

## **REITH LECTURES 2011: SECURING FREEDOM**

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI**

**LECTURE ONE: LIBERTY**

**FIRST BROADCAST ON BBC RADIO 4 AT 0900HRS, TUESDAY 28<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2011**

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/reithlectures>

**SUE LAWLEY:** Hello and welcome to the Radio Theatre in Broadcasting House, London.

Aung San Suu Kyi personifies the human aspiration for liberty. By dedicating her life to trying to secure freedom for the people of Burma, she's become a worldwide symbol of hope.

Today, in the first of two lectures - recorded in secret and smuggled out of her country - she explains the nature of that struggle and its importance, not only to Burma, but to the world as a whole. Welcome then, to the BBC's Reith Lectures.

They're called "*Securing Freedom*" and are being given at a time when the human determination to win freedom has never been stronger. Taking heart from the struggles of others, the people of many different countries in the Middle East are seeking to oust the dictatorial regimes that run their lives. At the same time, the fight against the forces of terrorism – which seek to destroy existing liberties – goes on.

In first two Reith Lectures this year, Aung San Suu Kyi will give a first-hand account of the fight against tyranny in a country that's been run by a military dictatorship for nearly fifty years.

The next three lectures, to be broadcast in September, will be delivered by the former head of MI5 - Britain's security service - Eliza Manningham-Buller. Her experience of the nature of terrorism in Britain provides another perspective on freedom and those who seek to take it away.

Aung San Suu Kyi has led the opposition to the Burmese military dictatorship since she returned to her homeland in 1988. Her political party, the National League for Democracy the NLD - won a landslide victory in a general election two years later, but the generals ignored the result.

Aung San Suu Kyi was put under house arrest, separated from her family in England, not daring to visit her dying husband lest the government prevent her from returning to continue the fight. In 1991 she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

At the end of last year she was released from a third long spell of house arrest. So now let's listen to the woman revered by many in Burma as '*The Lady*'. Ladies and gentlemen, the BBC's first Reith Lecturer 2011, Aung San Suu Kyi:

### ***Audience applause***

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI:** To be speaking to you now, through the BBC, has a very special meaning for me. It means that, once again, I am officially a free person. When I was officially un-free - that is to say when I was under house arrest - it was the BBC that spoke to me. I listened. But that listening also gave me a kind of freedom: the freedom of reaching out to other minds. Of course it was not the same as a personal exchange, but it was a form of human contact. The freedom to make contact with other human beings with whom you may wish to share your thoughts, your hopes, your laughter, and at times even your anger and indignation is a right that should never be violated. Even though I cannot be with you in person today, I am so grateful for this opportunity to exercise my right to human contact by sharing with you my thoughts on what freedom means to me and to others across the world who are still in the sad state of what I would call un-freedom.

The first autobiography I ever read was providentially, or prophetically, or perhaps both, *Seven Years Solitary*, by a Hungarian woman who had been in the wrong faction during the Communist Party purges of the early 1950s. At 13 years old, I was fascinated by the determination and ingenuity with which one woman alone was able to keep her mind sharp

and her spirit unbroken through the years when her only human contact was with men whose everyday preoccupation was to try to break her.

It is one of the most basic needs that those who decide to go into, and to persevere in, the business of dissent have to be prepared to live without. In fact living without is a huge part of the existence of dissidents.

What kind of people deliberately choose to walk the path of deprivation? Max Weber identifies three qualities of decisive importance for politicians as passion, a sense of responsibility, and a sense of proportion. The first - passion - he interprets as the passionate dedication to a cause. Such a passion is of crucial importance for those who engage in the most dangerous kind of politics: the politics of dissent. Such a passion has to be at the core of each and every person who makes the decision, declared or undeclared, to live in a world apart from the rest of their fellow citizens; a precarious world with its own unwritten rules and regulations. The world of dissidence.

There are no external signs by which the strange denizens of this world can be recognised. Come any week day to the headquarters of the NLD, a modest place with a ramshackle rough-hewn air of a shelter intended for hardy folk. More than once it has been described as the NLD "cowshed". Since this remark is usually made with a sympathetic and often admiring smile, we do not take offence. After all, didn't one of the most influential movements in the world begin in a cowshed?

In our shabby, overcrowded office, you will find very ordinary looking people. That elderly man with poetically unstylish hair is a veteran journalist. He is also a dissident supreme, and when he was released after 20 years in prison immediately set about writing a book about his harrowing experiences entitled *Is This A Human Hell?* He always wears a prison blue shirt to keep alive the awareness that there are still thousands of prisoners of conscience in Burma. This neat, bespectacled woman with a face free from lines of worry or despair is a doctor who spent 9 years in prison. Since her release 3 years ago, she has been busily involved in the social and humanitarian projects of our party. There are some sweet old ladies in their eighties.

