PHILIPPINE STATEMENT

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar
11 December 2007

Ambassador ERLINDA F. BASILIO
PHILIPPINE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE

Thank you, Mr. President,

We thank Mr. Paulo Sergio Pinhiero, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, for his report.

The Philippines supported Human Rights Council resolution S-5/1 adopted by the Council at its 5th Special Session which mandated the report of the Special Rapporteur. We did so in the spirit of constructive international engagement, based on dialogue and cooperation, to help countries create the proper enabling environment for the effective promotion and protection of human rights.

In this regard, we are pleased that the Government of Myanmar invited the Special Rapporteur to conduct a visit to Myanmar on 11-15 November 2007. We are encouraged by the cooperation the Government of Myanmar extended to the Special Rapporteur, which included visits to places the Special Rapporteur wanted to investigate such as monasteries and prisons, and meetings with various government officials and civil society groups. We acknowledge the granting of amnesty to a large number of prisoners which aims to take forward the Myanmar National Road Map to Democracy.

We welcome the cooperation of the Government of Myanmar with the United Nations and the Human Rights Council. We are glad that the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ibrahim Gambari was able to visit Myanmar twice. We support the process of dialogue between the Government of Myanmar and Mr. Gambari and hope that more tangible results will ensue from the process.

These developments since the tragic events of September are an indication of the Government of Myanmar's willingness to engage with the international community in resolving its problems. At the same time, Mr. President, we are also aware that much more needs to be done.

The Philippines wishes to see greater and quicker progress towards democracy and national reconciliation in Myanmar. President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo called on the Myanmar authorities to ensure 1) the early and safe release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and political prisoners; 2) the full and free participation of political parties, including the National League for Democracy, in the political process; and 3) for the peaceful return to democracy. This would be good not only for Myanmar, but for ASEAN and the world.

We take this opportunity to reiterate President Arroyo's call that Daw Aung Suu Kyi should be released.

Mr. President,

Mr. Pinhiero's report highlighted the profound socio-economic hardships faced by the people of Myanmar, especially the tremendous rise in the price of oil and widespread

poverty, which in many ways spurred the urgency of the demonstrations we witnessed in September.

We expressed concern then about the excessive use of force by authorities to quell the demonstrations, and note that the Rapporteur sought to ascertain the events and factors surrounding allegations of human rights violations during that period of unrest.

We also note the Special Rapporteur's recommendations in his report. We think that the Government of Myanmar should look at these recommendations in a constructive light, and address the issues raised in the report of the Special Rapporteur.

We would strongly encourage further dialogue and cooperation between the Human Rights Council, the Government of Myanmar, and the OHCHR to build on the positive groundwork established through the visits of Mr. Gambari and Mr. Pinhiero, whose mandates, though distinct, can also be viewed as mutually reinforcing.

We are of the opinion that prime importance should be placed on peaceful transition to democracy and national reconciliation in Myanmar. The promotion and protection of human rights standards in Myanmar should complement and reinforce these objectives.

The Philippines understands the complex, sensitive, and often volatile nature of transition to democratic governance, and thus stands ready to assist Myanmar as a friendly country which has likewise gone through a painful, yet necessary, process towards national healing and renewal.

For these reasons, we believe that the Human Rights Council should seek to adopt a practical and results-oriented approach in its country engagement. While human rights are universal and indivisible, each country has its own unique situation and challenges which need to be addressed in their own unique ways. The flourishing of a culture of genuine human rights awareness and protection takes time to foster. What is important is to keep taking the right steps in the right direction.

Mr. President,

We wish to see Myanmar keep taking these steps, supported by the Human Rights Council. In order to get far, we need to work together. The Philippine delegation supports outcomes on country engagement that enjoy the broadest amount of support possible.

We hope that the positive and consensual approach we adopted during the 5th Special Session and the cooperation so far shown by the Government of Myanmar can be continued and give impetus to our efforts to address the matter at this session.

Thank you.