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### DAW AUNG SAN SUU KYI: HOPE IMPRISONED

- Daw Aung Suu Kyi's leadership remains central to uniting the people of Burma.
- The military, frightened by her popular support, have targeted her liberty as a key strategy to undermine Burma's democracy movement.
- Since returning to Burma in 1988 to assist her ailing mother, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has spent 9 years and 3 months (as of February 2005) under detention, without proper security, health care, or access to her family.
- The 2004 extension of her house arrest, the later dismissal of her security guards and the drastic limitations put on her access to medical attention are further confirmation that her health and safety are under threat.
- The military has orchestrated at least 8 violent attacks against Daw Suu in the hopes that they can either "scare her away" or take her out of the equation.
- In May 2003, the SPDC sponsored a brutal assassination attempt against Daw Suu as she traveled the country, rallying huge crowds in support of both her and a democratic Burma.
- Even in the face of such abuse, her commitment to democracy and non-violence has not wavered.
- She commands such widespread respect and popularity within Burma and internationally that Burma's military leaders cannot even tolerate the uttering of her name, and usually refer to her as "that Lady" or "the Lady."
- The Lady's detention is symbolic of the way in which the people's aspirations for political and economic reform have been held hostage by the regime.

## **ENDURING POPULARITY**

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is the daughter of Burma's martyred independence leader, General Aung San, who was assassinated in 1947. She was only two years old when her father was murdered, and spent much of her teenage life in India with her mother, who was Burma's ambassador to India at the time. She later moved to England where she studied at Oxford University and she met Michael Aris, a Tibetan scholar, whom she eventually married. They have two sons, Alexander and Kim.

Aung San Suu Kyi returned to Burma to care for her mother in 1988 after she suffered a stroke. She returned to Burma without her husband and sons, having warned them earlier that "duty may one day call her back to her homeland."<sup>i</sup>

She was inadvertently drawn into politics in 1988, when people came to tell her of the oppression and hardship they suffered under the military. After a general strike was called on 22 August 1988, Daw Suu made an unexpected public appearance at Rangoon General Hospital where she called for unity and discipline. Here, she announced that she would address a public rally at the revered religious site, Shwedagon Pagoda on 26 August. An estimated half a million people, from all ethnic nationalities, came to hear her speak despite rumors the generals had planted bombs around the temple. There she spoke of "healing the country" and "promised she would do her utmost to restore democracy for the people."<sup>ii</sup>

In the elections that followed, the National League for Democracy (NLD), the party of which Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is general secretary won 80.1% of the seats. This election was a clear mandate for Daw Suu and illustrated overwhelming support for her and the NLD, despite the generals' best attempts to isolate her by detaining her under house arrest.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's popularity persists today, and can be seen in the phenomenal crowds she attracted whilst travelling around the country in 2003. During her travels throughout Burma, thousands of people risked abuse from the military to rally in support of her. Crowds of up to 40,000 are said to have turned out in support of Daw Suu, despite threats from local authorities.<sup>iii iv</sup> This enduring prominence proves that she remains a voice and a leader for the people of Burma.

## **DAW SUU UNDER DETENTION: THIRD TIME'S THE CHARM**

### **The First Internment: 1989 - 1995**

On 20 July 1989, the military placed Daw Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest after she attempted to organize a peaceful commemoration of Martyr's Day, the anniversary of her father's death. Her detention was authorized under the 1975 State Protection Law, legislation which permitted three years detention without charge or trial.<sup>v</sup> As many as 2,000 fellow NLD members and students were detained at the same time and, concerned for their security, Daw Suu requested that she be placed in Insein Prison alongside them. When this request was denied, she began a hunger strike, which lasted 11 days, broken

only after she was assured the students would not be tortured and would receive fair trials.<sup>vi</sup>

On 10 August 1991, the military retroactively amended the law Daw Suu was detained under, to allow for up to five years detention without charge or trial.<sup>vii</sup>

In a blatant abuse of the rule of law, the military junta enacted a law in 1994 allowing for Daw Suu to be detained for an additional year on the decision of a three-member committee, comprising the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs and Defense.<sup>viii</sup>

Daw Suu was released on 10 July 1995. On release she was told she would have “the rights of any ordinary Burmese citizen.”

