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SPEED UP MYANMAR RECONCILIATION PROCESS, URGES SECRETARY-GENERAL

AS HIS SPECIAL ADVISER BRIEFS SECURITY COUNCIL ON RECENT VISIT

Deeply Concerned over Rights Violations, Members Call for End to Repression, Immediate Release of Political Prisoners

Expressing deep concern over reports of human rights abuse in Myanmar, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon this morning called for the release of detainees and an expedited reconciliation process in the country, as the Security Council prepared to hear a briefing by his special envoy to the South-East Asian country.

“The use of force against peaceful demonstrators is abhorrent and unacceptable,” Mr. Ban said, adding that comprehensive political dialogue between the Government and the political opposition was indispensable. The announcement of a possible meeting between Senior General Than Shwe and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was welcome and should take place as soon as possible.

A window of opportunity had been opened, and the Government must respond positively, he said, underscoring the importance of a united Security Council coordinating with the efforts of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the rest of the United Nations system in putting Myanmar on the path to democratization, peace and prosperity.

In his briefing, Ibrahim Gambari, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General, said he had emphasized to Myanmar’s highest authorities the changing domestic, regional and international context within which his mission was taking place, and expressed the international community’s deep concern at recent events. He had called for an end to night raids, arrests and curfews, and for the release of those arrested during the recent demonstrations.

Noting that the Secretary-General’s good offices was a process rather than an event, he stressed the importance of sustained engagement by the United Nations, including through that process, with the active support of neighbouring States and the wider international community. Any decrease in tensions could only be sustained if accompanied by positive steps to address the root causes of unrest. Key areas in which tangible progress could be made included the release of all political prisoners, the promotion of an all-inclusive national reconciliation process, full cooperation with humanitarian organizations and the cessation of hostilities in conflict areas.

In the ensuing discussion, Council members agreed that reconciliation and democratization were essential, as was the exercise of restraint. Some speakers strongly condemned the Government’s crackdown on protesters and threatened further action if certain conditions were not met. The United States called for the immediate release of detainees and political prisoners, otherwise it would pursue Security Council sanctions in addition to those it had already imposed against the regime.

Other speakers maintained that too much external pressure would be counterproductive. While supporting Mr. Gambari’s efforts, China’s representative said the situation was already calming down as a result of efforts by all parties inside the country and by the international community. Myanmar posed no threat to international or regional peace and security, and additional international pressure might cut off crucial dialogue with the United

Nations. Instead, the international community should continue to offer constructive engagement and honest mediation as part of a long-term, gradual process, he said.

Speaking on behalf of ASEAN, the representative of Singapore called for the release of political detainees, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and urged Myanmar's cooperation with the United Nations, while stressing the complexity of the situation. Sanctions should not be ruled out. ASEAN would take a responsible position, as Myanmar was part of the Association's "family", but its influence was limited. China and India had a long history of engagement with Myanmar and were uniquely placed to play a role.

The representative of Myanmar, maintaining that Singapore's statement did not represent ASEAN, said his country had been going through a daunting challenge, but the situation had returned to normalcy. People all over the country were now holding peaceful rallies within the bounds of the law to welcome the successful conclusion of the National Convention and to demonstrate their aversion to the recent provocative demonstrations.

He said that, in view of the improved peace and stability in the country, curfew hours had been shortened in Yangon and Mandalay and detainees who had not infringed any serious laws had been released. To date, a total of 2095 monks and lay persons had been released, with more releases to follow. Myanmar would continue with its policy of national reconciliation, implementing its seven-step road map to fulfil the aspirations of the people. As part of that process, the Head of State had told Mr. Gambari that, should Daw Aung San Suu Kyi renounce her "obstructive and confrontational stance", he would be ready to meet her personally. Mr. Gambari had also been invited to visit Myanmar again in November.

