

### 'Forgotten crisis' - MPs call for more aid to Burma

The International Development Committee, a cross-party committee of MPs that oversees the work of the Department for International Development (DFID), has urged a fundamental change to the British Government's aid policy to Burma. In a hard-hitting report, the committee criticises DFID for failing to provide adequate aid to Burma and supports all of the proposals put forward by the Burma Campaign UK.

The report calls for:

- A quadrupling of aid to Burma by 2013, taking aid from £8.8m to £35.3m a year.
- Providing cross-border aid in addition to in-country aid, to ensure aid reaches internally displaced people who cannot be reached through in-country mechanisms because of restrictions imposed by the regime.
- Funding projects promoting human rights and democracy, including exile based Burmese women's groups and the trade union movement.
- Setting up alternative mechanisms to provide funding for HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB in parts of the country that the 3D fund can't reach because of restrictions by the regime.
- Conduct a proper assessment of the needs of IDPs in Burma to ensure adequate delivery of aid.
- Working with UN OCHA to improve co-ordination of aid efforts, which are currently "done poorly".

*"The Committee is clearly saying that DFID is not doing enough, given the scale of the humanitarian and human rights crisis in Burma,"* said Zoya Phan, Campaigns Officer at the Burma Campaign UK. *"The British government must ensure aid reaches those most in need, and if the regime blocks aid to people because of their ethnicity, then others ways to deliver aid must be found, such as delivering aid cross-border from neighbouring countries."*

In December last year the Burma Campaign UK published a report, *Failing the people of Burma?*, highlighting concerns with DFID's Burma policy. DFID has refused to fund cross-border aid, which is the only way to reach some of the most vulnerable people in Burma, and despite ministers stating that the regime is responsible for Burma's humanitarian crisis, has not funded projects targeted at promoting human rights and democracy in the country.

The full report can be viewed at:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmintdev/645/64502.htm>



## **National Convention resumes**

Burma's constitution-drafting National Convention resumed for its final session on 18 July 2007 and the regime has promised that it will conclude in two months' time. The convention, first started 14 years ago and in recess since December 2006, has been widely condemned as a process intended at entrenching military rule. America's top diplomat in Burma, Shari Villarosa, has condemned the process as a 'sham' that will not bring democracy to the country. Most delegates have been hand picked by the regime, essentially to rubber-stamp principles pre-drafted by the military.

Ethnic groups have criticised the proposed constitution as an attempt to legitimise military rule and have called for a more inclusive process. To date, all amendments suggested by ethnic delegates have been rejected and Lt Gen Thein Sein, acting Prime Minister and National Convention Convening Committee Chairman, ordered delegates not to introduce any further amendments. Despite this prohibition, leaders of 12 ethnic political parties in Burma issued a joint statement urging the regime to draft a genuine constitution to create a federal union. The ethnic leaders called the National Convention undemocratic and urged the government to conduct dialogue with all political groups and release all political prisoners, including democracy leaders Aung San Suu Kyi, Tin Oo and ethnic Shan leader Hkun Htun Oo.

## **Gambari on tour**

The Secretary General's Special Advisor to Burma, Ibrahim Gambari, toured Asia, Russia and Europe in July to promote democratic reform in Burma. Gambari met Chinese Foreign Ministry officials in Beijing before travelling to Delhi and Tokyo. In an interview with Reuters during his two-day visit to India, Gambari said, "*The best approach is...to combine, to recognize progress where it has been made and encourage them to move further along the lines of democratization and respect for human rights...We urge them to encourage the authorities in Myanmar to build on the positive steps they are making.*"

The Burma Campaign has long been calling for the UN to make Burma a priority and welcomes the fact that the UN is finally working to create a unified international approach. However, there are concerns about the language that Gambari is using, praising progress in Burma when the regime has failed to make a single democratic reform. NLD spokesman Myint Thein said, "*I want to ask what progress [made by the regime] means. I have to say there is no progress politically.*"

Gambari visited the UK at the end of July and Burma Campaign UK has learned that Gambari will be visiting Burma in September and briefing the Security Council on his return.

