

Enda Kenny, Magdalene Laundry Apology, February 2013

Irish Taoiseach (prime minister) [Enda Kenny](#) apologizes on behalf of the Irish government to the women who were forced to work in the [Magdalene laundries](#), institutions run by religious groups, where women were forcibly detained, unpaid or mistreated, sometimes for years.

The video is from [the Journal.ie website](#). The transcript is from the [Dáil Debates \(the official record of speeches in the Irish parliament\)](#). (The Dáil record uses the spelling Magdalen.)

At the end of the speech, the members of parliament give a standing ovation to some of the remaining Magdalen laundry women, attending in the public gallery. Miriam Lord in [an Irish Times article](#) describes the atmosphere.

Enda Kenny:

I begin by thanking Dr. Martin McAleese and his team for their excellent work on this report. I thank, equally, the women who met with them to assist in its compilation. I also thank the religious orders who co-operated fully with Dr. McAleese. Together, they have helped provide Ireland with a document of truth.

The Magdalen laundries have cast a long shadow over Irish life and over our sense of who we are. It is just two weeks since we received this report, the first ever detailed report into the State's involvement in the Magdalen laundries. It shines a bright and necessary light on a dark chapter of Ireland's history.

On coming to office the Government was determined to

investigate the facts of the State's involvement. The Government was adamant that these ageing and elderly women would get the compassion and the recognition for which they have fought for so long, deserved so deeply and had, until now, been so abjectly denied. For 90 years Ireland subjected these women and their experience to a profound and studied indifference. I was determined because of this that the Government, and this Dáil, would take the necessary time not just to commission the report but to study it and, having done so, to reflect on its findings. I believe that was the best way to formulate a plan and strategy that would help us make amends for the State's role in the hurt of these extraordinary women.

I am glad that so many of the women themselves agreed with that approach, and I am glad this time of reflection gave me the chance to do the most important thing of all, which was to meet personally with the Magdalen women and to sit down with them face to face to listen to their stories. It was a humbling and inspiring experience.

Today, as their Taoiseach, I am privileged to welcome some of these women to this House, many of whom have travelled long distances to be here. I welcome every one of them to their national Parliament, to Dáil Éireann. What we discuss today is their story. What we address today is how they took this country's terrible secret and made it their own, burying it and carrying it in their hearts here at home or with them to England, Canada, America and Australia on behalf of Ireland and the Irish people. From this moment on they need carry it no more, because today we take it back. Today, we acknowledge the role of the State in their ordeal.

We now know that the State itself was directly involved in over a quarter of all admissions to the Magdalen laundries, be it through the social services, reformatories, psychiatric institutions, county homes, the prison and probation service and industrial schools. We have, in fact, decided to include

all the Magdalen women in our response, regardless of how they were admitted.

Dr. McAleese set out to investigate five areas in particular: the routes by which the women entered the laundries; regulations of the workplace and State inspections; State funding of and financial assistance to the laundries; the routes by which the girls and women left the laundries; and death registrations, burials and exhumations. In all five areas there was found to be direct State involvement.

As I read this report and as I listened to these women, it struck me that for generations Ireland had created a particular portrait of itself as a good living and God fearing nation. Through this and other reports we know this flattering self-portrait is fictitious.

It would be easy to explain away all that happened and all we did with those great moral and social salves of "the culture back then", "the order of the day" and "the terrible times that were in it". By any standards it was a cruel, pitiless Ireland distinctly lacking in a quality of mercy. That much is clear, both from the pages of the report, and from the stories of the women I met. As I sat with these women as they told their stories it was clear that while every woman's story was different each of them shared a particular experience of a particular Ireland that was judgmental, intolerant, petty and prim.

In the laundries themselves some women spent week, others months, more of them years, but the thread that ran through their many stories was a palpable sense of suffocation, not just physical in that they were incarcerated but psychological, spiritual and social. Their stories were enriched by an astonishing vividness of recall of situation and circumstance.

Here are some of the things I read in the report and they said

directly to me:

The work was so hard, the regime was cruel. I felt all alone, nobody wanted me. They sent me because they thought I was going to a good school. I seen these older people beside me, I used cry myself to sleep. I was bold, I wasn't going to school. I was locked up ... I thought I would never get out. We had to sew at night ... even when we were sick. I heard a radio sometimes in the distance. We were not allowed to talk to each other. Your letters were checked. I was so short I needed a stool to put washing in. The noise was desperate. I thought I would go mad from the silence. The heat was unbelievable. I broke a cup once and had to wear it hanging around my neck for three days. I felt always tired, always wet, always humiliated. My father came for me after three months but I was too ashamed to go home. I never saw my Mam again; she died while I was in there.

