

NLD sets conditions for 2010 elections

The National League for Democracy (NLD) convened a general meeting on 28-29 April to discuss political issues, including the regime's 2010 elections. About 150 NLD members from across Burma attended the meeting, the first it has been able to hold in more than a decade.

In a statement issued at the end of the meeting, the NLD set out three conditions for taking part in the elections: the release of all political prisoners, a review of the Constitution, and inclusive free and fair elections under international supervision. The NLD also said it would have to wait until the publication of the election and party registration laws before deciding whether to take part in the election. In addition, the NLD urged the regime to begin a dialogue with pro-democracy forces and ethnic nationalities in order to solve Burma's ongoing political crisis.

The full statement is on page 4.

Other leading pro-democracy and ethnic groups have issued similar statements. On 4 April, following a three-day meeting on the Thai-Burma border, a coalition of seven democracy groups, including the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), the National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB) and the Ethnic Nationalities Council (ENC), said they would oppose the SPDC's 2010 elections as long as the regime ignores the proposals by the NLD for the release of political prisoners and genuine dialogue. On 26 April, the Karen National Union (KNU) issued a statement rejecting the regime's sham elections and calling for genuine tripartite dialogue facilitated by the UN.



EU renews Burma Sanctions

On 27 April, EU Foreign Ministers extended the EU Common Position on Burma for a further year, renewing EU sanctions against the military dictatorship. The dictatorship had called on the EU to lift sanctions, and some European governments sided with the regime and supported relaxing sanctions, despite the fact that the regime has ignored all requests by the EU regarding human rights and political reform.

"The renewal of European Union sanctions is very welcome," said Mark Farmaner, Director of the Burma Campaign UK. "To relax sanctions now, when the regime is showing no improvement on human rights, and increasing restrictions on delivery of aid, would be irresponsible. We would, however, like to see the EU use sanctions in a smarter way, in combination with diplomatic pressure."

Campaigners are calling for carefully targeted sanctions that hit the generals and their business

cronies, but for these to be linked with political initiatives, such as visits to Burma by UN envoys, so that sanctions can be used to apply political as well as economic pressure.

Although the EU has not introduced the kind of strong targeted sanctions that Burma's democracy movement has been calling for, Burma's generals regularly complain about those sanctions that do exist, demonstrating that they are having an impact. The first sanctions that had any significant impact stopping revenue going to Burma's generals and their cronies were only introduced in March 2008, including an import ban on gems and timber.

Villagers forced to act as Minesweepers in Karen State, Eastern Burma

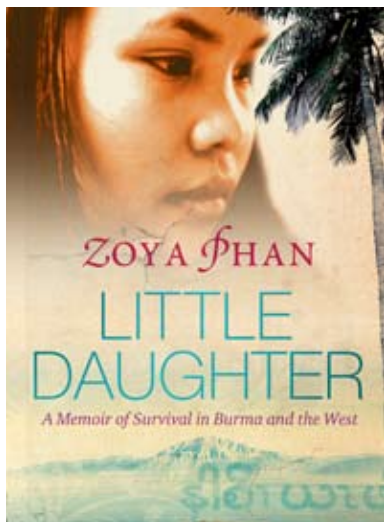
The Burma Army continues to use civilians as human minesweepers on a regular basis, forcing them to walk in front of troop patrols in areas where there are landmines, according to reports by the Free Burma Rangers.

On April 2, 2009, the Burma Army forced villagers from Play Hsa Lo to carry food and walk in front of a bulldozer in order to check for landmines. On March 23, the Burma Army arrested four villagers from the Maw Thay Der area. The villagers were forced to walk in front of the patrolling Burma Army troops and then forced to register with the Burma Army and ordered to move to a relocation site.

Little Daughter - A memoir of survival in Burma and the west

Zoya Phan, the International Coordinator at Burma Campaign UK, has published her autobiography 'Little Daughter - A memoir of survival in Burma and the west'.

Zoya Phan was born in the remote jungles of Karen State, Eastern Burma. For decades the Karen have been under attack from Burma's military junta; Zoya's mother was a guerrilla soldier, her father the Karen leader Padoh Mahn Sha Lah Phan. When Zoya was 14 years old the Burmese Army attacked her village and she was forced to flee. She lived in a refugee camp in Thailand before coming to the UK, where she now has asylum. She joined the Burma Campaign UK in 2005.



“Memorable...compelling”
Financial Times

“...a spotlight illuminating the dark, repressive and secretive activities of one of the world's nastiest and least-known regimes.”
The Australian

“Written in a very natural voice, this is an unusual story of life in Burma, a country of terrible turmoil.”
Waterstone's Book Quarterly

Copies of Little Daughter are available here:
<http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/merchandise.html>.