Considering the conditions of “ordinary Burmese citizens,” this did not bode well for the democracy icon.<sup>ix</sup> It quickly became clear that she was not permitted to travel beyond Rangoon. However, thousands, from all over the country, flooded her front gate for the hugely popular “weekend talks.”

### **Take Two: 2000 - 2002**

On 23 September 2000, Daw Suu was confined to house arrest after she attempted to travel outside Rangoon in defiance of travel restrictions imposed upon her.<sup>x</sup>

She was released “unconditionally” on 6 May 2002 after 19 months of house arrest. In a written statement, then-government spokesman Col. Hla Min said 6 May would mark “a new page for the people of Myanmar and the international community.” The statement did not mention Daw Suu by name, but said: “We shall recommit ourselves to allowing all of our citizens to participate freely in the life of our political process, while giving priority to national unity, peace and stability of the country as well as the region.”<sup>xi</sup>

These proved to be fickle promises, given that after her release, Daw Suu faced a coordinated harassment campaign from the military-sponsored United Solidarity Development Association (USDA) and local authorities. As she attempted tours around the country, she was subjected to escalating levels of violence. In several cases, government backed anti-NLD protestors attacked Daw Suu’s convoy with knives, slingshots and sharpened bamboo sticks. On 25 May 2003, a brick was even thrown at Daw Suu’s car. Local authorities merely assisted the USDA in blockading of NLD motorcades.<sup>xii</sup>

### **...And A Third Time: 2003 - ????**

After the SPDC’s assassination attempt against Daw Suu, allegedly masterminded by Burma’s current PM, Lt Gen Soe-Win, Daw Suu was detained once again under s.10(a) of the State Protection Law. Taken under “protective custody,” she was originally imprisoned in a cell at Insein Prison, notorious for its harsh conditions and use of torture and beatings. She was later moved to house arrest.<sup>xiii</sup>

In November 2004, she was told that her detention had been extended (yet again) for another year.

### **Indefinite extension**

During the ASEAN Summit in Laos in November 2004, rumors cropped up of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's extended incarceration. Although new PM Lt Gen Soe Win said he was "unaware" of any such developments, NLD spokesperson U Lwin verified the extension on 29 November.<sup>xiv</sup>

According to members of the NLD Youth Wing who had been acting as security guards in her compound, Daw Suu was approached by police on 27 November and informed that her detention would be extended for at least another year. Reports say she had been aware of the impending extension for at least one month.<sup>xv</sup>

### **Health and Security Concerns**

Disturbingly, the Nobel laureate was recently ordered to reduce her security contingent from 13 NLD youth members to six. In protest of the move, she instead dismissed the entire contingent, leaving her without security protection. The generals also ordered her medical visits to be cut from three per week to one.<sup>xvi</sup> Even more worrying are reports that her medical visits, initially dropped to one per week, have now been limited to merely "whenever" the junta decides.

## **RESOLUTE IN THE FACE OF VIOLENCE**

Daw Suu's dedication to non-violence has not wavered, even in the face of continued violent attacks against her.

In April 1989, Daw Suu narrowly escaped an assassination attempt as she confronted an army unit while speaking at a major public rally for democracy in the Irrawaddy Delta. The unit had been ordered to aim their rifles at her as she spoke, and were waiting for the order to fire. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi reportedly approached the soldiers and calmly reasoned with them. An army major eventually called the troops back.<sup>xvii</sup>

On 9 November 1996, 200 men attacked Aung San Suu Kyi's motorcade in Rangoon with iron bars and sticks in an assault believed to have been orchestrated by the military.<sup>xviii</sup> Most believe the offenders were members of the Union Solidarity Development Organization (USDA), a junta sponsored group, who were allegedly paid 500 kyats each to participate. One month prior to the attack, Daw Suu herself said a SLORC minister told a USDA meeting that she should be killed.<sup>xix</sup> This attack was used as an excuse to close down her weekend gate-side rallies.

