go from a centrally lead country to a democracy in one day. We understand that. And we applaud the efforts that you have made since 2011. Your country is on the right track. An acknowledgement of this is your current chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.



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However, getting on the right track may be easier than staying on it. It takes continuous work, ambition and courage. There are many important aspects to this, but let me name one in particular: inclusive governance. Here at the States General of the Netherlands, an example of inclusive governance is the fact that we have 12 parties - from the whole scope of the political spectrum - in the Senate and 14 in the House of Representatives, who all have the same rights. For example: all factions are granted an equal maximum amount of time during the first term of a debate, all factions can insist on a plenary debate on a legislative proposal, and there are free presidential elections.

As I mentioned before, each democracy can continue to improve itself. Therefore so can ours. Although our democracy here in the Netherlands dates back many years, just this summer the Senate received a proposal regarding the introduction of a general provision at the beginning of our constitution, stating that "the constitution guarantees democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights". This new provision sketches the contours within which our constitution should be read and understood. Thus: something new, a deepening of our democratic values and understanding.

I believe that you have certainly put steps in the right direction when it comes to the development of the fundamental rights in a democracy. I truly hope that you will stay on this path, that you will continue to improve democracy - just as we still do - and will continue to blossom as a country. The elections in 2015 are an important milestone. I wish you the best of luck!

I hope that today we can speak about democracy, the rule of law and the parliamentary process in both our countries.

If you have any questions regarding water management - maybe in relation to your visit to the Maeslantkering this morning - please direct these to Mr Schaap, who is our water specialist at the Senate.

Thank you.