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International NGO Leaders: More than lip service is needed now on Burma

Aung San Suu Kyi's August 11 conviction, based on trumped up charges by Burma's military regime, represents a new level of disregard for the well-being of the peoples of Burma, democracy, and the fundamental principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Tyranny has once again run roughshod over democracy; personal interest slapped the face of the universal truth of human freedom. The nongovernmental International Steering Committee of the Community of Democracies (ISC/CD) believes that the international community, including ASEAN, United Nations and the UN Security Council should move beyond the 'quiet diplomacy' being consistently employed by both ASEAN and UN, including numerous resolutions and recommendations crafted by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) on Burma, which has not resulted in concrete reforms. Now more than ever is the time to distinguish right from wrong and recognize what is moral and immoral. The junta's actions once again fall in the latter categories: they are wrong and immoral.

A Burmese court, which in the current system is fully subordinate to the junta, found Aung San Suu Kyi, 64, who had already spent 13 of the last 19 years under house arrest, guilty of sheltering an uninvited American visitor. Her sentence of three years in prison with hard labor was reduced to 18 months of house arrest by a "humanitarian" order of military junta's supreme leader Senior General Than Shwe. The State Peace and Development Council's (SPDC) verdict against Aung San Suu Kyi is an outright insult to the international community, particularly to UN and its Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, who had made repeated and calibrated requests for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners in accordance with internationally accepted norms for human rights and the rule of law.

Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights insists that citizens have the right to participate in the governance of their country; the 7 steps outlined in the junta's roadmap to democracy actually exclude democratic forces in Burma, notably the National League for Democracy (NLD), from participating in the democratization process while effectively strengthening the junta's hold on state power. From the conduct of the national convention drafting Burma's constitution to its approval via a referendum last year, the military regime has manipulated the whole process.

Burma's problems cannot be resolved without the concrete accompaniment of the international community. The UN and ASEAN should become more proactive in utilizing their powers over a regime that does not respect human rights and democracy. ASEAN, where Burma is a member, should take a brave stand.

The ISC/CD is a global network of civil society organizations committed to democracy and human rights, related to the Community of Democracies.

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The “constructive engagement” policy no longer applies, especially now that Burma's problems have gone beyond its borders and affected its Southeast Asian neighbors. 13 years of attempts to “mainstream” Burma since it was accepted into the ASEAN fold have miserably failed and Burma remains ASEAN's shame. To effect concrete change inside Burma, the ASEAN should take more concrete measures, such as requiring the military regime to come up with a timeframe for real democratic and political reforms.

We call on the Community of Democracies to do the same, exerting its influence at the UN through the UN Democracy Caucus, to make the Security Council heed the sentiment of the General Assembly by imposing binding sanctions on the incorrigible Burmese regime.

This junta’s verdict on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is clearly politically motivated. The military generals of Burma are afraid of their nemesis because they know that Aung San Suu Kyi is admired by many while they are despised by millions. They have decided to detain the NLD leader so that she could not provide effective political influence even in the junta's own 2010 elections. We cannot just stare and relax while millions of Burma’s population are being murdered in broad daylight. We cannot say that Burma’s business is not our business; human rights should be everybody’s business.

Today, the ISC/CD stands by the people of Burma in their relentless quest for genuine democracy. In the spirit of solidarity, we pledge our unwavering commitment and resolve to contribute our collective strength to join the peoples of Burma in their struggle.

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