



ISSUE FOCUS: THE PHILIPPINES AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN ASEAN

ARROYO TO MYANMAR PM: RELEASE AUNG SAN SUU KYI

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President Arroyo to PM Thein Sein of Myanmar

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Alistair MacDonald Ambassador and Head European Commission to the Philippines

When President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo met with Myanmar Prime Minister Thein Sein last April at the sidelines of the 14th ASEAN Summit in Pattaya, Thailand last April 10, President Arroyo urged the Myanmar government to release Aung San Suu Kyi. The meeting between the two leaders was upon the request of Myanmar.



President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and Myanmar Prime Minister Thein Sein before reporters prior to the start of their bilateral meeting at the Royal Cliff Grand Hotel in Pattaya, Thailand on April 10, 2009 (OPS-NIB Photo)

At their meeting, President Arroyo told the Myanmar Prime Minister that releasing Aung San Suu Kyi would be "an important gesture towards (Myanmar's) national reconciliation efforts."

The President pointed out that releasing Suu Kyi would result in "tremendous goodwill for Myanmar from the international community."

"As a neighbor of Myanmar, the Philippines has a deep sense of friendship with the people of Myanmar. We only have your country and your people's welfare at heart," the President said.

"This is the single, most concrete piece of advice and experience I can share with you," President Arroyo told the Myanmar leader. ☺

RP'S ACTIVE ROLE IN ASEAN HUMAN RIGHTS BODY LAUDED

The European Commission (EC) last March lauded the "particularly active role" of the Philippines in the mechanism for a human rights body (HRB) in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and announced a grant of P57 million for a human rights website launched in Manila on March 16.

Of the 10-member ASEAN, only the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand have so far established their respective human rights institutions (HRI), with Cambodia expected to become the fifth country joining the regional effort.

The ASEAN has been working on the establishment of an ASEAN Human Rights Body (AHRB), a commitment specified in the re-

cently-enforced ASEAN Charter, whose Terms of Reference (TOR) is being readied for possible adoption by Foreign Ministers in July and for launching at the ASEAN Summit in October.

"The Philippines has played a particularly active role in the fruition of the AHRB and I would like to express my appreciation for that," Ambassador Alistair MacDonald, head of the European Commission Delegation in the Philippines, said.

The website, a three-year project to be implemented by the four ASEAN national HRIs, will be under the chairmanship of the Philippine Commission on Human Rights. ☺

Statement of Dr. Alberto G. Romulo, Secretary of Foreign Affairs On the Detention of Aung San Suu Kyi at Insein Prison 17 May 2009

The Philippine Government is deeply troubled and outraged over the filing of trumped up charges against Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her transfer to Insein prison, particularly when concerns have been raised regarding her health condition.

These recent incidents will surely impede the process of national reconciliation and the Roadmap to Democracy in Myanmar.

We urge the government of Myanmar to resolve the matter speedily, and to release Aung San Suu Kyi immediately and unconditionally.

The Myanmar Government need not be sidetracked by the recent trumped up charges. As we have conveyed earlier, it is high time for the Myanmar Government to carry out its own "Roadmap for Democracy": its avowed program of releasing political detainees, including unfettering the National League for Democracy, and allowing its unconditional participation in free elections.

Fulfilling these commitments is long overdue.

MYANMAR STRAINING TIES WITH ASEAN

The Myanmar government's continued refusal to heed calls to end the oppression of opposition leaders could damage its relations with its fellow members in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Deputy Presidential Spokesperson Lorelei Fajardo said last March that the Philippine government has long been calling on the leaders of Myanmar to set opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi free.

She said the government has already conveyed its message to Myanmar's rulers through diplomatic Channels.

"We hope and wish and pray that as soon as possible we see the results (of our call) al-

ready for the betterment of the relations between and among countries in the ASEAN," Fajardo



Deputy Presidential Spokesperson Lorelei Fajardo

told a news briefing at the Palace.

