

Asian Center for the Progress of Peoples

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HOTLINE ASIA

Urgent Appeals Update 2010:1

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Happy New Year! At the start of the year 2010, we also mark the 30th year of *Hotline Asia*. Your solidarity has been encouraging the work of *Hotline Asia* and other justice and peace workers in Asia Pacific. Let us keep praying for the countries/ cities in the region throughout the year, especially on their democratic development, for example:

- The first election in Sri Lanka after the civil war (26 January);
- Presidential election in the Philippines (10 May);
- The first election in Burma since 1990 (10 October); and
- Constitutional reforms and de facto referendum movement in Hong Kong.

UA090626(5) - CHINA

**Release Dr. Liu Xiaobo and Stop Suppressing
Freedom of Expression**

Dr. Liu Xiaobo, the prominent leader of Democracy Movement in 1989 and drafter of the "Charter 08" (a petition calling for political reforms and the protection of human rights in the country), was convicted of "inciting subversion of State power" on 25 December 2009, and sentenced to 11 years of imprisonment and two years' deprivation of political rights.

The trial of Liu took place in Beijing No.1 Intermediate People's Court on 23 December 2009 and only lasted three hours, with security locking people out of the courtroom. The trial took place only 12 days after Liu was indicted. His lawyers have requested postponement of the trial, considering that they did not have enough time to review the case file and prepare their defense. However, the judge rejected the request, saying that "it was not possible". Rights activists accused Chinese government of deliberately pushing the case through the courts during the Western holiday season to avoid global attention.

On the eve of the trial, several social activists and supporters of Liu were threatened by the police not to organize any supporting activities on internet nor in front of the court during the trial. The police also warned some of these supporters not to leave their homes in the following 3 days, with attempt of forbidding them to go to the Court. Moreover, Liu's wife was prohibited from attending his trial on the grounds that she was a "witness" for the prosecution.

In Beijing, several diplomats of foreign embassies, including the United States (U.S.), Germany and Australia, requested to observe the trial but were told that all the observer passes had already been given out and they were barred from the courthouse when Liu's trial began. It is reported that Liu's lawyers were not able to conduct any interviews under strict orders from the State Judicial Bureau, until the verdict was finished.

Dr. Liu handed his appeal to the court on 29 December despite limited chance of altering the result. Under normal conditions, the hearing of appeal should be held within one month after the appeal being lodged. His lawyer, Shang Baojun, urged the international community to continue calling for release of Liu, hoping that pressure on Beijing could lead to a successful appeal or at least better prison treatment.

Since the verdict of Liu, the international community has criticized Chinese government's contempt for its commitments for universal human rights. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, issued a statement of concern that the conviction and extremely harsh sentence of Liu Xiaobo marked a severe restriction on the scope of freedom of expression in China. A number of governments, including the U.S., European, and Canadian governments, have also issued statements

of concern. Human rights groups have widely denounced the harsh sentence of Liu Xiaobo for exercising rights which is guaranteed by the Chinese constitution and international laws.

In Hong Kong, 21 protesters demonstrated on the Lo Wu Bridge, the area between the immigration border of Hong Kong and Shenzhen, on 27 December. Linking with a black thread on their wrists and wearing placards on the backs, protesters tried to walk across the bridge and give themselves up as signatories of Charter 08. Upon arriving the border of Shenzhen, three of the protestors, as well as a journalist and a passerby, were dragged away by Chinese officers in plain clothes to Shenzhen immigration control point. Those who were not arrested tried to find Hong Kong policemen for help, but they did nothing, according to one of the protestors. The arrested were released after three hours of detention.

Other signatories of Charter 08 have also been harassed. Zhao Shiyong, the secretary-general of the Independent Chinese Pen Center, has been harassed since 2008. Just about two weeks after the verdict of Liu, he was taken by the police on 11 January 2010 after a house search.

ACPP issued UA081224(9) and UA090626(5) respectively in August 2008 and June 2009 to call for the release of Liu and halt of harassment of other signatories of Charter 08, in solidarity with the concerned groups all over the world.

Sources:

Human Rights in China, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Agence France-Press, Associated Press, Reuters, AsiaNews, South China Morning Post

UA080807(5) – MYANMAR

**Commemorate 8888 Uprising,
Demand a Democratic Government**

On 4 January 2010, the Burma military junta announced that the general elections will be held this year and, on 6 January, it specified the date of election would be 10 October. Junta claimed the coming election as part of the “transition to civilian rule process” and “roadmap to democracy”. Burma’s military leader, Than Shwe, has urged people to “make a correct choice” in the coming election. Without spelling out the meaning, many Burmese would interpret his comments as an implicit warning.

The coming election will be the first one since 1990 election, in which the National League of Democracy had a landslide victory but were immediately subjected to vigorous suppression from the military government, such as detention of Aung San Suu Kyi and several other oppositions, and were never allowed to take the power.

Opposition groups refused to recognize the coming election unless their requests are fulfilled. Requests include engagement of the junta in dialogue with all stakeholders, a comprehensive review of the Constitution 2008 and release of all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi.

Due to defects of the current constitution, it is believed that, in the coming election, a substantial number of seats in Parliament would be reserved for the military and individuals being loyal to the junta. According to a local source, many incumbent ministers planned to resign from their post and announce their candidacy around April, giving themselves the necessary six months to prepare for election campaign. It is also expected that a few pro-junta political parties would be formed to compete for the election. Obviously, the junta has begun its election-jockeying to ensure their power in the government. The democratic election is merely a tactic to garner international approval.

American diplomats have emphasized that Washington’s wide array of political and economic sanctions would not be relaxed until progress was made on human rights, referring to the rules and conducts of the coming elections.

