



PRESS RELEASE

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Burma: Ongoing Protests Signal a Time to Unite

ARTICLE 19, Global Campaign for Free Expression, applauds UK Prime Minister, Gordon Brown's statement of 2 September pledging proactive dialogue on Burma. In the light of the Burmese junta's continued repression of peaceful protests, ARTICLE 19 calls on the international community to unite with the Burmese people in the spirit of Aung San Suu Kyi by taking peaceful action towards the restoration of freedom of expression and democracy in Burma.

"The significant protests that have been taking place in Burma over the past 16 days signal a cry for freedom by the Burmese people. The international community must respond by uniting to voice its concerns voice loudly and resolutely in favour of the people of Burma" said Dr. Agnès Callamard, Executive Director. "Gordon Brown's pledges are noteworthy but they must be followed by action taken collectively with the rest of the international community."

Since 19 August 2007, hundreds of Burmese people have taken to the streets daily to protest against fuel price hikes. More than 150 peaceful protestors have been detained, most of whom remain in detention, and face up to 20-year jail terms. They include 13 from among those who led the 1988 protests and it is feared that these 13 may face especially harsh treatment at the hands of a junta notorious for its practice of torture. Remarkably, the protests have continued, despite the ongoing activities of State sponsored thugs, a testament to the determination of the protesters to be heard, whatever the costs.

In a strongly worded statement issued on 2 September 2007, Gordon Brown condemned the "Burmese government's violent suppression of peaceful demonstrations" and called upon the Burmese authorities to "release immediately all those detained merely for protesting at the hardship imposed on them by the government's economic mismanagement and failure to uphold fundamental human rights". He pledged to raise the issue of Burma personally with his counterparts around the world and confirmed his support for discussions on Burma at the UN Security Council and among EU foreign ministers when they meet later this week. ARTICLE 19 together with organisations such as the Burma UK Campaign, have long campaigned for Western governments to commit to discussing Burma with governments such as China, India and Russia who hold some influence over the Burmese Junta.

Brown's statement coincided with the completion of the first of seven stages of the Burmese government's "roadmap to democracy", which began in 1993. Stage one, just producing guidelines for a new constitution, has taken 14 years to complete and, during this time, respect for freedom of expression and other key democratic rights in Burma, then among the worst in the world, has further deteriorated. On 19 August, a blackout on any discussion of the fuel price hike was imposed on local media and, when this was lifted on 29 August, a warning was issued to the effect that coverage of fuel hike must be "positive". Those journalists who have been brave enough to even observe the protests have allegedly been intimidated and threatened by police.

ARTICLE 19 urges Brown and other leaders to take effective action to press for respect for all human rights in Burma, including freedom of expression, and to call for the release of all political prisoners, including ARTICLE 19 honorary board member, Aung San Suu Kyi.

NOTES TO EDITORS

- For more information, please contact Catrina Pickering, Programme Officer, catrina@article19.org, +44 20 7278 9292.
- For the text of Gordon Brown's statement see: http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/statements/statements_gordon_brown.html
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees freedom of expression.