

Aung San Suu Kyi

Burmese pro-democracy leader and Nobel Peace Laureate; a renowned advocate of non-violence and human rights who spent many years under house arrest.

- Nobel Peace Laureate 1991
- Spent 14 years under house arrest in Burma
- Honorary Elder since 2007

"Human beings the world over need freedom and security that they may be able to realise their full potential."

The struggle for democracy

As one of the world's most renowned human rights activists, Aung San Suu Kyi remains the figurehead for Burma's struggle for democracy. Her father, the independence hero Aung San, was assassinated when she was two years old. She spent many years studying abroad, in India and the UK, but returned to Burma in 1988 and soon became involved in political life.

She joined the nascent National League for Democracy (NLD) and began to speak out about the need for freedom and democracy in Burma. Her popularity grew but the ruling military government responded with force, killing up to 10,000 demonstrators in a matter of months.

In 1990 the military regime, unable to maintain its grip on power, was forced to call a general election. Daw Suu Kyi and many of her fellow NLD members were detained as they attempted to campaign. Despite being held under arrest, Suu Kyi and the NLD won 82 per cent of seats in parliament. Burma's military rulers, however, have never recognised the results and remain in power to this day.

Political prisoner

For her continued efforts to bring democracy to her country, Aung San Suu Kyi was held under house arrest by the Burmese authorities for almost 15 of the past 21 years. Until November 2010, when she was finally released from her latest period of detention, she was the most well-known of Burma's 2,100 political prisoners.

She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 "for her non-violent struggle for democracy and human rights." She has also received the Sakharov Prize of the European Parliament, the United States Presidential Medal of Freedom, and the Jawaharlal Nehru Award from India.

Comparing her plight to the struggle of South Africa's celebrated anti-apartheid leader, Archbishop Desmond Tutu said: "Aung San Suu Kyi is a truly extraordinary woman. I can think of no better way of underlining her courage, sacrifice and importance than to describe her as Burma's Nelson Mandela."

Honorary Elder

An inspiration to human rights activists and pro-democracy campaigners around the world, Aung San Suu Kyi has been an honorary Elder since 2007. Having followed her case closely for many years, The Elders wanted to demonstrate their solidarity with Daw Suu Kyi and all Burma's political prisoners, and help ensure their struggle is not forgotten.

During her long years of house arrest in Burma, The Elders always symbolically placed an empty chair for Daw Suu Kyi at their meetings, and rejoiced at her release in November 2010.