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OPEN LETTER TO ASEAN LEADERS AT THE ASEAN SUMMIT (28-30 OCTOBER 2010, HA NOI) FROM AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S ASIA-PACIFIC DIRECTORS

Your Excellencies,

As you meet in Ha Noi for the ASEAN Summit, we would like to take this opportunity to express our concerns about the human rights situation in Myanmar.

As you know, on 7 November Myanmar will hold elections for the first time in two decades. Many governments in the Asia-Pacific region have emphasized the importance for the elections to be held in a “free, fair and inclusive manner”. However, the Myanmar government has yet to take any steps to improve its poor human rights record which could make this call a reality. In fact, in preparation for the elections it has done the opposite. Under a new Constitution, perpetrators of human rights violations are granted impunity, and restrictions on human rights have been tightened. Failure to address both past and present violations may prove critical for the future realization of peoples’ rights in Myanmar and the international credibility of its neighbours. As such it is crucial that you take this opportunity to send a clear message to the Government of Myanmar to take prompt action to address this terrible situation.

Despite repeated international calls for their release, more than 2,200 political prisoners continue to languish behind bars in Myanmar. This is double the number since the start of the mass peaceful anti-government protests of August – September 2007, a grim reminder of the government’s zero tolerance of legitimate forms of peaceful political dissent. Political prisoners are further excluded from taking part in the elections by Electoral Laws enacted in March, barring them from participation. These laws and other broadly-worded regulations effectively deny the people of Myanmar the “three freedoms”, that is, the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association. It is therefore simply not enough for governments to adopt a “wait and see” attitude. Human rights, including the “three freedoms”, must be safeguarded for all, whether people choose to participate in the elections or boycott them.

As you meet for the ASEAN Summit, we therefore urge you to work together to send an unambiguous message to the Myanmar government to uphold human rights, including to:

- Release immediately and unconditionally all prisoners of conscience arrested solely on the basis of their peaceful political activity, ethnicity, or religion; and
- Ensure that all people in Myanmar can enjoy the “three freedoms” of expression, peaceful assembly, and association throughout the elections period and beyond.

We call on you to do your utmost to help protect the human rights of the people of Myanmar during this critical year for the future of the country, and the credibility of ASEAN.

Yours faithfully,

Claire Mallinson Director, AI Australia	Makoto Teranaka Director, AI Japan	Nora Murat Director, AI Malaysia	Altantuya Batdorj Director, AI Mongolia
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Rameshwar Nepal Director, AI Nepal	Patrick Holmes Director, AI New Zealand	Aurora Corazon Parong Director, AI Philippines
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