The Magdalen women might have been told that they were washing away a wrong or a sin, but we know now and to our shame they were only ever scrubbing away our nation's shadow. Today, just as the State accepts its direct involvement in the Magdalen laundries, society, too, has its responsibility. I believe I speak for millions of Irish people all over the world when I say we put away these women because for too many years we put away our conscience. We swapped our personal scruples for a solid public apparatus that kept us in tune and in step with a sense of what was "proper behaviour" or the "appropriate view" according to a sort of moral code that was fostered at the time, particularly in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. We lived with the damaging idea that what was desirable and acceptable in the eyes of the church and the State was the same and interchangeable.

Is it this mindset then, this moral subservience, that gave us the social mores, the required and exclusive "values" of the time that welcomed the compliant, obedient and lucky "us" and

banished the more problematic, spirited or unlucky “them”? To our nation’s shame it must be said that if these women had managed to scale the high walls of the laundries, they would have had their work cut out for them to negotiate the height and the depth of the barricades around society’s “proper” heart. For we saw difference as something to be feared and hidden rather than embraced and celebrated. Were these our values? We can ask ourselves for a State, least of all for a republic, what is the “value” of the tacit and unchallenged decree that saw society humiliate and degrade these girls and women? What is the “value” of the ignorance and arrogance that saw us publicly call them “penitents” for their “crime” of being poor or abused or just plain unlucky enough to be already the inmate of a reformatory, or an industrial school or a psychiatric institution? We can ask ourselves as the families we were then what was worthy, what was good about that great euphemism of “putting away” our daughters, our sisters, our aunties?

Those “values”, those failures, those wrongs characterised Magdalen Ireland. Today we live in a very different Ireland with a very a different consciousness and awareness. We live in an Ireland where we have more compassion, empathy, insight and heart. We do, because at last we are learning those terrible lessons. We do, because at last we are giving up our secrets. We do, because in naming and addressing the wrong, as is happening here today, we are trying to make sure we quarantine such abject behaviour in our past and eradicate it from Ireland’s present and Ireland’s future.

In a society guided by the principles of compassion and social justice there never would have been any need for institutions such as the Magdalen laundries. The report shows that the perception that the Magdalen laundries were reserved for those who were offensively and judgmentally called “fallen women” is not based upon fact at all but upon prejudice. The women are and always were wholly blameless. Therefore, I, as Taoiseach,

on behalf of the State, the Government and our citizens, deeply regret and apologise unreservedly to all those women for the hurt that was done to them and for any stigma they suffered as a result of the time they spent in a Magdalen laundry. I hope that the publication of the McAleese report and this apology makes some contribution to the healing process.

In reflecting on this report, I have come to the view that these women deserve more than this formal apology, important though it is. I also want to put in place a process by which we can determine how best to help and support the women in their remaining years. One of the many things I have learned during my recent meetings with the Magdalen women is that their circumstances and current needs vary greatly from person to person. That is why the Government has today asked the President of the Law Reform Commission, Mr. Justice John Quirke, to undertake a three month review and to make recommendations as to the criteria that should be applied in assessing the help that the Government can provide in the areas of payments and other supports, including medical cards, psychological and counselling services and other welfare needs. The terms of reference for Mr. Justice Quirke will be published later today and I will also arrange for the representatives of the women to be fully briefed on this process. When Mr. Justice Quirke has reported, the Government will establish a fund to assist the women, based on his recommendations. I am confident that this process will enable us to provide speedy, fair and meaningful help to the women in a compassionate and non-adversarial way. I am determined that the fund will be primarily used to help the women, as is their stated and strong desire, and not for legal or administrative costs.

The McAleese report also refers to women who recounted similar experiences in other residential laundries, such as the laundry offering services to the public that operated in the

training centre at Stanhope Street, Dublin. The Government has decided that these women should be included in both the apology I have extended today and in the fund.

I am also conscious that many of the women I met last week want to see a permanent memorial established to remind us all of this dark part of our history. I agree this should be done and intend to engage directly with the representative groups and as many of the women as possible to agree on the creation of an appropriate memorial to be financed by the Government separately from the funds that are being set aside for the direct assistance for the women.

Let me conclude by again speaking directly to the women whose experiences in Magdalen laundries have negatively affected their subsequent lives. As a society, for many years we failed you. We forgot you or, if we thought of you at all, we did so in untrue and offensive stereotypes. This is a national shame for which I again say, I am deeply sorry and offer my full and heartfelt apologies.

At the conclusion of my discussions with one group of the Magdalen women one of those present sang [“Whispering Hope”](#). A line from that song stays in my mind: [“When the dark midnight is over, Watch for the breaking of day](#). Let me hope that this day and this debate heralds a new dawn for all those who feared that the dark midnight might never end.

