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CONTACT:

Saw Myat Mar 408 205 9683
George Berticevich 415 789 9225

MEDIA ADVISORY

BADA lauds US Congress for honoring Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

The Burmese American Democratic Alliance (BADA) today praised the US House of Representatives for voting to award the Congressional Gold Medal to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and urged the US Senate to quickly approve a similar measure, which would provide strong American support and recognition for the struggle for democracy in Burma.

The House of Representatives unanimously voted to award Daw Aung San Suu Kyi the Congressional Gold Medal on the 17th of December, 2007. In the Senate, a similar bill is being introduced by Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) and Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.).

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is Burma's democracy icon, and her people's beloved leader. She has been under house arrest most of the last 19 years, and in virtual isolation for the last four and a half years since a brutal attack on her entourage on the 30th of May 2003.

In mid-2007, after learning that the Gold Medal had been awarded to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, BADA engaged with Congressional Representatives and Burmese activist groups in order to try to secure the award for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. "We believe this is a much-deserved recognition of her sacrifice and devotion to non-violence and democracy, and a much-needed moral support for the people's struggle in Burma. But when we initially approached some members of Congress with the idea six months ago, we were told that it would be a huge undertaking," says Victor Win a BADA Board Member who was instrumental in pushing the bill in through Congress.

The legislation to award a Congressional Gold Medal must be co-sponsored by two-thirds of the membership of both the House of Representatives and the Senate before the Congressional Committees can consider it.

"And most importantly, we were also told that all the Burmese groups must work in harmony to make this a reality. We quickly and formally introduced the idea and encouraged all leading activist groups to work on this together. Many were supportive of our effort," he added.

Such an effort usually takes up to three years, and fewer than ten non-Americans have ever been awarded the Congressional Medal. But now, thanks to the recent dramatic protests in Burma, understanding and support for Burma in the US Congress has greatly increased. Our on-going lobbying effort quickly turned into a bill that received the overwhelming support of 291 co-sponsors and passed unanimously, 400-0, in the House. The bill had been introduced by Congressman Crowley (D-N.Y.), but many other members of Congress were also instrumental in its passage.

"We thank Congressman Crowley and the House of Representatives for giving voice to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the people of Burma," said George Berticevich, a BADA Board Member who recently attended the ceremony awarding the Congressional Gold Medal to His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Washington, DC. Berticevich, and other BADA members, had also been meeting with some members of Congress and Burmese groups to promote the same award for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

"We urge the US Senate to follow suit, and quickly and unanimously approve the Senate bill, when introduced. The historic and peaceful protests in Burma are still being brutally crushed, and so the US Senate must show that it is behind the people of Burma," Berticevich added.

BADA is a community-based organization in the San Francisco Bay area. BADA has been advocating democracy and freedom for all the people of Burma since its founding in 2001.