

THE SOUTH AFRICAN CENTRE OF INTERNATIONAL P.E.N
A World Association of Writers

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15th April 2004

Senior General Than Shwe
Chairman, State Peace and Development Council
c/o Director of Defense Services Intelligence (DDSI)
Ministry of Defense, Signal Pagoda road, Dagon Post Office
Yangon, Union of Myanmar
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Your Excellency,

On behalf of the South African Centre of International PEN I wish to support most strongly the demand contained in the letter addressed to you by Vaclav Havel, Jiri Grusa and listed Nobel Laureates, dated 13th April 2004, relating to the house arrest in Yangon, of Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and writer Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

South Africa's third democratic election was held yesterday, 14th April 2004, in terms of our 1996 Constitution which upholds free press and freedom of expression. Such principles lie at the very base of democracy. When they are denied in Africa or in Asia, we must express our deep concern. The current government of Zimbabwe, under President Robert Gabriel Mugabe, has denied his citizens free expression – even at the polls - and this other threat to democracy, in a neighboring country, reinforces our vigilance on this vital principle: “All historical experience teaches us that freedom of speech and free and open public debate cannot stand at the end of a road to democracy, but must be at the very beginning of any meaningful reform.”

Release imprisoned writers, allow democracy to develop.

Yours sincerely,

Anthony Fleischer

President