Aung San Suu Kyi: Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, June 2012

On 20th June 2012, [Aung San Suu Kyi](#), Chairman of the Burmese National League for Democracy and member of the Burmese

parliament, finally gave this acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize her husband and sons had accepted on her behalf 21 years earlier in 1991, when she was under house arrest.

The transcript is from the [AsiaSentinel.com website](http://AsiaSentinel.com). The video can be seen on the [Nobel Prize](http://NobelPrize.com) website.

Aung San Suu Kyi

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highness, Excellencies, Distinguished members of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, Dear Friends,

Long years ago, sometimes it seems many lives ago, I was at Oxford listening to the radio program Desert Island Discs with my young son Alexander. It was a well-known program (for all I know it still continues) on which famous people from all walks of life were invited to talk about the eight discs, the one book beside the bible and the complete works of Shakespeare, and the one luxury item they would wish to have with them were they to be marooned on a desert island.

At the end of the program, which we had both enjoyed, Alexander asked me if I thought I might ever be invited to speak on Desert Island Discs. "Why not?" I responded lightly. Since he knew that in general only celebrities took part in the program he proceeded to ask, with genuine interest, for what reason I thought I might be invited. I considered this for a moment and then answered: "Perhaps because I'd have won the Nobel Prize for literature," and we both laughed. The prospect seemed pleasant but hardly probable.

(I cannot now remember why I gave that answer, perhaps because I had recently read a book by a Nobel Laureate or perhaps because the Desert Island celebrity of that day had been a famous writer.)

In 1989, when my late husband Michael Aris came to see me

during my first term of house arrest, he told me that a friend, John Finnis, had nominated me for the Nobel Peace Prize. This time also I laughed. For an instant Michael looked amazed, then he realized why I was amused. The Nobel Peace Prize? A pleasant prospect, but quite improbable! So how did I feel when I was actually awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace? The question has been put to me many times and this is surely the most appropriate occasion on which to examine what the Nobel Prize means to me and what peace means to me.

As I have said repeatedly in many an interview, I heard the news that I had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on the radio one evening. It did not altogether come as a surprise because I had been mentioned as one of the frontrunners for the prize in a number of broadcasts during the previous week. While drafting this lecture, I have tried very hard to remember what my immediate reaction to the announcement of the award had been. I think, I can no longer be sure, it was something like: "Oh, so they've decided to give it to me." It did not seem quite real because in a sense I did not feel myself to be quite real at that time.

Often during my days of house arrest it felt as though I were no longer a part of the real world. There was the house which was my world, there was the world of others who also were not free but who were together in prison as a community, and there was the world of the free; each was a different planet pursuing its own separate course in an indifferent universe. What the Nobel Peace Prize did was to draw me once again into the world of other human beings outside the isolated area in which I lived, to restore a sense of reality to me. This did not happen instantly, of course, but as the days and months went by and news of reactions to the award came over the airwaves, I began to understand the significance of the Nobel Prize. It had made me real once again; it had drawn me back into the wider human community. And what was more important, the Nobel Prize had drawn the attention of the world to the

struggle for democracy and human rights in Burma. We were not going to be forgotten.

To be forgotten. The French say that to part is to die a little. To be forgotten too is to die a little. It is to lose some of the links that anchor us to the rest of humanity. When I met Burmese migrant workers and refugees during my recent visit to Thailand, many cried out: "Don't forget us!" They meant: "don't forget our plight, don't forget to do what you can to help us, don't forget we also belong to your world." When the Nobel Committee awarded the Peace Prize to me they were recognizing that the oppressed and the isolated in Burma were also a part of the world, they were recognizing the oneness of humanity. So for me receiving the Nobel Peace Prize means personally extending my concerns for democracy and human rights beyond national borders. The Nobel Peace Prize opened up a door in my heart.

The Burmese concept of peace can be explained as the happiness arising from the cessation of factors that militate against the harmonious and the wholesome. The word *nyein-chan* translates literally as the beneficial coolness that comes when a fire is extinguished. Fires of suffering and strife are raging around the world. In my own country, hostilities have not ceased in the far north; to the west, communal violence resulting in arson and murder were taking place just several days before I started out on the journey that has brought me here today. News of atrocities in other reaches of the earth abound. Reports of hunger, disease, displacement, joblessness, poverty, injustice, discrimination, prejudice, bigotry; these are our daily fare. Everywhere there are negative forces eating away at the foundations of peace. Everywhere can be found thoughtless dissipation of material and human resources that are necessary for the conservation of harmony and happiness in our world.

