



**Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'Homme**

ORGANISATION INTERNATIONALE NON GOUVERNEMENTALE AYANT STATUT CONSULTATIF AUPRES DES NATIONS UNIES, DE L'UNESCO,  
DU CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE ET D'OBSERVATEUR AUPRES DE LA COMMISSION AFRICAINE DES DROITS DE L'HOMME ET DES PEUPLES

International Federation  
for Human Rights

Federación Internacional  
de los Derechos Humanos

الفدرالية الدولية لحقوق الانسان

The Honorable Dr. Manmohan Singh  
Prime Minister  
Office of the Prime Minister  
Republic of India

via fax : +91 11 230 16857

Paris, 20 July 2010

**Subject: The State visit of General Than Shwe to the Republic of India**

Your Excellency,

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), representing 164 organisations across the world, is deeply troubled by your government's decision to welcome Senior General Than Shwe of Burma in a state visit to India, to take place from 25-29 July 2010. As chairman of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), Than Shwe leads one of the most abusive dictatorships in the world. The military junta has ruled Burma for more than forty years, during which it refused to recognise the landslide victory by the National League for Democracy (NLD) in the 1990 elections, brutally suppressed all voices of dissent, and conducted military campaigns against ethnic minorities. The long list of the junta's well-documented human rights abuses includes acts that may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity under international law.

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Burma is at a critical juncture this year, as the military junta is preparing for the first general election in two decades. Sadly, the planned elections will be neither free nor fair under the prevailing conditions. The 2008 Constitution, approved through a sham referendum in the immediate aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, ensures the military is above the law and immune to prosecution. It also grants broad powers to the Armed Forces' Commander-in-Chief, including the right to appoint 25% of the seats in both houses of Parliament. On March 8, the SPDC enacted five draconian election laws that give the junta absolute control over the entire election process. The laws also bar political prisoners from participating in the elections. There are currently over 2,100 political prisoners in Burma, including Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been under some form of detention for over 14 of the last 20 years.

Considering the dismal human rights record of Burma, high-level visits between Burma and India that focus primarily on military and economic cooperation send the wrong message and serve to perpetuate the military dictatorship in Burma. According to media reports, bilateral trade between India and Burma reached US\$1.19 billion in the fiscal year of 2009-10, an increase of 26.1 percent from the previous year, and India is now Burma's fourth largest trading partner. Over the past decade, military ties between the two countries have grown progressively closer and India has sold Burma's regime military equipment that includes artillery pieces, mortar and artillery rounds, and anti-aircraft weapons. As a result, FIDH is deeply concerned by India's potential complicity, in particular of Indian private actors, such as companies, in the Burmese regime's widespread and systematic human rights violations.

FIDH believes that maintaining bilateral relations with the Burmese regime without due regard to universal human rights is unbecoming of the world's largest democracy and a responsible world power. India should play a constructive role in support of democracy and human rights in Burma. Thus, it should, at a minimum, refrain from lending legitimacy and support to Burma's military junta. Instead, the Government of India should convey clearly and publicly to Burma's military leaders that there is an urgent need for genuine democratic reform. In particular, India should join the international community in urging the Burmese authorities to meet key benchmarks before the planned elections.

The benchmarks include:

- The immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and ethnic nationality leaders;
- Genuine and inclusive dialogue with key stakeholders from democracy groups and ethnic nationalities, including a comprehensive review of the 2008 Constitution; and

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- Immediate cessation of systematic human rights abuses and criminal hostilities against ethnic nationalities.

FIDH sincerely hopes that the Indian government will seize the opportunity of this State visit to remind to its Burmese counterparts their obligations under international human rights law and universal principles, obligations that Burma/Myanmar blatantly violates.

Thank you in advance for taking into consideration our concerns and recommendations.

Sincerely yours,



Souhayr Belhassen  
FIDH President

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