A number of neighbouring countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations have said that they would closely watch the election to gauge the country’s progress on human rights.

Aung San Suu Kyi who has been detained for 14 of the past 20 years and remains under house

arrest in Yangon (Rangoon). Last August, she was sentenced for further detention by 18 months, allegedly for violating detention rules because of an American, who swam across a lake and stayed in her residence. An appeal hearing was conducted at Myanmar's Supreme Court on 18 January 2010, but a ruling might be a week away. She was barred from attending the hearing. Her lawyer has argued that the law she was charged under was no longer applicable because it was part of the 1974 Constitution, which have been reformed in 2008. If the Supreme Court upholds the decision, Aung will be unable to participate in coming elections.

To join the collective efforts to urge for release of political prisoners and a democratic government in Burma, *ACPP* issued *SUA070928(3)* and *UA080807(5)* in 2007 and 2008 respectively.

Sources:

BBC News, the New York Times, Asashi Shimbun, Burma Partnership, United Press International, Aljazeera.net

UA060815(6) – INDIA

Give Timely Relief to Suicide-driven Farmers in Vidarbha

Remedies for the plight of farmers in Vidarbha have been far from satisfactory over years. Under pressure from local and foreign groups, the state government recently planned to introduce a dairy development scheme by providing an alternative source of income for the distressed farmers in Vidarbha.

The proposal, initiated by Nitin Raut, Animal Husbandry and Dairy Development Minister (AHDD), targets the educated but unemployed youth of villages hit by suicide, self-help groups and farmers from backward communities.

According to the scheme, every farmer in the district will receive five cows or buffaloes and every village will have a pashu sevak (veterinary helper) who has a diploma in veterinary sciences. Beneficiaries will receive initial training from the agricultural and dairy development department. The officials from AHDD will take part in the training and seek markets for the beneficiaries' products and will monitor their activities and progress. The proposal will be tabled in the next cabinet's meeting.

To raise the concern on the widespread suicide in Vidarbha, as well as other parts of the country, *ACPP* issued *UA060815(6)* on August 2006.

Source:

Hindustan Times

UA020207(3) - INDIA

Avoid Bloodshed, Maintain Peace at Ayodhya

Since the demolition of the Babri Masjid (Babri Mosque, a Muslim temple) on 6 December 1992, which resulted in great violence and killings, the long-running dispute between Hindus and Muslims over the claim of the owning right of the piece of land has yet to be resolved.

Led by the retired Indian Supreme Court Judge M.S. Liberhan, a Commission was formed on 16 December 1992 by an order of the Indian Home Union Ministry to investigate the destruction of the disputed structure. The Commission was originally mandated to submit its report within three months. After a delay of 17 years, the commission submitted the report to Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, on 30 June 2009. In 24 November 2009, a day after the allegedly leaked contents of the report was published by a newspaper, the report was tabled in the Indian parliament by the Home Minister. While the court report is expected to resolve the dispute between Hindus and Muslims, it is also likely to spark a fresh round of violence.

In the 1,029-page report, a number of BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) leaders were labeled as "pseudo-moderates" and were accused of complicity with Hindu extremists. They include top leaders like Lalchand Kishen Advani, the current opposition leader of the Parliament; Murli Manohar Joshi, a former Development minister; and Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the prime minister between 1998 and 2004. The Liberhan report has caused a political storm because it blames BJP leaders.

Asgar Ali, a Muslim intellectual and the president of the Center for Study of Society and Secularism, commented that the parliamentary debate on the destruction of the mosque, as well as those responsible for massacres, might be manipulated for the benefit of ambitious party leaders and would

not lead to common peace between the Hindu and Muslim community. For reconciliation between the communities, it is important to understand the real problems between Hindu and Muslim communities and safeguard the secular nature of the country.

Asgar recalled, "rather than fighting for Babri Masjid, [the Muslims are now focusing more] on problems of education, economic progress and development." He added that, as long as they were not held accountable, perpetrators would continue to make use of the issue for electoral purposes, even at the cost of violent propaganda.

On 6 December 1992, 150,000 members of the Hindu organization, Sangh Parivar, tore down the mosque causing disorder, resulting in death of more than 2,000 people, mostly Muslims. To raise concern on the issue, which has not been resolved for more than 10 years, ACPP issued UA020207(3) on February 2002. For background of the issue, please refer to UA020207(3).

Source:

AsiaNews, Times of India

Publication on Request

I. Justice and Peace Workers Bulletin, October - December, No. 4 2009

- **A Silent Moment**

- **What's Going on in Asia?**

FIJI: Activities of ECREA

INDIA: Millennium Development Goals Campaign- SUTA; Siege to the Garbage Recycling Plant Imperiling; Thousands of Villagers

JAPAN: 35th National Gathering of Justice and Peace Council in Saitama; Inter-religious Conference on Article 9 and Peace in Asia

NEW ZEALAND: Aotearoa New Zealand in solidarity with West Papua

PAKISTAN: NCJP's Recent Activities

PHILIPPINES: Justice for the Victims of Maguindanao Massacre; Voices against Intex Mining Project in Mindoro

SRI LANKA: Prison Day programme; Santha Fernando Released on Bail

THAILAND: Bangkok Climate Change Talks 2009

- **Issues of Concern/Events**

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- **Justice and Peace Resources**

Master of Human Rights and Democratization

Nexus of Climate Change and Human Rights

- **JPW Exchange Corner**

UM Appeals for Communities Affected by Typhoon Ondoy

Hong Kong Constitutional Reform

21 JPWs at ACPP Workshop on "Responding to Injustices"

ACPP's Christmas Message 2009

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