The First World War represented a terrifying waste of youth and potential, a cruel squandering of the positive forces of

our planet. The poetry of that era has a special significance for me because I first read it at a time when I was the same age as many of those young men who had to face the prospect of withering before they had barely blossomed. A young American fighting with the French Foreign Legion wrote before he was killed in action in 1916 that he would meet his death: "at some disputed barricade;" "on some scarred slope of battered hill;" "at midnight in some flaming town." Youth and love and life perishing forever in senseless attempts to capture nameless, unremembered places. And for what? Nearly a century on, we have yet to find a satisfactory answer.

Are we not still guilty, if to a less violent degree, of recklessness, of improvidence with regard to our future and our humanity? War is not the only arena where peace is done to death. Wherever suffering is ignored, there will be the seeds of conflict, for suffering degrades and embitters and enrages.

A positive aspect of living in isolation was that I had ample time in which to ruminate over the meaning of words and precepts that I had known and accepted all my life. As a Buddhist, I had heard about dukha, generally translated as suffering, since I was a small child. Almost on a daily basis elderly, and sometimes not so elderly, people around me would murmur "dukha, dukha" when they suffered from aches and pains or when they met with some small, annoying mishaps. However, it was only during my years of house arrest that I got around to investigating the nature of the six great dukha. These are: to be conceived, to age, to sicken, to die, to be parted from those one loves, to be forced to live in propinquity with those one does not love. I examined each of the six great sufferings, not in a religious context but in the context of our ordinary, everyday lives. If suffering were an unavoidable part of our existence, we should try to alleviate it as far as possible in practical, earthly ways. I mulled over the effectiveness of ante- and post-natal programs and mother and childcare; of adequate facilities for the aging population; of

comprehensive health services; of compassionate nursing and hospices. I was particularly intrigued by the last two kinds of suffering: to be parted from those one loves and to be forced to live in propinquity with those one does not love. What experiences might our Lord Buddha have undergone in his own life that he had included these two states among the great sufferings? I thought of prisoners and refugees, of migrant workers and victims of human trafficking, of that great mass of the uprooted of the earth who have been torn away from their homes, parted from families and friends, forced to live out their lives among strangers who are not always welcoming.

We are fortunate to be living in an age when social welfare and humanitarian assistance are recognized not only as desirable but necessary. I am fortunate to be living in an age when the fate of prisoners of conscience anywhere has become the concern of peoples everywhere, an age when democracy and human rights are widely, even if not universally, accepted as the birthright of all. How often during my years under house arrest have I drawn strength from my favorite passages in the [preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#):

..... disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspirations of the common people,

..... it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law . . .

If I am asked why I am fighting for human rights in Burma the above passages will provide the answer. If I am asked why I am fighting for democracy in Burma, it is because I believe that democratic institutions and practices are necessary for the

guarantee of human rights.

Over the past year there have been signs that the endeavors of those who believe in democracy and human rights are beginning to bear fruit in Burma. There have been changes in a positive direction; steps towards democratization have been taken. If I advocate cautious optimism it is not because I do not have faith in the future but because I do not want to encourage blind faith. Without faith in the future, without the conviction that democratic values and fundamental human rights are not only necessary but possible for our society, our movement could not have been sustained throughout the destroying years. Some of our warriors fell at their post, some deserted us, but a dedicated core remained strong and committed. At times when I think of the years that have passed, I am amazed that so many remained staunch under the most trying circumstances. Their faith in our cause is not blind; it is based on a clear-eyed assessment of their own powers of endurance and a profound respect for the aspirations of our people.

It is because of recent changes in my country that I am with you today; and these changes have come about because of you and other lovers of freedom and justice who contributed towards a global awareness of our situation. Before continuing to speak of my country, may I speak out for our prisoners of conscience. There still remain such prisoners in Burma. It is to be feared that because the best known detainees have been released, the remainder, the unknown ones, will be forgotten. I am standing here because I was once a prisoner of conscience. As you look at me and listen to me, please remember the often repeated truth that one prisoner of conscience is one too many. Those who have not yet been freed, those who have not yet been given access to the benefits of justice in my country number much more than one. Please remember them and do whatever is possible to effect their earliest, unconditional release.

Burma is a country of many ethnic nationalities and faith in its future can be founded only on a true spirit of union. Since we achieved independence in 1948, there never has been a time when we could claim the whole country was at peace. We have not been able to develop the trust and understanding necessary to remove causes of conflict. Hopes were raised by ceasefires that were maintained from the early 1990s until 2010 when these broke down over the course of a few months. One unconsidered move can be enough to remove long-standing ceasefires. In recent months, negotiations between the government and ethnic nationality forces have been making progress. We hope that ceasefire agreements will lead to political settlements founded on the aspirations of the peoples, and the spirit of union.

