US House of Reps. Extends Burma’s Sanctions in Landslide

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ACTIVISTS PRAISE “STALWART” SUPPORT FOR NOBEL PEACE PRIZE RECIPIENT, DEMOCRACY STRUGGLE

(Washington, DC) The United States Campaign for Burma today praised Congressional leaders for continuing their tough stance against Burma’s ruling military regime. In a landslide vote of 373-2, the US House of Representatives passed a resolution renewing a one-year ban on all imports from the Southeast Asian country.

“This vote shows stalwart support for Aung San Suu Kyi and the democracy movement in Burma,” said Aung Din, co-founder of USCB and a torture survivor and former political prisoner of Burma’s regime.

The resolution was led in the House by Tom Lantos (D-CA) and Peter King (R-NY), members of the International Relations Committee. Mitch McConnell (R-KY), the US Senate Majority Whip, and Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) have introduced an identical resolution in the Senate. Secretary of State Colin Powell has called for passage of the resolution.

The vote comes amid a growing international chorus of condemnation of the regime, which is reneging on promises of reform made publicly and to the United Nations Secretary General. The regime, led by Senior General Than Shwe, had publicly promised to form a “national convention” resulting in a transition to democracy. However, instead of permitting the democracy movement to participate openly and freely in the convention, Than Shwe’s regime hand-selected cronies as convention participants and pledged to enforce an order sentencing critics of the convention to 20 years in prison.

The move was criticized by the US and European Union. In a June 1st press conference, the UN Human Rights Commission’s special rapporteur on Burma, Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, described
the convention as, “a meaningless and undemocratic exercise.” He stated, “This political transition will not work. It will not work on the moon. It will not work on Mars.”

The US and EU have imposed a broad range of economic and political sanctions on Burma’s regime, and actors in Southeast Asia are increasingly hesitant to defend the regime’s behavior. US sanctions include a freeze on the regime’s assets, a ban on the granting of travel visas to top members of the regime, a ban on new US investment inside Burma, and a ban on all imports from the country. Under the terms of the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003, the ban on imports must be renewed every year with a joint Congressional resolution.

The regime’s brutality is well-documented. According to credible nongovernmental organizations, it has imprisoned over 1,500 political prisoners, conscripted up to 70,000 child soldiers, carries out a modern form of slavery, and uses rape as a weapon of war. 1991 Nobel Peace Prize and Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient Aung San Suu Kyi led the National League for Democracy (NLD) to an 82% victory in Burma’s last democratic election, in 1990, but the military regime has refused to allow the party to take power. Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD have called for the international community to impose sanctions to pressure the regime into talks.

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