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For Immediate Release

Urgent Appeal by the Burma Lawyers' Council on Behalf of Dr. Salai Tun Than

June 19, 2006

Dr. Salai Tun Than, a former professor and political prisoner, was refused permission to board a plane flying from Bangkok, Thailand, to Rangoon, Burma this morning, despite his possession of a valid passport. The airline acted under pressure from the military junta of Burma, acting through its Bangkok embassy, who threatened to revoke the airline's license to operate flights in Burma.

Dr. Salai Tun Than obtained his passports and all other travel documents legally. His passport is not set to expire until 2008. BBC News reported June 6 that the military junta declared his passport invalid, but he received no official notice of the revocation or the reasons for doing so.

Dr. Salai Tun Than is a citizen of Burma and military junta has no legal authority to unilaterally revoke a citizen's passport. Their actions of denying reentry have the effect of stripping him of his legal rights as a citizen and arbitrarily exiling him from his country, which is expressly forbidden by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 9. Therefore, they have criminalized the attempts of Dr. Salai Tun Than to return to his homeland of Burma in accordance with the Burma Immigration act, 1947, Section 3, Paragraph 2. Dr. Salai Tun Than does not wish to sacrifice his status as a citizen of Burma, and is committed to finding a resolution to this problem within the legal system. Dr. Salai Tun Than has been in contact with officials at the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs to obtain the legal justifications for his denial of re-entry into Burma.

Dr. Salai Tun Than is a Burmese professor who became an activist in 2001 when he staged a solo protest against the military regime. He was arrested and served one-and-a-half years of a seven-year sentence before being released due to international pressure. After his release, he traveled to the United States, Japan and Korea to share his story of resistance. He planned to return to Burma to continue encouraging his countrymen to participate in democracy through non-violent political action.

The Burma Lawyers' Council implores the governments of all democratic nations, human rights defenders, legal organizations, political parties, and people everywhere who are deeply attached to human rights and to justice to do everything in their power to put pressure on the military junta to allow Dr. Salai Tun Than to return to Burma legally. We also ask their help persuading the Thailand government, which is obliged to deal with the issue properly, by using its legal and administrative mechanism on Dr. Salai Tun Than's behalf.

Burma Lawyers' Council

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