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ARTICLE 19

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Burma: Crackdown on opposition and media

Following the 4th May cyclone the Burmese military Junta have today been fervently attempting to suppress all information on the manifest humanitarian disaster ahead of the UN Secretary General’s visit, including detaining democratic youth activists and censoring media reporting.

With the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon in Burma, the Junta have rounded up and detained thirteen prominent youth leaders from the National League for Democracy who were trying to raise awareness of the cyclone victims.

Simultaneously, local media have been ordered by the Press Scrutiny and Registration Board not to publish any stories that show the destruction and human suffering caused by the cyclone.

These last violations are taking place while a number of relief agencies are still prevented from effectively accessing the victims and disaster-hit areas and providing much needed assistance and alleviate the suffering.

“The full information black-out imposed by the authorities since September has been elevated to heights rarely or ever witnessed before. Effective assistance depends on uncensored information about who has been affected and how. The Burmese government is not only suppressing this information. It is also preventing assistance in order to maintain the cloak of secrecy and fear over the country.” said Dr. Agnès Callamard, Executive Director of ARTICLE 19

“But no disaster of this scale can ever be erased from people’s memory. No such gross failure to respect and protect people’s most basic right – the right to life – could ever be forgotten. The obstruction of the efforts to address the monumental disaster afflicting their people constitutes the most obscene prioritisation of the status quo.” adds Dr. Callamard.

ARTICLE 19 urges the international community, but particularly the governments of India and China, to use all their leverage on the Burmese authorities to stop this insanity.

ARTICLE 19 is also calling on the international community to undertake a full, independent and public review of the nature and scale of the Burmese authorities’ violations of their international obligations, and particularly to determine the nature of the crimes and violations resulting from the obstruction of aid and the deliberate censorship and concealment of the extent of the deaths, wounded, damages, displacements, and sufferings.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.