

**Keynote Address by H.E. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, State Counsellor,
Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar**

at the

Myanmar-Japan-U.S. Forum on Fostering Responsible Investment

**20 August 2019
Novotel Hotel, Yangon**

<Opening Salutation>

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to speak with you here today.

I believe that it is only through constructive and open dialogue that we can all better appreciate the important role that the international private sector has in ensuring sustainable development in countries such as Myanmar.

But more importantly, I believe that these exchanges help to instill in us a sense of unity; a sense of common purpose and shared confidence in the immense potential that Myanmar and our people have to offer our region, and the world.

<Brief Thanks>

I wish to convey my sincere appreciation to Ambassador Ichiro Maruyama and Ambassador Scot Marciel; to Mr Kunio Negishi, Chairperson of the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Myanmar, to U Khin Maung Win, President of the American Chamber of Commerce in Myanmar; and to the team from our own Ministry of Investment and Foreign Economic Relations led by Minister U Thaung Tun , for helping to make this forum a reality.

<A Changing Asia>

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,

We are witnessing a monumental shift in the world's centre of economic gravity; a global economic rebalancing toward Asia.

Asia is expected to exceed 50 per cent of global GDP by the year 2040. Even today, Asia accounts for almost 50 per cent of global investment. It is estimated that our region could drive up to 50 per cent of global consumption growth in the years ahead. In the next decade alone, close to one billion new middle-class consumers will rise in Asia.

Myanmar sits at the crossroads of Asia, providing a key bridge between East and West; linking India and China, and ASEAN more broadly. Myanmar seeks to capitalize upon this favourable position, connecting these rising geo-economic regions, offering a strategic trade conduit, providing a gateway to the Indian Ocean, and benefitting the country and the region accordingly.

It is in this context that we meet today.

<Myanmar is Also Changing>

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Just as Asia is changing, Myanmar too is undergoing a period of radical change amidst unprecedented growth. Our economy has expanded, with GDP rising from US\$8.9 billion in 2000 to over US\$71 billion in 2018. This places Myanmar amongst ASEAN's fastest-growing economies.

The rapid, prolonged growth we've experienced has enabled an unprecedented structural shift in Myanmar's economy. The challenge for this government, policy-makers, and for the country more broadly, is how to ensure that we take full advantage of this period of tremendous growth and dynamic change.

Guided by our new Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan, trade policy continues to be revised in line with regional and global commitments, according to liberal economic principles.

We continue to promote a more favourable, friendly and predictable investment enabling environment which offers our investors a fair and level playing field - attracting responsible investment into Myanmar that creates jobs, opens up new opportunities, sustains growth, and spreads prosperity.

The reforms we have undertaken include opening up retail and wholesale trade to foreign investment, inviting investors such as Japan's Dai-ichi Life and United States' Chubb Limited into our newly liberalised insurance sector, doing away with unnecessary regulations, launching a new online business registration portal, a new Ministry devoted to investment and foreign economic relations, an Investment Promotion Plan, our Project Bank and a new online Land Bank that will provide clarity regarding land ownership, and simplify investor access to land for industrial and commercial purposes.

These reforms are also changing the very nature of our nation's private sector. To provide just one example, 'corporate governance' is now a trending topic within the business community. Many have noted the growing push for regulatory requirements in favour of better corporate governance and greater corporate disclosure. I am very pleased to note that a great deal of this effort has been led by our Directorate of Investment and Company Administration supported by our Securities and Exchange Commission and the Central Bank.

We are confident that these and other reforms will prove fruitful in attracting increased foreign investment – particularly from Japan and the U.S.

<Challenges Remain>

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests:

Despite progress, we would do well to recognise that there are challenges to be faced; barriers and obstacles to be removed.

As difficult as it may be to believe, not all wish to see an economically vibrant, competitive, and prosperous Myanmar. Some seek to slow investment-related reform in the misguided belief that they benefit from maintaining the status quo. What for us here today are clear indicators of success are perceived as threats.

Others unwittingly deny our people's right to development, by painting a picture of Myanmar's economy that is, in many respects, a decade out of date. The myriad ways in which our economy has evolved since the early days of Myanmar's democratic reform process have, at times, been dismissed.

Today, ours is an open and competitive economy where the practices of yesteryear are no longer viable as they once were. The days of our economy being solely the domain of vast and unaccountable monopolies are no more. Those who choose to maintain a myopic focus risk being blind to the bigger picture – they deny us access to the tools and opportunities we require to sustain the vibrant and energized business and investment landscape which has emerged in Myanmar in recent years.

