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**Stop the Terror in Burma**  
Commentary by U.S. first lady Laura Bush

The following op-ed by U.S. first lady Laura Bush first appeared October 10 in *The Wall Street Journal*. It is in the public domain; there are no republication restrictions.

(begin text)

Stop the Terror in Burma  
President Bush is preparing further U.S. sanctions against the dictatorship.

By Laura Bush  
*Wednesday, October 10, 2007 12:01 a.m.*

It is 2 a.m. in Rangoon, Burma. In the middle of the tropical night, army troops pour into the neighborhood surrounding a peaceful Buddhist monastery. The soldiers occupy nearby homes, so that residents will not peek through their windows or go outside to witness the raid. Troops then storm the monastery, brutalizing, terrorizing and arresting the monks inside.

Eventually the monks are imprisoned inside Rangoon's former Government Technical Institute. According to one eyewitness, hundreds are crammed into each room. They have no access to toilets or sanitary facilities. Many of the monks refuse food from their military jailers. There is no space to lie down and sleep.

These are the stories of Burma's "Saffron Revolution." The protests that started a few weeks ago with a 500% spike in regime-controlled gas prices have now unleashed 19 years of pent-up national anger. As the demonstrations play out on front pages, computer monitors, and TV screens across the globe, millions of people have been inspired by the sea of orange-robed Buddhist monks standing up to the military dictatorship.

Millions have also been stunned by the junta's shameful response: nonviolent demonstrators struck down with batons, tear gas, smoke grenades and bullets; civilians, including children, seized at random; innocent men and women slain.

The generals' reign of fear has subdued the protests--for now. But while the streets of Burma may be eerily quiet, the hearts of the Burmese people are not: 2007 is not 1988, when the regime's last major anti-democracy crackdown killed 3,000 and left the junta intact. Today, people everywhere know about the regime's atrocities. They are disgusted by the junta's abuses of human rights. This swelling outrage presents the generals with an urgent choice: Be part of Burma's peaceful transition to democracy, or get out of the way for a government of the Burmese people's choosing.

Whatever last shred of legitimacy the junta had among its own citizens has vanished. The regime's stranglehold on information is slipping; thanks to new technologies, people throughout Burma know about the junta's assaults. The public mood is said to be "a mixture of fear, depression, hopelessness, and seething anger." According to reports from Rangoon, "The regime's heavy-handed tactics against the revered clergy and peaceful demonstrators have turned many of the politically neutral in favor of the recent demonstrators."

The international community, too, is distancing itself. On Saturday, during a "Global Day of Action for Burma," thousands of people marched through dozens of cities--from Kuala Lumpur to London, Sydney to Paris--in solidarity with the monks. Spiritual leaders, including Pope Benedict XVI and the Dalai Lama, have enlisted millions of faithful to pray for peace and justice in Burma.

Governments from Spain to Estonia to Panama to Australia have voiced their

disapproval. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations has denounced the generals' actions as "repulsive." Burma's neighbor, Malaysia, has urged the regime to hold "unconditional" talks with Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of Burma's popularly elected National League for Democracy party. India, one of Burma's closest trading partners, has called for an inquiry into the regime's crackdown, and encouraged the junta to hasten the process of political reform.

On Friday, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon described the regime's violent repression as "abhorrent and unacceptable." Yesterday, Mr. Ban called me to say that he will send the U.N.'s special envoy to Burma, Ibrahim Gambari, back to the region "as soon as possible." Mr. Gambari will coordinate with Burma's neighboring governments, encouraging them to use their influence with the junta to bring about a transfer of power.

And last week, the United States led an effort to put Burma, for the first time in history, on the agenda of the U.N. Security Council. The United States expects that the Security Council--especially permanent members Russia and China, who typically support Burma's military dictatorship--will keep pressure on the regime.

The junta has also shut itself off economically. Money talks--and we know it speaks to those who rule the country, Gen. Than Shwe and his deputies. One of last week's more promising developments was the general's statement indicating, for the first time, his willingness to meet with Ms. Suu Kyi--but on the condition that she "stop calling for economic sanctions." The junta is feeling the financial squeeze.

The economic pressure will only grow more intense. Last week, the European Union tightened its sanctions against the regime; over the weekend, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown called for harsher measures. Amid growing outrage over the murder of a Japanese journalist, Japan--one of the largest providers of aid to Burma--is likely to suspend assistance.

President Bush has directed the U.S. Treasury Department to freeze the assets of 14 senior members of the Burmese junta. Our State Department has identified top junta officials and their immediate families--more than 200 people--as subject to a ban on entry into the U.S., and President Bush is preparing further U.S. sanctions against the dictatorship.

Gen. Than Shwe and his deputies are a friendless regime. They should step aside to make way for a unified Burma governed by legitimate leaders. The rest of the armed forces should not fear this transition--there is room for a professional military in a democratic Burma. In fact, one of Burma's military heroes was also a beloved champion of Burmese freedom: General Aung San, the late father of Aung San Suu Kyi.

As part of a peaceful transition process, the generals must immediately stop their terror campaigns against their own people. They must commit to a meaningful, unrestricted dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi and other opposition leaders--including the demonstrating monks, the 88 Generation Students and members of Ms. Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party. The junta has taken a small, promising first step by appointing its deputy labor minister as a liaison to Ms. Suu Kyi. Now, the regime must release her--and all members of the political opposition--so they can meet and plan a strategy for Burma's transition to democracy.

Meanwhile, the world watches--and waits. We know that Gen. Than Shwe and his deputies have the advantage of violent force. But Ms. Suu Kyi and other opposition leaders have moral legitimacy, the support of the Burmese people and the support of the world. The regime's position grows weaker by the day. The generals' choice is clear: The time for a free Burma is now.

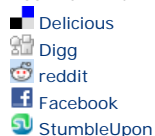
*Mrs. Bush is first lady of the United States.*

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