

# Global Protest over Myanmar Crackdown

RAPHAEL G. SATTER, Associated Press | October 6, 2007 at 8:49 PM EDT

LONDON — Thousands of demonstrators in cities across the world joined Saturday in protests against the military junta in Myanmar after the regime admitted holding hundreds of Buddhist monks who had led huge protests.

While protesters from typhoon-wracked Taipei to London chanted and waved signs, political activists in Myanmar held candlelight prayer vigils for those killed and arrested in the junta's brutal suppression of their uprising.

Hoping to send Myanmar's generals a message that "the world is still watching," the human rights group Amnesty International organized marches in more than two dozen Asian, European, and North American cities.

Some observers have said these would probably not have much of an effect on an inward-looking military government which has largely ignored world opinion during its 45 years in power.

Demonstrations that began in mid-August over a sharp fuel price increase grew into Myanmar's largest anti-government protests in 19 years. Thousands of the demonstrators were Buddhist monks who poured into the streets.

In the wake of the recent crackdown, however, there were no visible demonstrations in Myanmar's largest city of Yangon, where gun-toting soldiers enforce a ban on meetings, but throughout the country people prayed in their homes at the suggestion of a Buddhist monk interviewed by Radio Free Asia.

The military has admitted detaining hundreds of monks, who led the mass demonstrations. The political party of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi said Saturday that 210 of its members had been arrested during the crackdown.

Before protests began in London, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown called for new European Union sanctions against the junta, including a ban on future investment in the country, also known as Burma.

"The anger of the world has been expressed about the outrages that have taken place against the people of Burma," Mr. Brown said during a televised meeting with Buddhist monks gathered in his 10 Downing Street office.

Myanmar monks scattered flower petals in London's River Thames and led about 3,000 people — some chanting "Burma, Burma, Free, Free" — to a rally in Trafalgar Square.

"Burma is not a human rights emergency of today, last week or last month," said Amnesty International's chief, Irene Khan. "It is a human rights emergency that the world has chosen to forget for the last 20 years. We will not forget this time round, we will not let the people of Burma down."

The international day of protest began in Melbourne, Australia, where 200 people marched behind a banner demanding "No More Bloodshed." In Sydney, some 200 marchers dressed in colorful



Supporters for democracy in Myanmar hold a candle light vigil in New Delhi Saturday. (AP Photo/Gurinder Osan)

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clothes to show their support for what some are calling the "Saffron Revolution" after the Myanmar monks' robes.

In Brussels, Belgium about 700 people brought yellow roses as a symbol of peaceful protest and carried banners and pictures of Ms. Suu Kyi. In Paris, France a few hundred demonstrators, one holding a placard reading "Boycott the 2008 Olympics," gathered near the Chinese Embassy to urge Beijing to use its influence to stop the crackdown.

Centrist politician Francois Bayrou, who took part in the protest, told AP Television News that a threat to not attend the Beijing Olympic Games could get China to end its support for the Myanmar regime. "We have to show them... that we are ready to go to great lengths," he said.

About 200 people dressed in red took part in a silent demonstration in one the main squares of Stockholm, Sweden's capital. This was the same shade of red used by Myanmar's protesters.

In Taipei, hundreds braved a strong typhoon to demand action from the international community. Smaller crowds turned out in Bangkok and Manila. In Malaysia's biggest city, Kuala Lumpur, 300 people attended a candlelight vigil Friday evening.

An emotional protest was held in Vancouver. Speakers explained what drew them to stand in the grey, drizzling rain to advocate that Canada's government pressure the Myanmar military regime.

In Halifax, Nova Scotia, protesters lit candles and burned incense as they chanted for peace.

And in Montreal, Québec, protesters marched in the rain, holding banners and waving signs calling for freedom for Myanmar's monks.

Some celebrities attended. Actor Jim Carrey held a New York news conference to call for United Nations Security Council action, while singer Damien Rice in London planned to perform a concert in honor of Ms. Suu Kyi.

International condemnation of Myanmar's junta grew stronger at the UN, with the U.S. warning it would push for UN sanctions against Myanmar if it fails to respond to the world's demands for democratic change.

But the junta has shown little evidence that it is taking these messages to heart.

Myanmar's Foreign Minister Nyan Win told the UN General Assembly last week that democracy "cannot be imposed from outside" and demonstrators at recent pro-government rallies have carried signs saying "No interference."

"International public opinion is not enough. It hasn't been as effective as we had hoped. There is hope now that opposition is stirring inside the country. It must happen from inside the country, with pressure from outside," said Asda Jayanama, a former Thai diplomat who watches Myanmar.

The junta's treatment of the Buddhist monks — who are revered in the deeply religious country and led the street protests — is a key issue that could further anger the people of Myanmar as well as soldiers loyal to the military rulers.

The government said that most of the monks it held had already been freed, with only 109 still in custody, according to an official statement broadcast Friday night on state TV. The report said the police were still looking for four monks it believed were ringleaders of the protests.