



Private Member's Bill: Aung San Suu Kyi
House of Representatives Main Committee

17 August 2009

Sharon Grierson MP

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (8.12 pm)— I rise today to speak in support of the Private Member's Bill deploring the Myanmar regime for pressing new and spurious charges against Dr Aung San Suu Kyi for her ongoing detention and persecution, and condemn the regime for continuing to deny the Dr her fundamental human rights, notably those which prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention, guarantee the right to a fair trial, and guarantee the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

Her incarceration is a gross injustice of the most serious kind, an incarceration by a regime that is afraid of Dr Suu Kyi's ability to organise and unite the people of her country against its authoritarian rule.

Dr Suu Kyi's credentials, and her international reputation cannot be doubted. Winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991, Dr Suu Kyi has received vocal support from countries throughout Europe, North and South America, India, Israel, and Japan, and from Australia.

In 2007 she was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal by the United States – the US House of Representatives voted unanimously 400-0. She was awarded the medal in 2008; the first person in history to receive the prize while imprisoned.

So how is it that an individual of such prestige, and of such honour, can continue to be imprisoned on such spurious charges?

In the 1990 general election, Suu Kyi was elected to be Prime Minister, as leader of the winning National League for Democracy party, which won 59% of the vote and 394 of 492 seats. Her subsequent detention by the military junta prevented her from assuming office. Dr Suu Kyi has been under house arrest for 14 of the last twenty

years.

Her latest charges and detention stem from an incident in May of this year, when an American citizen, John William Yettaw, swam across to her private compound. Protestingly to have exhaustion, he was allowed to stay at her residence for two days before making the return swim, where he was subsequently arrested.

Dr Suu Kyi was arrested for violating the terms of her house arrest under Burma's so-called Law Protecting the State Against the Dangers of Subversive Elements. Last week, Aung San Suu Kyi was sentenced to three years with labour, but reduced to 1 ½ years' home detention.

This sentence removes any prospect of Aung San Suu Kyi participating in Burma's elections, scheduled for 2010. Elections, no doubt, that would see her as the people's choice to lead the country to freedom and democracy.

The Australian government has since condemned her most recent arrest.

Dr Suu Kyi's situation is one of only thousands of similar incarcerations in Myanmar. It is estimated that in the last 18 months alone, leading up to the next 2010 elections, the number of political prisoners in Myanmar has doubled.

Her detention is symptomatic of the ongoing internal situation in Burma. Unless significant political, economic and social reforms occur, the threat the regime poses to its people, and to the region surrounding it, will only continue to increase.

I join my government in repeating its call for the regime to release Aung San Suu Kyi immediately and unconditionally, and to release the more than 2000 political prisoners in Myanmar.

Australia maintains financial sanctions against the Burmese regime. The Government will now move to update these and keep them focused for maximum impact. I strongly support these sanctions – knowing full well that the majority of the Myanmar populace suffer while the privileged few of the junta live well.

It is still not too late to set aside the conviction and sentence, release Aung San Suu Kyi and move the regime down the path of national reconciliation.

I applaud Dr Suu Kyi for her courage in peacefully protesting the democratic rights of the people of Myanmar over all these years, with great dignity and civility

I finish with an excerpt from one of Dr Suu Kyi's most famous speeches: "Freedom From Fear". It begins:

It is not power that corrupts but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it.