

Burma under fire from UN rights chief

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The United Nations human rights chief and a trio of experts have called on Burma to immediately release peaceful protesters and respect the rights of detainees.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, says she has been following with growing concern the suppression of peaceful protests in Burma.

She urged authorities to release detainees and political prisoners as well as ensure respect for fundamental rights.

Ms Arbour was speaking during the sixth session of the Human Rights Council, which has been criticised for not addressing the human rights situation in Burma during the first year of its work.

In a separate statement, three independent rights experts, including Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, the special rapporteur for human rights in Burma, renewed calls for the country's military junta to free people detained after protesting over unprecedented fuel price hikes.

Chinese pressure

China has cautiously added its weight to international pressure on Burma by calling on the Southeast Asian junta to defuse public unrest by pressing ahead with a democracy process appropriate to the country.

The official Xinhua newsagency says Senior Chinese diplomat, Tang Jiaxuan, made the comments to Burma's Foreign Minister, U Nyan Win, who was visiting Beijing for talks.

Since August, Burma has sought to stamp out public protests sparked by fuel price rises.

Reuters newsagency says the crackdown has been one of the harshest since the army crushed a nationwide pro-democracy uprising in 1988.

Earlier this month, Burma's military junta completed the first stage of drawing up a new constitution, but left unclear when and how it will allow the document to be written.

<http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/news/stories/s2032721.htm>