

PRESS RELEASE

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122 Human Rights Groups in Asia-Pacific Call for a Special Session on Burma

(Bangkok) 122 human rights organisations, representing every sector of civil society, join hands in writing an open letter to Ambassador Doru-Romulus Costea, the President of the Human Rights Council (HRC) calling for the HRC to convene a special session on the human rights situation in Burma. This is one of the largest shows of solidarity to date from national, regional and international NGOs based in the Asia Pacific; the situation in Burma is in dire need of focused attention.

The open letter, which was delivered to the Human Rights Council Bureau this morning at 10 am (Bangkok Time) stated that “[the situation in Burma] requires immediate international concerns and actions...[as] the Myanmar government since 26 August 2007 responded by forcefully dispersing the demonstrators and monks who have been demonstrating peacefully in Rangoon”.

Currently, more than 200 human rights defenders, including monks and National League for Democracy (NLA) members, have been arrested, while nine people have reportedly been killed although this number could be significantly higher. There are eyewitness reports and footage of monks, demonstrators and civilians being beaten, tear gassed and shot at.

The letter stressed that the ongoing violence, if the HRC remains silent, could become a regional human rights issue, if not global one; in 1988 the government’s response to mass demonstrations was to massacre over 3,000 people. Currently over 3 million refugees and asylum seekers have escaped Burma, as well there are an estimated 27,000 Internally Displaced Persons in the Karen State due to the military offensive.

Lastly the open letter urged:

- The Presidency of the UN Human Rights Council to issue concern on the human rights situation in Myanmar in light of the urgency of the situation.
- The UN Human Rights Council to take immediate response to the human rights situation in Myanmar in its 6th Session.
- The UN Human Rights Council to convene a Special Session on the urgent human rights situation in Myanmar, with the view to prevent further human rights violations in Myanmar and to establish an appropriate preventive mechanism with the involvement of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Situation in Myanmar.
- To urge the Government of Myanmar to implement all the decisions and resolutions by the former Commission on Human Rights Regarding Myanmar.

The letter was initiated by Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), a regional human rights organisation based in Bangkok, Thailand. The letter was endorsed by 122 organisations in 18 countries in Asia-Pacific region.

For more information, please contact:

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Please see attached letter: Open Letter to Ambassador Doru-Romulus Costea, President of the Human Rights Council