



LAST MONTH IN BURMA

News from and about Burma

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Seven more countries support UN Burma Crimes Inquiry

In September, seven more countries publicly backed a UN Commission of Inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burma. They are Canada, France, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Netherlands and New Zealand

The other countries supporting a Commission of Inquiry are Czech Republic, UK, Slovakia, Australia and USA, bringing the global total to twelve.

In March 2010 the UN Special Rapporteur on Burma recommended that the UN establish an Inquiry. However, despite the growing call for an Inquiry from EU member states, the European Union has not yet decided an official position on whether to support a Commission of Inquiry.

GNU declares Ceasefire for International Day of Peace

The Karen National Union, the largest armed group in Burma which has not signed a ceasefire with the dictatorship, announced it would observe a unilateral one-day ceasefire on September 21st, designated by the United Nations General Assembly as International Day of Peace.

Although UN bodies have repeatedly called on all sides in Burma to end armed hostilities, no serious effort has been made by the United Nations to persuade the dictatorship to end its attacks against civilians and negotiate a ceasefire.

Burma Campaign UK called on the United Nations and international community to seize the opportunity created by the GNU declaring a one-day ceasefire to pressure the dictatorship to end its attacks and turn it into a nationwide ceasefire.

The Karen National Union (GNU) took up arms to defend ethnic Karen people in 1949, following attacks on Karen civilians, and communal violence stoked by elements with the government. It is believed to be the longest running armed conflict in the world.

Previous negotiations between the GNU and dictatorship failed, with the GNU claiming that the regime only demanded complete surrender with no compromise. A gentlemen's agreement to end hostilities in 2004 fell apart as the Burmese Army continued to attack civilians.

The UN has repeatedly reported human rights abuses by the Burmese Army in Karen State which amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The GNU statement can be viewed at: <http://www.karennationalunion.net/index.php/burma/news-and-reports/news-stories/knu-to-observe-one-day-ceasefire-on-international-day-of-peace1>

Voting cancelled in ethnic areas

On 16 September, the SPDC Election Commission announced that polls would not be held in 3,314 villages in Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Mon, and Shan States because "they are in no position to host free and fair elections."

According to ALTSEAN-Burma, these areas comprise nearly 50% of Karen State, most of the areas in Kachin State under the control of the Kachin Independence Organization, and four of the six Townships in the Wa Self-Administered Division.

In addition, the SPDC Election Commission rejected the application of 14 Kachin State Progressive Party members and one Northern Shan State Progressive Party member who applied to run as independent candidates after their parties were unfairly denied registration.

Wai Hnin Wins Standing Ovation at Labour Party Conference

Wai Hnin Pwint Thon, Campaigns Officer at Burma Campaign UK, won a standing ovation for her speech on the main stage of the Labour Party Annual Conference.

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Dismissing elections in Burma as failing to bring change, she called for stronger international pressure to bring Burma's generals to the negotiating table. Wai Hnin told delegates that; "The generals in Burma are trying to tell the world they are reforming. In November they are holding elections, but these are not real elections that will bring real change. They are elections designed to maintain dictatorship, the only real change will be a change of clothes for some soldiers. We will end up with a dictatorship with a civilian face. Our suffering will continue."

Wai Hnin's father is a political prisoner in Burma serving a 65 year sentence for his involvement in the uprising in 2007.

The Hidden Impact of Burma's Arbitrary & Corrupt Taxation

A new report from the Network for Human Rights Documentation- Burma (ND-Burma) reveals how widespread, arbitrary taxation damages the country's economy, exacerbates poverty and denies most Burmese the right to an adequate standard of living, health care, housing, food, and education. The repressive taxation system includes the appropriation of non-monetary assets including the arbitrary confiscation of land and property and forced labour, indicating serious breaches of international laws.

While the majority of the people of Burma live in abject poverty, the regime spends just 1.3% of GDP on health and education, and Burma is the only country in the region whose military budget is greater than that of health and education combined.

A villager from Mon State described the burden of taxation, "On average, we villagers have to provide military government organizations with more than 10,000 Kyat a month (≈10 USD). Even though we have no food to eat, we still have to pay them. At the hands of the SPDC we have to work harder but we still have not enough food for our families."

The report. 'The Hidden Impact of Burma's Arbitrary & Corrupt Taxation' can be viewed here:

<http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/index.php/news-and-reports/reports/title/the-hidden-impact-of-burmas-arbitrary-corrupt-taxation>

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www.burmacampaign.org.uk tel: 020 7324 4710 fax: +44 20 7324 4717**



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