They have been coming regularly to our office since 1997. That was one of our “Tsunami” years when a big wave of repression swept away large members of our democracy activists into jail.

At one of our party meetings, I called on the wives and small children and old parents of those who had been taken away to rally to our cause to show the Junta that we will not be defeated; that those of us who remained free would take up the standard of those whose freedom had been curtailed. The sweet old ladies were among the brave who picked up the standard. They are still holding onto it with great tenacity.

You will also see in our NLD office women and men whom the Burmese would say were of “good age”. That means they’re in their forties. When they joined the Movement for Democracy, they were in their twenties or even still in their late teens, fresh faced and flashing eyed, passionate for the cause. Now they are quieter, more mature, and more determined, their passion refined by the trials they have undergone. You do not ask them if they have ever been to prison. You ask them how many times they have been to jail.

Then there are young people, but not too young to be strangers to interrogation and incarceration. Their faces are bright with hope, but sober, free from the flush of illusion. They know what they have let themselves in for. They threw down the gauntlet to the future with clear eyes. Their weapons are their faith; their armour is their passion - our passion. What is this passion? What is the cause to which we are so passionately dedicated as to forego the comforts of a conventional existence? Going back to Vaclav Havel’s definition of the basic job of dissidents, we are dedicated to the defence of the right of individuals to free and truthful life. In other words, our passion is liberty.

Passion translates as suffering and I would contend that in the political context, as in the religious one, it implies suffering by choice: a deliberate decision to grasp the cup that we would rather let pass. It is not a decision made lightly - we do not enjoy suffering; we are not masochists. It is because of the high value we put on the object of our passion that we are able, sometimes in spite of ourselves, to choose suffering.

In May 2003 a motorcade of NLD members and supporters accompanying me on a campaign trip to Dabayin, a small town in North Burma, was surrounded and attacked by unknown assailants thought to be operating under the orders of the Junta. Nothing has been heard to this day of the fate of the attackers, but we, their victims, were placed under arrest. I was taken to the notorious insane jail and kept alone, but, I have to admit, kept rather well in a small bungalow built apart from the quarters of other prisoners.

One morning, while going through my daily set of physical exercises - keeping fit, as fit as possible was, in my opinion, one of the first duties of a political prisoner - I found myself thinking this is not me. I would not have been capable of carrying on calmly like this. I would have been curled up weakly in my bed, worrying my head out over the fate of those who had been at Dabayin with me. How many of them had been severely beaten up? How many of them had been dragged away to I did not know where? How many of them had died? And what was happening to the rest of the NLD? I would have been laid low by anxiety and uncertainty. This was not me here, working out as conscientiously as any keep fit fanatic.

At that time, I had no recollection of Akhmatova's lines: "No, this is not me. This is somebody else that suffers. I could never face that and all that happened." It was only much later, back in my own house but still under arrest, that these words of requiem came back to me. At the moment of remembrance, I felt almost as a physical force the strong bond that linked those of us who had only our inner resources to fall back on when we were most in need of strength and endurance.

Poetry is a great unifier that knows no frontiers of space or time. U Win Tin, he of the prison blue shirt, turned to Henley's *Invictus* to sustain him through the interrogation sessions he had to undergo. This poem had inspired my father and his contemporaries during the independent struggle, as it also seemed to have inspired freedom fighters in other places at other times. Struggle and suffering, the bloody unbowed head, and even death, all for the sake of freedom.

What is this freedom that is our passion? Our most passionate dissidents are not overly concerned with academic theories of freedom.

If pressed to explain what the word means to them, they would most likely reel off a list of the concerns nearest to their hearts such as there won't be any more political prisoners, or there will be freedom of speech and information and association, or we can choose the kind of government we want, or simply, and sweepingly, we will be able to do what we want to do.

This may all sound naïve, perhaps dangerously naïve, but such statements reflect the sense of freedom as something concrete that has to be gained through practical work, not just as a concept to be captured through philosophical argument.

Whenever I was asked at the end of each stretch of house arrest how it felt to be free, I would answer that I felt no different because my mind had always been free. I have spoken out often of the inner freedom that comes out from following a course in harmony with one's conscience. Isaiah Berlin warned against the dangers of the internalisation of freedom.

He said: *"Spiritual freedom, like moral victory, must be distinguished from a more fundamental sense of freedom and a more ordinary sense of victory. Otherwise there will be a danger of confusion in theory and justification of oppression in practice in the name of liberty itself"*.

There is certainly a danger that the acceptance of spiritual freedom as a satisfactory substitute for all other freedoms could lead to passivity and resignation. But an inner sense of freedom can reinforce a practical drive for the more fundamental freedoms in the form of human rights and rule of law. Buddhism teaches that the ultimate liberation is liberation from all desire. It could be argued, therefore, that the teachings of the Buddha are inimical to movements that are based on the desire for freedom in the form of human rights and political reform. However, when the Buddhist monks of Burma went on a Metta - that is loving kindness - march in 2007, they were protesting against the sudden steep rise in the price of fuel that had led to a devastating rise in food prices. They were using the spiritual authority to move for the basic right of the people to affordable food.

