

Open letter to the Burmese Ambassador in Sri Lanka: Stop the repression of peaceful dissent in Burma

3rd October 2007

H E Tin Oo Lwin,
Ambassador for Myanmar,
Embassy of the Union of Myanmar,
4A Rosmead Avenue,
Colombo.
00700

Your Excellency,

As religious groups, academics, media, civil society, political groups and individuals in Sri Lanka, we express our fullest support towards the peaceful protests initiated in your country by Buddhist Monks and ordinary citizens on economic burdens heaped on them, restrictions on democratic freedoms, and repression of independent media including blockage of internet and in particular brutal suppression of democratic and legitimate dissent.

Sri Lanka is a country where different faith traditions, including Buddhism teaches and promotes human rights, justice, democracy and peace, and we are inspired and commend the leadership shown by the Buddhist clergy in Myanmar to foster similar ideals, through peaceful means, even in the face of violent and brutal repression.

We watched in horror the inhuman treatment meted out to Buddhist clergy and Burmese peoples, which has resulted in many deaths, injuries and hundreds of arrests and detentions in unknown places and conditions. We join our Burmese brothers and sisters and people around the world, in condemning in the strongest possible terms this brutal suppression.

We are also shocked to learn that Aung San Suu Kyi, the pro-democracy leader and Nobel Peace Laureate, who has been under house arrest for 15 years have been sent to high-security Insein Prison for detention, inspite of almost universal calls by the people around the world and world leaders to release her.

In 1988 at a similar mass demonstration, your government responded by brutally firing into the crowd – leading to about 3,000 killed. The 1990 election where the opposition National League for Democracy won the most seats was not upheld, and the military continued its undemocratic rule to the present. Since then there have been tremendous cases of violence against women, human rights defenders, media personnel and cases of political dissidents being harassed, tortured, killed, or disappeared. Currently there are more than 3 million refugees and asylum seekers around the world from Myanmar – from the massive massacre in 1990 onward – not to mention Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), including 27,000 in the Karen State alone. As a result recent crackdown millions could will flee Myanmar as refugees making them vulnerable to further human rights abuses.

In these circumstances, dissent is inevitable. And dissent needs to be treated with respect and dignity, and the way to address these is to address the causes that lead upto these agitations.

We demand that your government immediately halt the brutal suppression of peaceful dissent, release all political prisoners including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and those arrested last week, restore democratic rights of the people and recognize the results of the democratic Election that chose Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to lead your country.

We also call on your government to cooperate with the actions recommended and decided by the United Nations to resolve the crisis in Burma.

Sincerely yours,

Organizations:

1. Association of the Family Members of the Disappeared (AFMD), Colombo
2. Centre for Peace Building and Reconciliation (Cpbr), Colombo
3. Centre for Peoples Dialogue, Negombo
4. Centre for Development Alternatives, Kandy
5. Christian Alliance for Social Action (CASA), Colombo
6. Community Trust Fund (CTF), Puttlam
7. Families of the Disappeared (FOD), Katunayake
8. Friends of the Third World, Negombo
9. Free Media Movement (FMM), Colombo
10. Free Trade Union Centre, Colombo
11. Human Development Organization (HDO), Kandy
12. INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre, Colombo
13. International Friends for Global Peace, Colombo
14. Just and Free Society of Uva Province, Badulla
15. Law & Society Trust (LST), Colombo
16. Meepura publications, Negombo
17. Mothers and Daughters of Lanka
18. Muslim Information Centre (MIC), Colombo
19. National Anto War Front, Colombo
20. Right to Life Centre, Katunayake
21. United Socialist Party (USP), Colombo
22. Women's Resource Centre, Kurunegela

Individuals:

23. Dishani Jayaweera, Attorney-at Law, CPBR
24. Dr. Anita Nesiya, National Peace Council, Sri Lanka
25. Dr. Devanesan Nesiya, Centre for Policy Alternatives, Sri Lanka
26. Dr. Suppiramaniam Nanthikesan, UNDP New York
27. Dr. Vasuki Nesiya, ICTJ, New York
28. Kumanan Nesiya, New Cork
29. Prof. Kumar David, Colombo
30. Prof. Jayantha Senevrtane, University of Kelaniya
31. Rev. Fr. Dominic Saminathan, Catholic Priest, Batticaloa
32. Rev. Fr. Terrence Fernendo, Catholic Priest, St. Anne's Church, Palangatura, Kochchikade
33. Rukshana S Nanayakkara, Transparency International Sri Lanka
34. Vaseeharan Nesiya, Australia