My party, the National League for Democracy, and I stand ready and willing to play any role in the process of national reconciliation. The reform measures that were put into motion by President U Thein Sein's government can be sustained only with the intelligent cooperation of all internal forces: the military, our ethnic nationalities, political parties, the media, civil society organizations, the business community and, most important of all, the general public. We can say that reform is effective only if the lives of the people are improved and in this regard, the international community has a vital role to play. Development and humanitarian aid, bilateral agreements and investments should be coordinated and calibrated to ensure that these will promote social, political and economic growth that is balanced and sustainable. The potential of our country is enormous. This should be nurtured and developed to create not just a more prosperous but also a more harmonious, democratic society where our people can live in peace, security and freedom.

The peace of our world is indivisible. As long as negative forces are getting the better of positive forces anywhere, we are all at risk. It may be questioned whether all negative

forces could ever be removed. The simple answer is: "No!" It is in human nature to contain both the positive and the negative. However, it is also within human capability to work to reinforce the positive and to minimize or neutralize the negative. Absolute peace in our world is an unattainable goal. But it is one towards which we must continue to journey, our eyes fixed on it as a traveller in a desert fixes his eyes on the one guiding star that will lead him to salvation. Even if we do not achieve perfect peace on earth, because perfect peace is not of this earth, common endeavours to gain peace will unite individuals and nations in trust and friendship and help to make our human community safer and kinder.

I used the word 'kinder' after careful deliberation; I might say the careful deliberation of many years. Of the sweets of adversity, and let me say that these are not numerous, I have found the sweetest, the most precious of all, is the lesson I learnt on the value of kindness. Every kindness I received, small or big, convinced me that there could never be enough of it in our world. To be kind is to respond with sensitivity and human warmth to the hopes and needs of others. Even the briefest touch of kindness can lighten a heavy heart. Kindness can change the lives of people. Norway has shown exemplary kindness in providing a home for the displaced of the earth, offering sanctuary to those who have been cut loose from the moorings of security and freedom in their native lands.

There are refugees in all parts of the world. When I was at the Maela refugee camp in Thailand recently, I met dedicated people who were striving daily to make the lives of the inmates as free from hardship as possible. They spoke of their concern over 'donor fatigue,' which could also translate as 'compassion fatigue.' 'Donor fatigue' expresses itself precisely in the reduction of funding. 'Compassion fatigue' expresses itself less obviously in the reduction of concern. One is the consequence of the other. Can we afford to indulge in compassion fatigue? Is the cost of meeting the needs of

refugees greater than the cost that would be consequent on turning an indifferent, if not a blind, eye on their suffering? I appeal to donors the world over to fulfill the needs of these people who are in search, often it must seem to them a vain search, of refuge.

At Maela, I had valuable discussions with Thai officials responsible for the administration of Tak province where this and several other camps are situated. They acquainted me with some of the more serious problems related to refugee camps: violation of forestry laws, illegal drug use, home brewed spirits, the problems of controlling malaria, tuberculosis, dengue fever and cholera. The concerns of the administration are as legitimate as the concerns of the refugees. Host countries also deserve consideration and practical help in coping with the difficulties related to their responsibilities.

Ultimately our aim should be to create a world free from the displaced, the homeless and the hopeless, a world of which each and every corner is a true sanctuary where the inhabitants will have the freedom and the capacity to live in peace. Every thought, every word, and every action that adds to the positive and the wholesome is a contribution to peace. Each and every one of us is capable of making such a contribution. Let us join hands to try to create a peaceful world where we can sleep in security and wake in happiness.

The Nobel Committee concluded its statement of 14 October 1991 with the words: "In awarding the Nobel Peace Prize ... to Aung San Suu Kyi, the Norwegian Nobel Committee wishes to honour this woman for her unflagging efforts and to show its support for the many people throughout the world who are striving to attain democracy, human rights and ethnic conciliation by peaceful means." When I joined the democracy movement in Burma it never occurred to me that I might ever be the recipient of any prize or honour. The prize we were working for was a free, secure and just society where our people might be able to

realize their full potential. The honour lay in our endeavour. History had given us the opportunity to give of our best for a cause in which we believed. When the Nobel Committee chose to honour me, the road I had chosen of my own free will became a less lonely path to follow. For this I thank the Committee, the people of Norway and peoples all over the world whose support has strengthened my faith in the common quest for peace. Thank you.

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Aung San Suu Kyi: Address to Houses of Parliament, London, 2012

In June 2012, newly-elected MP and National League for Democracy leader [Aung San Suu Kyi](#) visited the UK. In this clip she addressed the Joint Houses of Commons and Lords at [Westminster Hall](#).