The belief in spiritual freedom does not have to mean an indifference to the practical need for the basic rights and freedoms that are generally seen as necessary that human beings may live like human beings.

A basic human right, which I value highly, is freedom from fear. Since the very beginning of the democracy movement in Burma, we have had to contend with the debilitating sense of fear that permeates our whole society.

Visitors to Burma are quick to remark that the Burmese are warm and hospitable. They also add, sadly, that the Burmese are in general afraid to discuss political issues.

Fear is the first adversary we have to get past when we set out to battle for freedom, and often it is the one that remains until the very end. But freedom from fear does not have to be complete. It only has to be sufficient to enable us to carry on; and to carry on in spite of fear requires tremendous courage.

*“No, I am not afraid. After a year of breathing these prison nights, I will escape into the sadness to name which is escape. It isn’t true. I am afraid, my darling, but make it look as though you haven’t noticed.”*

The gallantry embodied in Ratushinskaya lines is everyday fare for dissidents. They pretend to be unafraid as they go about their duties and pretend not to see that their comrades are also pretending. This is not hypocrisy. This is courage that has to be renewed consciously from day to day and moment to moment. This is how the battle for freedom has to be fought until such time as we have the right to be free from the fear imposed by brutality and injustice.

Akhmatova and Ratushinskaya were Russians. Henley was English. But the struggle to survive under oppression and the passion to be the master of one’s own fate and the captain of one’s own soul is common to all races.

The universal human aspiration to be free has been brought home to us by the stirring developments in the Middle East.

The Burmese are as excited by these events as peoples elsewhere. Our interest is particularly keen because there are notable similarities between the December 2010 revolution in Tunisia and our own 1988 uprising. Both started with what at that time seemed small, unimportant events.

A fruit-seller in a Tunisian town, unknown to the world at large, gave an unforgettable demonstration of the importance of basic human rights. One humble man showed the world that his right to human dignity was more precious to him than life itself. This sparked off a whole revolution. In Burma, a quarrel in a Rangoon teashop between university students and local men was handled by the police in a way the students considered unjust. This led to demonstrations that resulted in the death of a student, Phone Maw. This was the spark that fired the nationwide demonstrations against the dictatorship of the Burmese Socialist Programme Party.

A friend once said she thought the straw that broke the camel's back became intolerable because the animal had caught a glimpse of itself in a mirror. The realization dawned that the burden it was bearing was of unacceptable magnitude and its collapse was in fact a refusal to continue bearing so oppressive a load.

In Tunis and in Burma, the deaths of two young men were the mirrors that made the people see how unbearable were the burdens of injustice and oppression they had to endure. It is natural that the young should yearn for freedom. The desire to stretch newly matured wings is as strong as it is instinctive. It comes as no surprise to us in Burma that young people are at the vanguard of the Tunisian Revolution. It also comes as no surprise that a popular rapper was prominent among those who demanded that they be allowed to decide the shape of their own existence.

In Burma today, young rappers are at the core of Generation Wave, an informal organisation strongly committed to democracy and human rights. A number of them were imprisoned after the Saffron Revolution of the monks. About 15 of them still remain in jail today. The Burmese authorities, like the now ousted Tunisian government, are not fond of intense, unconventional young people.



They see them as a threat to the kind of order they wish to impose on our country. For those who believe in freedom, young rappers represent a future unbound by prejudice, by arbitrary rules and regulations, by oppression and injustice.

The similarities between Tunisia and Burma are the similarities that bind people all over the world who long for freedom. There are dissimilarities too and it is because of these dissimilarities that the outcome of the two revolutions has been so different. The first dissimilarity is that while the Tunisian Army did not fire on their people, the Burmese Army did. The second, and in the long-run probably the more important one, is that the Tunisian Revolution enjoyed the benefits of the communications revolution.

This not only enabled them to better organise and coordinate their movements. It kept the attention of the whole world firmly focused on them. Not just every single death - but even every single wounded - can be made known to the world within minutes. In Libya, in Syria, and in Yemen now, the revolutionaries keep the world informed of the atrocities of those in power. The picture of a 13 year old boy tortured to death in Syria aroused such anger and indignation that world leaders had to raise their voices in condemnation. Communications means contact and, in the context of the Middle Eastern revolutions, it was a freedom contact.

