Statement No 18/97

1. At 4:00 p.m. on December 18, 1997 five Central Executive Committee (CEC) members of the National League for Democracy (NLD) (not including the chairman, two vice-chairmen, general secretary and secretary) were summoned to meet with the Minister of Home Affairs of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

2. At about 13:30 p.m. (on the same day), an official of the Ministry came to verbally inform the chairman of the NLD about the meeting without formally informing the party in advance. Despite this, bearing in mind the importance of developing smooth relations and mutual understanding with state authorities, an NLD delegation comprising five members went to meet with them at their ministry.

3. The Minister of Home Affairs raised certain issues which his superiors had wanted him to discuss with the NLD. In response, the NLD delegation also stated its party positions.

4. The Minister for Home Affairs primarily raised, among other things, two issues: the discontinuation of the NLD's regular practice of issuing statements which the NLD has published so many times, and matters regarding official activities of the NLD, in particular the organizing activities of the general secretary of party.

5. The NLD is a legal political party and was established with the aim of bringing democracy and human rights to Burma. Being a legal political party, the NLD therefore must perform its official duties such as organizing activities and the issuing of papers and statements promoting democracy. These undertakings do not at all violate the existing laws and orders.

6. In the meeting with the Minister, the NLD delegation discussed these matters based on the following two principles;

   a) The NLD will hold discussions only with state authorities who have the power to make decisions on political matters:

   b) The NLD will meet and hold talks with state authorities who have the power to make decisions on administrative matters.
7. The Minister of Home Affairs never raised the issue of holding a dialogue, (between the NLD and state authorities) which is a political matter. The NLD delegation briefly told the minister that the prevailing problems would be solved only through a face-to-face dialogue. The minister however did not respond to this.

8. Regarding the NLD's official duties, the party later heard the authorities declare, "It's time for the NLD to stop its activities... and if these are to be continued, the holding of a dialogue and the national reconciliation that the NLD has been talking about will be further away from reality. The NLD not the state government will be responsible for this. And now is the time for the leaders of the NLD to realize this and to review their policies." The NLD contends that the accusations are unfounded.

9. Because the NLD is a legal political party, its activities are carried out within the framework of existing laws and orders. So also, the publishing of necessary papers and statements is one of the official duties of the party. This is not in violation of any laws.

10. The NLD believes that the current social, political and economic problems of the country can be tackled only through a meaningful dialogue. The NLD also believes that the military authorities have avoided this most viable option under various pretexts because they have no genuine desire to engage in dialogue.

11. The NLD thereby states solemnly that the party has resolved to strive steadfastly for the realization of a substantive dialogue which it believes will offer solutions to the problems of Burma.

Central Executive Committee
National League for Democracy

Rangoon
Date: 5 Waning Moon of Nattaw, 1359
December 19, 1997