

11 August 2009

To the members of the Security Council:

Austria	France	Turkey
Burkina Faso	Japan	Uganda
China	Libyan	United Kingdom
Costa Rica	Mexico	United States
Croatia	Russia	Viet Nam

We, the undersigned Nobel Laureates, are writing to urge you to act now for the people of Burma. The decades-long struggle to end atrocities and repression and bring about national reconciliation and democracy in Burma is at a particularly critical moment. The nonviolent efforts to bring about the change so desperately needed require the full support of the United Nations Security Council.

At the limitless discretion of Burma's brutal military regime, Burma's democratic leader, our sister Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, has again been found guilty on trumped up charges and sentenced to 18 more months of detention. Already under house arrest for 13 of the past 19 years, she was transferred to the Insein prison in early May on charges of violating the terms of her house arrest after an American man snuck, uninvited, into her compound. Due to have been released from house arrest on 24 May 2009, this new sentence is clearly the latest in the military government's determined efforts to keep her imprisoned throughout the period leading up to elections scheduled for 2010.

Meanwhile, while the international community is focused on the outcome of Aung San Suu Kyi's trial, the Burmese military continues to unleash more violence on its civilians. In June, the army stepped up its military offensive in eastern Burma, including dropping mortar shells into an internally displaced persons camp. This action forced over 4,000 villagers—mostly women and children—to flee for their lives into Thailand.

Such atrocities are not new in Burma. In the last fifteen years, the Burmese military has destroyed more than 3,330 villages in a systematic campaign to crush Burma's ethnic nationalities as it continues efforts to wipe out rebel movements. It has forcibly recruited tens of thousands of child soldiers and enslaved civilians to work as human minesweepers. Hundreds of women in the Shan state alone have been raped over a five-year period. These, and other crimes against humanity, continue to go unprosecuted.

Those seeking democratic change in Burma also are the recipients of the military's oppression. While she is the country's most prominent political prisoner, Aung San Suu Kyi is not alone. Over 2100 democracy activists are presently in Burmese prisons.

A new report released on May 21 by the International Human Rights Clinic at Harvard Law School was commissioned by Judge Richard Goldstone (South Africa), Judge Patricia Wald (United States), Judge Pedro Nikken (Venezuela), Judge Ganzorig Gombosuren (Mongolia), and Sir Geoffrey Nice (United Kingdom) details such crimes and other human rights violations in Burma, and makes a compelling case for an International Criminal Court (ICC) investigation. The Harvard report, Crimes in Burma, calls for a UN Security Council Commission of Inquiry into crimes against humanity in Burma as the starting point. Importantly, the report draws upon investigations already conducted by the United Nations, human rights bodies and many Burmese organizations. Adding his voice to a growing chorus, former UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights, Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, strongly supported the call for a UN Security Council Commission of Inquiry in an opinion piece published by The New York Times on May 27.

The Security Council has made a commitment to ending impunity for crimes in a series of resolutions, including Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on women, peace and security, Resolution 1612 on Children and Armed Conflict, and Resolution 1674 on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. It's time to make good on those commitments in the case of Burma.

Today, as we see yet another example of gross injustice committed by the Burmese regime, we call on the members of the UN Security Council to pass a Resolution creating a Commission of Inquiry into the crimes against humanity in Burma. It is critical that the regime be held accountable for its crimes and that the full extent of its brutality be investigated. We believe it is time to end impunity for the military's crimes. Please honor the courage of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi – and her compatriots -- by taking strong action against the generals who continue to hold Burma hostage.

Sincerely,

Mairead Maguire

Betty Williams

Rigoberta Menchu Tum

Jody Williams

Shirin Ebadi

President Jose Ramos Horta

The Dalai Lama

President Mikhail Gorbachev

Wangari Maathai

John Hume

President Kim Dae-jung

Adolfo Perez Esquivel

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Elie Wiesel