

## Transcript of 12 Tweets posted by Derek Tonkin on 22 February 2024

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@NewcastleCC @Edinburgh\_CC @cityoflondon might wish to read

<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/defence-aung-san-suu-kyi> and reflect on their decision to revoke the Freedom of the City granted to Aung San Suu Kyi in her hey-day. [1]

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There can be no question of restoring these Freedoms, which Aung San Suu Kyi would politely decline in any case. Several Councils wrote to Aung San Suu Kyi before revoking her Freedom, but in no case would it seem that Aung San Suu Kyi responded. [2]

### **News Release 5 March 2020**

Elected Members of the City of London Corporation's Court of Common Council have today voted to revoke the Honorary Freedom for Aung San Suu Kyi with immediate effect.

Burma's State Counsellor was awarded the Honorary Freedom of the City of London at a ceremony at Guildhall in May 2017 in recognition of her 'non-violent struggle over many years for democracy and her steadfast dedication to create a society where people can live in peace, security and freedom'.

#### **Sir David Wootton, Chairman of the City of London Corporation's Freedom Applications Committee, said:**

"Today's unprecedented decision reflects the City Corporation's condemnation of the humanitarian abuses carried out in Myanmar, which have been detailed during the recent genocide hearing in The Hague, at which Aung San Suu Kyi led the delegation of the Government of Myanmar, and gave evidence.

"The Freedom Applications Committee concluded that the argument for the removal of the award had been much strengthened by Aung San Suu Kyi's close association with Myanmar's Government at the hearing, as well as her lack of response to letters from the Freedom Applications Committee."

Previous recipients of the City of London Corporation's highest award include Winston Churchill, Florence Nightingale, William Pitt the Elder, and more recently, Nelson Mandela, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Sir Tim Berners-Lee, and Professor Stephen Hawking.

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The reasons are only too clear. Aung San Suu Kyi was saddened that Councils seemed unaware of her many statements and interviews on the crisis in Rakhine State in the wake of her release from house arrest in November 2010. [3]

**Why have you failed to speak out on the plight of the Rohingya?**

I haven't been silent. Actually, we've been sending out a lot of statements from my office, and I've also made statements of my own. But I think what people mean is that what I say is not interesting enough. But what I say is not meant to be exciting, it's meant to be accurate. And it's aimed at creating more harmony and a better future for everybody, not for setting people against each other.

We mustn't forget that there are many different communities in the Rakhine, and if they are to live together in peace and harmony in the long-term, we can't set them against each other now. We cannot make the kind of statements that drives them further apart. This is the reason why we are very careful about what is said. But if you check, you will see that I've not been silent. I'm not been making very incendiary statements or very exciting statements, but we have always kept the public informed for what has been going on and what we are trying to do to make the situation better. (*Joint Press Conference with Rex Tillerson, November 15<sup>th</sup> 2017*)

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More particularly, Aung San Suu Kyi would have regretted that they clearly had no understanding of her perilous situation which made it all but impossible for her to "speak out" against military excesses in Rakhine State without provoking a military coup against her. [4]

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She would also have known that to attempt to explain her position was fraught with political danger. She was walking a tight-rope and any detailed explanation of her position to satisfy Councils would have been political suicide. [5]

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Pushed by governments and human rights organisations to use her moral authority to bring the military to account, Aung San Suu Kyi took action to highlight the human rights abuses which had occurred, notably in her Financial Times article of 20 January 2020. But she had no control whatsoever over the military justice system. [6]

**[Extract from Article in the Financial Times of 23 January 2020 by Aung San Suu Kyi]**

I stated at the ICJ that there would be domestic investigations and prosecutions if the ICOE report presented further evidence of violations in Rakhine. The ICOE has done that, concluding that war crimes were committed during the internal armed conflict with the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army by members of Myanmar's security forces and civilians. The report details killing of civilians, disproportionate use of force, looting of property, and destruction of abandoned homes of Muslims. The ICOE found no evidence of genocide.

Myanmar's Union Attorney-general has already announced plans to investigate civilians who may have participated in looting or burning of villages. War crimes that may have been committed by members of the Defence Services will be prosecuted through our military justice system.

We need to respect the integrity of these proceedings and to refrain from unreasonable demands that Myanmar's criminal justice system complete investigations in a third of the time routinely granted to international processes.

It is never easy for armed forces to recognise the self-interest in accountability for their members, and then follow through with actual investigations and prosecutions. This is a common challenge around the world. But that does not mean that international justice should immediately come into play.

An informed assessment of Myanmar's ability to address the issue of violations in Rakhine can only be made if adequate time is given for domestic justice to run its course.

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In any case, it was beneath her dignity to respond to such requests for clarification of her position. Yet she used her address on 11 December 2019 to the ICJ to restate her differences with the military in terms which would have eluded most Western readers. See my analysis at <https://www.networkmyanmar.org/ESW/Files/DASSK-The-Hague.pdf> .[7]

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Those Councils who have any doubt about Aung San Suu Kyi's compassion and continuing moral authority in Myanmar should read Professor Sean Turnell's dramatic account of his imprisonment in Myanmar when his term for a time coincided with her in Nay Pyi Taw. [8]

### **Extract from "An Unlikely Prisoner" by Sean Turnell**

Back in the real world of that trial, something that stood out was Daw Suu's engagement with all of us collectively and her consistent, concerted efforts to keep everyone's spirits up. Demonstrating a remarkable ability to rise above her own suffering – four out of five days in a court, listening for up to eight hours at a time to the most errant nonsense conjured up by Myanmar's knavish junta – she managed to give us a lift. It was more than a boost in the broadest sense, it occurred to me. Daw Suu was attuned to the particular anxiety we felt as a result of the whole 'criminal justice' framing of everything. For her co-accused, being charged with a crime and placed in a jail was a most unlikely, horrific and – in the back of most of our minds, I think – shameful thing. She cut through this decisively – urging us not to get caught up in this faux-legal process, and to understand that all around us was nothing but the expression of raw and brutal power. Of a particularly ugly form of politics. And, yes, that our tormenters beyond the court were the true criminals, and the people of Myanmar the true victims.

Daw Suu was unfailingly courteous to the functionaries of the court, the police, the prison guards, the prosecution team and the pumped-up, pompous judges. Her compassion, wisdom, and sheer moral authority reasserted itself in the most trying and character-testing of circumstances.

A constant in my weekly conversations with Daw Suu was her pride in the Myanmar people's response to the coup, especially considering their brief experience of freedom and (imperfect) democracy. ▽

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For Burmese, Aung San Suu Kyi has never fallen from grace. This is not to say that she might not have handled the Rakhine crisis differently and that the NLD administration 2016-2021 did not act unwisely on issues such as press freedom and the ethnic peace process.

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But on the Rohingya issue, she has demonstrated throughout a coherent, principled, compassionate and honourable position. Her appearance at the ICJ in The Hague was not made to defend the military, but her country's honour, dignity and democratic aspirations.

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My main criticism of her detractors is that those who awarded and then revoked her honorary degrees and freedoms made absolutely no attempt to try to understand her perilous situation, but simply alleged the worst. Thus Bob Geldorf's infamous "handmaiden to genocide". [11]

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Aung San Suu Kyi's martyrdom in prison, like that of the late Alexei Navalny, is a rebuke to all those in the West who have reviled and maligned her so thoughtlessly in recent years, though Aung San Suu Kyi has already forgiven them. [12]