

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI Index: ASA 20/016/2010  
18 June 2010

### **India's relations with Myanmar fail to address human rights concerns in run up to elections**

As Daw Aung San Suu Kyi marks her 65th birthday tomorrow, Amnesty International calls on the Government of India as a regional leader, to use its influence to improve the human rights situation in Myanmar in advance of the upcoming elections.

With Myanmar's first elections in two decades approaching, the three freedoms - of expression, association and peaceful assembly - essential for people to freely participate in the political process, are increasingly being denied. Daw Suu Kyi is one of some 2,200 political prisoners in Myanmar. None of them will be able to participate in this year's elections under new election laws - laws that the Indian government has failed to condemn.

The Government of India claims to follow a 'constructive' approach in promoting human rights improvements in Myanmar. However, its response to the dire state of human rights in the country has been increasingly inadequate.

By disassociating itself from the recent critical resolution on Myanmar's terrible human rights record at the United Nations Human Rights Council, while issuing the anodyne call for elections to be 'inclusive and broad based', the Government of India has ignored the reality on the ground the resolution looked to address.

Political repression is also occurring against a backdrop of widespread and systematic violations of international human rights and humanitarian law by the Myanmar army in its campaign against ethnic minorities.

While India suspended most shipments of military hardware to Myanmar in late 2006, it is reportedly considering a resumption of its arms sales. Its opposition to a global arms embargo on Myanmar makes its reluctance to support wider sanctions, supposedly based on the harm they would do to the wider population, disingenuous. Amnesty International calls on the Government of India to maintain its current suspension of military transfers to Myanmar.

Myanmar's other neighbours have in some crucial instances taken a stronger stance than India. Singaporean Foreign Minister, George Yeo, in a statement after the ASEAN Summit on 9 April 2010, complained of the obstacles ASEAN faces in acting on Myanmar due to the stances of both India and China. In October 2007 during the popular protests against the Myanmar government, ASEAN - chaired then by Singapore - expressed "revulsion" at the brutal crackdown. India expressed only "concern". In May 2008 after the devastating Cyclone Nargis, many in the international community, including China and ASEAN, raised the Myanmar government's failure to assist the 2.5 million survivors. India instead 'saluted' the people and government for their resilience and called for the aid process to be 'apolitical', ignoring the fact that Myanmar's leaders had already politicised aid by blocking much-needed assistance.

India's role in the "Group of Friends of the Secretary-General on Myanmar" at the UN is a small step in the right direction but much more is needed. To participate in the group but to be silent unilaterally at best weakens India's ability to help effect positive change in Myanmar, and at worst sends a mixed message that could be interpreted as tacit endorsement of the human rights violations taking place.

The numerous human rights violations documented by Amnesty International and many others during periods of heightened political dissent in Myanmar indicate the need to focus on upholding human rights during the upcoming election period.

As the Myanmar elections approach Amnesty International urges the Government of India to publicly call for the three freedoms - of expression, association and peaceful assembly - to be guaranteed throughout the election period. This is the time to show true human rights leadership as befits a key regional player – and not the time for silence.

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