In 1998, she was twice detained when police blockaded her car as she attempted to leave Rangoon to meet with NLD officials. The first, a five-day stand off, was forcibly ended when the military seized her car, restrained her and drove the car back to her home against her will. In the second incident, one month later, she was detained for 13 days at the same roadblock. She had wisely taken food and water supplies in expectation of a blockade, but the authorities refused to allow her access to fresh supplies when these ran out. She was returned to Rangoon when deteriorating health and dehydration set in.<sup>xx</sup>

On 26 June, 1998, Daw Suu and NLD Deputy Chairman U Tin Oowas injured when the military attacked a group of university students arriving at her home for a literature class.<sup>xxi</sup>

During 2000, her convoy was raided by nearly 200 riot police at Dallah, on the outskirts of Rangoon. She was then forcibly returned her to Rangoon. The raid ended a nine-day standoff in which she was (again) confined to her vehicle.<sup>xxii</sup>

After her release in 2002, the military violently blocked her travels around the country. On 25 December 2002, during Daw Suu's trip to Arakan State in North Western Burma, soldiers placed trucks, boulders and barbed wire across streets to stop her vehicle, and civilians were warned not to attend her rallies.<sup>xxiii</sup>

On 30 May 2003, the SPDC orchestrated a brutal assassination attempt against Daw Suu and her motorcade. A military-sponsored mob of up to 5,000 people attacked Daw Suu during a tour of Depayin, Northern Burma. The attackers were, once again, the SPDC-backed USDA. An estimated 100 - 282 NLD members and supporters were killed during the brutal attack, after which Daw Suu was placed under "protective custody."<sup>xxiv</sup>

## **STRENGTH ENDURES: DAW SUU'S PERSONAL HARDSHIP**

### **Isolation**

Without her security contingent, Daw Suu is now isolated in her compound, apart from two housekeepers. The SPDC have continually tried to isolate her: from the pro-democracy movement, the wider Burmese populace and the international community. Military personnel surround her home and telephone lines are regularly cut to prevent contact with the outside world. Residents near her home on Rangoon's University Avenue report that security forces had parked vans, cars and motorcycles at both ends of the street in an effort to prevent her leaving the house, as well as unwanted visitors.<sup>xxv</sup>

### **Unable to see her Family**

When she was first placed under house arrest in 1989, Daw Suu was unable to see her sons for two years. Her youngest son, Kim, was 11 when she was detained; Daw Suu herself said he underwent a complete "physical transformation" during the initial two-year separation, saying, "had they met on the street...she would not have known her

son.”<sup>xxvi</sup> She has not been allowed to stay in touch with her children for extended periods of time. It has now been several years (again) since her sons were allowed to visit her.

Daw Suu was also prevented from seeing her husband for four years before his death in 1999. In early 1999, the junta refused to issue him a visa when he was diagnosed with prostate cancer, even though they had not seen each other since 1995 when he visited her for Christmas. While the junta had said numerous times she was free to leave the country to “be with her husband and children” it was clear that she would not be allowed to return to Burma were she to do so.<sup>xxvii</sup>

### **Travel Restrictions**

When free from detention, the military authorities also imposed travel restrictions on Aung San Suu Kyi, prohibiting her from leaving Rangoon. The SPDC hoped that by isolating her from Burma’s outlying regions, her support base there would diminish.

She continually defied the travel bans and attempted to leave Rangoon but was prohibited, often forcibly. For example, in March 1996, she boarded a train bound for Mandalay but citing a "last minute problem" the coach she was in was left behind at the station.<sup>xxviii</sup>

### **Personal Attacks**

For much of her time under detention, and during periods of release, the state-controlled media continually instigated personal attacks against Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy.<sup>xxix</sup>

In September 2000, the junta raided her headquarters, seized documents and arrested several members of the NLD.

### **Prohibiting Personal Ceremonies**

On 16 April 1996 Authorities prevented Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and supporters performing a traditional New Year ceremony at a Rangoon lake.

(END)

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