"We are for democracy and we have been fighting this oppression for a long time. We

have been going hard on this issue for a long time," she said.

On his part, Cebu City Representative Antonio Cuenco, who chairs the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, emphasized that the Philippines is not the only country seeking Suu Kyi's release.

"The US is also calling for that. We've been calling for that. It's actually long overdue. We've been clamoring for her release."

"There must be drastic action against Burma in case they don't heed our appeal. There have been demands for the release of Suu Kyi for a long, long time now and yet Burma has not moved an inch," the Visayas lawmaker said. ☺

RP URGED TO LEAD EFFORTS TO FREE AUNG SAN SUU KYI

A group of current and former legislators from member states of ASEAN called on the Philippine government last month to lead the way in securing the immediate release of democracy activist Aung San Suu Kyi.

"May we call on the Philippine government to please urge members of ASEAN to collectively take a stand urging the Myanmar Government to comply with the democratic principles of ASEAN and its human rights body," said former congresswomen Loretta Ann Rosales, in a letter to Foreign Affairs Secretary Alberto Romulo.

Ms. Rosales is senior adviser to the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC).

When Secretary Romulo was senator, Rosales

recalled, "you delivered a strong privilege speech in favor of granting freedom to Ms. Suu Kyi, who has consistently stood as staunch leader and is continually loved and supported by her people."

The AIMPC's vice president, Malaysian Member of Parliament Lim Kit Siang, also issued a statement calling on ASEAN to pressure the junta to release Suu Kyi "to prove to the world that the ASEAN Charter is no 'whitewash' for the most egregious human rights violations in Myanmar."

Rosales said the AIPMC members feared that the move by the military junta to charge Suu Kyi of breaking the terms of her detention "is intended to justify her continued incarceration." ☺

When you were a Senator, you delivered a strong privilege speech in favor of granting freedom to Ms. Suu Kyi, who has consistently stood as staunch leader and is continually loved and supported by her people.

Letter of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus to Foreign Affairs Secretary Alberto G. Romulo



Ambassador Willy C. Gaa FROM THE CORNER OF BATAAN AND MASSACHUSETTS

was Assistant Secretary for Asian and Pacific Affairs at the Department of Foreign Affairs when President Arroyo first assumed the Presidency in 2001.

Although 9/11 highlighted the importance of fighting terrorism and intolerance, President Arroyo as early as then placed a high priority on democracy in Myanmar, a fellow ASEAN country, and on the immediate release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

This was not entirely surpris-

ing. As a senator, President Arroyo added her strong voice to the call of parliamentarians in the Philippines, in the region, and in the world for democratic reforms in Myanmar and for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

President Arroyo knew that ASEAN had an important role to play in convincing Myanmar to adopt democratic reforms. She knew that the world would judge ASEAN by how it works together to get Myanmar firmly on the road to democracy.

This same reasoning, on top of President's abiding respect for human rights, motivated her to take a very active role in working for the inclusion of a human rights body in the ASEAN charter.

Strong Philippine advocacy in the negotiations that led up to the adoption of the historic ASEAN Charter ensured that human rights would be a primary element and that a human rights body would be included in the ASEAN Charter.

Here in Washington, the clamor continues for democratic

reform in Myanmar and the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. High officials, society personalities, famous actors all speak with one voice on Myanmar.

The recent imprisonment and trial of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is a serious cause of concern for all. In his statement on this issue, Foreign Affairs Secretary Alberto G. Romulo said that the Philippines is "deeply troubled and outraged over the filing of trumped up charges against Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her transfer to Insein prison."

President Arroyo is keeping tabs on developments surrounding the court case against Myanmar democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, Press Secretary Cerge Remonde said last month.

The President has remained concerned but remains hopeful that through diplomacy and peaceful dialogue, and working together with the international community, genuine democratic reforms will be implemented in Myanmar and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi released immediately. ☺

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