

1-15 September 2007

China voices support for Myanmar's democracy process

Xinhua News Service - 13 September 2007

China whole-heartedly hopes that Myanmar will push forward a democracy process that is appropriate for the country, Chinese State Councilor Tang Jiaxuan said on Thursday.

Tang said China, as a friendly neighbor of Myanmar, sincerely hoped Myanmar would restore internal stability as soon as possible, properly handle issues and actively promote national reconciliation.

Tang made the remarks as he met with the special envoy of Myanmar's head of state, Than Shwe, in Zhongnanhai, the headquarters of the Chinese government.

During his meeting with U Nyan Win, Myanmar Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tang said the democracy process was in the fundamental interests of the people of Myanmar and conducive to regional peace, stability and development.

U Nyan Win briefed Tang on the latest situation in his country. His government was concentrated on maintaining internal stability, reinforcing national solidarity and promoting economic development. Myanmar will continue to push forward the democracy process according to established principles.

Myanmar set out on Monday the principles of drafting a new constitution, under which the country will elect a parliament consisting of multiple political parties and introduce a market economy.

Phone service cut off at headquarters of Myanmar's main opposition party

Associated Press - September 12, 2007

YANGON, Myanmar: The telephone line has been cut at the headquarters of Myanmar's top opposition party, the National League for Democracy, a party spokesman said Thursday.

The action, taken Wednesday, presumably at the behest of the military government, came as the junta has been facing the most sustained protests in a decade against its rule.

"We are a legal political party but we cannot perform legal party activities," said NLD spokesman Myint Thein.

Myanmar protests "just the start" - top dissident

Reuters - September 13, 2007

Nearly four weeks of protests in Myanmar are "just the start" of a mass movement against the ruling junta and the grinding poverty endured by the former Burma's 53 million people, a top activist said from hiding.

"There is no way this will stop," Htay Kywe told Reuters from a secret location inside Myanmar, where he has been in hiding since evading an Aug. 21 crackdown on dissidents who launched a rare string of protests against shock increases of fuel prices.

"Arresting and killing people will not free us from economic hardship," the 39-year-old said in digitally recorded answers to questions e-mailed by Reuters and authenticated by a person known to be a very close friend.

Thirteen of Htay Kywe's colleagues in the "88 Generation Students Group" that spearheaded a nationwide uprising against military rule in 1988 have been arrested and accused of terrorism, charges that could see them jailed for decades.

But Htay Kywe, who managed to elude midnight raids on homes across Yangon, said the generals who have run the Southeast Asian nation for the last 45 years would never be able to cover up the reality of deepening poverty.

"As long as the public are experiencing a lack of development, economic hardship, authoritarian rule and injustice, there will be, and will always be, a situation where the public will not accept it and will fight back," he said.

As long as they are unable to solve the troubles the country is in today, movements like this will never end," he said. "Like the rising tide and waves, the military government will be hearing these voices loud and clear."

Countering junta charges he was being "sheltered" by a Western embassy, Mr. Htay Kywe said he was hiding "among the public."

"We are hiding because we want to continue working hand-in-hand with the public to show evidence of this military government's untruthful political solutions," he said.

Analysts said the fact he and other activists such as Ma Nilar and Suu Suu Nway had remained undetected for so long suggested the junta's internal spy networks may not be as powerful or sophisticated as they used to be.

U.N. experts call on Myanmar to release protesters

Reuters - 13 Sep 2007

GENEVA - Three U.N. human rights experts called on Myanmar on Thursday to release more than 150 protesters detained after demonstrating against fuel price increases.

The U.N. investigators on freedom of opinion and expression, the independence of judges and lawyers, and human rights in Myanmar said the "brutal arrests" violated international human rights standards and should not be tolerated.

"It is shocking that peaceful demonstrators have received life sentences in trials without any basic guarantee of the due process of law and that local journalists were prevented from reporting on these measures," Ambeyi Ligabo, Leandro Despouy, and Paulo Sergio Pinheiro said in a joint statement.

U.S. urges humanitarian access to Myanmar prisoners

Reuters - 11 September 2007

WASHINGTON - The United States demanded on Tuesday that Myanmar let humanitarian groups visit people arrested in recent protests against fuel price increases, citing unspecified reports they have been brutally beaten.

"We are concerned for the well-being of the more than 150 Burmese citizens detained since August 19 for their participation in a series of peaceful protests against dramatically increased fuel prices in Burma," U.S. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said in a statement.

