

dramatically for the better in Burma over the past year. After all, elections were held last fall, a “new” regime took office earlier this year, and Aung San Suu Kyi was freed. However, as our experience with Burma has taught us, things there usually require a closer look.

First, the November elections took place without the benefit of international election monitors, and no reputable observers viewed the elections as free or fair. This was in large part because the National League for Democracy—Suu Kyi’s party and the winner overwhelmingly of the last free elections in the country in 1990—was effectively banned by the junta and couldn’t participate in the election. There were restrictions placed on how other political parties could form and campaign. No criticism of the junta was permitted. And the results were unsurprising: the regime’s handpicked candidates won big and the democratic opposition was largely sidelined.

Second, the “new” regime appears to be essentially the junta with only the thinnest democratic veneer. The Constitution, which places great power in the hands of the military, cannot be amended without the blessing of the armed forces. Furthermore, those in parliament are limited in how they can criticize the regime.

The only legitimately good news was Suu Kyi’s release. Yet the extent of her freedom to travel remains an open question. Moreover, despite her release, nearly 2,000 other political prisoners remain behind bars in Burma; they are no better off than before. Neither are the hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced persons who are without a home due to the repressive policies of the junta.

That the political situation in Burma remains largely unchanged is also reflected in the defection this summer of two Burmese diplomats. One of them was the Burmese Deputy Chief of Mission here in Washington. He wrote a letter to the Secretary of State requesting political asylum and, according to press reports, in the letter, he stated as follows:

My efforts to improve bilateral ties have been continually rejected and resulted in my being deemed dangerous by the government. Because of this, I am also convinced and live in fear that I will be prosecuted for my actions, efforts, and beliefs when I return to Naypyidaw after completing my tour of duty here. The truth is that senior military officials are consolidating their grip on power and seeking to stamp out the voices of those seeking democracy, human rights, and individual liberties.

These words do not come from a Western government or an NGO; they come from a senior Burmese diplomat. His words make clear that the democratic trappings of the “new” regime are in many ways just a façade.

Finally, it is worth noting that there remain important security considerations that must be addressed before ending sanctions. The junta’s increasingly close bilateral military relation-

ship with North Korea, in particular, is a source of much concern.

I am hopeful that the time will soon come when sanctions against the Burmese government will no longer be needed; that like South Africa in the early 1990s, the people of Burma will be able to free themselves from their own government. However, as evidenced in the Deputy Chief of Mission’s letter, the Burmese junta appears to maintain an iron grip on its people, and continues to carry out a foreign policy that is inimical to U.S. interests. The United States must continue to deny this regime the legitimacy it craves by continuing sanctions, and these sanctions must remain in place until true democratic reform comes to the people of Burma.

HUNGER ACTION MONTH

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, this past month we recognized Hunger Action Month, a time for all Americans to focus on the problem of hunger in our communities. As we begin the month of October, we must remember that this is a year-round reality for many individuals and families around the country and that our efforts to eradicate this problem must continue.

Our Nation continues to face both a 9.1-percent unemployment rate, as well as a 15.1-percent poverty rate. Everyone has been touched in some way by this challenging economy. Many of our friends, neighbors and family members still might be struggling in ways that they never imagined with less money to spend and tough choices to make. Thankfully, there have been a number of community assistance organizations that have been able to step up and help out.

Many of these are local food banks and soup kitchens that are challenged to find resourceful ways to do more with less in order to provide services to those in need in their communities. One such organization that is still making a significant difference is the Arlington Food Assistance Center, AFAC. For over 20 years the AFAC has partnered with local churches, schools and social service agencies to assist over 1,200 families weekly with their basic food needs. Last year the AFAC was able to distribute over 2.3 million pounds of food directly to Arlington community residents. Community support of AFAC and thousands of organizations like it across the country is integral to their ability to provide the necessary services to those most in need. We must continue to give our support.

I hope my colleagues will join me in recognizing the Arlington Food Assistance Center and the many other organizations like it, as well as the importance of our commitment to addressing the problem of hunger across the Nation.

CUBA

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD an article highlighting the Castro regime’s continued abuse of the Cuban people as they organize efforts to create a freer Cuba. The people being held unjustly and abused in Cuban prisons—as well as those being intimidated and repressed outside of prison—need the continued support of America.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Wall Street Journal, Oct. 3, 2011]

AMERICA’S: CUBA’S REPRESSION ESCALATES

(By Mary Anastasia O’Grady)

Former New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson returned home from an attempted hostage-rescue mission to Cuba last month empty-handed and “still scratching [his] head” as to why the Castro regime double-crossed him. What is truly baffling is why Mr. Richardson expected anything different from a dictatorship operating in extreme-repression mode.

In a Sept. 14 interview with CNN’s Wolf Blitzer, Mr. Richardson said he had been invited to the island to discuss the release of U.S. Agency for International Development contractor Alan Gross. Mr. Gross was arrested in December 2009 and is serving a 15-year sentence.

Mr. Richardson admitted that he got stiffed by Cuba’s “foreign ministry, which a lot of the people there I know and have been friends” with. What he could not grasp is why those “friends”—a strange designation for individuals who might one day be hauled before an international human-rights tribunal—don’t appreciate the Obama administration’s outreach. Yes, they are “hardliners,” he admitted, but they ought to understand that the White House has been bending over backward to get along.

Actually they do understand, and that’s why they treated him so badly.

Mr. Richardson told Mr. Blitzer that he was “flabbergasted” when, after a “delightful” three-hour lunch discussing how U.S.-Cuba relations might be improved—including, he told me by phone Friday, the possibility of removing the country from the list of state sponsors of terrorism after the release of Mr. Gross—the foreign minister “slammed me three ways: one, no seeing Alan Gross; no getting him out; and no seeing Raul Castro.”

What happened was very predictable. The “loosened travel restrictions” and increased “remittances [from] Cuban-Americans” that Mr. Richardson cited as signs of Mr. Obama’s willingness to deal are read as weakness by the bullying regime. It has something, i.e., somebody, the U.S. wants back very badly, and the administration acts as if it is powerless. Why should Castro deal?

Mr. Richardson did even less for Cuba’s dissidents. One Richardson pearl of wisdom, shared on CNN, was that Cuba’s “human-rights situation has improved.” In fact, human rights in Cuba are rapidly deteriorating. To claim otherwise is to abandon the island’s brave democrats when they most need international solidarity.

Ask Sonia Garro, pictured in the nearby photo (See accompanying photo—WSJ October 3, 2011) . . . For years Ms. Garro has denounced the regime’s discrimination against Afro-Cubans. Despite her own poverty, in 2007 she created a recreation center in her home for poor, unsupervised children, according to a report by an independent Cuban