

Statement for the World March of Women

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Secretary General, National League for Democracy, 8 March 2000

Let me start by saying I wish I could be marching with you today. About two weeks ago, some women from ASEAN nations came to talk to us about this march of the world's women. It was a very happy occasion for us. Our women here in the National League for Democracy learned about this march of the women and were very inspired by it.

The longer I work in politics, the more I am convinced that there is a need to work for women's rights. At the beginning, because in Burma we are suffering so much from the violation of basic human rights, I thought that it was enough to work for human rights in general. But now I have realised that as we work for human rights in general, we also have to work for the particular rights of women and children. Women and children are always the ones who suffer most in times of crisis, from violence and from poverty. So I would like to say to those who are organising this march and who are taking part in it, that although we are not with you today in person, our hearts and our spirits are with you. We believe that there is a need to work against violence and poverty so that women and children may be safer in this world.

Our women are the ones who suffer most from the economic and political problems of this country. When a family is poor, it is usually the women and children who bear the brunt of the poverty. Still, our culture is such that the men are given the most privileged position. If there is little to eat, it is the men who get the lion's share. In the same way, with regard to education, if the funds for education are limited, it is always the sons, who are given preference over the daughters. They are the ones who are provided with the greatest opportunities.

Our political problems are such that there are now many

political prisoners in Burma. When men are taken prisoners, it is the womenfolk who are left to struggle. And we have found again and again, that the most successful men have behind them, the bravest women. It is only the courage of the women and their determination to support the men that keep most of the men going. I begin to feel more and more that women are certainly the stronger sex when it comes to spirit and endurance.

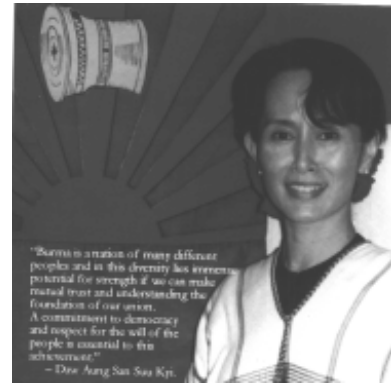
This is not to say that I do not appreciate what men have done for our cause. But on this day, I would like to express my admiration for women all over the world, in Burma and elsewhere. Some of our greatest supporters in the international community are women who are helping us not because they hope to get anything from Burma, but because they have the courage and compassion to understand that we need their help, and that they must give whatever help they can.

The United Nations and the international financial institutions can do much to help the march of women against violence and poverty. Programmes of the United Nations could be planned and implemented to help women and children, especially those in situations of crisis. It is not enough to put on paper what is needed to be done. We need to do the work now. We cannot wait another year, another decade. Year by year, the technological advances are such that human evolution cannot keep up with them.

There is a great need to develop care and compassion—care and compassion for the weak. The weak and the needy are women and children. And because of that, I would like to appeal to the United Nations, to the various agencies and programmes of the United Nations, and to the international financial institutions to make special provisions for the

fight against violence and poverty—to protect women and children from the effects of violence and poverty. This means, of course, that there is a need to involve more women in the planning and implementation of such programmes.

Only women understand the needs of women. Of course there are men who understand, but not quite to the same extent. And I may be prejudiced, but I tend to believe that women have greater



resources of understanding and compassion. Unless there is understanding and compassion, we cannot really make these programmes work for those who really need help. Too often, it is the privileged who get more and more help, while the underprivileged are ignored. To change the situation, please involve more women in the work of international institutions. Please accept that women have a lot to offer, and that by taking what they have to offer, all the peoples of the world, including the male population, will benefit a great deal. Thank you very much.

Note: The World March of Women 2000 is supported by more than 2,505 women's groups in 139 countries. It is a worldwide campaign to overcome the violence and poverty experienced by women. For more details, please visit the Website <<http://www.ffq.qc.ca/marche2000/>>.