

**Statement of the Burma Lawyers' Council
Regarding the Arrests of Peaceful Demonstrators in Burma
(February 23, 2007)**

Media sources reported that on February 22, 2007, between 12 and 50 demonstrators took to the streets of Rangoon to protest against the ruling military regime. Accordingly, the demonstrators were calling upon the military government to rectify the country's economic and social crisis and eliminate corruption. All sources reported that the demonstrations were peaceful but many of them were arrested.

The Burma Lawyers' Council (BLC) denounces these improper arrests by the ruling military regime, SPDC. The SPDC is fully obliged to publicly explain under which law and which precise section the demonstrators and journalists were arrested, the current location of all detained individuals, and for how long they will remain in custody. It must provide assurances that none of them have been harmed in any way and provide the detainees all rights afforded under the law, including the right to due process, the right to seek the assistance of an attorney, the right to communicate with outside world, and the right to receive support of family members. Moreover, the entire process must be transparent and fully open to the public.

It is internationally recognized in Article 19 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights that all people have the right to freedom of speech. This means that everyone must be able to express their opinions without fear of censure or punishment by the government. Demonstrators and journalists taking part in a peaceful demonstration are no exception.

If the SPDC has any respect whatsoever for the rule of law, they must treat all demonstrators equally. In late January, pro-government demonstrations were held outside the U.S. and British embassies in Rangoon. The SPDC did not make any arrests and did not force the demonstrators to disperse. The rule of law requires equal treatment for all, whether their speech is favorable or not to the ruling regime.

The BLC demands that the SPDC immediately and unconditionally release all individuals arrested during the peaceful demonstrations held on February 22, 2007. The BLC respectfully calls upon all organizations and people both within and outside Burma to similarly condemn the SPDC's unlawful actions and encourages all lawyers and law-respecting individuals to come forward and defend the legal rights of people who are victims of the SPDC's abuse of law.

For more information on legal affairs, please contact:
U Aung Htoo; General Secretary, Burma Lawyers' Council
Tel: 66 (0) 89 794 1418