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Press Release

Women around the world launch campaign to free women human rights defenders in Burma

Chiang Mai/Prague, 23 November 2007 – International women's networks are today launching a campaign to free women human rights defenders in Burma, highlighting activists detained during the recent crackdown.

Beginning on November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, women's networks will be calling for the release of all detainees by December 10. Out of those arrested during last September's violent crackdown on peaceful protests led by monks, 106 women remain in detention, including six nuns.

The Women's League of Burma will launch the campaign in Bangkok with the release of a report "**Courage to Resist**" detailing how women activists have been hunted down, assaulted, tortured and framed with false charges, and their family members threatened and held hostage.

Breastfeeding mothers, pregnant women and elderly grandmothers have been the target of the regime's paramilitary forces and secret police. Women have also been used by the regime in their smear campaigns against activists, and forced to admit on camera to having sexual affairs with monks.

"We are gravely concerned about the safety and well-being of activists on the run and all political prisoners in prisons and detention centres throughout Burma," said WLB spokesperson Paw Hset Hser. *"We are particularly concerned that the women, including nuns, recently detained are facing gender and sexual violence in addition to the other deprivations and unacceptable conditions in the prisons."*

The WLB is urging governments around the world to call for the immediate and unconditional release of all women human rights defenders and other political prisoners in Burma, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and to guarantee women activists on the run a safe return home and reunion with their families. WLB is also calling for the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women to conduct a mission of inquiry to Burma.

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