

UN fails to agree tough response to Suu Kyi verdict
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The UN Security Council agreed on a watered-down statement expressing "serious concern" at the extended detention of Aung San Suu Kyi in Burma after a tougher draft met opposition from China, Libya, Russia and Vietnam.

After two days of closed-door bargaining, the 15-member body could only agree on a statement expressing "serious concern at the conviction and sentencing of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and its political impact" and reiterating "the importance of the release of all political prisoners."

Britain's UN Ambassador John Sawers, the council chair this month, described the non-binding statement as "an important expression of serious concern about the outcome" of the Suu Kyi trial.

A court at Rangoon's notorious Insein Prison on Tuesday sentenced Suu Kyi to three years' imprisonment and hard labor for breaching the terms of her house arrest following an incident in which a US man swam to her lakeside residence in May.

Than Shwe, head of the ruling junta, commuted the sentence to 18 months under house arrest but the trial and the verdict have created international outrage.

"I think we all know that different members of the Security Council have different views on the situation there and that the strong views in various Western capitals are not entirely shared in countries elsewhere," Sawers noted as he sought to explain why an initial US draft was watered down.

The tougher US draft which would have condemned Suu Kyi's conviction ran into opposition from China, a key ally of Burma, as well as from Russia, Vietnam and Libya.

The four countries invoked the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of a UN member state.

The text approved yesterday noted the decision by the Burma government to reduce Suu Kyi's sentence and urged the military regime "to take further measures to create the necessary conditions for a genuine dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all concerned parties and ethnic groups in order to achieve an inclusive national reconciliation."

It also affirmed the council's "commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Burma" and reiterated that "the future of Burma lies in the hands of all its people."

EU broadens sanctions

The European Union on Thursday broadened its sanctions against Burma in the wake of the Suu Kyi trial.

Brussels imposed a visa ban and asset freeze on members of the judiciary and in what it called "targeted measures," the 27 EU nations widened the bloc's existing assets freeze to cover businesses "owned and controlled by members of the regime" and their associates.

Suu Kyi has been confined for 14 of the past 20 years, ever since the military regime refused to recognize her National League for Democracy's landslide victory in the last elections held in 1990.

Unless she qualifies for an amnesty, the 64-year-old opposition leader and Nobel peace laureate will not be able to contest elections planned for next year.

A US senator plans this week to become the first senior American official to meet Burma's junta chief Than Shwe.

Democrat Jim Webb (*right*) - a hard-nosed Vietnam veteran who is close to President Barack Obama and chairs the Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee on East Asia and Pacific affairs - kicked off a two-week regional tour in Laos yesterday and is scheduled to visit Burma this weekend.



Aung San Suu Kyi trial

Myanmar's democracy icon returned to house arrest

Charge: Violating terms of earlier house arrest, after a visit by a US national John Yettaw

Sentenced to **18 months under house arrest**

Yettaw sentenced to seven years' hard labour

History of arrests

- 1989 - 1995**
First house arrest
- 2000 - 2002**
Second house arrest
- Since 2003**
-- Third house arrest
-- Junta has continuously extended house arrest at the end of each period

Aung San Suu Kyi
Led the National League for Democracy to victory in 1990 elections

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