human rights *first* Andrew Hudson 4.

Human Rights First Statement on Agenda Item 4 - interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Myanmar

March 12, 2008

On behalf of my organization, Human Rights First, I would like to congratulate the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Pinheiro, on his latest Report to the Human Rights Council.

Human Rights First recently returned from a mission to Myanmar and the region. I would like to draw the Council's attention to two particular aspects of the human rights situation in Myanmar about which we were able to gain first hand information.

In recent months, in order to appease the international community, the SPDC has publicized the release of a number of people jailed during the 2007 September crackdown. We met with human rights defenders inside Myanmar who informed us that none of the people released were however political activists. They were simple bystanders who should never have been arrested in the first place. We learned on the other hand that arrests of political activist were still currently ongoing. As it has failed to end the arrest of activists, so has the SPDC failed to ensure accountability for human rights abuses committed during the crackdown. We interviewed a monk who had witnessed the Kyaikkasan Road incident on September 27, during which military trucks ran over a group of schoolchildren, killing at least ten of them. When the crowd moved to recover the bodies of the children, soldiers opened fire. Our witness saw three additional children shot dead. To our knowledge, the SPDC has not only failed to investigate these crimes, they have tried to cover them and denied their existence. We were told that families of the victims had been visited by soldiers and threatened that their houses would be burned if they reported the incident or even just mourned their children.

We also continue to be gravely concerned about atrocities committed by the Burmese army against ethnic nationality groups in the eastern border region. Interviews with persons who had recently arrived to IDP camps inside Myanmar confirmed that violations of humanitarian law and crimes against humanity were still being committed today. Victims told us stories of extrajudicial executions, forced labor, pillaging and destructions of villages, among other crimes.

The ongoing violations we learned about likely represent only a part of a broader picture of repression. We commend therefore the efforts of the Special Rapporteur to shed a light on the many human rights abuses committed by the government of Myanmar. We urge members of the Human Rights Council to fully support the work of the Special Rapporteur and, with him, to press the SPDC to account for and release all political prisoners, institute accountability for crimes committed, and immediately cease its military campaign against ethnic nationality groups in border areas.

Human Rights First is a leading human rights advocacy organization based in New York City and Washington, DC. Since 1978, we have worked in the U.S. and abroad to create a secure and humane world –advancing justice, human dignity, and respect for the rule of law. All of our activities are supported by private contributions. We accept no government funds. Visit our web site: www.humanrightsfirst.org

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