

Aung San Suu Kyi



Since the end of World War II, democracy movements in East Asia have been met with harsh opposition. One such leader who suffered for her beliefs is **Aung San Suu Kyi**. She was born in Burma (officially known as Myanmar) in 1945. She became a political activist who opposed the military dictatorship that had ruled her country since 1960.

The late 1980's were a violent time in Myanmar. While students and other protestors held rallies demanding democracy, government soldiers fired live bullets into the crowds. Thousands were killed and many more were arrested and subsequently tortured.

In August 1988, Aung San Suu Kyi became the leader of the democracy movement the **National League for Democracy (NLD)**, a party dedicated to nonviolence and civil disobedience. She began to travel throughout the country encouraging huge crowds to support democratic reforms.

On July 20, 1989, she is placed under house arrest for treason; a charge, namely trying to divide the military, charges she denied. In the elections of 1990, the NLD won a landslide victory, more than 80% of the legislative seats, but the government run State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) did not recognize the election results.

For the next five years, Aung San Suu Kyi lived in isolation under strict government control. She was not allowed to see or write to her husband or her teenage sons. Many international protests were held hoping for the Myanmar government to release her but they were in vain. Even with her winning the Sakharov human rights prize from the European Parliament and the Nobel Peace Prize "for her non-violent struggle for democracy and human rights" in 1991, the house arrest remained. Finally, in 1995 her sanctions were lifted but she was still faced with sanctions against political activities.

These restrictions did not stop Aung San Suu Kyi fighting for the rights of her people and in 2000 she was again placed under house arrest. That same year, U.S. President Bill Clinton awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Suu Kyi in absentia.

On May 30th, 2003, while traveling in Myanmar, her motorcade was attacked by a pro-government mob, and she was held by the military and later placed under house arrest. On November 29, 2004, she learned that her house arrest has been extended for another year. Then, in May 2006, her house arrest was extended again for another year. Once again, in the following years (2007 and 2008), the government again extended her house arrest for another year.

In May 2009, when finally freed, Suu Kyi was arrested and charged with violating the terms of her house arrest. This is in response to an incident earlier in the month, when American John Yettaw swam uninvited to Suu Kyi's lakeside house. If convicted she faced up to five years in prison. Later that year, Suu Kyi's trial on charges of government subversion began. She was found guilty of violating the terms of her house arrest and sentenced to a further 18 months of home confinement.

In 2010, the NLD refused to register for the election, thereby disqualifying itself as a political party and the party officially dissolved.

Finally, in November 2010, Suu Kyi was released from house arrest. She had spent 15 of the last 21 years under house arrest.

Speaking to reporters at the headquarters of her National League for Democracy (NLD), Suu Kyi pledged to keep working toward restoring democracy and improving human rights in Myanmar. In 2011, Suu Kyi's recorded message was played at the World Economic Forum in Switzerland, in which she stressed the need for Myanmar to re-establish ties with the rest of the world.

Changes came on December 13, 2011 when the National League for Democracy was granted permission to register for future elections in Myanmar. In 2012, she won a seat in parliament in Myanmar's first multiparty elections since 1990. Along with 33 other newly elected members of her party, the National League for Democracy, takes the oath of office for Myanmar's parliament, resolving an impasse over the oath's wording that had been preventing her from taking her seat in the legislature.

In 2012 she made history by stepping on foreign soil for the first time in more than two decades when she arrived in Bangkok, Thailand.

June 1, 2012, Suu Kyi She then spoke at the World Economic Forum on East Asia and delivered her acceptance speech for her 1991 Nobel Peace Prize, in Oslo, Norway. Later that year she addressed both houses of the British parliament and accepted the Congressional Gold Medal in Washington, D.C. She later met with U.S. President Barack Obama at the lakeside villa where she spent years under house arrest. Obama praised Suu Kyi for her courage and determination during his visit to Myanmar, the first visit by a sitting U.S. president.

In 2013, she won re-election as opposition leader.

In 2015, during her first visit to China, she met with Chinese President Xi Jinping as she began a trip that will emphasize her apparent transition from human rights defender to pragmatic politician. In the same year, Myanmar's election commission announced that Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party had won a historic majority in the nation's first freely held parliamentary elections. Suu Kyi was not able to become President because of a constitutional amendment that prohibited anyone with foreign relatives from becoming the nation's leader. Instead, Suu Kyi was named **state counselor**, a role created especially for her.

The position allowed her to be in contact with ministries, departments, organizations, associations and individuals, and made her accountable to parliament, according to Myanmar's state media. While Suu Kyi was barred from holding the office of president, the new position was widely expected to allow her to rule by proxy (power or authority that is given to allow a person to act for someone else).

The following year, Suu Kyi met with President Obama at the White House for the first time since becoming the de facto leader of her country. (A de facto leader of a country or region is one who has assumed authority).

As Suu Kyi arrived, Obama issued a statement saying he will reinstate Myanmar to the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), which will help Myanmar with economic development, exportation of goods and job creation. Her country was now a "free" nation and her goal of democracy had finally come true.

However, in recent years there has been a great deal of controversy regarding Aung San Suu Kyi and her government.

On April 5th 2017, speaking to the BBC in England, Suu Kyi denied that ethnic cleansing had taken place against Myanmar's **Rohingya Muslim ethnic minority**, amid reports of human rights abuses in the Rakhine region of Myanmar. On March 7, 2018, the U.S. Holocaust Museum announced it was rescinding the Elie Weisel Award granted to Suu Kyi in 2012 because of her failure to intervene in the humanitarian crisis occurring in Myanmar's Rakhine State. On November 13th 2018, Amnesty International announced they would revoke the Ambassador of Conscience Award from Suu Kyi, which she received from them in 2009.

Suu Kyi has had a string of awards and accolades revoked amid the Rohingya crisis. As of this present time (2019), she is still ruling the Myanmar government but her future does not look bright.



Sources:

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<https://www.cnn.com/2013/01/18/world/asia/aung-san-suu-kyi-fast-facts/index.html>

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