Aung San Suu Kyi

## **About**

Aung San Suu Kyi (Burmese: အောင်ဆန်းစုကြည်; born 19 June 1945) is a Burmese politician, diplomat, and author. She is the leader of the National League for Democracy and the first and incumbent State Counsellor, a position akin to a Prime Minister. She is also the first woman to serve as Minister for Foreign Affairs, for the President's Office, for Electric Power and Energy, and for Education. From 2012 to 2016 she was an MP for Kawhmu Township to the House of Representatives.

The youngest daughter of Aung San, Father of the Nation of modern-day Myanmar, and Khin Kyi, Aung San Suu Kyi was born in Rangoon, British Burma. After graduating from the University of Delhi in 1964 and the University of Oxford in 1968, she worked at the United Nations for three years. She married Michael Aris in 1972, and gave birth to two children. Aung San Suu Kyi rose to prominence in the 1988 Uprisings, and became the General Secretary of the National League for Democracy (NLD), which she had newly formed with the help of several retired army officials who criticized the military junta. In the 1990 elections, NLD won 81% of the seats in Parliament, but the results were nullified, as the military refused to hand over power, resulting in an international outcry. She had, however, already been detained under house arrest before the elections. She remained under house arrest for almost 15 of the 21 years from 1989 to 2010, becoming one of the world's most prominent political prisoners.

Her party boycotted the 2010 elections, resulting in a decisive victory for the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party. Aung San Suu Kyi became a Pyithu Hluttaw MP while her party won 43 of the 45 vacant seats in the 2012 by-elections. In the 2015 elections, her party won a landslide victory, taking 86% of the seats in the Assembly of the Union – well more than the 67 percent supermajority needed to ensure that its preferred candidates were elected President and Second Vice President in the Presidential Electoral College. Although she was prohibited from becoming the President due to a clause in the constitution – her late husband and children are foreign citizens – she assumed the newly created role of State Counsellor, a role akin to a Prime Minister or a head of government. Aung San Suu Kyi's honours include the Nobel Peace Prize, which she won in 1991.

## **Personal life**

Aung San Suu Kyi was born on 19 June 1945 in Rangoon (now Yangon), British Burma. According to Peter Popham, she was born in a small village outside Rangoon called Hmway Saung. Her father, Aung San, founded the modern Burmese army and negotiated Burma's independence from the British Empire in 1947; he was assassinated by his rivals in the same year. She grew up with her mother, Khin Kyi, and two brothers, Aung San Lin and Aung San Oo, in Rangoon. Aung San Lin died at the age of eight, when he drowned in an ornamental lake on the grounds of the house. Her elder brother emigrated to San Diego, California, becoming a United States citizen. After Aung San Lin's death, the family moved to a house by Inya Lake where Aung San Suu Kyi met people of various backgrounds, political views and religions. She was educated in Methodist English High School (now Basic Education High School No. 1 Dagon) for much of her childhood in Burma, where she was noted as having a talent for learning languages. She speaks four languages: Burmese, English, French and Japanese. She is a Theravada Buddhist.

Aung San Suu Kyi at the age of 6, Suu Kyi's mother, Khin Kyi, gained prominence as a political figure in the newly formed Burmese government. She was appointed Burmese ambassador to India and Nepal in 1960, and Aung San Suu Kyi followed her there. She studied in the Convent of Jesus and Mary School in New Delhi, and graduated from Lady Shri Ram College, a constituent college of the University of Delhi in New Delhi, with a degree in politics in 1964. Suu Kyi continued her education at St Hugh's College, Oxford, obtaining a B.A degree in Philosophy, Politics and Economics in 1967, graduating with a third and M.A degree in politics in 1968. After graduating, she lived in New York City with family friend Ma Than E, who was once a popular Burmese pop singer. She worked at the United Nations for three years, primarily on budget matters, writing daily to her future husband, Dr. Michael Aris. On 1 January 1972, Aung San Suu Kyi and Aris, a scholar of Tibetan culture, living abroad in Bhutan, were married. The following year she gave birth to their first son, Alexander Aris, in London; their second son, Kim, was born in 1977. Between 1985 and 1987, Suu Kyi was working toward an M.Phil degree in Burmese literature as a research student at SOAS, the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. She was elected as an Honorary Fellow of SOAS in 1990. For two years, she was a Fellow at the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies (IIAS) in Shimla, India. She also worked for the government of the Union of Burma.

In 1988, Suu Kyi returned to Burma, at first to tend for her ailing mother but later to lead the pro-democracy movement. Aris' visit in Christmas 1995 turned out to be the last time that he and Suu Kyi met, as Suu Kyi remained in Burma and the Burmese dictatorship denied him any further entry visas. Aris was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 1997 which was later found to be terminal. Despite appeals from prominent figures and organizations, including the United States, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and Pope John Paul II, the Burmese government would not grant Aris a visa, saying that they did not have the facilities to care for him, and instead urged Aung San Suu Kyi to leave the country to visit him. She was at that time temporarily free from house arrest but was unwilling to depart, fearing that she would be refused re-entry if she left, as she did not trust the military junta's assurance that she could return.