The transcript of Aung San Suu Kyi's speech is original. The video is from [Ronald Ellis's website](#). You can also view a [BBC version](#) here.

Aung San Suu Kyi

Lord Speaker, Mr Speaker, Mr Prime Minister, My Lords, and Members of the House of Commons

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you here in this magnificent hall. I am very conscious of the extraordinary

nature of this honor. I understand that there was some debate as to whether I would speak here in this splendid setting or elsewhere in the Palace of Westminster. I welcome that debate and discussion. It is what Parliament is all about.

I have just come from Downing Street. It is my first visit there, and yet for me it is a familiar scene. Not just from television broadcasts, but from my own family history. As some of you may be aware, the best-known photograph of my father, Aung San [[Wikipedia](#), [Youtube](#)], taken shortly before his assassination in 1947 was of him standing in Downing St with Clement Atlee and others with whom he had been discussing Burma's transition to independence.

He was pictured wearing a [large British military-issue greatcoat](#). This had been given to him by Jawaharlal Nehru en route to the UK to protect him against the unaccustomed cold. And I must say that not having left my tropical country for 24 years, there have been the odd moments this week when I have thought of that coat myself.

A couple of hours ago I was photographed in the same place where my father was photographed, together with Prime Minister David Cameron, and it was raining. Very British!

My father was a founding member of the Burmese Independence Army in World War 2. He took on this responsibility out of a desire to see democracy established in his homeland. It was his view that democracy was the only political system worthy of an independent nation. It is a view of course that I have long shared.

[General Slim](#), commander of the 14th Army, who led the Allied Burmese campaign, wrote about his first encounter with my father in his memoir 'Defeat until Victory.' The meeting came towards the end of the war, shortly after my father had decided that the Burmese Independence Army should join forces with the Allies. General Slim said to my father "You've only

come to us because we are winning.”

To which my father replied “It wouldn’t be much good coming to you if you weren’t!”

Slim saw in my father a practical man with whom he could do business. Six decades later, I strive to be as practical as my father was.

And so I am here, in part, to ask for practical help. Help as a friend and as an equal. In support of the reforms which can bring better lives and greater opportunities to the people of Burma who have been for so long deprived of their rights and place in the world.

As I said yesterday in Oxford, my country today stands at the start of a journey toward I hope a better future. So many hills remain to be climbed, chasms to be bridged, obstacles to be breached.

Our own determination can get us so far. The support of the people of Britain and of peoples around the world can get us so much further.

In a speech about change and reform, it is very appropriate to be in Westminster Hall, because at the heart of this process, must be the establishment of a strong, parliamentary institution in my own country.

The British Parliament is perhaps the pre-eminent symbol to oppressed peoples around the world of freedom of speech. I would imagine that some people here, to some extent, take this freedom for granted.

For us in Burma, what you take for granted, we have had to struggle for long and hard. So many people in Burma gave up so much, gave up everything in Burma’s ongoing struggle for democracy, and we are only now just beginning to see the fruits of our struggle.

Westminster has long set a shining example of realizing the people's desire to be part of their own legislative process.

In Burma our parliament is in its infancy, having been established only in March 2011. As with any new institution, especially an institution which goes against the cultural grain of 49 years of direct military rule, it will take time to find its feet and time to find its voice.

Our new legislative processes, which undoubtedly are an improvement on what has gone before, are not as transparent as they might be.

I would like to see us learn from established examples of parliamentary democracies elsewhere, so that we might deepen our own democratic standards over time.

Perhaps the most critical moment in establishing the credibility of the parliamentary process happens before parliament even opens, namely the people's participation in a free fair inclusive electoral process.

Earlier this year, I myself participated in my first election as a candidate. To this day however, I have not yet had the chance to vote freely in any election. In 1990 I was allowed to cast an advanced vote while under house arrest.

But I was prevented from contesting as a candidate for my party, the National League for Democracy. I was disqualified on the grounds that I had received help from foreign quarters. This amounted to BBC broadcasts that the authorities considered to be biased in my favour. What struck me most ahead of this year's by-elections, was how quickly people in the constituencies around Burma grasped the importance of participating in the political process. They understood first hand that the right to vote was not something given to all. They understood that they must take advantage when the opportunity arose, because they understood what it meant to have that opportunity taken away from them.

During the years that I lived in the United Kingdom, I never had the right to vote myself. But I can remember, even during my university days, that I was always trying to encourage my friends to exercise their right to vote. It was never clear to me if they followed these instructions. But it was very clear to me even then that if we do not regard the rights we have, we run the risk of seeing those rights erode away.

To those who feel themselves to be somehow above politics I want to say that politics should be seen neither as something that exists above us, nor as something that happens beneath us, but something that is integral to our everyday existence.