Also speaking this morning were representatives of the United Kingdom, Indonesia, France, Belgium, South Africa, Slovakia, Qatar, Italy, Panama, Russian Federation, Peru and Ghana.

The meeting began at 10:10 a.m. and ended at 11:55 a.m.

Background

As it met this morning, the Security Council had before it a letter dated 4 October (document S/2007/590) from the Permanent Representative of the United States requesting it to consider the situation in Myanmar. The Council was expected to hear a statement by the Secretary-General and a briefing by Special Adviser Ibrahim Gambari on his recent mission to that country.

Statement by Secretary-General

BAN KI-MOON, Secretary-General of the United Nations, noting that he had asked his Special Adviser to convey a very clear message to Myanmar's senior leadership, expressed his deep concern over reports of continued human rights violations in that country. The use of force against peaceful demonstrators was abhorrent and unacceptable. Despite reports of some military force withdrawals and an easing of restrictions, the unknown predicament of many individuals arrested without due process was of serious concern, and they should be released without further delay.

Now, more than ever, the Myanmar Government should take bold action towards democratization and respect for human rights, he said, calling for an expedited national reconciliation process that was broad-based, inclusive and as transparent as possible. A serious, comprehensive political dialogue between the Government and the political opposition was indispensable. The announcement of a possible meeting between Senior General Than Shwe and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was welcome and should take place as soon as possible. A window of opportunity had been opened, and the Government must respond positively.

He said the sustained engagement of the United Nations and the active support of the international community, particularly countries in the region, were necessary to put Myanmar on the path of democratization, peace and prosperity. A united Security Council could play an important role in supporting the Organization's

ongoing efforts. He thanked member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) for their support and engagement.

Briefing by Special Envoy

IBRAHIM GAMBARI, Special Adviser of the Secretary-General, said his mission to Myanmar from 29 September to 2 October had had three objectives: to assess the situation on the ground in the wake of the recent demonstrations; to deliver clear messages from the Secretary-General to the Myanmar authorities; and to promote dialogue between the Government and the opposition as to the best path towards ending the present crisis and achieving national reconciliation.

He said he had been able to meet with the Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council, Senior General Than Shwe; Daw Aung San Suu Kyi; the Acting Prime Minister; and other members of the Government. Although he had not been able to meet with other relevant interlocutors — despite repeated requests — including representatives of the monks and the 88 Generation Students, he had received messages from many groups and individuals.

Of great concern to the United Nations and the international community were the continuing and disturbing reports of abuses being committed by security and non-uniformed elements, he said. There had also been reports of mass relocation outside Yangon of arrested monks. At least two national United Nations staff had been arrested and detained, but they had been released after he had brought the arrests to the attention of the authorities at the highest level. The United Nations office in Yangon had received requests from people asking for a safe place to hide.

Though informed by senior Government officials that the demonstrations had been instigated by a minority of elements, he said it had become clear that the demonstrations were, for the most part, the expression of deep and widespread discontent about socio-economic conditions in the country. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), one third of the people lived below the poverty line and 90 per cent were spending less than \$300 per year. Although the protests had coincided with the Government's sudden decision to sharply increase the price of fuel, the marches by monks across the country appeared to have provided a catalyst for the demonstrations to become explicitly political.

He said he had been able to deliver clear and strong messages on behalf of the Secretary-General to the authorities at the highest level. His first message had been to emphasize the changing domestic, regional and international context within which his mission was taking place, with the clear support of the Council and the ASEAN countries. He had also expressed the Secretary-General's and the international community's deep concern at recent events and made specific recommendations. Night raids and arrests should end and the curfew should be lifted as soon as possible. All those arrested during the demonstrations should be released, among other things.

