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OPEN LETTER TO EU LEADERS

Major opportunities for action on Myanmar at EU-Asia summits

Amnesty International calls on the EU to make the ongoing political and human rights crisis in Myanmar a central issue on the agendas of the forthcoming EU-ASEAN summit and the subsequent summits with China and India. The situation in Myanmar calls for concerted engagement by EU and Asian leaders to develop an effective international response with a particular focus on human rights.

Notwithstanding concerns about the process for reaching agreement on the new ASEAN Charter, Amnesty International welcomes the inclusion of the commitment to promote, protect and respect human rights, and to establish a regional human rights body. ASEAN must now make good on this commitment, by addressing serious violations of human rights within ASEAN member states.

Seven weeks after the brutal crackdown on peaceful protesters in Myanmar in September, serious human rights violations continue unabated in the country. Widespread arbitrary detentions, hostage taking, beatings and torture in custody and enforced disappearances clearly disprove any claims from the Myanmar authorities that the situation in the country has returned to normal.

The EU has made a number of strong statements on the deteriorating situation in Myanmar, and has also made demarches to strategic countries in the region. The upcoming summits with ASEAN on 22 November and with China and India on 28 and 30 November, constitute three important opportunities to reaffirm with the key actors in the region that they should emphasise to Myanmar the urgent need to:

- immediately and unconditionally release all those who were arrested for exercising their right to freedom of expression;
- reveal the identity and location of all detainees, guarantee their wellbeing, and allow immediate and independent access to them; and
- co-operate fully with the UN, including by complying with the substantive demands set out in the UN Human Rights Council resolution of 2 October 2007.

The government of Myanmar and its military, security and police forces have a well documented record of serious human rights violations, which the United Nations has described as widespread and systematic. However a number of states, including China, India and members of ASEAN, continue to supply military and security equipment to the Myanmar authorities, which can only serve to facilitate the ongoing abuses.

The arms embargoes which the EU and the US have in place regarding transfers to Myanmar are important, but insufficient. Although the EU arms embargo is legally binding, and covers indirect transfers of military components, there is currently no comprehensive EU-wide control system in place to ensure that member states can effectively implement and enforce their embargo commitments.

In addition to taking steps to ensure that implementation of its own arms embargo is watertight, the EU should call on:

- the UN Security Council to impose an international arms embargo on Myanmar; and
- Asian nations to cease all arms transfers to Myanmar.