After my marriage, I constantly preached my gospel of political participation to my late husband, [Michael](#). I still distinctly recall the occasion when a canvasser knocked on the door of our Oxford home during an election campaign. Michael opened the door and when he saw the gentleman poised to deliver his campaign pitch, said "It's no use trying to win me over. It's my wife who decides how I should vote. She's out now. Why don't you come back later?"

The canvasser did come back later, mainly I think to see what a wife who decided how her husband should vote looked like.

It has been less than 100 days, since I together with my fellow National League for Democracy candidates was out on the campaign trail across Burma. Our by-elections were held on April 1st, and I conscious there was a certain skepticism that this would turn out to be an elaborate April Fool's joke. In fact, it turned out to be an April of new hope.

The voting process was largely free and fair and I would like to pay tribute to [President Thein](#) for this and for his commitment and his sincerity in the reform process.

As I have long said, it is through dialogue and through cooperation that political differences can best be resolved, and my own commitment to this path remains as strong as ever. Elections in Burma are very different to those in many more

established democracies such as yours. Apathy, especially amongst the young, is certainly not an issue. For me, the most encouraging and rewarding aspect of our own elections was the participation in such vast numbers and with such enthusiasm of our young people. Often our biggest challenge was in restraining the crowds of university students, schoolchildren and flag-waving toddlers who greeted us on the campaign, blocking the roads throughout the length of towns.

The day before the elections, on the way to my constituency, I passed a hillock which had been occupied by a group of children, the oldest about 10 or 11, their leader standing at the summit holding the NLD flag.

The passion of the electorate was a passion born of hunger for something long denied.

Following Burma's independence in 1948, our parliamentary system was of course based on that of the United Kingdom. The era became known in Burmese as the Parliamentary Era, a name which, by the mere necessity of its application, speaks of the unfortunate changes which followed.

Our parliamentary era, which lasted more or less until 1962, could not be said to have been perfect. But it was certainly the most progressive and promising period until now in the short history of independent Burma. It was at this time that Burma was considered the nation most likely to succeed in South East Asia. Things did not however go entirely to plan. They often don't in Burma and indeed in the rest of the world.

Now once again we have an opportunity to re-establish true democracy in Burma. It is an opportunity for which we have waited many decades. If we do not use this opportunity, if we do not get things right this time around, it may be several decades more before a similar opportunity arises again.

And so it is for this reason that I would ask Britain as one of the oldest parliamentary democracies to consider what it

can do to build the sound institutions needed to support our nascent parliamentary democracy.

The reforms taking place led by [President Thein Sein](#) are to be welcomed. But this cannot be a personality-based process. Without strong institutions this process will not be sustainable. Our legislature has much to learn about the democratization process, and I hope that Britain and other democracies can help by sharing your own experiences with us.

Thus far I have only spent a matter of minutes inside the Burmese Parliament when I took the oath as a new MP last month. I must say that I found the atmosphere rather formal. Men have to wear formal headgear. There is certainly no heckling. I would wish that over time perhaps we would reflect the liveliness and relative informality of Westminster. I am not unaware of the saying that more tears have been shed over wishes granted than over wishes denied.

Nevertheless, it is when Burma has its own satisfactory equivalent of Prime Minister's Questions that we will be able to say that parliamentary democracy has truly come of age.

I would also like to emphasize the importance of establishing requisite parliamentary control over the budget.

In all this, what is most important is to empower the people, the essential ingredient of democracy. Britain is living proof that a constitution does not need to be written down to be effective. It is more important that a constitution should be accepted by the people, that the people feel it belongs to them, that it is not an external document imposed on them.

One of the clearly stated aims of my party, the National League for Democracy, is constitutional reform. [Burma's] original constitution was drawn up following the meeting between my father [Aung San](#) and [Clement Atlee here in London in 1947](#). This constitution may not have been perfect, but at its core was a profound understanding of and respect for the

aspirations of the people.

The current constitution, drawn up by the military government in 2008, must be amended to incorporate the basic rights and aspiration of Burma's ethnic nationalities. In over sixty years of independence Burma has not yet known a time when we could say that there is peace throughout the land.

At this very moment, hostilities continue between the Kachin forces and the state armed forces in the north. In the west, communal strife has led to the loss of innocent lives and the displacement of tens of thousands of hapless citizens. Since this speech was drafted, I've also heard that hostilities have resumed in the east of the country between Shan troops and the troops of the government.

We need to address the problems that lie at the root of conflict. We need to develop a culture of political settlement through negotiation and to promote the rule of law, that all who live in Burma may enjoy the benefits of both freedom and security.

In the immediate term, we also need humanitarian support for the many peoples in the north and west, largely women and children, who have been forced to flee their homes.

