

For Immediate Release

Asialink to host ASEAN regional dialogue in Yangon, Myanmar

Australian-based Asialink will host a first-of-its-kind dialogue in Yangon, Myanmar from 2nd - 4th February 2012. *The Conversations* are Asialink's signature Track II diplomacy initiative.

More than 40 delegates from 12 countries will attend. Visiting nations are Australia, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Delegates come from a range of different sectors, including business, government, academia and the media.

"The Conversations are designed to facilitate a relaxed and very frank exchange of ideas," says Asialink International Director Professor Tony Milner.

"The event brings together key Australians and ASEAN representatives to discuss the changing dynamics of this region," he said. "In the past we've met in Malaysia, Cambodia and Vietnam as well as Australia. We're delighted again to be able to help Australians engage with some of the most influential people in the region."

The talks come in the context of a wave of democratic reform in Myanmar. The opposition National League for Democracy, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, is widely anticipated to contest elections this year and more than 200 political prisoners have been released from detention.

In the midst of these developments, ASEAN members have approved the country's bid for ASEAN chair in 2014.

In June 2011 Australian Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd visited Myanmar to discuss ways Australia can support positive reform and development in one of the poorest countries in Southeast Asia. This was the first visit by an Australian Foreign Minister in almost ten years. On 30 January this year he explained that he is now interested to "determine the extent to which the Burmese government will be prepared to open up."

United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Burma in December 2011 to encourage further reform, the first visit by a Secretary of State in more than fifty years.

Asialink has organised this pioneering event in cooperation with the recently reorganised Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies (Myanmar ISIS).

Asialink CEO Jenny McGregor says Myanmar is indicating a real willingness to “take its place at the table.”

She adds: “This is an exciting time in the recent history of Myanmar and we are especially pleased that the Myanmar ISIS leadership has brought together an influential and diverse group from the host country, and have expressed a determination to tackle difficult issues in our meetings”, she said.

ENDS

The Conversations are held under the **Chatham House Rule**. For details on the specifics of the Rule, please visit:
<http://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/chathamhouserule>

Asialink International Director **Professor Tony Milner** and Asialink CEO **Jenny McGregor** are available for comment.

Selected **Conversations participants** may also be available for comment from Myanmar.

Photographs, selected audio and video from the event will be available on request.

All media enquiries:

Please contact Will McCallum on w.mccallum@asialink.unimelb.edu.au or phone +61 420 763 047

About the Conversations

The Asialink Conversations are a leading Track II dialogue bringing together influential participants from across the ten countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and from Australia to help solve political, social and economic issues of common concern. An informed dialogue, held outside government, the Conversations contribute to ASEAN-Australia future planning in a changing global landscape.

About Asialink

Asialink is one of Australia’s leading centres for the promotion of public understanding of the countries of Asia and of Australia’s role in the region. Asialink excels in “soft diplomacy”, delivering high-level forums, international collaborations, leadership training, education, community health and cultural programs in Australia and Asia.

Asialink is a non-academic centre of The University of Melbourne and an initiative of the Myer Foundation.

For more information please visit www.asialink.unimelb.edu.au