## **UN blames regime for poverty**

The growing levels of poverty in Burma are as a result of the regime's "*ill-informed and outdated socio-economic policies*" and "*uncompromising attitude*" to ethnic minorities, according to a confidential United Nations report, obtained by the Financial Times. In the report Charles Petrie, UN resident coordinator and head of the UN Development Program (UNDP) in Burma, said "*increasingly arbitrary and widespread land confiscation*" and the junta's agricultural policies were fuelling rural hunger and driving people from their communities in search of work. In ethnic minority areas, poverty rates can rise to 70%, the report said, and health facilities were unable to cope.

The report may be a response to the growing criticism of the UNDP over its failure to effectively coordinate aid to Burma or to speak out about the severe restrictions the regime places on aid delivery in Burma.

## **ASEAN agrees human rights commission**

Southeast Asian foreign ministers have agreed to set up a regional human rights commission, despite fierce resistance from Burma. The human rights mechanism will form part of Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) new charter and aims to promote respect for fundamental freedoms within the member countries. However, there is no agreement yet as to how the commission will operate.

## **Indonesia wants sanctions in ASEAN charter**

Indonesia has said that it wants to see the inclusion of voting and sanctions mechanisms as part of ASEAN's new charter. Foreign Minister Hassan Wirayuda said that "*In our view, the possibility for non-compliance measures should be opened although they will be used as a last resort.*" He went on to say that "*now it has been commonly accepted by the international community that non-interference principles can no longer be used to cover gross violations of human rights.*"

## **US renews sanctions**

The US House of Representatives and Senate have voted to extend import sanctions on Burma for another year. Speaker Nancy Pelosi said, "*Today's vote to renew U.S. import restrictions on the military regime in Burma sends a clear message that those fighting for democracy and human rights in Burma do not stand alone in their struggle.*"

## **Burma 'silent enemy' of ASEAN**

In response to parliamentary questions, the Philippines Foreign Ministry called Burma a 'silent enemy' of ASEAN. *"We know Myanmar is a silent enemy to ASEAN and our country's international image, but that doesn't mean that it is not a member of ASEAN or the United Nations,"* said Ahmad Shabery Cheek, Parliamentary Secretary to the Foreign Affairs Ministry. *"Although the conflicts in Myanmar involve human rights and democracy, they can be resolved instantly. That is why sometimes ASEAN has defended Myanmar, but we have stopped doing so now,"* he added.

## **India's GAIL pulls out of gas deal**

The Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL) has withdrawn from the A7 offshore gas exploration block on the Arakan coast in western Burma. While the official explanation said that the block *"does not fit into GAIL's E&P Portfolio"*, the real reason for the withdrawal appears to be the regime's recent decision to sell gas from other offshore blocks in the Shwe gas fields to China, despite the fact that GAIL offered a higher price.

## **French Foreign Minister criticises TOTAL Oil**

France's new Foreign Minister, Bernard Kouchner, criticised TOTAL Oil for not doing enough to pressure the regime in Burma. During a press briefing at a United Nations-sponsored business leaders conference in July, Kouchner said *"Total is not doing enough. Everything must be done to put pressure on the government,"* including through trade. This is a significant change in France's approach to TOTAL Oil, as they have previously refused to criticise the company's role in Burma.

## **France calls for release of Aung San Suu Kyi**

Following the release of six Bulgarian medics from a Libyan jail, the French government has now set its sights on the release of Aung San Suu Kyi. Rama Yade, France's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Human Rights, said that Aung San Suu Kyi *"would deserve that France give more attention to her situation, which is something I fully intend to do."*

## **New Zealand highlights human rights concerns**

New Zealand's Foreign Minister, Winston Peters, also expressed concern at the human rights situation in Burma when he met Nyan Win in Manila. *"New Zealand remains deeply concerned about the political and human rights situation, and the lack of genuine reform there. We will continue to express these concerns to Myanmar directly and through appropriate regional forums."*

