



Speech by

Hon. D. WELLS

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

Hansard 27 November 2003

PARLIAMENTARY AMNESTY GROUP

Human Rights Violations, Myanmar

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Environment) (2.51 p.m.), by leave, without notice: I move—

That this House join Amnesty International in its campaign against human rights violations in Myanmar.

Since late May, Amnesty International has been lobbying the State Peace Development Council, Myanmar's military government, requesting clarification on the many contentious issues surrounding the administration of justice. In May this year a National League for Democracy tour culminated in a violent attack and resulted in the rapid deterioration of the human rights situation in Myanmar. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, General Secretary of the National League for Democracy, had been travelling in upper Myanmar with permission from the State Peace Development Council when Suu Kyi and her supporters were reportedly harassed, intimidated and threatened as they attempted to conduct their legitimate political party activities.

In the absence of an independent investigation, it is difficult to establish exactly what happened that night in May. The almost complete lack of freedom of expression throughout Myanmar, including the absence of free press, has deterred witnesses from coming forward. After extensive investigation and research of various sources, Amnesty International believes the following summary to be credible.

On the evening of 30 May about 200 National League for Democracy members, including Aung San Suu Kyi, were travelling on a remote road when they were attacked by a mob of supporters of the military regime. The mob used sharpened sticks, clubs and iron bars to form a blockade and began physically attacking National League for Democracy members, resulting in beatings and imprisonment. In a 31 May press conference, the State Peace Development Council accused Suu Kyi of inciting unrest and took her into protective custody. Currently, 30 members arrested that night are still detained for expressing their peaceful political views, including Suu Kyi, who has been detained and was offered her freedom but rejected it until that of the remaining detainees is guaranteed.

Amnesty International believes that the National League for Democracy members were arrested solely for the peaceful expression of their non-violent political views. Amnesty International acknowledges the universal right to peacefully assemble and to conduct demonstrations of protest. The actions taken by the supporters of the Myanmar military government went beyond such non-violent expressions of dissent.

I encourage this House to support Amnesty International in their campaign for an independent investigation into the attack on National League for Democracy members and for the immediate release of Suu Kyi and the remaining 30 prisoners of conscience. I ask the House to join with me in carrying this motion. I ask honourable members to join with me in writing to the military regime in Myanmar—Burma—to protest against the violations of human rights in that country.