Do we envy the people of Tunisia and Egypt? Yes, we do envy them their quick and peaceful transitions. But more than envy is a sense of solidarity and of renewed commitment to our cause, which is the cause of all women and men who value human dignity and freedom. In our quest for freedom, we learn to be free. We have to act out our belief in freedom. This is Vaclav Havel's *Living in Truth*. We go about our duties out of our own free will, in spite of the dangers that are inherent in trying to live like free people in an un-free nation. We exercise our freedom of choice by choosing to do what we consider to be right, even if that choice leads to the curtailment of other freedoms because we believe that freedom engenders more freedoms.

Those old women and those young people who come to their unpaid jobs at NLD headquarters are exercising their right to choose the hard road to freedom.

As I speak to you, I am exercising my right to the freedom of communications; and the very fact that I am exercising this right makes me feel a much freer person.

Dissent is a vocation in accordance with Max Weber's views on politics as a vocation. We engage in dissent for the sake of liberty and we are prepared to try again and again with passion, with a sense of responsibility and a sense of proportion to achieve what may seem impossible to some. We are struggling with open eyes to turn our dream of freedom into a reality.

I would like to end this lecture with my favourite lines from Kipling with many thanks to Tim Garton-Ash who tracked them down for me.

*"I'd not give room for an Emperor - I'd hold my road for a King. To the Triple Crown I'd not bow down - but this is a different thing! I'll not fight with the Powers of Air - sentry, pass him through! Drawbridge let fall - He's the lord of us all - the Dreamer whose dream came true!"*

### ***Audience applause***

**SUE LAWLEY** : Aung San Suu Kyi recorded that lecture in the recent past, but we now have a live sound link to her in Rangoon. Aung San Suu Kyi, welcome. Did you hear the applause for your lecture?

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI**: Yes, thank you.

**SUE LAWLEY**: And I hope you're now happy to take questions from our audience here?

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI**: Yes I'd be happy with nice questions!

**SUE LAWLEY**: *(laughs)* Well with me I have Tim Garton Ash whom you mentioned just now, a historian and political commentator. He's written widely, as you know, about dictatorship and dissent from Eastern Europe under Communism to Burma today. And I have Sir Kieran Prendergast, a British diplomat who was Under Secretary General for Political Affairs at the

United Nations and now advises the Geneva based Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. And we've got a wide and distinguished audience with politicians and dissidents and commentators from China, Egypt, Iran, Syria, as well as Burma, and we'll be taking questions from them. Let me begin though by asking Timothy Garton Ash to put his question to Aung San Suu Kyi.

**TIMOTHY GARTON ASH:** Well, Suu, first of all thank you so much for a really wonderful, very moving lecture. I'm not sure if this is a nice question, but I wanted to push you a bit on the contrast you made with Tunisia, and I wanted to ask you why is it, do you think, that your struggle has taken so long - after all nearly a quarter century now, since 1988. Is it because the Burmese Army is prepared to shoot to kill? Is it because a non-violent struggle necessarily takes a long time? Is it because the communications revolution has not yet reached Burma as much as it has the Maghreb? Or is it perhaps the geopolitical situation where Tunisia has a free Europe as its neighbour, you have China? What is the mix of reasons, do you think, which means that your own struggle has been so long and so hard?

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI:** I think it's all of those. But to begin with, it's because our army shot on the people and when an army does that it really puts a stop to future movement for some time. I think it's not just in Burma; that you will find that in other countries as well. Even in Eastern Europe after the Hungarian Revolution was put down, people were more wary about taking to the streets. And then I think the communications revolution made a lot of difference. Now you can see what is going on everywhere in the Middle East, but what happened in Burma in 1988 was much worse. But people don't know that. And then of course there are also geopolitical considerations. But I think the shooting and the lack of images to rouse the whole world have a lot to do with the way in which our revolution has been going on for such a long time. Not just because we want it to be peaceful - because after all in Tunisia and Egypt it *has* been peaceful.

**SUE LAWLEY:** Nevertheless, Aung San Suu Kyi, Nelson Mandela himself changed, didn't he? He said that non-violence as a tactic should be abandoned when it no longer worked. Is that something you might be tempted by?

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI:** It's possible because I have said in the lectures that I do not hold to non-violence for moral reasons, but for practical and political reasons, because I think it's best for the country. And even Ghandiji, who is supposed to be the father of non-violence, said that between cowardice and violence, he'd choose violence any time.

**SUE LAWLEY:** We have with us in fact a young woman, a refugee from Burma, Wai Hnin Pwint Thon. She's a student now in London, but her father is a political prisoner still in Burma. Let me invite her to put a question to you.

**WAI HNIN PWINT THON:** Yes, *Mingalaba Ahmay* [translation: *Well wishes to you, Mother*]. I would like to ask as a young person from Burma, we all want to get involved in the movement. I would like to know what is the best practical action as young people to do to improve the change in Burma, to get the change in Burma.

