National League for Democracy  
No. (97/B), West Shwegondine Road  
Bahan Township, Bahan

STATEMENT 78 (6/99) (translation)

1. It must be admitted that the visit of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) representatives to Burma is better than no visit at all. To assess the outcome of such a visit it will be necessary to know all the facts from beginning to end.

2. We have complete faith in the integrity, motives, honesty, good will, expertise, and varied experiences of that organisation. We believe that in the process of interrogation and investigation at the big and small jails, they will witness the appalling hardships and denial of human rights imposed on prisoners by the military dictators and report on the true situation.

3. We anticipate better and more humane treatment of prisoners especially those who have been imprisoned for their activities for democracy. We are fully aware that this is the main objective of the ICRC. Moreover, every individual has the right to the freedoms set out in the Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations. The Burmese government was a signatory to that document.

4. To obtain a true picture of prison conditions, it is necessary that the representatives of the ICRC meet prisoners of significance in an atmosphere of independence and security.

5. Our information is that prior to the visit of these representatives, the Insein prison was transformed to appear like a most desirable town for living in. But political prisoners especially students and democracy activists had been regularly transferred to jails in other townships.

6. Our information is that under the supervision of the Military Intelligence, from early April, 1999, groups and batches of prisoners were transported in big motor vehicles, railway goods wagons (not passenger compartments), like animals locked securely and dispatched to jails all over the country.

7. Two days prior to the visit of the ICRC representatives, there was great hurry and flurry at the Insein jail to complete the transfers on time. The prisoners were made to assemble at the gate on the night prior to the transfer and as names were called out, the prisoner was hurriedly and forcefully bundled into waiting paddy wagons and driven away. The prison authorities were extremely rude and harsh in their behaviour towards the prisoners.
8. Visiting family members and relatives who arrived at the jail as usual on the scheduled visiting dates did not meet the prisoner they came to see. They had to leave the food and other articles they had brought with them with the authorities which the prisoners never received.

9. Extreme security measures were taken to prevent the transferred prisoners from escaping en route. On arrival at the gates of the new prisons, those Insein jail prisoners were picked out, classified as dangerous and heavy metal anklets and bars (old and rusted) were put in place on them. The coarse metal that rubbed against their skins caused sores to erupt and infection from rust. Shaving of their heads was another dehumanizing act that was adopted.

10. Those prisoners who were transferred from their original prisons had not committed any offence during the period of imprisonment and this amounted to an additional sentence. Criminologists and Sociologists will view this treatment as extremely unjust and illegal.

11. The social consequences of this forceful transfer of prisoners gives rise to grave consequences. Families and relatives of prisoners suffer great anxiety not knowing the place of imprisonment and are denied the right to visit and supply them with food and articles necessary for their survival. At great risk is the health of the prisoners for which the authorities will be held entirely responsible.

12. What is worse and most heartbreaking is the case where several prisoners of the same family have been transferred to different localities which makes it hard for family members to reach them all on visiting days that coincide. This is a reflection of the increasing heartlessness of the authorities who seem to be void of any human compassion and fellow feeling whatsoever.

13. The ICRC is reputed for its ideology, good-will, integrity, and vast experience which causes us to anticipate better conditions for all prisoners in all the jails in Burma. However, right now, this is not so. The immense, immeasurable hardship and sorrow that prisoners and their families are faced with is no cause for joy.

14. The National League for Democracy was voted in at the 1990 general elections with the greatest number of Hluttaw representatives and the people have entrusted the party with great responsibility in all and every matter. This cannot be ignored and should be treated seriously. The military dictators have ignored the results of the elections. But the National League for Democracy is a national political organisation that performs and applies the democratic principles and knows its obligations.

15. The ICRC has approached the SPDC, we believe, with genuine concern. In similar fashion, the NLD that won the mandate from the people through the
general election should be consulted. If this takes place, there can be opportunity for cooperation and information on the conditions that are current in the jails. Also, the majority of prisoners are members of the NLD, and elected representatives of the people. Therefore consultation with political parties is not something that should be avoided.

16. The National League for Democracy forcefully declares its hope that the ICRC will in keeping with its policies and objectives succeed in its investigations into prison conditions and the fate of prisoners that are suffering unjust and illegal imprisonment.

Central Executive Committee  
National League for Democracy  

Rangoon  
16 June 1999