## **EU-made rockets, guns and engines undermine arms embargo**

A new report by an international coalition of NGOs, including Amnesty International, Saferworld and Burma Campaign UK, has highlighted the weaknesses in the EU arms embargo on Burma. The report reveals that the Indian government is planning to transfer a military helicopter to Burma containing components and technology from as many as six European Union countries. If this transfer went ahead, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden and the UK could be undermining the EU arms embargo on Burma, which has been in place since 1988. You can view the report here: <http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/pm/reports.php>

## **Australia labels Burma 'insensitive'**

Foreign Minister Alexander Downer has criticised the regime in Burma for failing to carry out any democratic reforms and said he had expressed his frustrations directly in a meeting with his Burmese counterpart Nyan Win at the ASEAN Regional Forum in Manila in July. *"What amazes me about Burma is that... the leadership seems completely insensitive to and impervious to the views of outside world. And I don't mean Western countries, I mean ASEAN countries,"* Downer said. *"I think that's a shame. I think they should listen to what the broader community of countries in Southeast Asia has to say."* Downer said he hoped China, India and other countries would exert more pressure on Burma to help ASEAN push for reforms.

## **IAEA yet to see Burma's plan for nuclear reactor**

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has yet to see any concrete plan by Burma to build a nuclear reactor. IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei told a press conference in July that *"I haven't seen any plan by Myanmar to build a reactor."* Russia's atomic energy agency Rosatom signed an agreement with Burma in May to build the nuclear facility.

## **Bangladesh plans gas import from Burma**

Bangladesh is planning to import natural gas from Burma to meet future demand, the Bangladesh government said. The agreement was reached during a visit to Naypyidaw, Burma's new capital, by a high-level Bangladeshi delegation.

Wong Aung, the global coordinator of the Shwe Gas Movement, which is campaigning against investment in the gas and oil industry in Burma, said he was concerned that local people would suffer more human rights abuses because the Burmese military government has never honoured the rights of local people who live in the affected area.

## Martyrs' Day

A 60th Anniversary of the Martyrs' Day Commemoration event was held on 19 July 2007 at the National League for Democracy Party's head office in Rangoon with an estimated 1,000 people attending the event. On 19 July 1947 several of Burma's independence leaders were gunned down while they were holding a cabinet meeting, including Aung San Suu Kyi's father, General Aung San. In an attempt to intimidate protesters the authorities placed around 3000 armed security personnel, police and USDA members in front of the NLD office and around the Shwe Dagon Pagoda area.

## Activist's mother sacked over political activities

Daw Htay Htay Win, a worker at Myanmar Textile Industries, has been sacked for not reporting her husband and son's political activities to her superiors. Her son, Maung De Nyein Linn, was arrested during the June crackdown on prayer campaigners and her husband was then charged for aiding anti-government activists. Daw Htay Htay Win, who had worked at the Insein garment factory for 10 years, has sent a letter to senior general Than Shwe asking for reinstatement.

## Women raped, tortured and killed

The Burma Army has continued its attacks against villagers in Karen State in the last few months. Villagers are shot on site and homes and belongings destroyed. In one attack in Papun district in May, two women, aged 22 and 18, were raped, had their breasts and ears cut, and were then killed by Burma Army troops.

## Labour rights activists on trial

Six labour rights activists are reported to be facing a secret trial in Insein Prison, Rangoon. The six activists, Nyi Nyi Zaw, Thurein Aung, Kyaw Kyaw, Wai Linn, Kyaw Linn and Myo Min, were arrested for their participation in a discussion on labour laws in Burma at the American Centre in Rangoon on 1 May. Aung Thein, a lawyer and member of the National League for Democracy, said *"If the trial is held inside the prison, there cannot be a fair trial as most of the accused are denied a defence counsel."*

## Laura Bush criticises China's role in Burma

US First Lady Laura Bush has spoken out against China's support for the regime in Burma. *"China does have a huge amount of influence over Burma,"* she said. *"They share a border, for one thing. But also, they use the natural resources out of Burma,"* and in the end *"they prop up a government that, a failed state, really, is what they're propping up, just like in the Sudan."*

## Human rights activists imprisoned

In April Myint Naing and Maung Maung Lay (pictured below), members of Human Rights Defenders and Promoters (HRDP), were attacked by a group of around 100 Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) members carrying clubs and other homemade weapons in Henzada township, north west of Rangoon. Both men were admitted to hospital with serious injuries. The USDA is a regime-backed militia organisation. After the attack, Myint Naing was arrested and charged with inciting unrest and in July was sentenced to eight years imprisonment. Five villagers who had helped HRDP conduct human rights training were sentenced to 4 years imprisonment.



