



Janelle Saffin MP
Federal Member for Page

An Invitation to the Women of Australia

Dear Friends,

With the support of our Prime Minister, the Honourable Kevin Rudd MP and Ms Thérèse Rein, I am writing to request your participation in a unique event on Tuesday, October 27, 2009 at the Sydney Opera House in support of the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and Burmese hero, Aung San Suu Kyi.

In Burma, she is simply and respectfully known as 'The Lady'.

Aung San Suu Kyi has spent 13 of the last 19 years under house arrest, put there by a brutal military dictatorship.

I have been an advocate for the Burmese cause and specifically Aung San Suu Kyi for almost two decades. I recently introduced a Private Members Motion into the House giving Members of Parliament the opportunity to debate the ongoing human rights and humanitarian crisis in Burma.

Now I am seeking the support of Australian women in response to Aung San Suu Kyi's call 'Please use your liberty to promote ours'.

The concept is simple; women will gather on the steps of the Sydney Opera House - an internationally recognised symbol of freedom of expression. For 15 minutes we will stand united in support for Aung San Suu Kyi to send the world the message: 'We Gather for Democracy, Stand for Freedom'.

This is an opportunity to show the world Australia's commitment to peacefully promoting democracy and to demonstrate the power of Australian women in mobilising support for those causes close to our hearts and central to our values.

I personally want to thank you for your consideration of this invitation and look forward to standing with you at this event.

Warm regards

Janelle Saffin MP

Federal Member for Page.

Aung San Suu Kyi

"PLEASE USE YOUR LIBERTY TO HELP PROMOTE OURS" AUNG SAN SUU KYI



Aung San Suu Kyi, known simply as 'The Lady' in Burma, is considered worldwide as a torchbearer for freedom for the more than 50 million Burmese living under a brutal military regime.

As the popular leader of the people of Burma and renowned for her unwavering determination, courage and commitment to democracy, she has spent 13 of the last 19 years under house arrest in Burma.

This was recently extended for another 18 months, after she was sentenced to three years in prison on trumped up charges of violating her house arrest. General Than Shwe, the same man who brought the charges against her, commuted the three-year prison sentence to 18 months' house arrest.

In 1989, Aung San Suu Kyi became the leader of a pro-democracy movement in the aftermath of the brutal repression of a pro-democratic uprising which challenged the dictators of Burma.

She campaigned for her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), in the 1990 elections and despite harassment, arrests and killings by soldiers of her followers, the NLD went on to win 82 per cent of seats in parliament.

The dictators never recognise the results, after agreeing to hold the elections.

Aung San Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest in Rangoon under martial law which allows detention and imprisonment without charge or trial. It is believed more than 2100 political prisoners are being held in Burmese jails.

Despite worldwide protests and international pleas for her release from world leaders, Government bodies and the global community, Aung San Suu Kyi continues to be held prisoner.

She has refused to leave her people or her country, even when her beloved husband Dr. Michael Aris was dying, and the dictators went so far as to cut off telephone calls between husband and wife.

Aung San Suu Kyi's struggle is one of the most extraordinary examples of civil courage in recent decades. She has become a national hero and a symbol of peaceful resistance in the struggle against oppression.

Aung San Suu Kyi has won and had bestowed on her numerous international awards which include being admitted into the Companion of the Order of Australia, the Sakharov Prize of the European Parliament, the United States Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Jawaharlal Nehru Award from India and the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 for her efforts to bring democracy to Burma.

"There is nothing to compare with the courage of ordinary people whose names are unknown and whose sacrifices pass unnoticed. The courage that dares without recognition, without the protection of media attention, is a courage that humbles and inspires and reaffirms our faith in humanity."
Aung San Suu Kyi

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"PLEASE USE YOUR LIBERTY TO HELP PROMOTE OURS" AUNG SAN SUU KYI



Janelle Anne Saffin MP, Federal Member for Page, elected on November 24, 2007, made political history when she was elected the first female Member for the Federal seat of Page.

From humble beginnings, born and raised in the One Mile Housing Commission Estate in Ipswich, Queensland, Janelle's tenacity would lead her to become a teacher, a solicitor, a chief political advisor to a President and Prime Minister, a local representative in the Federal and State parliaments, a social activist, and above all, a respected humanitarian.

Her activism on injustice and human rights, at home and abroad, has allowed her to build strong friendships and networks across NGOs, church-based charities, advocacy bodies and foreign Governments. She counts among her

close friends, East Timorese Nobel Peace Prize recipient and now President of East Timor Dr José Ramos-Horta, for whom she served a three year appointment as a principal advisor, the Prime Minister of East Timor Xanana Gusmao, respected international activist Kirsty Sword-Gusmao, and Burmese Leader Aung Sun Suu Kyi.

Her tireless efforts in the world's newest nation East Timor contributed to the rule of law and poverty alleviation and she has been intimately involved with Burma for some 15 years. Janelle has been a member of the Burma Lawyers Council, banned in Burma for its strong rule of law advocacy, and continues to serve as an adviser to groups both inside and outside the struggling nation. She co-founded the website Gateway to Burma, and

has helped hundreds of Burmese refugees relocate world-wide.

Janelle recently introduced a Private Members Motion into the Federal Parliament, giving Members of Parliament the opportunity to debate the ongoing human rights and humanitarian crisis in Burma. She has now turned her attention to supporting the call of Aung San Suu Kyi 'Please use your liberty to promote ours' by galvanising Australian women to stand together in solidarity with Aung San Suu Kyi and all Burmese living under military dictatorship.



facts:

- Living conditions and status of women in Burma are among the lowest in Asia
- Military rape is systematically used in Burma as a weapon of the military regime's 'ethnic cleansing'. Rapes are often gang rapes and are accompanied by torture, murder, mutilation and display of bodies.
- Burma is believed to have the largest number of child soldiers in the world, with as many as 70,000 boys serving in the national army.
- Burma's health system is ranked the second worst in the world next to Sierra Leone.
- The government spends about 50% of its budget on the military, yet only 2.2% is spent on health. UNICEF estimates that government spending on healthcare is US\$0.40 per capita (compared to \$61 per capita in Thailand).
- Maternal mortality rate, which measures deaths in childbirth, is 380 per 100,000 live births. In ethnic minority and conflict areas the rate is much higher at 1200 deaths per 100,000 live births. This rate is among the highest in the world.
- Burma has a high infant mortality rate with 1 in 10 live births resulting in the death of the infant.
- About 10 % of children die before they reach the age of five.
- An estimated 30% of children under 5 are moderately to severely underweight due to food insecurity
- An estimated 40% of people have drug resistant tuberculosis and over 700,000 have malaria
- There is a 1.3 % HIV/AIDS prevalence rate, which is the second highest in South East Asia, after Thailand.
- Primary school enrolments are dropping. In 2004 only 85% of Burmese children were enrolled in primary school, down from 97.8% in 1991.
- Less than one third of girls who enrol in primary school actually complete it. Many girls are trafficked into exploitative sex work in various countries, especially Thailand.
- Only 34% of young people are enrolled in secondary schools
- Burma has a highly diverse ethnic population. Large numbers of villagers in ethnic nationalities areas are displaced by the military's 'scorched earth' or 'Four Cuts' policy to support ethnic resistance. Estimates of the total number of Internally Displaced Persons range from one to two million.



Population

50,519,000

Capital

Nay Pyi Taw

Area

676,552 square kilometers
(261,218 square miles)

Language

Burmese, minor languages

Religion

Buddhist, Christian, Muslim

BURMA 2009

References:

- www.amnesty.org.au
- www.unicef.org.au
- www.uscampaignforburma.org