Emphasizing the need to address without delay the political and socio-economic factors underlying the demonstrations through mid- and long-term measures predicated on dialogue among all stakeholders, he said any decrease in tensions could only be sustained if accompanied by positive steps to address the root causes of unrest. Key areas in which tangible progress could be made were the release of all political prisoners; the promotion of an all-inclusive national reconciliation process; full cooperation with and better access for humanitarian organizations; the cessation of hostilities in conflict areas, including Kayin State; and continued cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO). The authorities had already announced a relaxation of the curfew in Yangon and Mandalay, and 2,095 persons arrested during demonstrations had been released, including 728 monks.

As for the promotion of dialogue, he said he had conveyed messages between the senior leadership and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, whom he had been allowed to meet for a second time. He was cautiously encouraged by the Government's announcement yesterday that Senior General Than Shwe was prepared to meet with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, a potentially welcome development that called for maximum flexibility on all sides. Another step towards genuine national dialogue was the release of all political detainees. The future of Myanmar belonged to all

its people and it was, therefore, in the interest of the nation that all those with a contribution to make should have the opportunity to do so.

The specific recommendations put to the Government were aimed at encouraging it to engage in an all-inclusive, participatory and transparent post-national convention process of consultations, he stressed. That would enhance the credibility and legitimacy of the draft constitution to be submitted to a referendum. The United Nations had experience in facilitating such a constitutional review process. Another recommendation concerned the establishment of a broad-based poverty-alleviation commission. The work of in-country United Nations agencies had been recognized as useful, and every effort must be made to find areas of mutual interest. Humanitarian actions must not become hostages to political conditions. Any serious steps on the political front should also be acknowledged by the international community through the provision of incentives in the humanitarian and socio-economic areas.

Amid the tragic events of the past few weeks, the present time was an hour of historic opportunity for Myanmar, he said, emphasizing that responsibility for the country's future ultimately rested with its Government and people. To delay the prospect of peace, prosperity and democracy was to deny it to those who deserved it most -- the people of Myanmar. The Government should know that the world needed a Myanmar that could contribute to the development of the region. Having demonstrated greater openness and cooperation with the United Nations and the international community over the past two years, now was the time for Myanmar's leadership to make the bold choices that would demonstrate the country's readiness to partner with the international community by making serious, tangible progress in the areas of concern.

Noting that the Secretary-General's good offices was a process, not an event, he stressed the importance of recognizing that one mission by itself could not resolve the fundamental challenges facing Myanmar. Advancing the causes of all-inclusive national reconciliation, democratization and full respect for human rights would require sustained engagement by the United Nations, including through the Secretary-General's good offices, with the active support of neighbouring States, ASEAN countries and the international community, including a united Security Council.

Statements

JOHN SAWERS (United Kingdom) said the world had been inspired by the sight of people risking their lives for peaceful change to democracy and appalled by the callous brutality of a regime willing to beat and kill peaceful demonstrators, including revered Buddhist monks. The regime was continuing to carry out mass abuses across the country, and it was critical that those abuses end. The United Kingdom strongly condemned the violence, which was a threat to security beyond the country's borders.

There was also a need for the immediate release of Daw Aung Sang Suu Kyi and immediate progress towards democracy, he said. The test was whether the Government would work with all parties towards reconciliation and democracy. A presidential statement from the Council should convey those requirements. The Government needed to know that there would be no tolerance of further abuse. The Council should also continue to strongly support the Secretary-General and his special envoy in their encouragement of an inclusive dialogue leading to real democratic change. The world stood ready to help rebuild the country and see it integrated into the global community where it belonged. The sooner an inclusive reconciliation process took place, the sooner that would be achieved.

MARTY M. NATALEGAWA (Indonesia) urged the Government of Myanmar to see Mr. Gambari's visit as a window of opportunity to engage the international community towards the resolution of problems that had been left to fester for too long. Indonesia had already expressed concern and revulsion at recent developments, and had called upon the Myanmar Government to desist from the use of force, seek political resolution with all parties and release all political detainees, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

Surprisingly, Myanmar had been working with other ASEAN countries on a common vision of democratization, he said. The tragic events in the country had serious implications for the credibility and

reputation of ASEAN, and the group could not look the other way. It had committed itself to supporting Myanmar as it moved forward on the path to democratization in a frank, candid and firm way. The Security Council should consistently support the Secretary-General's good offices by promoting a climate conducive to the peaceful resolution of the current situation. It was equally important to implement the recent resolution of the Human Rights Council. Indonesia called on the Government to work urgently to substitute the climate of fear with the power of democratic persuasion and inclusive dialogue.

