



LAST MONTH IN BURMA

News from and about Burma

MAY
2010

National League for Democracy banned by Burma's dictatorship

Under new election laws introduced by Burma's dictatorship the National League for Democracy (NLD) officially ceased to exist from midnight on 6 May 2010.

The NLD was required to register as a political party to maintain its legal status, but the dictatorship deliberately introduced conditions in the election laws that would make it impossible for the NLD to register. These included expelling more than four hundred members who are in detention because of their peaceful activities for the NLD, and supporting a new constitution which is undemocratic, does not protect human rights, and is designed to maintain dictatorship under a civilian guise. As the NLD could not accept these conditions, it declined to register, meaning the dictatorship has now banned the organisation from legal existence.



The National League for Democracy, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won 82 percent of seats in Parliament in elections in 1990. The dictatorship refused to accept the results of the election. This time, for elections due later this year, they are taking no chances, ensuring the constitution and every aspect of the elections are rigged to ensure they remain in power.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has been criticised for his failure to take any serious action to prevent the NLD becoming a banned organisation.

European Parliament calls for Burma crimes investigation and says free elections 'impossible'

On 20 May, the European Parliament unanimously passed a strong resolution on Burma stating that Burma's election laws make free elections 'impossible' and that the new constitution will 'maintain a dictatorship in a civilian guise'.

The European Parliament also called on EU member states to support the recommendation by the UN Special Rapporteur on Burma for a United Nations Commission of Inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burma. So far, within the EU, only the UK and Czech Republic have publicly supported an inquiry.

The European Parliament also made calls for action in other areas, including calls for:

- The European Commission to reverse cuts in

funding to refugees on the Thailand-Burma border.

- The immediate release of all political prisoners.
- The United Nations to focus on securing genuine tri-partite dialogue between all the parties, including ethnic groups, and the dictatorship, after seven years of diplomacy failed to secure a single change to the dictatorship's so-called 'roadmap to democracy'.
- The European Commission to start funding cross-border aid to parts of Burma where the regime blocks aid.
- The EU to start actively working on building global support for a UN arms embargo on Burma.
- Bangladesh to improve its treatment of Rohingya refugees.

To subscribe to Last Month in Burma, simply send a blank email to:
lastmonth-subscribe@lists.burmacampaign.org.uk

EU/ASEAN Burma Statement “a day of shame for the EU”

A joint statement on Burma issued by the EU and ASEAN on 26th May, following the EU-ASEAN Ministers Meeting in Madrid, is so weak that campaigners condemned it as ‘irresponsible’ and so misrepresenting reality that it effectively amounts to a defence of the dictatorship.

The statement calls on the dictatorship to “continue to engage in meaningful manner with the international community, including ASEAN and the UN”. The reality is that the dictatorship has not been engaging in any meaningful manner with the international community. The dictatorship has not even allowed the EU Burma envoy to visit the country.

The statement also calls for the elections to be made free and fair, even though the EU and ASEAN are aware that this is impossible and that the dictatorship has no intention of making them so. Both the EU and ASEAN are also fully aware that the new constitution introduced after the election is designed to maintain dictatorship, making the question of whether elections are free and fair completely irrelevant.

The statement does not even use the words ‘political prisoners’. Instead it calls for “the early release of those under detention”. Again this misrepresents the truth of the situation in Burma in a way which presents the dictatorship in a more favourable light. It also bizarrely means that the EU and ASEAN have called for the release of criminals, not just political prisoners.

No mention is made of continuing military attacks against ethnic minorities. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Burma has recently described these as so serious that they warrant a United Nations Commission of Inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity.

“There was a time when the EU robustly engaged ASEAN to take a stronger and more principled stand on Burma,” said Mark Farmaner, Director of Burma Campaign UK. “We have become used to statements being watered down by ASEAN, but it appears the EU no longer has a bottom line. It’s a day of shame for the EU.”

The full statement is available at:
http://www.eu2010.es/export/sites/presidencia/comun/descargas/ASEAN/may26_cochairEN.pdf

US envoy ‘profoundly disappointed’ by response from Burma’s generals

US envoy, Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell, said that he was “profoundly disappointed by the response of the Burmese leadership” following a two-day visit to Burma in May. He met several government ministers but was again denied a meeting with Senior General Than Shwe. He also met with members of the National League for Democracy and Aung San Suu Kyi.

Campbell said “The key objective of my trip to Burma was to underscore the purposes and principles of our engagement, and to lay out the reasons for our profound disappointment in what we have witnessed to date.

We have outlined a proposal for a credible dialogue among all stakeholders in Burma that would allow all sides to enter into such a dialogue with dignity. Unfortunately, the regime has chosen to move ahead unilaterally – without consultation from key stakeholders – towards elections planned for this year. As a direct result, what we have seen to date leads us to believe that these elections will lack international legitimacy.”

Philippines Foreign Secretary calls Burma elections ‘farce’

Asked by reporters about the issue of sending election monitors to Burma, the Foreign Secretary of The Philippines, Alberto Romulo, said that sending observers may “legitimize a farce” as Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy are not taking part, according to a report by The Associated Press.

Romulo said “In the first place that election is fraudulent and a farce so why bother (sending monitors)? It’s a game, like children playing games.”

Amnesty International calls for Commission of Inquiry into crimes against humanity

Amnesty International has added its voice to the growing calls for a Commission of Inquiry into crimes against humanity and war crimes in Burma.

“Article 445 of the 2008 Constitution codifies immunity from prosecution for officials for past human rights violations. This provision clearly signals a continued unwillingness to investigate serious human rights violations and bring perpetrators to account ... Should a Commission confirm that crimes against humanity and other crimes under international law have been committed since 1 July 2002, the Security Council should refer the situation to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court.”

Amnesty added that it supported the statement of the UN Special Rapporteur, that: "Given the gross and systematic nature of human rights violations in Myanmar over a period of many years, and the lack of accountability, there is an indication that those human rights violations are the result of a State policy".

Burma faces water crisis



Over the past weeks, Burma has been hit by a major water crisis. Lakes and freshwater wells across Burma have been drying up, with water shortages affecting major towns in Sagaing, Bago and Irrawaddy divisions, and Rangoon. Tens of thousands of villagers have been forced to rely on donated water and many villagers are being forced to stand in queues for hours to collect water from wells.

According to the Democratic Voice of Burma, some relief workers in Bago division who have been helping with water donations have also complained of government harassment, with checkpoints being set up in affected areas.

Burma has been experiencing a heatwave that has pushed temperatures as high as 47C, resulting in many deaths. Reports from Mandalay said that more than 230 people had died.

The water crisis is also being blamed on the increasing damming of rivers. Water levels on the Irrawaddy river and its largest tributary, the Chindwin river, are low, and sand banks are appearing with increasing frequency. The Mekong river is at its lowest level in nearly half a century, largely as a result of heavy damming by the Chinese.

Veteran NLD leader dies

Soe Myint, a National League for Democracy (NLD) leader and colleague of Aung San Suu Kyi, died on 20 May. He was 87.

"The death of a well-experienced and reliable leader such as him is a great loss to our party", said NLD vice-chairman U Tin Oo. Fellow NLD leader, U Win Tin, said "At a time of struggle for the party, the death of a man who has fought for Burma's freedom since the anti-colonial struggles will have a great impact on our party."



**Published by The Burma Campaign UK, 28 Charles Square, London N1 6HT
www.burmacampaign.org.uk tel: 020 7324 4710 fax: +44 20 7324 4717**



**for Human Rights, Democracy
& Development in Burma**