"Multiple reports indicate that many of these protesters have been brutally beaten and interrogated," he added. "We call upon the Burmese regime to allow access to prisoners by international humanitarian organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, and renew our call for the immediate release of all political prisoners."

ILO demands release of Burmese labor activists

Irrawaddy- 12 September 2007

The International Labour Organization called on Wednesday for the immediate release of six Burmese labor activists who were sentenced to life imprisonment last week on charges of bringing the regime in contempt.

The sentences mean that the accused will have to serve at least 20 years.

"These kinds of sentences are not only entirely unwarranted, [but] they can also harm the few processes of engagement that exist, such as the activities against forced labor," said Kari Tapiola, executive director of the Geneva-based ILO in the statement.

The six labor activists—Thurein Aung, Wai Lin, Myo Min, Kyaw Win, Nyi Nyi Zaw and Kyaw Kyaw—were sentenced by a court in Rangoon's Insein prison, on charges covered by section 124/A (contempt of the regime) and two other sections of the criminal code.

They had planned to hold a May Day ceremony at the US Embassy's American Center in Rangoon, but were arrested before carrying out their plans.

The ILO statement pointed out that Burma had ratified the Freedom of Association Convention No 87 and had an international legal obligation to respect its citizens' right to associate freely.

Lone Myanmar protester jailed for four years

Reuters - 12 Sep 2007

YANGON - A court in military-ruled Myanmar has sentenced a man to four years jail for a solo protest calling on Buddhist monks to turn their backs on junta supremo Senior General Than Shwe, the opposition said on Wednesday.

The man, in his late 20s and identified as Soe Aung, was arrested in Taunggok, 250 miles (400 km) northwest of Yangon, on Tuesday and tried and sentenced at a closed hearing within a few hours, the local National League for Democracy (NLD) said.

He also called for a reversal of last month's shock fuel price rises.

However, Soe Aung's waving of a placard urging the Buddhist equivalent of excommunication of Than Shwe coincided with reports of some monasteries demanding a public apology for a junta crackdown on monks last week.

"Legal action was taken, so immediately he did not have any right of defence. It could be because of his slogan calling for the expulsion of the Senior General," Khin Hla, the NLD's Taunggok chairman, told Reuters.

"We will do all we can to help this activist. We are now making necessary inquiries and having discussions with legal experts," he added.

Myanmar Junta Deploys Police At Monasteries To Contain Monk Protests

Associated Press – 10 Sep 2007

YANGON, MYANMAR: Myanmar's military government posted police at monasteries nationwide, witnesses said Monday (10 Sept), after monks took to the streets last week in rare protests over recent fuel price hikes.

Plain clothes police and pro-junta supporters could be seen posted outside monasteries in Yangon and the surrounding neighborhoods, witnesses said.

Historically, monks in Myanmar, have been at the forefront of protests, first against British colonialism and later military dictatorship, and played a prominent part in the failed 1988 pro-democracy rebellion that sought an end to military rule, imposed since 1962. It was brutally crushed by the military.

UN to send envoy to Burma

Deutsche Presse-Agentur - 10 Sep 2007

New York - UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said Monday his special envoy will visit Burmain mid-October to pursue UN efforts to bring democracy and human rights to that nation.

"I am fully committed to working toward the full democratisation" of Burma, Ban said.

"Let's hope that the government in Myanmar will fully democratise their country, and respect and uphold the aspiration of international community, particularly the release of Madame Aung San Suu Kyi," Ban said.

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights urges Myanmar to release peaceful demonstrators immediately

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Statement - 07 September 2007

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour today expressed her growing concern over the detention of peaceful demonstrators by the Myanmar authorities and called for their immediate release.

The High Commissioner noted that more than 150 people have reportedly been arrested since 19 August 2007, when citizens began protesting against a sharp increase in fuel prices. The High Commissioner expressed dismay at the violence used against some protestors, including monks, by agents of the State.

The High Commissioner urged the authorities to uphold freedom of expression and association and engage with Myanmar's civil society, rather than suppress dissent. She observed that there will be no progress in Myanmar's political transition unless people have space to express their views openly and peacefully.

Myanmar generals threaten Suu Kyi's NLD party

Reuters - 09 September 2007

YANGON - Myanmar's generals accused detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy on Sunday of a political attack on the state through a string of protests and threatened it with unspecified action.