**SUE LAWLEY:** Do you mean action taken here, outside Burma ...

**WAI HNIN PWINT THON:** *(over)* Yes.

**SUE LAWLEY:** ... or in Burma by students?

**WAI HNIN PWINT THON:** Inside or outside for all young people to do. What can we do as a best practical action?

**SUE LAWLEY:** Daw Suu?

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI:** I don't think there is one best practical action. But for young people outside Burma, it's most important that they keep up an awareness of what's happening in Burma. That's what they can do best. But for the young people in Burma, they have so many things to do. We have to work in all directions at the same time. I think the young people inside Burma really have a tough time fighting for freedom. They have to learn to educate themselves practically as well as theoretically, and they have to learn to educate other people as well - to bring them along in their struggle.

**SUE LAWLEY:** Let me bring in Sir Kieran Prendergast here. What do you feel about the approach of the National League for Democracy, Sir Kieran? Do you feel that the nature of its approach - which has been very consistent now, hasn't it, since 1990 - do you think it should be changed in any way?

**SIR KIERAN PRENDERGAST:** Well I do ask myself sometimes whether the policy hasn't got frozen a bit, stuck in a little bit of a rut, particularly in terms of advice to the outside world in terms of our engagement. Really there are only four broad policy instruments open to us. One is to engage. The second is to isolate - but, as far as I can see, Burma has isolated herself very willingly since 1962. The third is to sanction, but the difficulty there is that China is moving in, in a bold and aggressive way to invest in Burma. And the fourth is to attack. And I honestly think that after the various follies of recent Western policy and the hubris of thinking that we can do so much by military means that is not going to happen.

So what I was wondering was whether there was scope for the NLD to have a look at those two remaining areas: namely engagement and also sanctions - whether a blanket ban doesn't just serve the interests of a country like China, which is not going to bring freedom or democracy. Whether, for example, the NLD could lay down criteria for foreign investment, which would ... because, after all, you know if you think about countries like Vietnam, about Indonesia, which have been very closed societies for many years or military dominated, it was really the prosperity and the Western investment that forced the military to see that they couldn't continue running and that they had to open up society.

**SUE LAWLEY:** Daw Suu, you're under attack there, not a nice question. You're frozen and stuck in a rut.

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI:** Well though it's not such a bad question because it gives me a chance to answer. First of all, I don't think these four ways that you mentioned are ways as such. We have always been in favour of engagement and we've always been in favour of critical engagement because I don't think you'll get anywhere without engaging. We don't believe in isolation. And with regard to sanctions, I don't think there are blanket sanctions in Burma.

Only Canada has imposed blanket sanctions. Certainly the EU hasn't and not even the United States. So I don't think you can say that they are blanket sanctions and there are many more things that you can do on the sanctions front if you really wish to. Now with regard to whether or not sanctions are effective, I would like to remind you that one of the very first motions tabled in this new National Assembly was a motion asking for the removal of sanctions by the USDP. Now if sanctions are not effective, why are they so keen on having them removed? I think this is something that you should think about. And with regard to critical engagement, it could be carried on in such a way as to help us in our network for democracy - which has been working well, much better than I had expected - since my release last November. And by empowering the people and decreasing their dependency on the government, you could help the movement for democracy in a new and more vigorous way.

**SUE LAWLEY:** I'm going to call in Vicky Bowman who's a former British Ambassador to Burma. And she was there as a diplomat in the 90s, but she's married I think to a Burmese dissident who was a political prisoner there for many years. Vicky Bowman?

**VICKY BOWMAN:** My question is about dissent within opposition movements because one sees that many opposition movements in authoritarian states have difficulty dealing with internal dissent, and the Burmese opposition movement I think has suffered similar problems, so it's such that it's tended to be you personally rather than a strong organisational structural or policy programme which has united and reunified the movement when it's fragmented. So my question is what can opposition movements in authoritarian regimes do to deal effectively with a broad church of views within their movement, so that they can survive and thrive independently of a single individual and thus be less vulnerable as your party has been vulnerable to you having been locked up for so many years in the last twenty years? Thank you.

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI:** I think a lot of people forget how very young the NLD is. For example, if we think about the ANC or the Indian National Congress during the Indian struggle for independence, they were old established parties which had had a long time in which to work out their difficulties.

I think dissent within dissenters is very normal and natural because life is difficult, we have to struggle; and when we have to struggle and life is difficult, people start disagreeing with each other as to the way out of the problems. And to depend on one or a few leaders is not so unusual either. This tends to happen in young movements. And although we have been going on for more than 20 years, in comparison with many movements like ours, we are still a young movement and we're learning all the time. We're still in the first generation in a way. When we get to the second generation, we'll be much better. But I hope that we'll get to democracy before we get to the second generation.

**SUE LAWLEY:** *(laughs)* But do you feel, Daw Suu, that you're in a stronger position now than you were 22 years ago? I mean when the results of the general election were announced by the regime back in November and then you were released, I mean weren't those signs that they felt stronger than ever?