As the long history of the United Kingdom shows clearly, people never lose their need to preserve their national or ethnic identity. This is something which goes beyond, which supersedes economic development. And that is why I hope that in working for Burma's national reconciliation, the international community will recognize that it is political dialogue and political settlement which must be given precedence over short term economic development.

If differences remain unresolved, if basic aspirations remain unfulfilled, there cannot be an adequate foundation for sustainable development of any kind – economic, social or political.

Britain has for so long, under successive governments, including the present Conservative /Liberal Democratic coalition, and the previous Labour government, been a staunch and unshakeable supporter of aid efforts in Burma. I hope that you can continue to help our country through targeted and coordinated development assistance. Britain has been until now the largest bilateral donor to Burma. It is in education in particular that I hope the British can play a major role. We need short-term results so that our people may see that democratization has a tangible positive impact on their lives.

Vocational training and creation of employment opportunities to help address Burma's chronic youth unemployment are particularly important. Longer term, Burma's education system is desperately weak. Reform is needed, not just of schools and the curriculum, and the training of teachers, but also of our attitude to education, which is too narrow and rigid.

I hope also that British businesses can play a role in supporting the democratic reform process, through what I have termed democracy-friendly investment. By this I mean investment that prioritizes transparency, accountability, workers' rights, and environmental sustainability. Investment particularly in labor-intensive sectors when carried out responsibly and with positive intent, can offer real benefits to our people.

One test will be whether new players will benefit from the investment coming in. Britain has played an important role in facilitating the forthcoming visit next month of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative Secretariat. I hope this will be the start of many similar initiatives in the month ahead.

It is through learning, while at Oxford, about two great British leaders, Gladstone and Disraeli, that I first developed my understanding of parliamentary democracy: that one accepts the decision of the voters; that the governing

power is gained and relinquished in accordance with the desires of the electorate, and that ultimately everyone gets another chance.

These are things taken for granted here in Britain, but in 1990, the winner of the elections was never allowed even to convene parliament. I hope that we can leave such days behind us, and that as we look forward to the future, it will be the will of the people that is reflected faithfully in Burma's changing political landscape.

This journey out of Burma has not been a sentimental pilgrimage to the past, but an exploration of the new opportunities at hand for the people of Burma. I have been struck throughout my trip by how extraordinarily warm-hearted and open the world has been to us.

To experience this first hand after so long physically separated from the world has been very moving. Countries that geographically are distant have shown that they are close to Burma in what really matters: They are close to the aspirations of the people of Burma. We are brought into proximity through our shared values, and no geographical distance, no human-made barriers can stand in our way.

During the years of my house arrest, it was not just the BBC and other broadcasting stations that kept me in touch with the world outside. It was the music of Mozart and Ravi Shankar and the biographies of men and women of different races and religions that convinced me I would never be alone in my struggle. The prizes and honors I received were not so much a personal tribute as a recognition of the basic humanity that unites one isolated person to the rest of the world.

During our dark days in the 1990s, a friend sent me a poem by [Arthur Hugh Clough](#). It begins – I think many of you will know it – Say not the Struggle Naught Availeth. I understand that Winston Churchill, one of the greatest parliamentarians this

world has known, used this poem as a plea to the United States to step in against Nazi Germany.

Today I want to make a rather different point that we can work together, combining political wisdom from East and West to bring the light of democratic values to all peoples in Burma and beyond.

I will just read the final verse. (I was advised that the whole poem was far too long)

*And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light;
In front the sun climbs slow, how slowly!
But westward, look, the land is bright!*

I would like to emphasize in conclusion that this is the most important time in Burma. That this is the time of our greatest need. And so I would ask that our friends both here in Britain and beyond participate in and support Burma's efforts towards the establishment of a truly just and democratic society

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to address the members of one of the oldest democratic institutions in the world. Thank you for letting me into your midst. My country has not entered the ranks of truly democratic societies but I am confident that we will get there before too long.

With your help.

Therapist: You know, we have to stop...

Wangari Maathai: Nobel Lecture, Oslo (2004)

[Wangari Maathai](#), the Kenyan environmental and political activist gave this Nobel Lecture in Oslo, Norway after winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004.

The video is an edited version of her speech. We recommend you read the full transcript which can be found [here on the SoftKenya website](#) with other famous speeches.

Wangari Maathai:

Majesties; Your Royal Highnesses; Honourable Members of the Norwegian Nobel Committee; Excellencies; Ladies and Gentlemen

I stand before you and the world humbled by this recognition and uplifted by the honour of being the 2004 Nobel Peace Laureate.

As the first African woman to receive this prize, I accept it on behalf of the people of Kenya and Africa, and indeed the whole world.