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Description

In 1988, Aung San Suu Kyi joined the fight for democracy in Myanmar. She spent 15 years under arrest before she was finally released and elected to parliament. This story is produced by NBC Learn in partnership with Pearson.

Keywords


Transcript

Aung San Suu Kyi, Struggle for Democracy
AUNG SAN SUU KYI: This is one of the most moving days of my life.
TODD JOHNSON reporting:
On September 19, 2012, political and human rights activist Aung San Suu Kyi accepted the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian honor given by the United States Congress. The award was one of many bestowed on Suu Kyi by the international community for her dedication in the fight for human rights and the high price she paid in the struggle.

SUU KYI: In spite of the imperfections, democracy still remains a beacon of hope for all of us.

JOHNSON: Only two years before, Aung San Suu Kyi was a political prisoner of the military government in her native country, Myanmar. Myanmar, formerly called Burma, first gained independence from British colonial rule in 1948. Suu Kyi's father had been a leader in the independence movement and her mother had worked as a diplomat. Political and ethnic groups were continually struggling for power. In 1962 a military dictator took over the government. Suu Kyi had studied in England and had lived abroad for years. But in 1988 when her mother became ill, she returned to her homeland and found the country in turmoil. People were marching in the streets, protesting the repressive military regime and calling for democracy and freedom. The regime came down hard on the protestors, killing or injuring thousands.

Moved by a sense of public duty, Suu Kyi joined the demonstrations. Even when her husband and two sons returned to England, she remained in Myanmar to fight for a democratic government. She helped found the National League for Democracy and became an outspoken leader of the opposition party. In 1989 the military government put Suu Kyi under house arrest. In a secret interview taped by NBC News in 2000, Suu Kyi talked about her confinement.

SUU KYI: I was not allowed out of the house at all, and nobody was allowed into the house to see me. I was completely cut off from the outside world.

JOHNSON: She spent more than 15 of the next 20 years imprisoned in her home, isolated from the world, separated from her family. She wasn't allowed mail or a telephone, and very few visitors. In 1991, when she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, her son accepted the award in her place.

SUU KYI: If any sacrifices were made, they were made by my family. I just took the path that I chose. And it was a choice I made, not a sacrifice.

LESTER HOLT (NBC News): Another story of freedom that has captured the world's attention tonight, the story of Aung San Suu Kyi. The pro-democracy leader was released from house arrest yesterday…

JOHNSON: In 2010 Suu Kyi was released. She was met by thousands who saw her as a symbol of courage and inspiration as they endured poverty, violence, and repression.

Reforms by the Myanmar government followed, such as elections, easing censorship, lifting protest restrictions, and freeing some political prisoners. The changes allowed the election of Aung San Suu Kyi to a seat in parliament in 2012, where she continues to work toward democracy in Myanmar.