In another case, a teacher, Ko Min Min, was arrested in Bago on July 10 for conducting a human rights workshop, sentenced to three years in prison and fined 30,000 kyat. According to Democratic Voice of Burma, more than 100 of his former students and rights activists attended his sentence hearing to offer moral support.

## Phyu Phyu Thinn released

Phyu Phyu Thinn, a prominent HIV/AIDS activist arrested in May, was released on 2 July. She began a hunger strike on 19 June to demand a trial or release.

## Star Trek star 'shocked' by plight of Burma's refugees

Star Trek star Walter Koenig has urged the show's fans to campaign against Burma's military junta, calling it an *"outpost of tyranny"*. The actor played Commander Chekov in the original Star Trek TV series. After visiting refugee camps on the Thai Burma border, Koenig said he was *"shocked"* at the plight of hundreds of thousands of refugees Burma living in camps in western Thailand. *"I can tell people what I experienced, meeting people without limbs, the ex-political prisoners, the squalor, all that I have seen in these brief days,"* he said.

## UNESCO calls for release of U Win Tin

UNESCO Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura renewed calls for the release of prominent journalist U Win Tin. On 4 July U Win Tin began his 18th year in prison. U Win Tin won the 2001 UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize.

## 'Elders' leave empty chair for Aung San Suu Kyi

At the launch of the "Council of Elders" on Nelson Mandela's 89th birthday, an empty chair stood on the stage for Aung San Suu Kyi, who was invited to join the Elders but remains under house arrest. The "Council of Elders" is a group of Nobel peace laureates, politicians and development experts dedicated to fostering peace and resolving global crises. The Elders "*will support courage where there is fear, foster agreement where there is conflict and inspire hope where there is despair,*" Mandela said.

## Regime threatens Kachin

Burma's military junta has threatened to "*kick the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) to the mountains*" if they persist in their demand for an autonomous Kachin State, according to the Kachin News Group. The threat was made in July by Maj-Gen Ohn Myint, the regime's Kachin State Commander, at a meeting in Myitkyina, capital of Kachin State. He said: "*No. We won't give you the rights. What the KIO is demanding is self-determination? We'll kick you out to the mountains.*" Maj-Gen Ohn Myint also told Kachin leaders "*Don't call it Kachin State! You Kachins are not living alone there.*" According to KIO sources, in December 2005 when the KIO presented a traditional Kachin silver sword to Maj-Gen Ohn Myint, he said, "*I'll cut your (Kachin's) neck with this sword.*"

## Regime accuses Red Cross of helping rebels

Following rare public criticism from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Burma's regime has accused the Red Cross of secret links to armed groups. Than Than Nwe, president of the Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation and wife of former Prime Minister Soe Win, said "*The authorities found out evidences that personnel of the five regional offices of the ICRC had clandestine relations with insurgent groups.*" The Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation is a state-sponsored organisation largely comprising the wives of Burma's ruling generals and other top officials.

## Newspaper ad's hidden message

A newspaper advert in the semi-official English-language Myanmar Times newspaper contained a hidden message calling the country's dictator Sr Gen. Than Shwe a "killer." The advert, placed by Danish-based satirical art group Surrend, looked like an advert for tourists visiting Burma from Scandinavia. However, the bottom of the advertisement had a Danish looking word -- "Ewhsnahtrellik". When read backwards, it reads "Killer Than Shwe". At least 10 staff members of the production and marketing department of the Myanmar Times have since been interrogated over the advertisement.

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