UK politicians call for political prisoner release

Former leaders of Britain's three main political parties have added their support to the campaign calling on the UN Secretary-General to make the release of Burma's 2,100 political prisoners his personal priority. Shadow Foreign Secretary William Hague, former Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock, former Lib Dem leader David Steel, and Shadow Secretary of State for International Development Andrew Mitchell are among more than 250,000 people who have now signed the petition.



During April, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners reported that at least 15 activists were arrested, 7 sentenced and 16 were transferred to prisons away from Rangoon. 8 activists were released. 13 political prisoners are reported to be in bad health, including famous comedian and activist Zarganar, who is serving a 35 year sentence. It was reported that his health was deteriorating but that he was being denied medical care. He was finally allowed a medical check up on 27 April.

Philippines urges Burma to release political prisoners

Alberto Romulo, Foreign Secretary of the Philippines, called on Burma to release political prisoners and bring democracy to the country. “Since its acceptance into the ASEAN family in 1997, Myanmar (Burma) has stated its commitment to democracy and to embark on a national reconciliation process,” Romulo said in a statement. “Fulfilling these commitments would be showing true progress.”

Philippine President Gloria Arroyo also urged the regime to release Aung San Suu Kyi at a meeting in April with Burma's Prime Minister Thein Sein.

Bali Process fails to act on Rohingya issue

A two-day meeting of the Bali Process regional forum in Indonesia has failed to find any solutions to the Rohingya issue. ASEAN had referred the issue

of the Rohingya boat people to the Bali Process, which was set up to address human trafficking and smuggling issues, after failing to tackle the issue at the ASEAN summit earlier this year.

During the meeting SPDC Deputy Minister for Home Affairs Brig Gen Khin Yi denied that Rohingyas were from Burma or that they faced persecution in Burma. Bangladesh Deputy Foreign Minister, Dr. Dipu Moni strongly refuted this claim, saying, "Rohingyas were one of the many races that make up Burma's total population. Rohingyas have been in Burma for centuries and many of them have even held high posts in the Burmese government."

The Rohingya ethnic minority are one of the most oppressed ethnic groups in Burma. They are denied citizenship, are subject to constant extortion and land confiscation, do not have freedom of movement, and even have to ask permission from the dictatorship to get married.

Burma 'worst place in the world to be a blogger'

A new report by the Committee to Protect Journalists, '10 Worst Countries to be a Blogger', says "Burma leads the dishonor roll", naming Burma as the worst place in the world to be a blogger.

Burma, which heavily censors print and broadcast media, has also applied extensive restrictions on blogging and other internet activity. Only about 1 percent of the population has private internet access. Most people access the internet in cybercafés. The regime heavily regulates these cafés, requiring them, for example, to enforce censorship rules. The government, which shut down the internet altogether during the uprising in 2007, monitors email and other communication methods and blocks users from viewing websites of political opposition groups, according to internet research group OpenNet Initiative. At least two bloggers are now in prison.

US confirms Burma sanctions to stay

The United States has confirmed that it is not considering lifting sanctions against Burma as part of its review of Burma policy. In a letter to a US Congressman Peter King, the State Department said "The sanctions that the United States and other countries maintain against the regime are an important part of our efforts to support change in Burma. While we are currently reviewing our Burma policy, we can assure you that we remain committed to delivering a firm message on the need for real reform, including the initiation of a credible and inclusive dialogue with the democratic opposition and the release of political prisoners."

Obama announces key Administration posts

President Barack Obama has announced his nominations for key State Department posts relating to Burma. Kurt Campbell is the nominee for Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, State Department and Eric P. Schwartz is nominee for Assistant Secretary for Population, Refugees and Migration, State Department.

UN report on child soldiers in Burma criticised

The latest Annual Report of the UN Secretary-General to the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict has come under heavy criticism for focusing too much attention on releases of child soldiers by the Burmese army whilst ignoring the fact that they continue to be recruited. Human Rights Watch accused the report of putting "a positive spin on the military government's cooperation" while failing to highlight the continued use of child soldiers by the army.

Two of Burma's main armed ethnic groups, the Karen National Union and the Karenni National Progressive Party, have denied accusations in the report that they continue to recruit child soldiers.

In a statement, the Karen National Union (KNU) said: "Since 2003, the KNU has not only banned the use of child soldiers under the age of 18, but has also strengthened the ban by instructing the [KNU armed wing Karen National Liberation Army] officers at all levels to follow the directive precisely and to verify and enforce the ban."

The Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) also released a statement, saying: "We, the KNPP reiterate that our armed group, the Karenni Army (KA), no longer recruit child soldiers and we do not have any under-age soldiers in our ranks."

Both groups reiterated offers to provide access and assistance to UN monitoring teams.

