



Burma: using our freedom to support theirs

Today we are hearing the people of Burma express their desire for democracy and justice. They are opposing a military junta which for 17 years has been denying the victory of the democratic party of Aung San Suu Kyi, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991.

This non-violent opposition made up of daily, growing and exceptional demonstrations stands in sharp contrast to the cruelty of the junta.

We are witnessing the rapid renaissance of a very important democratic movement in Burma. Huge protests take place for more than a week in the most important cities of Burma. Monday, 100.000 Burmese monks and citizens were in the streets of Rangoon. Never, in the last two decades, have so many Burmese citizens dared to protest against the military junta. Moreover, popular artists along with the scorned representatives elected by democratic suffrage in 1990 are publicly supporting the popular discontent. What Burmese ask today is democracy, national reconciliation and freedom for all political prisoners.

The situation, which reached a momentum, is however risky. The military junta might violently stop the movement any day to remain in power. The junta has indeed a long history of repression:

The United Nations High Commission for Human Rights declares that it is "gravely concerned about the systematic violations of human rights that the people of Myanmar continue to suffer." The International Red Cross counts 1550 political prisoners in Burma. The world trade union organisations estimate that 800,000 Burmese are subject to forced labour. For the International Labour Organisation, "the impunity with which the officials of the government and in particular the military treat the civilian population as an enormous source of forced labour is one element of a political system based on the use of force and intimidation intended to deprive the population of its democratic rights. Their actions are a serious offence against human dignity".

At a time when the Burmese need solidarity, we cannot remain silent. As female political leaders, we want first of all to send a message of support to Aung San Suu Kyi: the only Nobel Peace Prize winner deprived of her freedom of movement. Her call resounds in us and we want to amplify it: "Please use your freedom to promote ours", she constantly proclaims. This woman represents the aspirations of a people for peace and freedom. Those in our countries who have put all their energy into winning peace and recovering freedom know how important an international message of support is.

We support the courage of the Burmese people that aspire to freedom. They have chosen non-violence to ensure a transition to democracy. This choice is exemplary. We risk wasting its power if the international community does not take over the baton with strength and determination.

Within our countries and based on the responsibilities we have, we call upon the Security Council and the General Assembly of the United Nations, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, The European Union, but also on the great powers of this region of the world, to guarantee the





Burmese people respect for their fundamental rights as well as a rapid transition to democracy, the only guarantee of regional stability.

Burma has become a universal symbol of dictatorship and oppression. But it is also a universal symbol of the non-violence and the courage of its people, like the Chile of General Pinochet in the past or South Africa in the darkest years of apartheid.

Shattering the Burmese deadlock would prove the determination of the international community to support the democratisation of Asia.

Signatories:

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