State television broke into a Sunday afternoon movie to make the announcement, which could lead to the NLD, the landslide winner of 1990 elections the military nullified, being declared illegal after protests against huge fuel price rises last month.

"The NLD took advantage of the increase of fuel prices by the state and tried to exploit the situation to mount a political attack," the surprise announcement said a day after the junta accused 13 jailed dissidents of terrorism.

"They send letters to international organizations, embassies and governments, requesting assistance," it said in another indication the junta is determined to squash the dissent that has mushroomed since the shock fuel prices increases.

"They cooperated with the so-called '88 Generation Student Group' and exile groups to bring about demonstrations, riots and terrorist acts similar to 1988," it said referring to an uprising the army put down with the estimated loss of 3,000 lives.

"The government will never tolerate such malicious acts and will take effective action against those committing them."

NLD spokesman Nyan Win denied the party had done anything illegal.

"I don't think they have enough reasons to take legal action against the NLD because our party does not commit these things," he said.

Myanmar junta accuses top activists of terrorism

Reuters - 09 Sep 2007

YANGON - Myanmar's military junta accused 13 detained dissidents of terrorism on Saturday, suggesting it would impose long jail sentences on some of those suspected of being behind two weeks of protests against soaring fuel prices.

"The terrorists will be exposed and legal action will be taken against them," the former Burma's ruling generals said in a rare public statement on state-run radio and television.

Min Ko Naing, the most prominent dissident figure after detained opposition leader and Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, is among the 13.

China says wants reconciliation in Myanmar

Reuters - 07 September 2007

SYDNEY- China wants reconciliation and an improvement of conditions in army-ruled Myanmar, where scores of people have been arrested during weeks of protests, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said on Friday.

While Myanmar's biggest trade partner shuns interference in the domestic affairs of other countries, China welcomed international efforts to help stabilise the situation in Myanmar as long as it is done with a "constructive attitude and on the basis of mutual respect", spokesman Liu Jianchao said.

"We hope to see reconciliation and improvement in the situation in Burma," Liu told reporters on the sidelines of an Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in Sydney.

"China is willing to strengthen its communication and dialogue with all the relevant sides, including the United States."

In a sign Myanmar may even be testing Beijing's patience, earlier this year China's Foreign Ministry published an unflattering account of Myanmar's new jungle capital, complaining it was remote, isolated and barren.

Myanmar did not come up in various bilateral meetings that Chinese President Hu Jintao has held in recent days, including one with U.S. President George W. Bush on Thursday, Liu said.

Liu said Beijing was in "very close touch" with Myanmar's ruling military junta.

ASEAN engagement with Myanmar failing: Romulo

Agence France-Presse - 07 September 2007

SYDNEY - Philippines Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo said Friday that Southeast Asia's controversial policy to engage Myanmar, a pariah in the West due to its human rights record, was not working out.

The Filipino official said he delivered his assessment in a meeting with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on the sidelines of an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum summit here.

Romulo said he told Rice "the roadmap to democracy has long been coming and long delayed."

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) admitted Myanmar to the fold in a "constructive engagement" policy 10 years ago after the military-ruled nation laid out long-term plans toward democratization.

"We're still waiting and there is now impatience in ASEAN about the fact that it's not working out the way we thought it would work out," Romulo told reporters.

US, Indonesia urge China and India to press Myanmar

Agence France-Presse - 08 September 2007

SYDNEY - The US and Indonesian leaders called Saturday on China and India to bring their clout to bear on Myanmar's military junta to improve its human rights record, Jakarta's foreign minister said.

US President George W. Bush and his Indonesian counterpart Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono admitted international pressure had so far failed to produce change, Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda told reporters after talks in Sydney.

Wirajuda said countries grouped in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) had realised that their admission of Myanmar to the organisation 10 years ago had not had the desired effect.

"All of us in ASEAN have in the past year admitted and recognised that the constructive engagement by ASEAN has not produced any tangible result -- we admit that," Wirajuda said.

"Likewise also the West, they admitted the sanctions and pressure approach do not work, so we are all frustrated," added Wirajuda.

He said Yudhoyono told the US leader that "it's important to also work with China and India to help encourage Myanmar to change" because they are its two biggest neighbours.

Bush "agreed that we should talk with China and India," Wirajuda said.

