Statement No. 23 (2/99)

1. Information received is that the very poor residents of Kyisu western ward which surrounds Ywa-thar-gyi, North New Dagon township and South New Dagon township, Rangoon Division were invited to attend a meeting held on 29th January 1999 by the group headed by U Thein Tun, Chairman of the administration unit in North New Dagon.

2. The explanation given was that as they were trespassers they would have to vacate the land and return to where they came from. Arrangements would be made only for groups of ten households. Individual households would have to make their own arrangements. On the other hand they were given the option to move to the new scheme called Arakan Development (New Living Project) which would entitle them to a pair of cattle and agricultural land at the going price. If they preferred to move towards wetlands in Nyaungdon they would have no ownership rights to the land but would have to work as labourers. The choice was to either go for a new scheme without any proper definitions or to make their own plans. "There was the Insein jail for those who refused to be relocated" was the unmistakable threat given in no uncertain terms. Date of meeting was 29 January 1999 and the last date by which they were to be cleared out was 30 March 1999.

3. The residents of the area refused to sign the document that was presented to them to indicate their approval of the terms. They appealed and asked that consideration be given because of the children who were attending schools in the area. The reply given was that this was not an important issue because all the children will be promoted without having to take any exams. Some of the people have lived in this area for over 10 years, others for over five and others for over three years.

4. On the 31 January, 1999 (the next day), those "power holders" entered the area at a time when most were away at work. They demolished all the houses that had no occupants despite the pleas from the neighbours. The total population in that area is 1700 to 2000.

5. To proceed against people who refuse to be removed from their usual place of residence under the prevailing law is not appropriate because of the great distance and the unfamiliarity of the new sites, and the vagueness of the terms offered. These people have no idea how and if they will be able to make a living at the new location. All their plans and business will be lost. They are now miserable and the tears flow readily because of the enormity of the tragic circumstances they will face. They are daily wages earners relying entirely on what they can
earn. Somehow they had trusted the authorities and hoped that they could rely on them as on a parent, but no so. There is no compassion for them in their distress. We earnestly urge the authorities to take into consideration the social consequences and the dire distress of these people and to find a peaceful and equitable solution with compassion for fellow human beings.

Central Executive Committee
National League for Democracy

Rangoon
15 February 1999