

Burma Uprising First Anniversary

One year on from the brutal suppression of peaceful pro-democracy protests in Burma – known as the Saffron Revolution – campaigners around the world called on Ban Ki-Moon and governments to take action and to secure the release of political prisoners in Burma.

“One year on from the uprising the human rights situation in Burma continues to deteriorate, with almost double the number of political prisoners,” said Zoya Phan, International Coordinator at Burma Campaign UK. “Ban Ki-Moon, the UN Security Council, and Asian countries, have all called for the release of political prisoners, but no action is being taken. It is time to set timelines and benchmarks for progress.”



Speaking on the anniversary of the uprising, Foreign Secretary David Miliband, said, “The people of Burma have not been forgotten by the international community. It’s vital that, first, we don’t fall for the electoral and constitutional facade that has been erected over the last year, and, secondly, the UN remains determined in its support for the UN Security Resolutions that have been passed.”

The UN Security Council adopted a Presidential Statement in October 2007 calling for “the early release of all political prisoners” and “the need for the Government of Myanmar to create the necessary conditions for a genuine dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all concerned parties and ethnic groups, in order to achieve an inclusive national reconciliation with the direct support of the United Nations.”

In December UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon is expected to visit Burma to discuss the political crisis in the country. Pressure is now growing on the Secretary General to secure the release of political prisoners as a first step towards genuine tri-partite dialogue.

Gambari briefs UN Security Council

On 11 September, almost three weeks after his trip to Burma in August, the UN Special Advisor on Burma Ibrahim Gambari briefed members of the UN Security Council. Gambari said that it was imperative for the SPDC to deliver substantive results regarding the release of political prisoners and the resumption of dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. He also admitted that the results of his last Burma visit fell below expectations and had failed to meet the UN’s goals. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon said that he was frustrated with the lack political progress in Burma.

Following the briefing, the US and UK called for more pressure on the SPDC. Zalmay Khalilzad, Permanent Representative of the United States said, “the time has come to review what needs to be done to be more effective. More pressure needs to be applied on the regime.” The UK’s Permanent Representative at the UN Sir John Sawers, added

that, “the constitution has no legitimacy because the referendum was not free and fair, the results are not credible. We need to see full and open dialogue between the regime and the representatives of the people.”

Pinheiro condemns regime’s roadmap

In a recent interview with the Democratic Voice of Burma, the former United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Burma, Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, called for the United Nations to adopt a new strategy in dealing with the regime. He said, “I think that perhaps it will be the moment not to continue considering the roadmap a transition. I think that it’s a fake political process. Nowadays that I don’t have any other responsibility, I think that it’s very risky to continue expecting that from the roadmap, the other stages of the roadmap, will achieve something positive, just following up a process that goes nowhere. It just goes to normalise the military dictatorship.”

88 Generation Students on trial



Min Ko Naing

Thirty-five democracy activists have been put on trial in Rangoon, charged with hundreds of offences, mostly for their alleged involvement in the peaceful pro-democracy uprising in September last year. Nine of the activists face 21 separate charges, and could face 159 years in jail – a total of 1431 years.

On 5 September, as charges were read out, Min Ko Naing, leader of the 88 Generation Students, who make up thirteen of the 35 on trial, made a speech condemning the so-called trial, and ridiculing the number of offences they were being charged with. 'There are more charges than would be made against the terrorist Osama Bin Laden', he stated.

One of the lawyers for the defendants was barred from entering the court. He had been vocal in demanding that the trial be conducted according to the law, which allows members of the media and public to attend the trial. Only state media have been allowed to attend. International observers are also banned.

Leading activist arrested



Nilar Thein, with her husband, Ko Jimmy and their baby

Nilar Thein, a leading human rights defender and pro-democracy activist, was arrested on 10 September and is currently being held at the Aung Tha Pyay Detention Centre in Rangoon, where she is at risk of torture and ill-treatment. Nilar Thein is a prominent leader of the 88 Generation Students, who led

peaceful protests in August and September 2007.

