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WLB calls for General Than Shwe to be charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity under new UNSC resolution

24 June 2008

The Women's League of Burma (WLB) welcomes the unanimous adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1820 on sexual violence during the Council's debate on 19 June 2008. WLB believes that this historic resolution gives hope to women around the world and in Burma in particular for justice.

The Resolution notes that rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, and stresses the importance of ending impunity for such acts.

Rape has been used for decades as a weapon in the Burmese military regime's war against ethnic nationalities, to demonstrate the army's absolute power to retaliate against those who resist them. SPDC soldiers use women in conflict areas as porters to carry their military equipment and supplies during the day, and use them as sex slaves at night. Many women, and their family members, have been brutally killed to eliminate evidence of these crimes.

While the military remains in control, rule of law remains absent, and to this day incidents of rape committed by SPDC troops with impunity continue to be reported. A very recent rape incident took place on 8 June, 2008, when an SPDC Army Major and a lawyer raped two teenaged ethnic Chin girls, aged 13 and 14, in Thangtlang, Chin State, Northwest Burma. One of them has been hospitalized with serious injuries as a result of the sexual abuse.

When the State itself is the abuser of human rights and the perpetrator of rape and other forms of gender-based violence, we can only rely on international laws and criminal courts to deal with such heinous crimes and protect the women of Burma.

We call on the UNSC to consider referring Burma's General Than Shwe, top leader of the Burmese military junta, and his cronies to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for the war crimes and crimes against humanity for which they are accountable. We urge the Council members to live up to the commitment shown during their debate.

We believe that a campaign to bring the top leaders of the junta before the ICC or some other international judicial body would send a strong warning to other officers in Burma, and let them realize that it is pointless to continue supporting the dictator Than Shwe, who has no future.

WLB hereby affirms that it will start a campaign, along with our supporters around the world, using this new UNSC Resolution-1820 to punish the regime and bring justice for the women of Burma