EU calls rights violations in Myanmar a scandal

Reuters – 06 September 2007

The European Commission on Thursday called human rights violations in Myanmar a scandal and said its military government was a threat to the Southeast Asian region. But the EU executive said isolating Myanmar was not the way to encourage change.

"The Commission remains very worried about this situation," EU Commissioner Viviane Reding told the European Parliament. "We are believing that the military regime is a threat to the region, most of all to the country and the people of Burma."

Reding said much of Myanmar's population lived "in anguish and poverty" and the omission viewed the rights situation as a "scandal". She dismissed a National Convention process which this month completed the first stage of drawing up a new constitution as a procedure to boost the power of the current government.

"It was certainly not a genuine exercise to draft a new constitution and it was certainly far from inclusive," she said, adding that the European Union backed a U.N. call for a transparent and inclusive process.

"An effective policy should aim at bringing the country back into the international community. As regards engaging the regime, there is a consensus more needs to be done, not less. Isolation will only make the population pay a greater price."

The commissioner said communication channels needed to be kept open with the government, notably to allow the EU to convey its concerns on human rights.

"We do not believe that additional restrictive measures will push the government in the desired direction or will alleviate the suffering of the people," Reding said.

Myanmar monks take 20 security forces hostage

AFP – 06 September 2007

YANGON - Hundreds of Buddhist monks have taken about 20 members of Myanmar's security forces hostage inside their monastery, one day after clashes broke out at an anti-junta protest, residents told AFP Thursday.

The incident at the monastery in Pakokku, about 500 kilometres (310 miles) north of the country's commercial capital Yangon, is the biggest showdown with authorities since a rare string of protests erupted more than two weeks ago.

The security forces came to the monastery to apologise for the violence Wednesday in Pakokku, where at least three monks were injured after authorities violently dispersed a crowd of 300 monks protesting against a massive hike in fuel prices, residents said.

The monks locked the security forces inside the monastery and set four of their vehicles on fire, the residents said. "The monks told the people in the town not to participate in this matter. They want to solve the problem themselves," one resident told AFP.

The gates to the Aletaik monastery, where about 700 monks live, have been locked since 10:30 am (0400 GMT), the residents said. All the town's shops had closed as hundreds of people poured into the streets to applaud the monks from outside the gates, one resident said.

"The security forces outside the monastery are too afraid to go near the crowd. They won't even show their walkie-talkies," said another resident. "I fully support the monks. They were just peacefully praying for the people.

The monks are absolutely right," he said. "I'm surprised that these security people would dare to harm Buddhist monks in this country." Monks are important cultural standard-bearers in this devoutly Buddhist nation. Their participation was credited with helping to bring popular support to a pro-democracy uprising in 1988.

Myanmar troops fire warning shots at monk protest

Reuters - 24 minutes

Soldiers in military-ruled Myanmar fired warning shots on Wednesday to halt a march of 500 Buddhist monks protesting against fuel price hikes in a provincial town, a resident said.

The monks were holding banners and placards condemning the price hikes in Pakokku, around 370 miles (600 km) northwest of Yangon, and reciting Buddhist holy scriptures when the army broke them up by firing shots over their heads, the woman told Reuters.

The female resident said the supporters numbered in the thousands, again the first time that the so far small outbreaks of dissent have induced major support from a public normally too cowed to criticise the ruling junta.

Analysts said the military intervention against monks was particularly risky for the junta as the town is only 80 miles from the former Burma's second city of Mandalay, the religious heart of a devoutly Buddhist nation and home to 300,000 monks.

Historically, monks have played a major role in political uprisings, including those against colonial master Britain, and a nationwide revolt against decades of military rule in 1988, put down by the army with the loss of an estimated 3,000 lives.

News reports from dissidents organisations suggest the generals have been pressuring the heads of Mandalay's monasteries not to become involved in the fuel price protests.

"They seem to be more nervous. Once the monks in Mandalay start to rise, they won't be able to control it," a Yangon-based politician said.

Bush blasts "inexcusable" Myanmar repression

AFP - 5 September 2007

SYDNEY - US President George W. Bush on Wednesday blasted "inexcusable" repression of pro-democracy forces in Myanmar as he formally opened a visit here anchored on an Asia-Pacific summit.

"It's inexcusable that we've got this kind of tyrannical behaviour in Asia," Bush said at a joint press conference with Australian Prime Minister John Howard ahead of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum.