WANG GUANGYA ([China](#)) pointed out his country's long relationship with neighbouring Myanmar and expressed the hope that the country would soon return to stability, prosperity, harmony and democratic progress. China had closely followed the recent disturbances and called on all parties to exercise restraint and restore stability and democratic progress through peaceful means. It also encouraged the Government to implement the seven-step road map promptly, in agreement with the international community.

China supported the constructive role of the United Nations in Myanmar, particularly Mr. Gambari's visit, which had achieved some initial results, he said. A longer-term gradual process was needed, however, and Mr. Gambari was encouraged to continue his engagement with all parties. Any action by the Security Council should be aimed at facilitating the good offices of the Secretary-General, rather than affecting, or even undermining, the mutual trust already established, which was crucial to Mr. Gambari's further efforts.

He said the situation was already calming down as a result of the joint efforts by all parties and the international community, and hopefully, the situation would continue to develop in a positive direction. In any case, the current situation did not pose any threat to international or regional peace and security. The future lay in the hands of the people and Government of Myanmar through dialogue and consultation. Outside pressure would not help address the problem, but might lead to mistrust and confrontation, cutting off dialogue with the United Nations. The people of Myanmar would be the ultimate victims. The international community should instead offer constructive engagement and honest mediation. In that context, China supported the role of ASEAN and would continue to work with the international community for an appropriate settlement.

JEAN-PIERRE LACROIX ([France](#)) said the authorities had not responded to the urgent Council appeal for restraint, and it was impossible to know how many victims there had been. However, it was clear that the police and army actions had cost too many lives, and France condemned the violence against peaceful demonstrators. European targeted sanctions would be strengthened.

Thousands of people had been arrested, the population was living in fear of night raids and many monks had disappeared, he said. France was greatly concerned about the large number of prisoners and held the authorities responsible for their welfare. Those arrested during the demonstrations should be released immediately, as should Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners.

Welcoming the firm position adopted by ASEAN, he said the Council could not remain silent and must express the universal revulsion felt in the world. The authorities must realize that they could not remain in power through the reign of terror. Genuine national reconciliation and a transition to democracy were necessary. France hoped that the announcement by the head of the junta of his readiness to embark on a dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was not a mere ploy. If the authorities continued to refuse serious dialogue with the opposition, the Council would have to draw the necessary conclusions.

JOHAN VERBEKE ([Belgium](#)) said the massive demonstrations had shown that the long-term absence of dialogue was untenable. The demonstrations of the monks were unique in scale. Belgium condemned the repression of the non-violent demonstrations, and urged the Government to release those arrested for merely exercising their right of expression.

Noting that the European Union had decided to extend its targeted sanctions regime, he said the repression of fundamental human rights could not be tolerated. The role of countries in the region was crucial in addressing the situation, and Belgium welcomed the ASEAN statement and called for the immediate launch of an inclusive

political dialogue, opening the way for real democracy, with total respect for fundamental rights and the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners, first and foremost, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

PETER BURIAN (Slovakia) condemned the violent and repressive action by the military leaders of Myanmar against the peaceful civil demonstrations, and expressed shock and dismay over the reports of deaths and serious injuries among the protesters. Slovakia called on the Myanmar authorities to immediately cease all hostilities and human rights abuses, free the arrested demonstrators and commence a broad-based and all-inclusive process of political transformation and national reconciliation.

