

AGTA news

American Gem Trade Association

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Ban on Burmese Gemstones Lifted, Task Force Visits Myanmar



U.S. delegation in a meeting of gemstone miners representing the Mogok chapter of the Myanmar Jewellery and Gemstone Entrepreneurs Association (MGJEA).

October 24, 2016 - Dallas, TX -- Responding to the concerns of its members regarding U.S. sanctions and perceptions of the Myanmar Gem and Jade sectors, the American Gem Trade Association (AGTA) developed a coalition of the U.S. Jewelry Industry to make a scoping mission to Myanmar. This mission was similar to past AGTA efforts regarding past concerns about Tanzanite.

Responding to sentiments within Congress and the U.S. Department of State, the AGTA was encouraged by the State Department to form a task force and travel to Myanmar on a scoping mission to examine firsthand the conditions within the gemstone trading and mining community. The AGTA led the first jewelry industry effort to provide guidance for the newly formed government as to how to proceed in drafting new mining legislation that will benefit both the Burmese community of miners and dealers and align with the concepts of a transparent and beneficial supply chain mandated by the AGTA Code of Ethics and best

practices of Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Myanmar Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI).

The delegation, led by AGTA President Jeffrey Bilgore, included AGTA CEO Douglas Hucker; Jewelers of America's President and CEO Dave Bonaparte; Timothy Haake, JA's senior counsel; Dr. James Shigley, Distinguished Research Fellow of the Gemological Institute of America; and representatives from Inle Advisory Group, Myanmar business development specialists.

Visits by the group included commercial centers of Yangon and Mandalay, Nay Pyi Taw, the nation's seat of government, and Mogok, the trading center and legendary source of Myanmar's finest gemstones. The delegation conferred with Members of Parliament, Ministers for Natural Resources, Commerce, and Labor, local dealers, members of Myanmar's civil society community and both large scale and artisanal miners.

"We were very pleased with the welcome we got from the entire community in Myanmar," said Bilgore. "Our visits were very enlightening and encouraging."

"Our goal in traveling to Myanmar is to demonstrate that the gem sector in Myanmar is as worthy as any in the world, and that responsible commerce can only help all of us improve and make democracy stronger," says Bilgore.

After some fifty years of oppressive military rule the new democratically-elected government is re-writing and refining regulations governing the gemstones sector and openly expressed an eagerness to develop a mine-to-market supply chain that is in accordance with globally accepted best practices.

"The Myanmar people have emerged into a new order of democratic governance," says Hucker, "and with that comes the daunting task of writing new legislation and reforming practices that benefit all of the people of Myanmar, and at the same time encourages growth in commerce from the global jewelry community. They were very welcoming of the efforts made by the U.S. business community to engage with them in this process and we will continue to provide guidance and recommendations to help them be successful in their efforts."

On October 7th, 2016, President Obama signed an Executive Order, effectively removing all sanctions on the importation of gemstones from Myanmar. It is now legal to import all gemstones, including ruby and jadeite, from Myanmar.



AGTA President Jeffrey Bilgore and CEO Doug Hucker emerge from HP Mine, one of the largest producing ruby mines in Mogok.

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The American Gem Trade Association (AGTA) is a not-for-profit Association serving the natural colored gemstone and cultured pearl industry since 1981. The AGTA serves the industry as "The Authority in Color" and has its headquarter office in Dallas, Texas. Visit www.agta.org for more information.