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HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
Fifth special session

Written statement* submitted by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[1 October 2007]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

The situation of human rights in Myanmar

WILPF welcomes the Special Session on the situation of human rights in Myanmar prompted by the military regime's brutal repression of citizens protesting the authority's decision of a 500% increase in fuel prices that result in further severe economic hardships for the majority of the Burmese people.

WILPF firmly believes in the right of freedom of expression, of association and organization, and in the right of citizens to participate in the decision making that concerns their wellbeing and that of their community. These rights have been denied all too long by the military regime in Myanmar.

We call on the Myanmar government to refrain from further use of violence against the non-violent protesters and instead to enter into a dialogue with them and all political opponents to bring about a just solution to the turmoil. We are convinced that the release from house arrest of political leader Aung San Suu Kyi, and political freedom would be an important step in this direction.

WILPF is gravely concerned by the use of force and direct violence on the part of Security Forces against non-violent opposition protesters. In particular, photos of Monks and pro-democracy protestors' visibly beaten and video footage which appears to show a soldier shooting Japanese video journalist, Kenji Nagai at close range. According to press reports, the Government of Myanmar has confirmed ten deaths, though diplomats and activists report that the figures are much higher.¹ As a matter of urgency, WILPF calls on the Government of Myanmar to fully investigate all reported deaths.

Furthermore, WILPF is concerned that communication by internet, landline and mobile phone, already restricted, has been further suppressed to the extent of a blackout.

In a previous report to the General Assembly, the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro noted that "the culture of impunity remains the main obstacle to the efforts in view to safeguarding and securing respect for human rights in Myanmar and creating a favourable environment for their realization"(A/61/369, para. 27). WILPF calls on the government of Myanmar to end impunity without delay and allow the Special Rapporteur access to the country.

WILPF welcomes the UN Secretary General's appointment of Special Envoy, Ibrahim Gambari to Myanmar and calls on the Than Shwe, or his deputy Maung Aye. to meet with him and use his good offices to resolve the conflict peacefully. We call on the governments of Myanmar's neighbours and all other States that enjoy close trading and diplomatic relations with it to take steps that will accelerate this process.

We request that Member States consider how a lack of condemnation and silence towards the military regime also serve as an obstacle to the realization of human rights for all Burmese, including minority and indigenous groups. According to the Special Rapporteur, "Grave human rights violations are committed by persons within the established structures of the State Peace and Development Council and are not only perpetrated with impunity but

¹ UN Envoy sees top Burma dissident (30 September 2007) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/7020465.stm>

authorized by law” (A/HRC/4/14). Impunity at the highest level, a lack of human security (e.g. access to food, healthcare) and denial of fundamental human rights all impede Myanmar’s development and undermine peace and security in South East Asia region as a whole.

Should sanctions be among such steps be considered, WILPF would urge that the international community exercise caution in actions taken against Myanmar particularly regarding the provision of humanitarian aid. In his last report to the Human Rights Council the Special Rapporteur concluded by reaffirming that “humanitarian assistance cannot be made hostage to politics. Any decision on humanitarian assistance must be guided solely by the best interests of children, women, people living with disabilities, those affected by diseases and minority groups. It would be a terrible mistake to wait for the political normalization of Myanmar to help the population and to empower communities and their representatives” (A/HRC/4/14).