He went on to note the country's appalling human rights record, including the use of child soldiers, forced labour, torture and other cruel and inhuman treatment. For decades, the military regime had waged war on ethnic groups, with the security forces razing villages, raping women and killing civilians. That had created hundreds of thousands of refugees in neighbouring countries. The Security Council needed to take appropriate steps in finding ways for Myanmar to achieve a sustainable, peaceful and democratic solution to the crisis.

ZALMAY KHALILZAD (United States) said his country was appalled by the brutal repression of the people in Burma, including children, students and monks. Despite the regime's efforts to block access, the images reaching the outside world, including the bodies of a Japanese photographer lying in a street and a Buddhist monk floating down a river, had been gripping. The people must not be let down.

It was difficult to verify the facts on the ground, owing to the communications blackout, but there were signs that the repression continued, he said, expressing fear that detainees were being kept in inhuman conditions and that the crisis was encouraging the spread of diseases and the trafficking of drugs. The United States looked forward to China's continuation of its support for the Secretary-General's good offices. In that regard, it was a matter of deep concern that Mr. Gambari's access had been restricted during his visit and that abuses had continued only hours after his departure. Nevertheless, it was to be hoped that the visit would produce progress.

He called on the regime to end all aspects of the violent crackdown, immediately release the recently detained citizens, as well as all political prisoners, and restore communication links within the country and to the rest of the world. The United States had imposed sanctions on the regime to encourage it to make further progress. The Security Council must be the voice of the people, and the United States urged Mr. Gambari to return to the country as soon as possible. If there was no such progress, the United States would call for Security Council sanctions. It was time for the Council to do more than simply listen to a briefing. It must speak out to keep the momentum going, end the crisis and help the country move towards democratization.

NASSIR ABDULAZIZ AL-NASSER (Qatar), expressing his strong support for the efforts of the Secretary-General and his special envoy, condemned the repression, saying he hoped things would return to normal. Qatar called for stability by peaceful means as soon as possible. Solutions must not be sought through confrontation.

As some United Nations bodies were considering the situation, including the Human Rights Council, the Security Council should seek further cooperation and coordination with them, he said. It should support the good offices of the Secretary-General and his special envoy, as well as the efforts of neighbouring countries. Qatar called on the Government of Myanmar to investigate the latest abuses and bring the perpetrators to justice. It should cooperate with the special envoy and show more responsibility in ensuring prosperity for the people of Myanmar.

MARCELLO SPATAFORA (Italy), noting that a window of opportunity was now open, appealed to the Myanmar authorities not to close it. The unanimous support of the Council and the international community had been instrumental to the access granted to Mr. Gambari. Cohesion, unity of vision and common purpose had proved to be powerful forces.

However, since Mr. Gambari's departure from Myanmar, there had been disturbing reports of repression, he pointed out. The suspension of demonstrations had been achieved not through dialogue, but through a crackdown. Italy fully shared the calls for the authorities to account for its actions, including the

number of people killed and the whereabouts of those arrested. A democratic transition remained the only recipe for peace and all political prisoners must be released immediately. The Council could not remain silent. Its message should be one of strong support for the Secretary-General, so as to strengthen the hand of his special envoy.

RICARDO ALBERTO ARIAS (Panama) said he supported the transparent nature of the Council meeting; adding, however, that he would have preferred to hear also from the Human Rights Council, Myanmar and ASEAN before the discussion rather than afterwards. The Council seemed to agree on goals to be achieved, and it was essential to achieve them through a unified effort by the entire international community and its organizations. Any gesture undertaken by the Security Council should be consistent with previous undertakings.

VITALY CHURKIN (Russian Federation) supported the use of the Secretary-General's good offices, saying his country had called on the Myanmar authorities to exercise restraint and to resolve the crisis. The main point for future progress was to urge Myanmar to pursue democratic reform. The Council should continue to support the efforts of Mr. Gambari, who had received an appropriate mandate from the General Assembly.

