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New Report Documents Huge Increase in Burma Political Prisoners, In Defiance of UN Security Council

Human Rights Organizations Call for the UN Secretary-General to Secure Release of All Prisoners in Burma by December

(Bangkok, Washington, DC and New York) Two human rights organizations released a new report today detailing that the number of political prisoners held by Burma's military junta has nearly doubled over the past year even after the UN Security Council demanded in October 2007 that the junta release all political prisoners, including the world's only imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize recipient Aung San Suu Kyi.

The report, entitled "The Future in the Dark: the Massive Increase in Burma's Political Prisoners", was jointly produced by the Thailand-based Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) (AAPP) and the United States Campaign for Burma (USCB), based in Washington, DC.

The report is slated for release on 6 October 2008, just after the first anniversary of the Burmese junta's crackdown on Burmese Buddhist monks' "Saffron Revolution". During the crackdown, the junta beat, tortured, imprisoned, or shot many monks who were marching peacefully in the streets and calling for an end to military dictatorship. Many everyday people and monks -- an estimated over 100 -- were killed during the brutal crackdown. The release of the report is coincide with the launch of Dignity and Justice for Detainees Initiative, which aims to increase the pressure on States, parliaments, judiciaries, and other relevant institutions to abolish, or at least reduce, arbitrary and unlawful detention, by the office of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Along with the report (attached), the AAPP and the USCB today sent an open letter to the United Nations Secretary-General and the main bodies of the UN, calling on the world body to obtain the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners in Burma. The letter is addressed to the Presidents of the General Assembly, and the Human Rights Council, Members of the Security Council, as well as UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and newly appointed Human Rights Commissioner Navi Pillay.

The report states that in June 2007 the United Nations reported that there were 1,192 political prisoners in Burma. Now, there are at least 2,123 political prisoners in Burma -- a 78% increase. About 700-900 of them were arrested during the peaceful protests in August and September last year. On September 23, the regime announced that it had released over 9,000 prisoners from various prisons, but only 10 political prisoners were included. U Win Htein, senior assistant to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was released on 23 September and rearrested the next day. Almost all of the 2,100 political prisoners remain incarcerated.

"By nearly doubling the number of political prisoners, the Burmese regime is directly defying the United Nations, including the UN Security Council," said Bo Kyi, a former political prisoner and a co-founder of the AAPP. "Yet, the UN is paralyzed because the Secretary-General is still reluctant to call on China to work together with other members of the Security Council to secure the release of all prisoners by the end of December."

The Secretary-General is expected to travel to Burma at the end of December, and the report authors are calling on him to arrange the release of all political prisoners in Burma by the conclusion of his trip, including Aung San Suu Kyi.

"The Secretary-General has a clear mandate from the Security Council, the General Assembly, and the Human Rights Council to secure the release of all political prisoners in Burma," added Aung Din, a former political prisoner and executive director of USCB. "It is time for Ban Ki-moon to show his effective leadership and moral authority, vested in him by the 192 members of the United Nations. He must make Burma's dictator Than Shwe realize that freeing all political prisoners by the end of December is a necessary first step toward national reconciliation and democratization."

On 11 October 2007, the UN Security Council issued a Presidential Statement that demanded the release of all political prisoners: "emphasizes the importance of the early release of all political prisoners and remaining detainees."

Besides the UN Security Council, the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council have also called for the release of all political prisoners in Burma.

Since 1991, the UN General Assembly has adopted resolutions on Burma calling for the release of all political prisoners. In February 2008, the UNGA said the regime should "release without delay those who have been arbitrarily arrested and detained, as well as political prisoners, immediately and unconditionally, including the leaders of the National League for Democracy, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and U Tin Oo, the leaders of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, Khun Htun Oo, and other Shan leaders, and the "88 Generation" students' group leaders Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi."

On December 2007, the UN Human Rights Council called on the regime to "release all political detainees in Myanmar, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi."

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