New Zealand remains profoundly concerned at the situation in Myanmar.

Protestors have been killed, shot at, beaten and arrested. This violent treatment is reprehensible. Engaging in peaceful protest is a fundamental human right. Myanmar has an obligation to promote and protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of its people, including the freedom of association and of expression, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

New Zealand joins others in calling for the immediate release of those detained in recent weeks, along with the many political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, who have been held without trial for much longer periods.

The Myanmar regime should be held responsible – indeed it is directly accountable to the international community - for the personal safety and treatment of all people it has detained. We call on the authorities to stop the violence and open a process of genuine dialogue with pro-democracy leaders and ethnic minorities.

New Zealand fully supports UN efforts to resolve the immediate and longer term situation in Myanmar. We have welcomed the visit to Myanmar by Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari and look forward to receiving a full report on his return to New York. We fully support continued discussion of the situation in Myanmar in the Security Council, with a view to considering what further steps might be taken by the international community.

New Zealand believes that the Human Rights Council has an important role to play on this issue, and we have co-sponsored the request for this special session. This is a key test for the Council’s relevance. Accordingly we strongly support a visit by the Special Rapporteur to Myanmar, in order to convey to the Myanmar regime the consensus of this Council on recent developments and report back to us on the situation. The visit would need to involve the full cooperation of the Myanmar authorities and be closely coordinated with the broader activities of the UN Special Envoy.

Developments in Myanmar are of concern to us all. There are some countries, including in the neighbourhood, who are likely to be able to play a particularly constructive, influential and active part in resolving the crisis. We urge them to do so.

New Zealand welcomes the strong statement released last week in New York by the chair of ASEAN. That statement notes the serious impact of developments in Myanmar on the credibility and reputation of ASEAN. As a long friend and dialogue partner of ASEAN, we have been following with close interest its discussions on a proposed Charter. The new Charter provides the opportunity for ASEAN to take an historic step forward as a credible international institution founded on the promotion of human rights as well as of economic, social and political development. It would be a tragedy if the actions of the government of one member denied all others of this opportunity.

Underlying recent developments is the fact of the regime’s impoverishment of its people. Most Myanmarese continue to live below the poverty line, whilst the region as a whole has been experiencing sustained and rapid economic growth. Despite having the advantage of vast natural resources, Myanmar falls well below ASEAN averages across a wide range of socio-economic indicators.

This dire economic situation is a direct consequence of the regime’s political repression and absence of democratic reforms. We call on the Government of Myanmar urgently to engage in genuine dialogue aimed at achieving national reconciliation and a brighter future for its people. In this regard we fully support the draft resolution, and hope that the Special Rapporteur’s report on his visit will identify possible further action by the Council to promote implementation of the resolution.