

## France joins calls for Suu Kyi's release

Nov 17, 2009 (DVB)—Calls from the French foreign ministry to release Burma's Aung San Suu Kyi have been welcomed by campaigners in France who say that Western engagement with the regime is long overdue.

A statement released by the foreign ministry yesterday stated that "we hope that this call to the Burmese prime minister to release all political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi will be heard".

Following United States' president Barack Obama's call for the release of the imprisoned Nobel laureate last week, the French Foreign Ministry backed US assertions that the upcoming 2010 elections would not be credible unless the junta released the 2,100 political prisoners currently incarcerated in Burma.

"We are particularly glad that France is taking the release of all political prisoners, not only Aung San Suu Kyi, into the perspective of next year's elections because the release of all political prisoners is essential to these elections," said Isabelle Dubuis, from Info Birmanie.

She added that the current Western position of critical engagement with Burma is one that "we have always called for".

The foreign ministry statement went on to state that "it is now up to [the Burmese government] to undertake concrete measures in favour of dialogue and national reconciliation."

Dubuis also called for western diplomats to "closely co-ordinate and unify their efforts to secure concrete progress".

France's position towards Burma came under close scrutiny earlier this year after the French foreign minister, Bernard Kouchner, labeled European Union sanctions on the country "useless".

French policy makers have also been accused of ambivalence and double standards as the French oil multinational Total declined to halt its controversial business dealings in the Burmese fossil fuel sector.

It is an investment that Dubuis said had "terrible impacts on the people of Burma. We have a lot of concerns about the situation".

*Reporting by Joseph Allchin*