Human Rights Council
Fifth Special Session
“The Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar”
2 October 2007
Statement by HE Caroline Millar, Permanent Representative of Australia to the UN

Australia strongly supports this timely Special Session. We remain extremely concerned by the current human rights situation in Burma.

We thank the Special Rapporteur for his statement. He has asked a number of highly pertinent questions to which the international community needs answers. We also welcome the statement by the High Commissioner and note, in particular, her reference to ‘responsibility to protect’ – which Australia strongly endorses – and the need for this Council to act now.

Mr President,

Australia is appalled at the violent response to peaceful protests by monks and other citizens. The deaths and injuries to the protestors, including the monks, are particularly distressing.

We strongly urge the Government in Burma to respect its citizens’ legitimate right to freedom of expression and assembly.
The detention of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and thousands of other political prisoners is unacceptable. We urge the Burmese regime, immediately and unconditionally, to release all political prisoners, including those arrested and detained as a result of the recent repression of peaceful protests, and to treat these detainees humanely.

We welcome the strong stance that has already been taken by the international community, including within the region. The ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ call for the Burmese Government to resume its efforts at national reconciliation and work towards a peaceful transition to democracy is particularly important.

The recent protests in Burma are a clear call from the Burmese people for such democratic change. The Government must heed international opinion – and the voice of its own citizens – and commit to recognising and respecting international human rights norms.

Mr President,

Strong credible action by the Human Rights Council is imperative in response to this critical situation. We urge Council members to support the draft resolution (A/HRC/S-5/L.1/Rev.1) – which Australia has co-sponsored. This is a balanced text, reflecting regional and broader international concerns, and containing the key elements on which this Council should focus – including provision for ongoing monitoring and reporting mechanisms. Given the
expressions of concern articulated by speakers today, we would expect the resolution to be adopted by consensus.

We welcome the decision by the Burmese authorities to accept a visit by the UN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy, Mr Ibrahim Gambari, and strongly urge the Government to cooperate meaningfully with Mr Gambari to enable him to discharge his mandate.

We also urge the Burmese authorities to work constructively with the Human Rights Council and the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar.

Finally, we take this opportunity to express our condolences to the victims of repression by the Burmese regime and to their families. Australia – along with the rest of the world – strongly supports Burmese citizens’ call for democratic change and national reconciliation. We expect this call to be strongly reflected in the outcome of this Special Session.