Structural changes enabled by greater levels of foreign investment have seen the emergence of a new breed of vibrant companies while many of the larger, more established firms have come in from the cold.

It is also true that some dinosaurs have yet to fully embrace this new reality. They must evolve or like dinosaurs they risk extinction.

As a democratically elected, civilian government we cannot unlock our country's full potential overnight, nor stand alone. We must join forces with all those who see in Myanmar a country rich in both opportunity and potential – we must also partner those who demonstrate a deep understanding of the constraints –political, economic and social.

In recent years, we have been striving to turn small steps towards our goal of peace and prosperity for all our people into larger strides. We invite our friends to be our partners in this endeavor.

<Why We Need the Private Sector>

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests:

We welcome investors - from Japan, from the U.S., and further afield as partners in our endeavour as we pursue the vision outlined within our Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan; a more prosperous, peaceful and democratic Myanmar.

<Japan Support>

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests:

Japan is a steadfast ally - our responsible and reliable friend from the East. We value your steady hand. Through good times and bad, Japan has supported Myanmar, and it is warmly appreciated.

Now, linked by daily direct flights, Japanese investors maintain a robust presence in Myanmar, bringing with them a deep understanding of this country, its history and our people.

Thanks to Japan, the Thilawa Special Economic Zone near Yangon is pulsating with activity. Some 108 companies have invested in the Thilawa SEZ as of June this year; over half of whom are Japanese. Suzuki Motor Company is leading the pack with a facility producing a range of passenger cars and small trucks. I also understand that Japanese probiotic drink manufacturer Yakult has commenced operations in Thilawa earlier this month.

Well-known Japanese automobile manufacturer Toyota recently announced its intention to invest in an assembly plant within the Thilawa SEZ, an investment that promises to grow and bring with it a range of auxiliary industries.

Japanese retailer Aeon Co too has invested in our retail sector.

Major Japanese investments in our energy sector are also bearing fruit, with access to electricity climbing from 55.6% in 2016 to 69.8% in 2017!

Some may even know that it was in partnership with Japan's Hokkaido University and Myanmar Aerospace Engineering University that we were able to launch our first satellite - MyanmarSat2 - which will provide greatly improved communications throughout the country including remote areas.

Japan—you are welcome.

<U.S. support>

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests:

I note the presence of Ms Manisha Singh, Assistant Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs here today. A warm welcome to you and the U.S. investor community.

We appreciate that the United States is committed to supporting private sector-led growth in Myanmar.

To offer just a snapshot of how U.S. investment is supporting Myanmar's development –thanks to energy capabilities, technologies and solutions provided by General Electric, we are gradually addressing one of our biggest barriers to investment, that is, ensuring a stable supply of electricity to our industries, commercial sites and residences.

Another well-known U.S. brand, Chevron Corporation, through its local subsidiary, has been working with partners to spur economic growth and development for over twenty years.

The Ford Motorcar Company is one of several automobile manufacturers to have opened an assembly plant here in recent years, providing a direct investment into Myanmar's economy, creating new jobs serving our expanding domestic car market.

To offer another example, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation committed over US\$ 250 million through Apollo Towers, one of Myanmar's largest telecom tower companies, to finance the construction of over 1,800 telecommunications towers to satisfy Myanmar's growing demand for modern communications infrastructure.

I also understand that OPIC has very recently greenlighted a US\$ 8 million investment to Proximity Finance to increase lending to entrepreneurs and smallholder farmers, many of whom are women, whose productivity is often limited by their inability to invest in their businesses. I am also pleased to note that Proximity Finance's parent company, Proximity Designs, was recently listed as one of the worlds 50 best workplaces for innovators.

U.S. investors are showing a keen interest in other areas such as banking and finance, and education and we very much look forward to welcoming them.

<Closing>

In Myanmar we have a common saying:

"A big tree can host 10,000 birds."

Some may question 'What if the tree falls?'

I agree that it would be far better to create and nurture a forest to make assurances doubly sure. And so, let the presence of Japanese and U.S. investors here belike our teak, strong, sturdy and durable.

Clearly, there are still many daunting challenges. We seek your active support to overcome them.

Your presence in Myanmar provides balance and stability just as the transfer of your technology, skills and standards will help propel our nation forward.

For those considering to invest here, you will find a welcome doormat.

For those already here, please be assured that we are committed to seeing your investment thrive and prosper.

Thank you.

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