Aris died on his 53rd birthday on 27 March 1999. Since 1989, when his wife was first placed under house arrest, he had seen her only five times, the last of which was for Christmas in 1995. She was also separated from her children, who live in the United Kingdom, but starting in 2011, they have visited her in Burma.

On 2 May 2008, after Cyclone Nargis hit Burma, Suu Kyi lost the roof of her house and lived in virtual darkness after losing electricity in her dilapidated lakeside residence. She used candles at night as she was not provided any generator set.Plans to renovate and repair the house were announced in August 2009. Suu Kyi was released from house arrest on 13 November 2010.

## **Political beliefs**

It is not power that corrupts, but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it.

—Freedom From Fear

Asked what democratic models Myanmar could look to, she said: "We have many, many lessons to learn from various places, not just the Asian countries like South Korea, Taiwan, Mongolia, and Indonesia." She also cited "the eastern European countries, which made the transition from communist autocracy to democracy in the 1980s and 1990s, and the Latin American countries, which made the transition from military governments. "And we cannot of course forget South Africa, because although it wasn't a military regime, it was certainly an authoritarian regime." She added: "We wish to learn from everybody who has achieved a transition to democracy, and also ... our great strong point is that, because we are so far behind everybody else, we can also learn which mistakes we should avoid."

In a nod to the deep US political divide between Republicans led by Mitt Romney and the Democrats of Obama—then battling to win the 2012 Presidential election—she stressed with a smile, "Those of you who are familiar with American politics I'm sure understand the need for negotiated compromise."

## **House Arrest**

Aung San Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest for a total of 15 years over a 21-year period, on numerous occasions, since she began her political career, during which time she was prevented from meeting her party supporters and international visitors. In an interview, she said that while under house arrest she spent her time reading philosophy, politics and biographies that her husband had sent her. She also passed the time playing the piano, and was occasionally allowed visits from foreign diplomats as well as from her personal physician.

Although under house arrest, Aung San Suu Kyi was granted permission to leave Burma under the condition that she never return, which she refused: "As a mother, the greater sacrifice was giving up my sons, but I was always aware of the fact that others had given up more than me. I never forget that my colleagues who are in prison suffer not only physically, but mentally for their families who have no security outside- in the larger prison of Burma under authoritarian rule." Her loyalty to the people of Burma and her solidarity with those imprisoned for their pro-democratic acts have earned her deep respect among the Burmese people.

The media were also prevented from visiting Aung San Suu Kyi, as occurred in 1998 when journalist Maurizio Giuliano, after photographing her, was stopped by customs officials who then confiscated all his films, tapes and some notes. In contrast, Aung San Suu Kyi did have visits from government representatives, such as during her autumn 1994 house arrest when she met the leader of Burma, General Than Shwe and General Khin Nyunt on 20 September in the first meeting since she had been placed in detention. On several occasions during her house arrest, she had periods of poor health and as a result was hospitalized.

The Burmese government detained and kept Aung San Suu Kyi imprisoned because it viewed her as someone "likely to undermine the community peace and stability" of the country, and used both Article 10(a) and 10(b) of the 1975 State Protection Act (granting the government the power to imprison people for up to five years without a trial), and Section 22 of the "Law to Safeguard the State Against the Dangers of Those Desiring to Cause Subversive Acts" as legal tools against her. She continuously appealed her detention, and many nations and figures continued to call for her release and that of 2,100 other political prisoners in the country. On 12 November 2010, days after the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) won elections conducted after a gap of 20 years, the junta finally agreed to sign orders allowing Suu Kyi's release, and Suu Kyi's house arrest term came to an end on 13 November 2010.

## **Periods Under Detention**

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| No. | Date | Incident Description |
| 1. | 20 July 1989 | Placed under house arrest in Rangoon under martial law that allows for detention without charge or trial for three years. |
| 2. | 10 July 1995 | Released from house arrest. |
| 3. | 23 September 2000 | Placed under house arrest. |
| 4. | 6 May 2002 | Released after 19 months |
| 5. | 30 May 2003 | Arrested following the Depayin massacre, she was held in secret detention for more than three months before being returned to house arrest |
| 6. | 25 May 2007 | House arrest extended by one year despite a direct appeal from U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan to General Than Shwe. |
| 7. | 24 October 2007 | Reached 12 years under house arrest, solidarity protests held at 12 cities around the world. |
| 8. | 27 May 2008 | House arrest extended for another year, which is illegal under both international law and Burma's own law |
| 9. | 11 August 2009 | House arrest extended for 18 more months because of "violation" arising from the May 2009 trespass incident. |
| 10. | 13 November 2010 | Released from house arrest. |

## **Books**

* Freedom from Fear (1991)
* Letters from Burma (1991)

## **Citations**

* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aung_San_Suu_Kyi>
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_from_Fear_(Aung_San_Suu_Kyi)>