**AUNG SAN SUU KY:** No, I feel stronger now; we feel stronger now. I don't know whether *they* feel stronger or not, but we certainly feel stronger because of this infusion of new blood. I have never seen so many young people supporting the NLD. They are not necessarily members of the NLD, which is what I really like. They're not members of the NLD, but they support our movement very enthusiastically and they are in many ways better qualified than the young people of the 1988 generation because they have had better access to modern education and it's all part of the communications revolution too. So we certainly feel in a stronger position in spite of the fact that we're supposed to be an unregistered party.

**SUE LAWLEY:** I'm going to call in Heba Morayef who's an Egyptian who works for a human rights group and was in Tahrir Square during the spontaneous uprising there in January. Heba, your question?

**HEBA MORAYEF:** I wanted to ask you what you think the obligations of the international community are when local dissidents are being cracked down upon because one of the things we struggled against in Egypt for years was the fact that the Mubarak government was given unconditional support by the United States and the EU.

But also what the limitations of that international support should be because if you look across the rest of the Middle East intervention in Libya complicates things for local dissidents and threatens in a sense to de-legitimise their struggle at a certain point, while other countries such as Bahrain are untouched by international criticism and can continue to crack down. So how to get that balance right in terms of what we ask for as local dissidents?

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI:** First of all I think we have to accept the sad fact that people are attracted by power. I have found that perfectly decent [people] are flattered when the ruling governments bathe them some attention, makes a fuss over them, and this is true for Burmese people as well as for non-Burmese people who come to Burma. And this attraction that power and influence has over humanity in general works against those who are in the dissenting faction because we are who are dissidents, we don't have the power, and people tend to think that those who are in power must be in power for good reasons when actually there can be very, very horrible reasons for people being in power. So I think what we have to do is to raise people's awareness as to where it leads to in the long run - if you support those who should not be supported - and I think Egypt is now in a very good position to do that.

**SUE LAWLEY:** How disappointed are you in the responses of the international community? Do you feel, Daw Suu, that they could and should be doing more?

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI:** I won't say disappointed is the word because some have been very supportive. For example, the United States has certainly been very supportive. We can't deny that. The EU has been supportive - some countries more than others, but certainly supportive. And even among the Asian countries - this is something I've discovered since my latest release - is that they are beginning to be more aware of the need to support the movement for democracy in Burma. You find ...

**SUE LAWLEY:** (*speaks over*) But China, India, Singapore you know are big trading partners with the regime, aren't they?



**AUNG SAN SUU KYI:** Yes - trading partners, yes. But alright, China and India, let's leave them aside for the time being because they certainly have a lot more to do with the government than we would wish them to, quite frankly. But Singapore is part of ASEAN (The Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and in general, although I don't want to name the nations individually, the ASEAN nations have been so much more supportive since my release than they ever were before I was put away under house arrest in 2003.

**SUE LAWLEY:** A quick comment from Timothy Garton Ash.

**TIMOTHY GARTON ASH:** Daw Suu, can I push you on that because, after all, India, your immediate neighbour, is the world's largest democracy. Don't you think the country of Gandhi should be doing more to support a strictly non-violent movement for human freedom?

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI:** Oh certainly, I think so, and I say that ad nauseum. I say that they should be firmly rooted in the democratic principles instead of putting trade and strategic interests at the forefront.

**SUE LAWLEY:** Sir Kieran Prendergast, what about the UN? The UN has not been at all effective really, has it, in helping the people of Burma?

**SIR KIERAN PRENDERGAST:** The trouble is that policy on issues of peace and security are made by the Security Council and in the Security Council Russia and China have a veto, and I think that it's not actually realistic to expect, for example, India to take a policy which ignores its own strategic interests. It's not going to cede the field to China. Now China has not been completely immobile. When I joined the UN in 1997, there would have been no question of Burma being discussed in the Security Council. They simply would have said this is an internal matter, we can't discuss it. Whereas in fact in recent years Burma *has* come under discussion in the Security Council. It's inching forward, but there are going to be very serious limits to how far that goes.

**SUE LAWLEY:** You've suggested before now that China is a little embarrassed about its trade with Burma.

**SIR KIERAN PRENDERGAST:** I think they're a bit embarrassed by the behaviour of the regime when it uses violence, but you know interest trumps embarrassment.

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI:** Could I put in a remark about China and the UN? China is very concerned now about the hostilities which have broken out in the North between the KIA and the Burmese Army. Now one of the things that China keeps repeating is that the military regime is necessary for stability in Burma. I think they are beginning to see that perhaps stability is not achieved through repression, certainly not by the kind of military repression that is going on. And then with regard to the UN, there are other things I think that the UN can do besides what is done within the Security Council. For example, one of the previous Secretary Generals, Perez de Cuellar, did everything possible to put Burma on the United Nations map. In that way, I think the Secretary General and the United Nations Secretariat can do more to help Burma if they should wish to.

