

Email to Brighton and Hove City Councillors who spoke at the Special Meeting on 19 October 2023 which revoked the Freedom of the City awarded to Aung San Suu Kyi

5 November 2023

Dear Friends,

Some of you may have seen the interview with Kim Aris, Daw Suu's younger son, in 'The Times Supplement' on 4 November 2023, titled: "I fear I may never see my mother, Aung San Suu Kyi, again". On her fall from grace, Kim Aris had lots to say, notably:

"What was said and done [by her] at the time was completely misrepresented," he says. "She was taking every action possible to rectify the situation without more bloodshed. She was condemning what the military were doing. It's just that people weren't interested in the way she was saying it. She wanted rule of law. People are bored by things like that. She wants justice to be done in an orderly manner."

He blames the media for his mother's loss of reputation. "They'll build idols up and then tear them down even quicker," he says. "It wasn't at all proportionate." The pop stars, actors and politicians who had competed for Suu Kyi selfies suddenly shunned her; the honorary degrees were abruptly withdrawn. "It upset me," says Kim. "After all she'd given over the years, to see her treated like that was saddening to say the least."

My memorandum commenting on the Council's decision to revoke the Freedom of the City award made to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has been circulated widely, especially to Burma scholars. The Council had, I feel sure, not realised that the only people to benefit from their decision to revoke Daw Suu's Freedom of the City award are the military junta themselves, who are delighted that the British are still bashing Daw Suu, which gives them every excuse to continue doing the same.

No one with whom I have been in touch (all Burma specialists) shares anything like the critical view of Daw Suu which the Council took. Nor I believe do the bulk of the Rohingya population in Bangladeshi camps or still in Rakhine State, who know that it is the military, supported by more extreme sections of the local Rakhine Buddhist population, who are responsible for their persecution and victimisation, and not Daw Suu and her National League for Democracy.

Daw Suu remains State Counsellor of the Shadow Government known as the **National Unity Government**, who have an office in London and whose representatives maintain contact with most Western Governments, including the UK. **The NUG has issued a policy paper** to clarify their position on the Rohingya. The NUG position (which naturally includes Daw Suu, though she has not been able because of her imprisonment to give her personal blessing) includes the assurance that:

"We will actively seek justice and accountability for all crimes committed by the military against the Rohingyas and all other people of Myanmar throughout our history. We intend if necessary to initiate processes to grant International Criminal Court jurisdiction over crimes

committed within Myanmar against the Rohingyas and other communities. We consider that the 88 recommendations set out in the final report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State chaired by Dr Kofi Annan must play a crucial role in addressing the affairs in Rakhine State. These recommendations are based on solutions for the root causes of violence.”

It was of course Daw Suu who set up the Kofi Annan Commission.

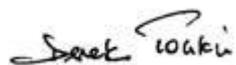
It is widely understood that before her detention on 1 February 2021 Daw Suu herself was operating under considerable duress. A perceptive analysis published in [the “Journal of Burma Studies” Volume 2 \(2023\)](#) by the Danish academic Mikael Gravers - “Preparing the Coup in Myanmar: The Military’s Strategy for Undermining the National League for Democracy” - highlights the constant pressures and aggravation from the military which Daw Suu encountered during the period of the NLD administration 2016-2021. Military resentment against Daw Suu focussed on her perceived sympathy and support for the Muslim Rohingya community. As Mikael Gravers notes on Page 372:

“As mentioned above, [military] officers profess negative views of Aung San Suu Kyi. She is regarded as divisive and treasonous, working with foreigners, and being a friend of Kalar, a derogatory term for Muslims and Hindus. Footnote: Soldiers looting private homes [in Rakhine State] after the coup told their victims they could ask Kalar Ma, ‘Kalar mother’, that is, Aung San Suu Kyi, for help.

So while Councillors thought fit to cancel Daw Suu because of her alleged hostility to the Rohingya, the Burmese military thought exactly the opposite, attacking her because she was allegedly far too close to them.

Councillors may now better understand her dilemma.

Yours sincerely



Derek Tonkin
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