

DECLARATION OF SOLIDARITY

FOR THE BURMESE MONKS, CITIZENS AND THEIR PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATIONS

We, Japanese Buddhists, would like to express our solidarity, respect and strong support for the peaceful demonstrations of monks and citizens in all regions of Burma.

In Burma, this past August, the military government suddenly hiked prices for fuel. This was adding insult to injury to the impoverished lifestyles of the people of Burma who have lived under military dictatorship for the last 19 years. This became a trigger which spurred on anti-government activities by students and civilians. By the beginning of September, the Buddhist monastic sangha could no longer bear to see the suffering of the people, and they began to demonstrate as well. The monks and nuns wanted a tranquility in which all could live. They engaged in a practice based in a religious motive and used methods which were very peaceful. However, in order to block a peace march in the town of Pakokku in Central Burma on September 5th, the military regime used the national army violently in reacting to a group of monks. They arrested, detained and also forcibly disrobed monks.

Taking a firm stance against these violent actions of the military government, the monks urged the military leaders to reflect on their actions. They began a campaign called "goverturning the bowl" (patta-nukkujjana kamma), based on a teaching the Buddha, and continued to show their intentions through protest. For us Buddhists, this nationwide movement of "goverturning the bowl", which denies the military leaders the opportunity to offer the monks alms and thus to practice as devout lay people, is a grave act. Since the beginning of the "goverturning the bowl" movement on September 17th, it spread to the capital of Yangon and all regions of the country. Day after day, this movement grew as from hundreds to tens of thousands of monks participated in peaceful demonstrations. On September 22nd, they were able pass by the residence of Aung San Suu Kyi, still under house arrest, and receive her greeting. The monks as leaders of the protest movement have been strongly welcomed and received by the people of Burma. On September 24th, the movement swelled in Yangon to an anti-military government protest numbering 100,000 people.

Amidst increasing anxiety about the attitude of the military government, the Burmese monks' activities have tried to persuade through example, and transform a politics of fear into a politics of compassion by facing the overwhelming violent power into order to remove the cause of the people's suffering. While we cannot see what is Burma's future, these activities are a large development for the future of Buddhism. The actions of the monks who respect the people have been regulated by the military government, and so the people have lost their spiritual bearings. When the monastic sangha cannot practice its activities for the many devout Buddhist followers in Burma, the people will surely endure great hardship.

In this way, we heartfully call upon the government of Myanmar to immediately cease from these oppressive measures, free the people from fear, restore social tranquility, and immediately begin to engage in national reconciliation. We, Japanese Buddhists, will continue to watch and support the monks' non-violent and democratic movement for Burma.

ayus:Network of Buddhist Volunteers on International Cooperation

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Network of Women and Buddhism in Kanto Region

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