"It's inexcusable that people who march for freedom" are then mistreated "by a repressive state", he said. "And those of us who live in comfort of a free society need to speak out about these kinds of human rights abuses," he said.

He spoke as the US State Department denounced Myanmar's so-called national convention that drew up guidelines for a new constitution a "total sham."

"Mister Prime Minister, I hope you don't mind me speaking as clearly as I possibly can about the fate of Aung San Suu Kyi and her friends and average citizens who simply want the same thing we have: To live in a free society," said Bush.

Egat pulls staff from Hutgyi dam in Burma

Rebel attack on survey team leaves one dead

Bangkok Post – 05 September 2007

The Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (Egat) has evacuated all staff from the construction site of the Hutgyi hydro-power dam in Burma after an attack on surveyors by unidentified rebels led to one death.

An Egat technician was killed on Sunday when attackers shelled the site in eastern Burma near the Salween river.

He was the second person killed while working on the project. Another man stepped on a landmine while surveying last year and later died.

"We can no longer deal with the risks there," Egat governor Kraisi Kanasuta said yesterday.

He said all staff would be withdrawn from the site indefinitely. Egat would cooperate with security agencies in Thailand and Burma to monitor the situation, Mr Kraisi said.

The US\$1 billion (36 billion baht) dam is being developed under an agreement between the Thai and Burmese governments, from which Egat will purchase all 1,500 megawatts (MW) of electricity produced by the project.

Burma: Constitutional Convention Reinforces Military Rule

Protests Continue in Wake of Convention's End

Human Right Watch - September 5, 2007

The conclusion of Burma's National Convention on Monday shows that Burma's military intends to ignore public sentiment and remain in power indefinitely, said Human Rights Watch today.

"The end of the national convention heralds neither reform nor change in Burma," said Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "It merely marks the end of a long, drawn-out chapter of faits accomplis designed by the military to stay in power."

The National Convention began in 1993 and has met haphazardly for over a decade, even failing to meet at all between 1996 and 2003. The convention followed an election in 1990 that had been overwhelmingly won by a pro-democracy party, the National League for Democracy (NLD). In July, Human Rights Watch set out its serious concerns about the convention in "Burma: Constitutional Convention a Facade for Military Rule", and to view the Chronology of the National Convention.

Street demonstrations – very rare under Burma's repressive government – during the past two weeks were sparked by sharply increased fuel prices, which were hiked in mid-August. More than 150 activists have been arrested by authorities, and the low-key conclusion to the convention was likely a further response to the popular unrest.

The convention has still not produced a written constitution. The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has drawn up a list of "Fundamental Principles" and "Detailed Basic Principles" that will serve as the basis of a future constitution. Some of the clauses in the "Principles" are those designed to ensure the continued primacy of the military in Burmese

politics. For example, in Chapter 1, State Fundamental Principles, Article 2 (f) allows "for the Tatmadaw (Burmese armed forces) to be able to participate in the national political leadership role of the State." Article 10 (d) states that "necessary law(s) shall be enacted to make citizens' freedoms, rights, benefits, responsibilities and restrictions effective, firm and complete." The future president, who must possess "military vision," also has sweeping emergency powers that grant the office the right to seize national or local control in the event of a threat against the national sovereignty "by wrongful means such as violence or insurgency" (Chapter 11, Article 8).

"This long convention process has excluded the majority of the Burmese population, it has muzzled the delegates who were permitted to attend, and it has ignored their concerns, suggestions and proposals, along with those of many civil society groups and ethnic nationalities," said Adams. "The constitution that comes out of this will be a constitution by the generals for the generals, who rule Burma for their own benefit."

News Summary 2 Sept:

Brown calls on Myanmar to free protesters

Reuters - 02 September 2, 2007 6:05PM BST

LONDON - Prime Minister Gordon Brown slammed on Sunday Myanmar's crackdown on dissidents and demanded the release of those held after street protests against fuel price rises.

More than 100 people have been arrested in recent days as the dissent provoked one of the most far-reaching crackdowns in the former Burma since 1988.

"I deeply deplore the Burmese government's violent suppression of peaceful demonstrations," Brown said in a statement.

"I call 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 said.

He called for the release of all political prisoners, including Nobel Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi.

He urged countries and organisations with influence over the Myanmar authorities to impress upon the generals the need for an early transition to democratic rule, full respect for human rights and genuine national reconciliation."

