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MYANMAR: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WELCOMES THE RELEASE OF AUNG SAN SUU KYI

Amnesty International was delighted to hear reports today that restrictions on long-time prisoner of conscience and 1991 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi have been lifted. She had been held under house arrest without charge or trial since 1989 under the provisions of the 1975 State Protection Law.

"We are pleased that after six years of worldwide campaigning, Aung San Suu Kyi is finally free," Amnesty International said today. "We hope that no conditions are placed on her freedom, and that she is allowed to participate fully in her country's political process."

"We also hope that this decision marks the beginning of a new policy to fundamentally improve Myanmar's human rights record. Only then can all the people of Myanmar truly be free."

Amnesty International is now taking this opportunity to renew its request to Myanmar's military authorities to release the 40 other prisoners of conscience who are still imprisoned. The organization is also concerned about 20 members of parliament-elect who, instead of taking office after the 1990 elections, were thrown in jail instead.

Aung San Suu Kyi is the leader of Myanmar's leading political opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD). The NLD was founded in 1988 during massive protests against 26 years of one-party military rule, a protest violently suppressed by the army. After killing hundreds of demonstrators in 1988, the SLORC went on to arrest scores of pro-democracy activists during a nationwide clampdown in 1989. Although political parties were allowed to form and democratic elections held in May 1990, the SLORC refused to recognize the overwhelming victory of the NLD. Instead, they arrested scores of political activists, including dozens of members of parliament-elect.

In spite of this very positive move by the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) in releasing Aung San Suu Kyi, the human rights situation in Myanmar remains desperate. Hundreds of political prisoners are in jail, most after unfair trials. Among them is prisoner of conscience Ma Thida, a [29] year-old physician and writer who assisted Aung San Suu Kyi and was arrested for her peaceful opposition activities.

Another prisoner of conscience Khin Zaw Win, a dentist and graduate student, was arrested in July 1994 for trying to pass on information to the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights. Both were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment during trials which fell far short of international standards. Most recently nine young activists were sentenced to seven years' imprisonment on 28 April for speaking out at the funeral of former Prime Minister U Nu.

Human rights violations occur throughout the country -- and not just in the form of political imprisonment. Tens of thousands of civilians are forced to work on massive construction projects. In areas where ethnic minority armed opposition groups are active forced portering, torture, and killings of villagers by the Burmese army's counter-insurgency forces continue unabated. Karen, Mon, and Shan civilians have all been victims of such practices. ENDS\