Nilar Thein was arrested in Rangoon on her way to visit the mother of Ant Bwe Kyaw, another detained activist. Ant Bwe Kyaw and Kyaw Min Yu, Nilar Thein's husband (also known as Ko Jimmy), were among 13 activist leaders from the '88 Generation Students Group' who were arrested on 22 August 2007. Rumours began to circulate three weeks after her husband's arrest that he had died in police custody. The rumours turned out to be false and are believed to have been planted by the government to bring Nilar Thein out of hiding. Following the

crackdown last year, she was forced into hiding but continued to issue public appeals calling for the international community to take action.

NLD leader sentenced for trying to complain to ILO on use of child soldiers

Prominent labour activist U Thet Way, Chairman of the Sanchaung Township National League for Democracy (NLD), was recently sentenced to two years in prison for trying to lodge a complaint to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on the use of child soldiers by the Burmese military junta. There are an estimated 70,000 child soldiers in Burma, more than any other country.

The police arrested U Thet Way in January for being in possession of a 'memory stick' in which complaint letters on the use of child soldiers to be sent to the ILO were stored. U Thet Way was reportedly told by junta officials that he would be acquitted on the condition that he issue a statement saying all the complaint letters were bogus and based on wrong information but U Thet Way refused.

Monks protest in Sittwe to mark the anniversary of Saffron revolution

According to eyewitnesses, around 150 monks peacefully marched in Sittwe, in western Burma's Arakan State, to mark the one-year anniversary of "Saffron Revolution" on 27th of September. Another group of about 100 monks later marched along the same route. The authorities closely watched the procession and later arrested one monk, Shin Thawbanah.

Regime challenged over UN credentials

Burmese democracy groups, led by the National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB), launched a campaign to challenge the credentials of the military regime at the United Nations. On 9 September, the Members of Parliament Union (MPU) filed a challenge to the UN, objecting to the regime's right to represent Burma at the United Nations. The MPU set up a permanent mission to the UN and had appointed Thein Oo, an elected MP from Mandalay, as its representative to the UN.

However, the challenge was rejected on 26 September due to a legal technicality. Before a claim is assessed by the UN Credentials Committee, it must be reviewed by a legal team to make sure it complies with legal requirements. A UN spokesperson said "the General Assembly has decided not to take action on the letter as it does not comply with the formal legal requirement set out in rule 27 of those rules of procedure." Rule 27 states that credentials must be issued by a country's head of state or government, or by the minister for foreign affairs.

UN 'Group of Friends' meet

On 27 September, the UN Secretary-General convened and chaired the first high-level meeting of the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General on Myanmar. It was the sixth meeting of the Group since it was established in December 2007.

The group consists of Australia, Britain, China, France, India, Indonesia, Japan, Norway, Portugal, Russia, Singapore, Thailand, the United States and Vietnam. The Secretary-General of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the High Representative of the European Union (EU) also attended the meeting.

The group urged Burma to address key issues, "especially the release of political prisoners, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and the initiation of an all-inclusive dialogue between the government and the opposition." However, they failed to agree on what measures the international community should take to achieve this.

U Win Tin released but arrests continue

Seven political prisoners were released on 23 September, including U Win Tin, one of Burma's longest-serving political prisoners. U Win Tin, 78, is a journalist, prominent political activist and senior official in the National League for Democracy. He had been imprisoned for 19 years and was often held in solitary confinement and denied medical treatment. After his release, he told reporters "I will keep fighting until the emergence of democracy in this country."

Win Htein, one of the seven political prisoners released on 23 September, was re-arrested a few hours after his release. He was picked up by police officers and returned to Kathar prison.

The releases were part of a bigger amnesty that the regime granted to 9002 prisoners. However, there is no political significance to the prisoner releases as the regime grants such amnesties regularly. In the past, many of these are prisoners who should already have been released, or about to be released, or who are old and ill.

In fact, over the past year, the number of political prisoners has almost doubled to more than 2,130 and human rights organisations, including the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, all report that arrests of activists continue unabated. According to AAPP, during September there were at least 77 arrests, with 18 sentenced to prison.

