



Betty Williams, Ireland - 1976
Máiread Corrigan Maguire, Ireland - 1976
Rigoberta Menchú Tum, Guatemala - 1992
Prof. Jody Williams, USA - 1997
Dr. Shirin Ebadi, Iran - 2003
Prof. Wangari Maathai, Kenya - 2004

united for peace with justice and equality

Nobel Peace Laureate and prominent women's delegation say human rights must not be compromised by post-cyclone recovery efforts

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Increased political pressure on the Burmese military junta to take steps toward democracy including freeing Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners must not be eclipsed by the desperate need for humanitarian aid in the wake of Cyclone Nargis. This, according to Nobel Peace Laureate Jody Williams, actress-activist Mia Farrow and a delegation of prominent international women led by the Nobel Women's Initiative visiting Thailand this week to meet with Cyclone Nargis victims who have fled to the Thai-Burma border as well as women's groups and other community organizations.

“Handing the military junta in Burma aid without also using the opportunity to push for democratic reform will not help the people in Burma in the short, medium or long-run,” says Professor Williams, who received the Nobel Peace prize in 1997 for her work on banning landmines. “As it stands, international aid is not reaching the people who need it most—and civil society groups trying to help those in need are being harassed and even imprisoned.”

Earlier this week, the UN together with ASEAN and the Burmese military junta released the final Post-Nargis Joint Assessment report that provides the data recommending the level of international aid required by Burma. The report also makes recommendations regarding implementation of the aid and accountability.

Since the cyclone in May, the military regime has arrested at least 17 activists including the most famous comedian in Burma for taking aid to the affected communities, and international aid organizations report that their efforts to distribute aid—including medical help—are hampered or even sometimes blocked by the military regime.

“We salute the work of those courageous Burmese individuals and grassroots organizations that put their lives at risk to help the survivors,” says Ms. Farrow, internationally-known for work to help the victims of the war in Darfur. “It is

unacceptable that the people of Burma—already suffering after years of repression—should now be dying from starvation and disease. It is long past time for some semblance of accountability and transparency. The people of Burma deserve nothing less.”

Williams, Farrow and the other delegation members—which also includes Dr. Sima Simar, Chair of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission—collected testimonies this week from prisoner rights groups, women’s groups and other civil society organizations working along the Thai-Burma border.

“As my sister Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi said, we must use our freedom to promote the freedom for the people of Burma,” says Prof. Williams. “The people we spoke to don’t understand why there is no international outrage over a regime that steals aid and resells it to needy survivors. In the words of one of the Nargis survivors, ‘The regime is very rich now. It looks like the international community is supporting and protecting the regime. They send supplies to us but it is the regime who receives it. As long as they are in power, we will have nothing.’”

It is estimated that 40% of Burma’s national budget is dedicated to military spending, while less than 3% goes to health and education. Civil society groups report a collapse of human services within Burma, and cite the violence and conflict as one of the major barriers to improving the situation. Burma has the 4th highest child mortality rate in the world, at 106 deaths per 1,000 lives births. In Burma’s conflict zones, those rates are estimated to be higher – comparable to the Congo in Central Africa.

The Nobel Women’s Initiative delegation is calling for the UN, ASEAN and other international institutions to pressure the Burma military regime to make immediate steps toward greater democracy. Specifically, the women’s delegation is calling for:

- the immediate release of all political prisoners in Burma, including Nobel Peace Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi;
- the end to the campaign of violence against Burma’s ethnic minorities, and specifically end the use of rape as a weapon of war;
- the delivery of aid directly to the people of Burma, not into the hands of the military dictatorship;
- a commitment from ASEAN, as well as the UN Security Council, to act upon their own call for democratic reform including freedom of assembly in Burma; and
- China and Russia to follow the lead of India to stop selling arms to the military dictatorship.

After Thailand, the delegation will visit Addis Ababa, Juba in South Sudan and conclude their trip in Chadian refugee camps bordering Darfur. In Africa, the delegation will make the link between the on-going human rights crisis in Burma to the war in Darfur and Sudan.

The Nobel Women's Initiative was founded in 2006 by 6 women Nobel Peace Laureates to address increased instability and violations to women's rights worldwide. The 7th Nobel Peace Laureate, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, is under house arrest in Burma.