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Statement by the Anti-Slavery Society

General Ne Win came to power a quarter of a century ago in the midst of student unrest and rebellions by several of Burma's ethnic communities. His recent resignation took place in parallel conditions. But there has been an essential change; the country has degenerated from potentially one of the richest in Asia to its present 'L.D.C.' status - a UN-listed Least Developed Country. It is now one of the world's poorest nations with a per capita income of less than £100.

The Anti-Slavery Society urges the new order in Rangoon to take advantage of the changing times and recognise that most non-Burmans, and certainly those forming the National Democratic Front, have suffered long and grievously and have been subjected to human rights violations in addition to the political and economic deprivations that have been the lot of the population as a whole.

The Karen and Kachin peoples in particular have been fighting for the recognition of their ethnic identities for 40 years. They, along with other Burmese minority communities - communities large enough to be nations in their own right - have been bombed, shot, raped, tortured and used as human mine detectors by the Burmese military authorities.

The recent changes in government provide the ideal opportunity not only for the lifting of the bamboo curtain and for Burma to end its international isolation, but also for the restoration of justice to the country's various ethnic peoples and the constitutional recognition of their separate identities.

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