**SUE LAWLEY:** So that's your message? This is one of our questions from the audience that's just been handed to me: what is your message for the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon? It is do more, please, and now?

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI:** Yes, whatever the Secretary General and the United Nations Secretariat are capable of doing should be done as quickly as possible.

**SUE LAWLEY:** Brief comment, please.

**SIR KIERAN PRENDERGAST:** Well we've had for a long time a personal representative of the Secretary General who visits Burma from time to time. I have to say I found it a very frustrating experience when I was at the UN because in order to try and open up a more productive debate, we wanted, for example, to be able to take with us someone from the World Bank to hold up some of the benefits that might come to Burma if they were to open up their political system. And we were unable to do that because the Americans'

administration told us that if we did, they might lose - as a result of congressional pressure - they might lose funding for the World Bank. So whoever goes has to have some instruments that he or she can deploy.

**SUE LAWLEY:** I'm going to call in Geoffrey Alan. Geoffrey Alan, where are you?

**GEOFFREY ALAN:** I'm going to bring it back to the communications revolution. Daw Suu, it's an honour to speak to you. I'm really interested in what you were talking about - the difference between the movements for democracy in Burma and what we're seeing in the Middle East. How are you planning to use the communications revolution in Burma? Are you tweeting? Are people finding ways to get information out of Burma that we can be following and re-tweeting here?

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI:** *(over)* Well I'm using it right now talking to you. I couldn't have done that seven years ago. *(Sue Lawley tries to interject)* They just cut off my telephone line and that was it. I was isolated from the rest of the world.

**SUE LAWLEY:** But what about the young people of Burma? Are they able to communicate in the way that the young people of the Middle East are - mobile phones, Twitter and so on? Is that happening?

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI:** Not to that extent. Not to that extent because there are far fewer mobile phones and computers here in Burma than in the Middle East. But one of the first differences I noticed on the day I was released were all those hand phones in the hands of the young people who came to greet me at my gate. I had never seen a hand phone before except in the hands of my security officer - that is to say the people in charge of my security.

**SUE LAWLEY:** But you know back in 2007 when the monks rose up, the Saffron Revolution, we did see pictures of that on mobile phones, you know, and yet it didn't become the trigger that it has in the Middle East when we've seen pictures from Tahrir Square. Why do you think that is? Is there simply perhaps not enough of it?

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI:** Well I was told there was not enough of it - I don't know because I was under house arrest then and of course I saw none of these pictures. I only heard the news on the radio. And the radio news are very important, but certainly it doesn't have the same sort of impact as visual images.

**SUE LAWLEY:** I'm going to call in Cara Bleiman. A question on tourism, I think.

**CARA BLEIMAN:** Oh hello, it's an honour to speak to you. So those of us who can use our freedom to visit Burma as tourists.

**SUE LAWLEY:** Should we use our freedom to visit Burma as tourists, Daw Suu?

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI:** Oh. We would like tourists to avoid the facilities that are owned not just by the government but by the cronies, and also to encourage those institutions which have outreach programmes to help the people of Burma and to help in the conservation of the environment. And we hope soon to bring out a list of the actual travel agencies and hotels which are engaging in such positive programmes.

**SUE LAWLEY:** But you're saying that you would prefer it if people avoided the big cruises or the big hotels in the centre of Rangoon? The money goes into the pockets of the cronies if you go on those, yes?

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI:** We can't say that *all* the big hotels are owned by cronies, but I would say that the great majority of them are and we are trying to work on a list so that the tourists will have a clearer idea of which hotels and which facilities they should encourage and which they should not encourage.

**SUE LAWLEY:** Let me call Rouhi Shafii from Iran.

**ROUHI SHAFII:** Yes, my question is I was recently at the UN Human Rights Council sessions in Geneva and there was a lady from your country, a member of an NGO, and she was saying

that it was best if you participated in the elections in Burma instead of refusing it. I just wanted to know the reason why you didn't participate in the elections. Thank you.

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI:** There are three main reasons why we didn't participate in the elections. The first was that if you were to contest the elections, you have to sign an undertaking to protect the 2008 constitution. Now this constitution give the army a right to take over all powers of government whenever they feel it's necessary. Now, secondly, we couldn't accept the condition that we would have to expel all members of our party who were in prison. That is to say we must abandon our prisoners of conscience if we wanted to contest the elections. And, thirdly, we would have to wipe the 1990 elections off the political map of Burma. That also we were unprepared to do. I don't know why that lady said we should have contested the elections, but for us it was not possible under those conditions.

**SUE LAWLEY:** And finally a question from Maureen Lipman, the actress who's a long time campaigner for democracy and human rights in Burma. Maureen?

