

On the Release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from Detention

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Akbayan party joins the international community particularly the Burmese people in rejoicing over the release of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi after almost two decades of imprisonment by the ruling Burmese military junta. This important democratic gain while partial is an important victory that all democratic forces in solidarity with the Burmese people must claim. We hope her new-found freedom will bring unity to the different sections of the Burmese democratic opposition and will pave way for the complete restoration of democracy and freedom to a country under the firm grip of a military-backed government.

However, as much as we celebrate this historic event, we must maintain our guard and vigilance against the Burmese military junta, which inspite of everything, continues to act as a repressive and totalitarian regime with total disregard for the right of life, liberty and security.

Truth is, Suu Kyi may be free, but her country is not. The junta continues to have a tight control on its people. Not even the conduct of the country's recent electoral exercise will hide this fact. Large-scale cheating, violence and other irregularities marred Burma's elections, which heavily favoured the political parties backed by the military junta. In fact, many democratic forces labeled it a sham with Suu Kyi's party the National League of Democracy shunning the election so as not to provide the electoral charade any speck of legitimacy.

Suu Kyi's detention and subsequent release from incarceration was seemingly orchestrated to weaken if not fracture Burma's democratic opposition and in making certain that she will not be able to participate in the recent elections. Suu kyie's release is also widely seen as part of the continuing effort of the military junta to project a new political image that of which of a benevolent government committed to democratic reforms. This is despite the fact that no major reforms were implemented or even though it continues to violate the rights of its people.

Furthermore, while Suu Kyi is now free from incarceration, we believe, as long as the military-backed government is in power, her freedom is all but temporary. We are all witness on how this regime repeatedly used its repressive powers whenever its authority is seriously challenged. As such, it is not surprising that Suu Kyi will end up back in jail if ever she decides to resume her role as the leader of the democratic opposition.

The only way Aung San Suu Kyi and her country will absolutely be free is through the removal of the illegitimate military-backed regime. In this

regard, we join the Burmese people in calling for the complete repudiation of the results of the anomalous electoral exercise last November 7. We firmly support the right of the Burmese people to have truthful, free and fair elections.

Together with this demand, we call for the urgent convening of the legitimately elected Parliament/government of Burma based on the results of the 1990 elections, a political exercise which resulted in the landslide victory of Suu Kyi's NLD and which was swiftly invalidated by the military junta.

We also call for the unconditional and immediate release of all Burmese political prisoners. We demand for an end to the systematic human rights violations in the land, and a declaration of a nationwide ceasefire to pave the way for a process of national reconciliation that includes ethnic nationality groups and the NLD.

Furthermore, we demand access into Burma for UN and ASEAN envoys to contribute in the resolution of the conflict in Burma. Knowing that the military-backed Burmese government remains insensitive to the appeal of its people and the international community to institute democratic reforms, external pressure remains an important tool to effect change.

Lastly, we call for a review of Burma's membership to the ASEAN. Despite ASEAN's "constructive engagement" policy and "strong advising" to compel the military junta to initiate reforms, the regime for the last 8 years has not shown any substantial reform. ASEAN must not be a party to the continuing repression perpetuated by a brutal state to its own people, much more, have in its membership list a regime that is not even recognized by its own people.

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