

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Tuesday, April 14, 2009

Senate Women's Caucus on Burma Calls on UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to Exert More International Political Pressure on Burma's Military Junta

Washington, DC – Members of the Senate Women's Caucus on Burma are calling on Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations, to use his authority to exert more international political pressure on the despotic military junta in Burma. The bipartisan Caucus is co-chaired by U.S. Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-Texas).

In a letter to UN Secretary General Ban, the Senate Women's Caucus underscored the dire human rights situation in Burma and the detention of political prisoners, including the prolonged house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi, the country's democratically elected leader.

Below is the text of the letter, which was signed by Caucus Co-Chairs Feinstein and Hutchison, as well as Senate Caucus members Patty Murray (D-Wash.), Olympia Snowe (R-Maine), Blanche Lincoln (D-Ark.), Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), Susan Collins (R-Maine), Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.), and Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska).

April 9, 2009

His Excellency Ban Ki-moon
Secretary General of the United Nations
United Nations
First Avenue at 46th Street
New York, New York 10017

Dear Mr. Secretary General:

We, the members of the U.S. Senate Women's Caucus on Burma, understand you will soon travel to Southeast Asia, and potentially visit Burma during your trip this month. We are writing to you today to express our concern about the ruling State Peace and Development Council's scheduled elections for 2010, the continued detention of Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners, and the regime's human rights abuses against Burma's civilian population.

As you are aware, the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention recently announced its finding that Aung San Suu Kyi's continued house arrest is not only a violation of international law but a violation of the Burmese law the regime purports to detain her under as well. While this finding is not surprising, it does provide us with insight into the Burmese military regime's increasing disregard for the rule of law.

The upcoming election is based on a unilaterally drafted constitution that violates international law and entrenches gender discrimination in Burma. The constitution in its current form precludes women from holding high-level government positions and attempts to give amnesty to the military junta and thus deny access to justice for the victims of the military regime's systematic sexual violence against ethnic minority women.

The Burmese military regime has destroyed more than 3,300 ethnic minority villages; displaced more than a million people, including more than half a million struggling to survive as internally displaced persons; employs the rampant use of forced labor; uses systematic rape as a weapon of war; and forcibly recruits tens of thousands of child soldiers.

Given the Burmese regime's continued intransigence, we urge you to call on the regime to:

Release Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners immediately and unconditionally;

Abandon plans for the upcoming election and facilitate a genuine and time bound tripartite dialogue towards national reconciliation between Aung San Suu Kyi, the military regime and ethnic nationality representatives, as called for in the UNSC Presidential Statement of October 11, 2007;

Cease human rights abuses against civilians; and

Eliminate rape as an instrument of war and human trafficking and bring those who have condoned and committed such acts to justice;

We must not allow this regime to continue to commit such dire crimes unabated while the people of Burma continue to suffer.

As members of the Senate Women's Caucus on Burma, we express our solidarity with our friend and sister, Aung San Suu Kyi, and express our deep commitment to the struggle for freedom and justice in Burma. We appreciate your attention to this request and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Senator Dianne Feinstein
Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison
Senator Patty Murray
Senator Olympia Snowe
Senator Blanche Lincoln
Senator Maria Cantwell
Senator Susan Collins
Senator Barbara Boxer
Senator Amy Klobuchar
Senator Barbara Mikulski
Senator Lisa Murkowski

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