**MAUREEN LIPMAN:** Daw Suu Kyi, it's a great honour for me to be your showbiz representative here. During your years under house arrest and in captivity, was it comedy or tragedy which lifted your spirits?

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI:** It was certainly comedy. I've always liked comedy. Perhaps I have been influenced by my mother who used to tell me that ... about sad films. She said she never wanted to watch sad films because there had been too much sadness in her personal life. And perhaps because of that, I've never liked sad films. I've never been fond of tragedy - though mind you, I like some of Shakespeare's tragedies. So comedy any time.

**MAUREEN LIPMAN:** I think it would be wonderful ... I'm not allowed to ask a second question, but if you ... because it's so hard to get the profile of Burma out into the world, to make people care as much as they care about other things like the Middle East, it would be wonderful if you could just say a word about what the education system is in Burma now, how difficult it is for people to have an education.

**SUE LAWLEY:** Daw Suu?

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI:** I think people have to learn to educate themselves and that's too tough. You can't expect children to educate themselves. You have to wait until you're grown-up before you know that you *can* educate yourself. So I think we need to start from the very, very beginning and we need help from every possible source. And I might as well say that NLD and the Democracy Network have started a series of free schools, which are very successful and very much in need of all kinds of help.

**SUE LAWLEY:** Daw Suu, as you said in your lecture yours is a very serious business. You talked about the dangers of the politics of dissent and you dice with danger every day in the course of your struggle. I know before now you've actually faced a line of soldiers with their rifles point at you and their commander counting down to fire. Have you - and it's probably obvious that you have - come to terms with the fact that ultimately you might, like your father before you, have to give your life for your cause and your country?

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI:** Yes, I think we all come to terms with such a possibility very early on.

**SUE LAWLEY:** And nothing changes? You know that that's always a possibility?

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI:** That's always a possibility. But, on the other hand, there's always the possibility that you might be knocked down by a bus on the high street. *(laughter)*

**SUE LAWLEY:** Kieran Prendergast, what do you feel about the future if you can possibly look into it for Burma? It's incredibly difficult and it is ... it is always the elephant in the room really, isn't it? What chances do you think there are of democracy eventually coming to Burma?

**SIR KIERAN PRENDERGAST:** My gut feeling is that it's one of the most difficult of all of the countries to deal with. Because of this long tradition of isolation, self-isolation and I suspect that change will come much more from within than from without.

**SUE LAWLEY:** Daw Suu, do you believe it possible that you might one day lead a democratic Burma?

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI:** Oh very possible. I would like just to remind Tim that he wrote in one of the books published in the late 1980s that change was not going to come to East Germany for a *long, long* time ...*(laughter)*

**TIMOTHY GARTON ASH:** Oh hang on, hang on.

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI:** *(laughing)*... and everything happened in 1989. *(Timothy Garton Ash laughs)* And I think if you had asked anybody last year what they thought of the possibility of Tunisia and Egypt changing overnight, I think very few people would have said oh it was going to change. They would probably have said oh well, you know what *are* you talking about?

**SUE LAWLEY:** Timothy Garton Ash, you can put this in context for us. You studied dissent in Eastern Europe. Where do people find ... I know Daw Suu is so modest that you know we can't tell her she's a courageous person, but where do people find the courage to face these kinds of things some inner steel that means they are prepared not just to give up their liberty but possibly their lives in the interests of their cause?

**TIMOTHY GARTON ASH:** Well I certainly feel able to tell Aung San Suu Kyi that she's a heroine. You know what, I've spent 40 years thinking about this question and actually it's much easier to work out why people become collaborators, servants of a dictatorship. The ingredients of cowardice are much easier to identify than the ingredients of courage, which are often mysterious. But if I may on that note, could I just put a quick question to Daw Suu because one of the most fantastic sentences in your lecture, Suu, is when you say of people in the opposition, I quote:

*"They pretend to be unafraid as they go about their duties and pretend not to see that their comrades are also pretending."*

And that's a wonderful insight into what drives an opposition. Do you feel coming out of house arrest that the barriers of fear are higher or are lower? Which direction? Do you think the barrier of fear is close to being overcome in the wider society?

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI:** Yes, I think the barriers are lower. And could I just say that I think one of the reasons why we go on is because we just don't know how to stop. *(laughter)* We don't know how to turn our backs on our beliefs. We don't know how to abandon our comrades, our colleagues. We just don't know how to do these things, so we go on.

**SUE LAWLEY:** There we have to end it, I'm afraid. Next week our lecturer develops her theme as she discusses the forces at work against her political party, The National League for Democracy, and what Vaclav Havel has termed "*the power of the powerless*". Our thanks to our audience here in the Radio Theatre in London and an incredibly special thanks to our Reith Lecturer in Burma, Aung San Suu Kyi.

***Audience Applause***

**END**