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ASEAN leaders should act over Myanmar's appalling rights record

Myanmar's appalling human rights record is a serious breach of the ASEAN charter and should be at the top of the agenda for Southeast Asian states attending the organisation's summit in Ha Noi on 8 April, Amnesty International said today.

"It is clear that Myanmar has been seriously and systematically breaching the ASEAN Charter's human rights provisions. It is now up to the summit, under its new chair Viet Nam, to address this breach as a matter of urgency," said Donna Guest, Amnesty International's Deputy Asia Programme Director.

"The 10 members of ASEAN should also continue to press Myanmar to halt the increasing repression of activists, particularly from the country's large ethnic minority community," said Donna Guest.

ASEAN (The Association of South East Asian Nations) has urged Myanmar's military government to free Aung San Suu Kyi and all other political prisoners and deliver free, fair and inclusive elections in 2010.

Myanmar's government recently enacted election laws that bar hundreds of thousands of persons, including at least 2,200 political prisoners, from meaningfully participating in the election. Widespread political repression and ongoing armed conflicts continue in the run-up to the election.

"ASEAN's reputation as a meaningful regional forum will suffer if it does not call for Myanmar to respect freedom of expression, assembly and association in the lead-up to the election," said Donna Guest.

Myanmar's highly restrictive new election laws have drawn criticism from the governments of Indonesia and the Philippines, and resulted in an election boycott by the National League for Democracy, the main Myanmar opposition party headed by Aung San Suu Kyi.

"This summit is an opportunity for Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia to continue their demands for Myanmar to improve its human rights record," said Donna Guest. "The ASEAN summit's final statement should include a clear condemnation of Myanmar's human rights record."

To give weight to its statements on Myanmar, ASEAN needs to address human rights crises in member countries, including through empowering the new ASEAN Intergovernmental Human Rights Commission to address individual rights violations.

Background

Indonesia, Cambodia, Brunei, Laos, Malaysia, Viet Nam, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Myanmar are members of ASEAN, which was founded in 1967.

Article 20(4) of the ASEAN Charter states: “In the case of a serious breach of the Charter or noncompliance, the matter shall be referred to the ASEAN Summit for decision.”