Aung San Suu Kyi refuses food supplies



From mid-August to mid-September, Aung San Suu Kyi refused to accept any food supplies, leading some observers to speculate that she was on hunger strike. The National League for Democracy (NLD) released a statement clarifying that she was not staging a hunger strike, but was eating "thriftily" from the small supplies stored in her home. The refusal to accept food supplies was in protest at the conditions of her detention, in particular the conditions for Daw Khin Khin Win and her daughter, who stay at her home to help. Daw Khin Khin Win's daughter was ill but had been refused hospital treatment.

The regime eventually agreed to Aung San Suu Kyi's demands and Daw Khin Khin Win's daughter was admitted to hospital with kidney problems. Aung San Suu Kyi has also reportedly been allowed to receive news magazines and letters from her family. After accepting food deliveries again, Aung San Suu Kyi spent several hours with her doctor on 14 September. According to reports, she was malnourished and placed on a drip.

During September Aung San Suu Kyi also held a rare series of meetings with her lawyer to discuss a legal appeal against her detention.

Regime orders NLD to withdraw statement

On 25 September Burma's police chief ordered National League for Democracy (NLD) leaders retract a statement they issued on 18 September calling for a constitutional review. NLD Chair U Aung Shwe and members of the party's central executive committee were summoned by police chief Khin Yi and told to withdraw their statement because "the contents of the letter amounted to inciting the public and that we could be liable to prosecution" U Aung Shwe said. However, the NLD leaders refused to withdraw the statement.

The NLD statement rejected the military junta's constitution and called on the authorities to convene parliament and to form a committee to review the constitution, which should include representatives of political parties, Members of Parliament, Army representatives, ethnic nationalities and ceasefire groups, constitutional experts, and representatives

of the NLD and other winning parties from the 1990 elections.

Military build up in Karen State

The Burma Campaign UK has received unconfirmed reports of a military build up in Karen State, Eastern Burma and there are fears it could escalate into a full-scale military offensive. Two years ago the regime launched a massive military offensive against civilians in Karen State. Between early 2006 and 2008 an estimated 30,000 people have been displaced in northern Karen State.

Russia to explore for oil and gas

According to the regime's newspaper, the New Light of Myanmar, a production sharing contract has been signed between regime owned Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) and the Russian company Nobel Oil. Three other Russian oil companies have been operational in the oil and gas sector in Burma since 2006, JSC Zarubezhneft Iteraaws, Silver Wave Sputnik Petroleum Pte Ltd and Silver Wave Energy Pte Ltd.

There are reportedly 19 onshore oil fields in Burma along with many offshore natural gas fields. Foreign investment in Burma's oil and gas sector had reached US\$3.243 billion dollars in 85 projects as of the end of 2007. In 2007, foreign investment in the oil and gas sector more than tripled to 474.3 million U.S. dollars compared with 2006. According to regime sources, 13 foreign oil companies are involved in oil and gas projects in Burma, from countries including Australia, Britain, Canada, China, Indonesia, India, South Korea, Malaysia, Thailand and Russia.

Switzerland expands Burma sanctions

The Swiss Government has extended targeted sanctions against Burma to include a ban on wood imports, wooden products, coal, certain metals and gemstones. Financial sanctions have also been extended, the number of companies facing Swiss sanctions has risen from 39 to 83. Switzerland's sanctions now reflect European Union's sanctions, which were strengthened earlier this year.

Democracy websites under cyber attack

A severe, coordinated cyber attack was unleashed on the websites of three news sites of the democracy movement; the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), The Irrawaddy and the New Era Journal. The websites were attacked for three days in September, rendering the sites inaccessible. The attacks, known as Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks flood the communication channel of website servers with data, disabling the sites as the servers are overwhelmed with the volume of data.

The attack is the fourth for the Oslo based DVB in the past three months. Cyber attacks against the democracy movement are becoming more common. In July the Burmese website of Mizzima News, another Burmese news agency based in New Delhi, India, suffered a similar DDoS attack. Whilst the attacks have not been traced to the regime, many in the democracy movement believe the junta are driving these coordinated attacks.

