anti-slavery
today's fight for tomorrow's freedom

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**UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**
**Seventh session**
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## Oral intervention delivered by Anti-Slavery International on 13 March 2008

**Item 4: Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human rights in Burma/Myanmar**

**[CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]**

Anti-Slavery International welcomes Professor Pinheiro's latest report to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/7/18) and would like to praise his unyielding efforts over the past seven years to promote human rights in Burma despite very limited cooperation from the Burmese regime.

In particular, we are gravely concerned by systematic discrimination and human rights violations against the Rohingya, a Muslim minority of North Arakan State. This group has been rendered stateless by the provisions of the 1982 Citizenship Law. Their freedom of movement is severely restricted; forced labour is consistently practised; extortion and arbitrary taxation are on the rise and the authorities have stepped up confiscation of Muslim land to settle poor Buddhist settlers from other regions of Burma.

Another harsh form of discrimination is restriction on marriages, ostensibly aimed at limiting population growth. Rohingya couples in North Arakan must apply for permission to marry, which is only granted against the payment of bribes and can take up to several years to obtain. Couples found living together without official marriage permission have been routinely arrested and jailed. As a result, backstreet abortion has dramatically increased, new-born babies are registered as the children of other officially married couples and many young Rohingya couples are fleeing to Bangladesh to marry.

In October 2007, the NaSaKa [border security forces] arrested 3 couples for marrying without official permission in Buthidaung Township. The 3 men were sentenced to 3 years imprisonment and the 3 women to 6 months. In November, it was reported that the 3 women had been raped in detention and sent to Buthidaung hospital for treatment under police guard. Two of them died and only one survived.

Rohingya asylum seekers continue to arrive in Bangladesh and, since October 2006, more than 8,000 Rohingya, escaping appalling conditions in North Arakan, have boarded flimsy boats in attempts to reach Thailand and Malaysia. Hundreds have already drowned at sea. On 3 March 2008, the Sri Lankan Navy rescued 71 boat people, most of them Rohingya, whose boat had drifted for 22 days in the Indian Ocean with a broken engine. By then, 20 had already died of starvation and dehydration.

Professor Pinheiro,

Policies of discrimination against Rohingya are the root causes of forced migration affecting not only Bangladesh but increasingly other countries in the region. What initiatives could the distinguished membership of the Human Rights Council undertake to address their predicament?

Thank you.