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Burma Lawyers' Council Warns of SPDC Delays and Trickery

- 1) The Burma Lawyers' Council has just learned that a fire has burned part of the Burmese Embassy in Bangkok. While the source of the fire is still unclear, the fire must not be used as another reason for the State Peace and Development Council to yet again delay the delivery of foreign aid to the victims of Cyclone Nargis. In fact, the fire looks extremely suspicious, particularly since a large amount of foreign aid workers are presumably waiting for visas.
- 2) The SPDC has a long history of deceiving, delaying and tricking the UN and international community. While we applaud and appreciate UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for using his good offices to push the SPDC to allow more aid to reach cyclone victims, we are concerned that the SPDC's partial concessions are just another tactic to relieve international pressure.
- 3) Just recently, for instance, after the September 2007 Saffron Revolution, the SPDC told Ibrahim Gambari, UN Special Envoy, that they would have meaningful dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Those talks have gone nowhere. Mr. Gambari's trips to Burma are generally considered to have been a failure.
- 4) Similarly, Professor Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar, was told by the SPDC that he would be "accorded full cooperation" during his visit to Burma. Mr. Pinheiro's December 2007 Report, however, describes being prohibited from accessing a crematorium where a large number of bodies had been reportedly burned, being told that information on injuries of detainees was "classified", and having his request to meet Daw Aung San Suu Kyi denied.
- 5) Significantly, after each of these UN visits, the SPDC's tactics have successfully resulted in a decrease in international pressure. The media, foreign governments, and many international NGOs move on to another crisis. The SPDC has done it before, and is likely doing it again.
- 6) To show genuine care for the people of Burma, the SPDC must immediately and unconditionally open its borders to foreign aid. While Ban Ki-moon called Senior General Than Shwe's decision to allow in all aid workers, regardless of nationality, an "important development", on May 26 Thai Foreign Minister was reported as saying that "[t]hey have opened more, ... but it is not unhindered access." Simply put, this is unacceptable when people are dying.
- 7) One day before Ban Ki-moon's visit to Burma, the European Parliament passed a resolution "call[ing] on the EU Member States to press for a UN Security Council resolution referring the case to the Prosecutor of the ICC for investigation and prosecution." The SPDC's delay tactics continue to cost lives; they make the case even stronger to prosecute not only the countless crimes that have occurred in years past, but also the intentional prevention of foreign aid delivery.