

*CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY*

Introductory Statement by Mr. B. Lynn Pascoe  
Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs  
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Mr. President  
Distinguished Members of the General Assembly,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

We meet at a time when the situation in Myanmar is attracting unprecedented world attention. The fast-moving developments have brought into sharp focus the international context in which Myanmar finds itself today and the role the United Nations is expected to play through its good offices efforts in addressing the multiple challenges faced by the country.

It is in this context that I have the honour to present the report of the Secretary-General on the human rights situation in Myanmar today. This report is mandated by General Assembly resolution 61/232 which, inter alia, asks the Secretary-General to continue to provide his good offices and to pursue his discussions on the situation of human rights and the restoration of democracy with the Government and the people of Myanmar. While the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Mr. Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, addressed the human rights aspects of the resolution, the Secretary-General's report focuses on the good offices aspects of the resolution covering the period since October 2006 until October 2007.

Efforts to engage the Myanmar authorities through the good offices have continued since October last year, including a second visit to Myanmar by then Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Ibrahim Gambari, from 9 to 12 November 2006. On 22 May 2007, the Secretary-General designated Mr. Gambari to continue to pursue the good offices mandate. The present report details the activities undertaken on behalf of the Secretary-General since last year, including cooperation extended by the Government of Myanmar to the United Nations system by engaging in a dialogue with several senior officials, and the agreement reached between the International Labour Organization and the Government. In the interest of time, however, my introductory remarks will focus mainly on recent developments which led to more intense activities by the Secretary-General and his designated Special Envoy in pursuit of the good offices mandate.

Mr. President,

The sudden decision by the Government of Myanmar, on 19 August 2007, to sharply increase fuel prices directly affected the livelihood of the entire population in a dramatic way. This triggered peaceful demonstrations against the Government's economic policies and overall political and socio-economic conditions in the country. The demonstrations, while small in scale, spread from Yangon to other cities and the Government arrested several "88 Generation Students" leaders, activists and members of the opposition. The demonstrations quickly grew in size when monks and nuns started marching in protest against the Government's initial response and, by some reports, between fifty thousand and one hundred thousand people demonstrated peacefully in the streets of Yangon, Mandalay and other cities. After showing initial restraint, the authorities moved forcefully to suppress the peaceful protests by deploying security units throughout the cities and declaring a ban on public assembly and a curfew.

By 24 September, reports indicate the authorities used lethal force to disband the peaceful protestors. The number of casualties among the demonstrators clearly suggest an excessive use of force by the security forces. The incidents shocked the world and the Secretary-General was among the first to express his concern, calling for maximum restraint and dialogue. His call for the release of all those arrested during the demonstrations and for an end to the use of force against peaceful demonstrators was joined by the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Myanmar.

On 26 September, the Secretary-General dispatched Mr. Gambari to the region in anticipation of an invitation from the Government to visit Myanmar. Mr. Gambari visited the country from 29 September to 2 October. By the time his mission started, the protests on the streets had been largely put down but he delivered clear and strong messages to the senior most leadership on behalf of the Secretary-General. In the strongest possible terms, Mr. Gambari expressed the Secretary-General's and the international community's deep concern about the events of the preceding weeks and made specific recommendations for immediate steps to de-escalate the situation.

The situation in Myanmar remains of serious concern in light of continuing reports of human rights violations by security and non-uniformed personnel, particularly at night. These have included raids on private homes, intimidation, beatings, arbitrary arrests, and disappearances. A consensus resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 2 October deplored the violent repression of peaceful demonstrations and urged the Government to release detainees and other long-term political prisoners. On 11 October, the Security Council issued a Presidential statement deploring the violence used against peaceful demonstrations and stressed the need for the Government of Myanmar to create the necessary conditions for a genuine dialogue.

The Government has since announced that the curfew has been completely lifted and that some 2,677 demonstrators have been released. It has also announced that it would welcome the visits of the Secretary-General's Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, and a return visit by Mr. Gambari.

Mr. President,

During his short visit following the crisis, Mr. Gambari was also tasked by the Secretary-General to promote dialogue with the opposition as the best path to ending the crisis and to achieve national reconciliation. He was able to resume the role he had started to play during his last visits to Myanmar by conveying messages between the senior leadership and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the detained leader of the National League for Democracy (NLD). The Government of Myanmar publicly announced on 4 October that Senior General Than Shwe was prepared to meet with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi on certain conditions and on 8 October it announced the appointment of the Minister of Labour as the liaison officer to facilitate relations with her. The first meeting between Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the Labour Minister has since taken place.

The Secretary-General and the international community share the belief that a return to the status quo ante is no longer an option, nor is it sustainable. Since the issuance of the present report, the Secretary-General has asked Mr. Gambari to return to the region for consultation with the leaders of the region and to return quickly to Myanmar. We are pleased that leaders in the region and the entire international community are united in its support to the good offices efforts of the United Nations. The guiding principles for the implementation of the good offices remain the same as outlined in the report, and have been further strengthened by the following key objectives: (a) to follow-up on the implementation of the immediate steps recommended to the Government to de-escalate the crisis; (b) to facilitate the implementation and recommendations made to the Government to pursue an inclusive, participatory and transparent national reconciliation process; and (c) to facilitate the implementation of the recommendations made to the Government to address the socio-economic and humanitarian factors underlying the crisis.

Mr. President,

Ultimately, the responsibility for the future of Myanmar rests with the Government and people of Myanmar. The United Nations and the world is watching closely how that responsibility will be exercised in the interest of all the people in Myanmar. The Secretary-General is committed to making every effort, including by intensifying his good offices efforts, to work in partnership with Myanmar for a peaceful and prosperous Myanmar. We will support efforts towards national reconciliation, the transition to democracy and full respect for human rights as the necessary foundation for Myanmar's long-term stability and prosperity. We will count on the continued support of the international community, including the General Assembly as represented by this Committee. A renewed mandate from the General Assembly for the Secretary-General's good offices would contribute to enhancing the efforts of the Secretary-General and the United Nations. The more united the international community is, the better the prospects for arriving at the shared goals of peace, democracy and prosperity for the people of Myanmar.

Thank you Mr. President.

(29 October 2007)