National League for Democracy statement on April 29, 2009

National League for Democracy
97/B West Shwegondaing Street
Bahan Township, Rangoon

Shwegondaing Declaration

We the members of the National League for Democracy (NLD) including the Central Executive Committee, representatives of State and Division organizational committees, the Members of Parliament—elect still standing with the NLD, Representatives of the Central Women's Affairs Committee, representatives of the Youth Affairs Implementation Committee gathered on the 28th and 29th of April 2009 in the meeting hall of the Head Quarter of the NLD on West Shwegondaing Street and held discussions on the political and organizational situations and the analytical report regarding the Constitution with the aim to resolve all the political impasse in striving to build up the Union of Burma as the democratic state in accordance with the inspiration of all the people.

This Shwegondaing Declaration is issued to inform the people as the agreement of the majority was obtained through these discussions for the plan to create a fair climate for the evolvement of a dialogue which is the best means for resolving the above impasse.

The NLD believes that the current political problems facing the country such as the immediate and unconditional release of all the political prisoners including U Tin Oo, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi; review of the Constitution; establishment of a genuine Union based on the principle of equality for all the ethnic nationalities; recognition in some ways of the result of the 1990 general election; are the main issues to be resolved immediately for the benefit of the country and the people.

The stands of the League are:-

(a) Unconditional Release of All the Political Prisoners including U Tin Oo and Daw Aung San Su Kyi

(b) Review of the Draft Constitution (2008)
A State Constitution based on the democratic principles is required to establish a democratic state. The not yet in force Constitution (2008) of the State Peace and Development Council contains provisions which are not accord with democratic principles. Therefore the emergence of the Constitution which is acceptable to all the people including the ethnic nationalities is urgently required.

(c) Organization

In this Union of Burma where all the ethnic nationalities live together, a unity based on the principles of equal opportunity and mutual good will must be established. Genuine democracy can flourish only on such a fertile ground. Furthermore, all the political parties must have the freedom to organize. Therefore, the offices of the State/ Divisional and Township Organization Committees which were closed and sealed since May 31, 2003, said to be a temporary measure, should be reopened immediately together with those of the parties of ethnic nationalities.

(d) Recognition of the result of the Multi Party Democracy General Election (1990)

At the present, recognition in some way of the People's Parliament, which is the outcome of the 1990 election, is urgently needed in accordance with the Section 3 of the People's Parliament Election law. Only then the democratic traditions can be maintained. Otherwise the State Peace and Development would seem to be breaching their own laws and regulations enacted by themselves.

(e) Political Dialogue

The NLD has been constantly striving for finding solution through political dialogue since 1988. Daw Aung San Su Kyi, the General Secretary of the NLD has candidly stated the fact that she can work with flexible approach according to the political necessity as follows:-

"We have repeatedly stated that the NLD would negotiate flexibly to get beneficial outcomes for the people of Burma. Nevertheless such dialogues should not aim for the good of the NLD nor should they aim for the benefit of the authorities. Only the interest of the people of Burma should be targeted." Therefore, the NLD request again with pure intention that the dialogues that can resolve all the problems be carried out without fail. The agenda of the dialogue envisaged by the League is as follows:-

(1) Unconditional dialogue participated by the decision markers should be commenced immediately based on the principles of mutual respects and national reconciliation.

(2) During the dialogues the issues of provision of equal opportunities for the ethnic nationalities; the unconditional release of all political prisoners including U Tin Oo and Daw Aung San Su Kyi; review of the Constitution (2008); recognition in some way of the People's Parliament with is the result of 1990 election; issues of the elections of the future; development of the living condition of the people etc shall be considered.

(3) To arrange to recognize the result of the 1990 elections by approving the result of the dialogues at the People's Parliament which is to be formed according to the People's Parliament Election Law.

(4) All the stake holders to follow unitedly the political course for the future delineated by the agreements of the dialogue as adopted by the People's Parliament.

(f) Attitude towards the Possible Future Elections
The NLD firmly believes that enduring political stability and the development of the country could be achieved only by resolving the fundamental problems mentioned above.

The people shall be informed what will be its stand if the State Peace and Development Council unilaterally hold upcoming election at their own arrangement, without considering to resolve through dialogue.

The League accepts that elections are the landmarks to be passed in the journey to democracy. The NLD will not abandon the struggle for democracy. The League will stand by the people in all circumstances.

Therefore if the State Peace and Development Council unilaterally hold possible upcoming election with their own plan and if:-

(1) All the political prisoners including the leaders of the NLD were unconditionally released,

(2) The provisions of the (2008) Constitution which are not in accord with the democratic principles were amended,

(3) All inclusive free and fair general election were held under international supervision,

The National League for Democracy, through this Shwegondaing Declaration, states that, anticipating for the realization of the benefit of the whole people, it intends to participate in the elections only after gravely considering as a special case and after studying the coming Party Registration Act and the Laws relating to the Elections.

As per the resolution made at the meeting of the Central Executive Committee
Held on 29-4-09

C.E.C
N.L.D
Rangoon

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