

UN Human Rights Council Fact Sheet: Quick Action on Burma Applauded

October 11, 2007 -- **The United Nations Human Rights Council held an emergency special session on Tuesday, October 2, to take action on the human rights crisis in Burma**, where the military regime has killed, detained, beaten, and intimidated unknown numbers of Buddhist monks and other unarmed civilians as they staged peaceful and democratic protests. The session was in part a response to a rapid and effective advocacy effort by an international coalition of human rights organizations, including organizations from throughout the developing world.

The special session adopted a strong resolution by consensus – **with traditional supporters of the military regime such as China and India joining with the rest of the Council – to condemn “the continued violent repression of peaceful demonstrations.”** The resolution went further, affirming the democratic rights of the Burmese people and calling on the military regime to release all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi and to “to engage urgently in a national dialogue with all parties with a view to achieving genuine national reconciliation, democratization and the establishment of the rule of law.”

The Council, by deciding to send a Special Rapporteur to Burma and to have him report back to the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly, has ensured that the situation in Burma will remain on the international agenda – even as the military regime desperately tries to divert attention by shutting off international communications.

None of these actions would have been possible under the former Commission on Human Rights, which met only once a year and was unable to call special sessions to address human rights emergencies. A similar crisis took place in Uzbekistan in May 2005, when hundreds of peaceful protestors were gunned down in the famous Andijan massacre just after the Commission had concluded its annual session.

Although the human rights community advocated for a resolution with stronger directives to the military regime and a more aggressive agenda for future reporting and reassessment of progress, we welcome the resolution as adopted. It is much stronger than the one adopted on Darfur in December 2006, indicating that the Council can play a role strengthening the international consensus on human rights issues if given time and support. The Council’s consensus creates a strong basis for international action, as the Darfur resolution demonstrated by laying the groundwork for a stronger peacekeeping mission. Building on this momentum, the Security Council unanimously approved a strong presidential statement on Burma on October 11 and referenced the Human Rights Council’s resolution, demonstrating the value of building consensus on human rights issues as a step toward international action.

The Human Rights Council is often criticized in the United States, but on the Burma crisis it is beginning to demonstrate its value. We call on the United States government to recognize the positive contribution of the Council in this crisis and to use it as a positive example for future engagement with United Nations human rights institutions.

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