Brown backed calls for the United Nations' Security Council to examine the situation in Myanmar as soon as possible. He said he planned to raise the Myanmar situation with key countries in the region and with the European Union and United States.

Myanmar opposition calls for dialogue as charter talks near end

Agence France Presse - 01 September 2007

Myanmar's opposition party Saturday pressed the country's junta for talks with its leader Aung San Suu Kyi as the regime was to wrap up talks on a charter, which would effectively bar her from politics.

"We ask the government to have a meaningful dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi," said Thein Nyunt, a spokesman of the National League for Democracy (NLD).

The comment came as Myanmar was finally to complete long-running talks on drafting guidelines for a new constitution on Monday.

But the military has laid out no timeline for elections, and analysts say the new charter will serve only to formalise the junta's role in government.

Myanmar steps up manhunt for activists

Agence France Presse - 02 September 2007

YANGON (AFP) - Myanmar's junta has stepped up a manhunt for pro-democracy activists after a rare string of protests, raiding homes and subjecting citizens to arbitrary searches, campaigners and residents say.

More than 10 plainclothes policemen have surrounded the home of 34-year-old labour rights campaigner Su Su Nway, who went into hiding after leading a brief demonstration last week in Yangon over soaring fuel costs.

Su Su Nway, who managed to evade arrest by jumping into a taxi, told AFP by telephone on Sunday that she was ready to stand up to the generals, who tolerate little public dissent.

"I will not hide forever. I have to stand up for our people," said the activist, who is a member of Myanmar's opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD).

Apart from Su Su Nway, the regime has targeted key activists including Htay Kywe, who also went into hiding after the first rally in Yangon which drew about 500 people.

Authorities have sent Htay Kywe's picture to every police station in the country and raided his home in Yangon, along with the homes of other protest leaders, confiscating computers, mobile phones and documents, activists say.

Myanmar activists plan protest march

Associated Press - 02 September 2007

YANGON, Myanmar - Defiant anti-government protesters in Myanmar plan to stage a 100-mile protest march Monday as the country's military government wraps up its work on guidelines for a new constitution.

Pro-democracy activist Aung Moe Min told U.S.-supported Radio Free Asia the marathon procession would end in Myanmar's biggest city, Yangon.

"I know that it will be a long and tedious walk and is bound to face crackdowns by the authorities," said Aung Moe Min, calling on the public to overcome fear and take part in the march.

"The government that has declared to bring democracy to the country must support the peaceful acts of the people who are exercising their civil rights," he said.

Amnesty urges Myanmar to free protesters

Agence France-Presse - 09/01/2007

BANGKOK--Amnesty International has urged Myanmar's junta to free around 150 people detained over a string of peaceful protests against soaring fuel costs, saying they were at risk of abuse and torture.

"Amnesty International urges the Myanmar authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all those detained, unless they are to be charged with a criminal offense," the rights group said in a statement Friday.

Amnesty said more than 150 protesters have been arrested by the junta over a series of rare demonstrations, which began in Myanmar's commercial capital Yangon on August 19 and spread to other parts of the country.

Min Ko Naing and 12 activists were sent to Myanmar's notorious Insein prison in northern Yangon, home to some of the nation's estimated 1,100 political prisoners. Rights groups say torture is rampant at Insein.

Amnesty said the new detainees were "at risk of torture and other ill-treatment, which is commonly reported during interrogation and pre-trial detention in Myanmar."

"The authorities should also ensure that none are tortured or ill-treated in detention, and provide medical care for those injured during the violent break-up of demonstrations," it said.

The UN's silence on Burma

Boston Globe - August 31, 2007

Pro-democracy activists, students, Buddhist monks, and citizens who are simply fed up with the ruling military junta in Burma have been staging impromptu protests since Aug. 19, when the cancellation of fuel subsidies sent prices soaring. The burden is unbearable for many of the 90 percent of Burma's population living at or below the poverty line. The regime has responded to the demonstrations with violent repression. Plainclothes security agents and gangs of young thugs working for the junta beat up the protesters and throw them into flatbed trucks. Among those arrested are members of the 1988 democracy movement who have already survived long prison sentences and torture. These followers of Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi are expressing resistance to the dictatorship even at the risk of losing their freedom once again.

Their resoluteness should not be surprising. And there is nothing novel about the regime's response. But the resounding silence of the United Nations is hard to fathom.

Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and his special envoy for Burma, Ibrahim Gambari, have had two months to reflect on a June warning about Burma sounded by the International Committee of the Red Cross. Not since it denounced the Rwanda genocide of 1994 has the Red Cross issued such a public condemnation of a government's behavior.

The junta has destroyed more villages in areas inhabited by ethnic minorities than have been razed in Darfur. Its partnership in the narcotics trade has helped spread addiction and HIV/AIDS infection to Burma's neighbors. The army's brutal conscription of forced labor has drawn sanctions from the International Labor Organization. Yet when the Red Cross asked to deliver humanitarian assistance to the victims, or even to engage in dialogue with the military rulers about such assistance, the junta rebuffed its requests.

Because of the United Nations' shameful refusal to act during the Rwandan genocide, its leaders ought to feel a moral obligation not to repeat that tragic lapse of solidarity with victims of state-sponsored violence. Ban Ki-moon should call for a Security Council meeting to address the new wave of repression in Burma.

Gambari, who visited Asia and Europe recently and spoke airily of dialogue and reconciliation in Burma, ought to be sent to meet with the junta leader, General Than Shwe. He should bring a clear message from the UN Security Council: that all prisoners of conscience in Burma must be released - including Suu Kyi and her fellow members of the National League

for Democracy, which won 80 percent of seats in a 1990 parliamentary election the generals refused to honor.

The UN failed to react while another vicious regime was hacking its citizens to death in Rwanda. The world body cannot afford another display of moral blindness.

Myanmar bars relatives from seeing detained protesters, claim families

Agence France Presse - 31 August 2007

YANGON: Myanmar's government has barred the relatives of detained pro-democracy supporters from contacting their loved ones, some of whom are said to be on hunger strike, the families said Friday.

Many of the protesters are thought to be in an improvised detention centre at the city's Kyaikkasan sports grounds, the activists added.

"No family members have been allowed to meet with them," the activist added.

Activists inside Myanmar and exiled dissidents have expressed concern about the treatment of the detainees. The government has clamped down on any information about the protests or the detainees.

Myanmar: UN Human Rights Experts Calls for Immediate Release of Protesters

UN News Centre, New York, Aug 31 2007

PM Deploring the arrests of more than 100 peaceful protesters following demonstrations in Myanmar over the recent surge in fuel prices, a United Nations independent human rights expert today appealed for the immediate release of the detainees.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro said in a statement that he "believes that the future of the political transition process in the country must be directed by the people and the Government of Myanmar."

Mr. Pinheiro expressed his "serious concern" about yesterday's start of a hunger strike by a group of detainees at the Kyaikkasan Detention Centre after authorities denied medical treatment to a detainee who was severely beaten at the protest. He also noted that he has heard allegations of the detainees also being beaten and tortured.

The Rapporteur deplored what he described as the severe treatment of citizens peacefully expressing their views, and called on the South-East Asian nation's authorities to participate in a dialogue and in consultations with demonstrators regarding their concerns.

He recalled the statement of 26 August by Louise Arbour, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, who stressed that freedoms of expression and association are "touchstones of human rights" and said that allowing greater space for citizens to express their views and discontent will be essential in fostering the way towards a democratic transition and reconciliation in Myanmar.

Bush condemns Myanmar junta for crackdown

Agence France Presse - 31 August 2007

US President George W. Bush on Thursday strongly condemned the Myanmar military junta's crackdown on pro-democracy protesters and called for the release of those who have been jailed.

"I strongly condemn the ongoing actions of the Burmese regime in arresting, harassing, and assaulting pro-democracy activists for organizing or participating in peaceful demonstrations," Bush said in a statement.

He said the activists were merely voicing concerns about recent dramatic increases in the price of fuel "and their concerns should be listened to by the regime rather than silenced through force."

The US leader, who has personally met with pro-democracy activists from Myanmar -- previously known as Burma -- at the White House in the past, urged the military rulers to heed international calls to release the jailed protestors immediately.

The junta should also "stop its intimidation of those Burmese citizens who are promoting democracy and human rights" and "release all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, and ... lift restrictions on humanitarian organizations that seek to help the people of Burma," he said.

Dennis Wilder, a Bush aide specializing in East Asian Affairs, said Thursday that the Myanmar crackdown would be "a major topic of discussion" at a summit meeting of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in Sydney next week, which the US leader is due to attend.