

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Open Letter

AI Index: ASA 16/011/2007 (Public)  
News Service No: 185  
27 September 2007

## Open letter to ASEAN member states on the situation in Myanmar

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27 September 2007

### OPEN LETTER

Dear Secretary General,

Amnesty International urgently requests the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to call on the authorities in Myanmar to resolve the current crisis without resort to violence and address the outstanding human rights issues in the country.

Amnesty International remains gravely concerned that peaceful protests by tens of thousands calling for reform in Myanmar are being met with escalating violent repression that will aggravate an already grave human rights situation and pose serious threats to peace and security in ASEAN and the wider region.

We urge ASEAN Foreign Ministers to call specifically for peaceful demonstration to be allowed; for those arbitrarily arrested to be immediately and unconditionally released; and for cooperation with UN initiatives aimed at addressing the human rights situation in the country. This is particularly pertinent as the Foreign Ministers are meeting in New York to discuss, among other issues, the draft of an ASEAN Charter enshrining common standards of behavior for all member states.

Following ASEAN's efforts over many years to engage constructively with the Myanmar government to encourage national reconciliation and peaceful democratic reform, Amnesty International believes the current situation demands resolute interventions to prevent the threat of massive human rights violations. By using its influence to ensure the Myanmar authorities respect human rights, the Association will send a crucial signal to the people of ASEAN and the world that it is committed to the protection and promotion of human rights.

Peaceful protestors, earlier led by Buddhist monks, continue to demonstrate in the capital Yangon and other cities in Myanmar demanding political reform and the release of political prisoners. On 25 September the authorities launched a crackdown on the protestors and at least 500 people, including opposition parliamentarians, have reportedly been arrested and are feared to be at grave risk of torture or other ill-treatment. The security forces have reportedly beaten demonstrators with batons and used tear gas to disperse crowds defying a recently imposed curfew.

The reported killing of up to nine demonstrators suggests that the situation may escalate resulting in large scale refugee flows and other serious threats to peace and security of ASEAN states. As the experience of 1988 shows there is a real danger that the authorities will resort to further indiscriminate violence, killing many more peaceful demonstrators to suppress dissent.

The situation in Myanmar has reached critical dimensions as demonstrations occur against the backdrop of persistent and massive violations of human rights. These include the prolonged detention of over 1,160 political prisoners held

in deteriorating prison conditions, the continued detention of Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other senior opposition figures who are prisoners of conscience, extrajudicial executions and the widespread use of torture in detention. There is also endemic suppression of freedom of expression throughout the country, use of forced labour and child soldiers continue as do crimes against humanity committed in counter insurgency operations in eastern Kayin (Karen) state. Access by independent observers and international human rights organizations to many parts of the country continues to be denied.

The seriousness of developments in Myanmar, which are arousing worldwide concern, should now engage the responsibility of ASEAN as a whole. ASEAN's 1967 founding Declaration states that the aims and purposes of the Association include the "promotion of regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationship among countries in the region and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter". Vision 2020, adopted in 1997, agreed on a shared vision of ASEAN as "a concert of Southeast Asian nations, outward looking, living in peace, stability and prosperity, bonded together in partnership in dynamic development and in a community of caring societies."

As the escalating violence and instability in Myanmar threatens the realization of this vision, Amnesty International looks forward to ASEAN taking prompt action to address the grave situation in Myanmar.

I am sending similar open letters to the Foreign Ministers of ASEAN member states.

Yours sincerely,

Irene Khan  
Secretary General

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