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BAUCUS HAILS SENATE RENEWAL OF SANCTIONS AGAINST BURMA

Washington, DC – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) today applauded the Senate’s renewal of trade sanctions against Burma. The renewal came in response to the Burmese government’s continued human rights violations and suppression of political opposition. Several other nations, including Canada, Australia and the members of the European Union have also imposed sanctions. Chairman Baucus issued and entered into the record the following statement yesterday urging the Senate to renew the import sanctions, which include a comprehensive ban on products of Burmese origin:

Nelson Mandela once said, “There is no easy walk to freedom anywhere.”

The walk to freedom for the Burmese people has certainly not been easy, and it is far from complete. The military-controlled government that rules Burma continues to maintain its tight grip over the Burmese people through fear, intimidation and violence.

According to the State Department, over the last year the Burmese regime has “severely restricted and frequently violated freedoms of assembly, expression, association, movement and religion.” And in furthering its hold over Burmese society, the regime has committed crimes of murder, abduction, rape, torture, recruitment of child soldiers and forced labor – all with impunity.

In recent months, however, we have seen some encouraging steps. Last November, the Burmese regime released Aung San Suu Kyi, the Burmese democracy leader and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, after a long and unjustified incarceration. The regime has made some modest movement towards dialogue with the opposition.

But it is far too soon to think that the walk to freedom has succeeded. Just two months after releasing Aung San Suu Kyi, the regime dissolved the National League for Democracy, which has sought to bring democracy to Burma for more than 20 years. And the regime keeps more than two thousand political prisoners in detention.

As Aung San Suu Kyi herself has said, “If my people are not free, how can you say I’m free? We are none of us free.”

In order to help the Burmese people on their march to freedom, I urge my colleagues to extend our sanctions against Burmese imports for another year.

Several of our trading partners — including the European Union, Canada, and Australia — have joined us in imposing trade and investment sanctions against Burma. These sanctions have put significant pressure on the Burmese leadership.

So let us extend the import sanctions on Burma for another year, and let us do our part to help the Burmese people complete their long walk to freedom.

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