JORGE VOTO-BERNALES (Peru) said he was concerned at the violations of human rights and the serious humanitarian crisis, as the situation had deteriorated over the last year. Peru condemned the repression of peaceful demonstrations, the restraints on human freedom and the detention of peaceful demonstrators, and rejected as well the arbitrary detention of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other opposition leaders.

He said the increase in the number of internally displaced persons was creating a situation of instability that could affect the region. There was an urgent need to promote dialogue in order to seek political solutions that would lead to a democratic transition and national reconciliation. Countries in the region had an important role to play in that regard.

Council President LESLIE KOJO CHRISTIAN (Ghana), speaking in his national capacity, strongly supported the Secretary-General's positive interventions in Myanmar. Mr. Gambari's recent visit to the country underscored the continuing importance of the special envoy's role as a vital link, not only between the Government and people of Myanmar, but also with the international community at large.

He said recent events in Myanmar had introduced a new dynamic in the political situation. The country's long-term peace and stability would depend on the fulfilment of the legitimate aspirations of the people for democracy and a better quality of life. The special envoy's contribution in that regard was of the utmost importance.

U KYAW TINT SWE (Myanmar), maintaining that the statement to be made by the representative of Singapore was not on behalf of ASEAN, said his country had been going through a daunting challenge, but the situation had returned to normal. People all over Myanmar were now holding peaceful rallies within the bounds of the law to welcome the successful conclusion of the National Convention, which had laid down the principles for a new constitution, and to demonstrate their aversion to the recent provocative demonstrations.

He said Mr. Gambari had been accorded access and full cooperation during his visit. He had met with Government officials, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other parties. He had travelled to northern Shan state and had been able to see peace and stability in such far-flung areas, as well as a mass rally in support of the National Convention. In view of the improved situation of peace and stability in the country, curfew hours had been shortened in Yangon and Mandalay, and detainees who had not infringed any serious laws had been released. To date, a total of 2,095 monks and lay persons had been released and more releases would follow.

Myanmar would continue with its policy of national reconciliation, implementing its seven-step road map to fulfil the people's aspirations, he said. As part of that process, the Head of State had told Mr. Gambari that, should Daw Aung San Suu Kyi renounce her "obstructive and confrontational stance", he would be ready to meet her personally. Mr. Gambari had also been invited to visit Myanmar again in November.

He agreed with the Secretary-General that the challenges in the country must be met by the people themselves, and that his good offices role was “a process and not an event”. Patience, time and space were needed; the process was proceeding well. Despite the recent tragic events, the situation was not a threat either to regional or international peace and security, and therefore no Security Council action was warranted. Myanmar called on the Council to refrain from any action that would be detrimental to the Secretary-General’s efforts. For its part, Myanmar would continue to cooperate with the United Nations.

VANU GOPALA MENON (Singapore), speaking as Chair of ASEAN, said recent events in Myanmar could not be ignored, which was why the Association had issued a statement on 27 September expressing revulsion over reports of violent suppression of protesters, and calling for the release of political detainees, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

He said the United Nations efforts must be recognized as irreplaceable and he urged Myanmar to cooperate with the Organization. The situation in that country was complicated, and it was important not to pigeon-hole Mr. Gambari’s visit in “success or failure” terms. States must be pragmatic, as Myanmar’s military was a key institution that could not be wished away. Any peaceful solution to the crisis must involve all parties. Moreover, there were armed ethnic groups opposed to the Central Government’s rule and a very tenuous ceasefire prevented renewed hostility. The world did not want a “Yugoslavia in South-East Asia”.

Stressing that sanctions should not be ruled out, he said ASEAN would take a responsible position, as Myanmar was part of its “family”. However, the Association’s influence was limited. On the other hand, China and India had a long history of engagement with Myanmar and were uniquely placed to play a role. ASEAN commended China on its “quiet efforts”, while Japan also had a role due to its status as a major aid donor to Myanmar.

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