India wins dams contract

The Indian government has claimed a "strategic victory" by winning agreement to build two large hydro-electricity dams on the Chindwin River. India has expressed hope that this is the first of many similar deals. "The Chindwin holds huge hydropower potential and we intend to further strengthen this relationship by going in for other such projects" said Jairam Ramesh, India's Minister of State for power and commerce. An Indian government owned company has secured the rights to build a 1,200-megawatt dam at Tamanthi, and a 600-megawatt capacity system at Shwzaya in North-Western Chin State bordering India. The Tamanthi Dam will reportedly produce more power than the whole of Burma can currently produce and will cost US\$3 Billion. These dams are similar in size and cost to the projects on the Salween River by Thai and Chinese companies.

Even though Burma faces severe electricity shortages, almost all the electricity produced by the dams will be sold to India, Thailand and China. Power lines will be constructed to carry electricity generated by the dams to India. It is estimated the flooding of 7,000 hectares by the dam will flood a town of 30,000 and force an unknown number of people to leave 30 villages, as well as endangering rare leopards and tigers in the Hukaung Valley Wildlife Sanctuary.

British Government ramp up pressure on Lloyd's over Burma link

Following calls from the Burma Campaign UK, the British Foreign Office has written to Lloyd's of London urging them to consider "the involvement with Burma's repressive regime". Lloyd's is now under huge pressure. Other companies, including British American Tobacco and Premier Oil, pulled out of Burma after coming under pressure from the Foreign Office. The Burma Campaign UK's report, Insuring Repression, exposed how members of Lloyd's have helped to finance the Burmese regime.



The Burma Campaign UK has been pressuring Lloyd's to cut its links to the Burmese junta for years, yet Lloyd's has ignored these calls. In response to the Government's action, Lloyd's chairman, Lord Levene, was last week forced into action; reportedly writing to all managing agents "urging them to consider" the involvement with Burma's repressive regime. Lloyd's are refusing to disclose the full contents of Levene's letter. They also refuse to admit the full extent of their involvement in Burma, failing to clarify if they are involved in sectors lucrative to the regime, such as oil, gas and mining.

Myanmar Airways 'unsafe'

The British Foreign Office has issued an advisory warning to its staff not to use flights operated by Myanmar Airways, Burma's state-owned domestic airline, because of the airline's failure to meet international safety standards. It also advised staff to avoid the privately owned Air Bagan, which sometimes uses aircraft leased from Myanmar Airways. The warning extends to Myanmar Airways International (MAI) flights that use Fokker 100 aircraft owned by Air Bagan. Air Bagan is owned by Tay Za, a business crony of the junta.

Bomb blasts across Burma

A bomb blast in Hpa-an township, Karen state, on 6 September destroyed a hydropower generator, according to the regime's newspaper The New Light of Myanmar. The bomb slightly injured a staff member. On 11 September two bombs exploded in Kyaukgy, a town in the department of Bago, 160 kilometres northeast of Rangoon, killed two people and wounded ten. On 23 September an explosion in Rangoon wounded at least seven people. The explosion occurred at a bus stop near City Hall.

These latest incidents follow attacks in July when the offices of the pro junta militia group, Union Solidarity and Development Association, were bombed in Rangoon and an explosion on a bus travelling on the Mandalay to Rangoon highway reportedly killed four people. The Burma Campaign UK has been warning governments for more than a year that violence in Burma is likely to escalate if there is no political progress in the country.

Burma activist wins Human Rights Defender Award

Burmese human rights activist, Bo Kyi, was one of five activists to win Human Rights Watch's 2008 Human Rights Defender Awards. As a college student, Bo Kyi participated in the 8.8.88 uprising. He was sentenced to prison for seven years and three months. After his release, he fled to the Thai Burma border and set up the Assistance Association of Political Prisoners (AAPP) in Mae Sot, Thailand. AAPP works on behalf of current and former political prisoners and their families. Human Rights Watch praised Bo Kyi for his relentless campaigning for the release of the political prisoners and exposing the regime's brutal abuses to the world.

US says Burma failing to combat drugs trade

According to a White House report, Burma has failed to meet international requirements to combat the illegal narcotics trade. It says the Burmese regime has made little effort to stop poppy cultivation and little effort to curb production of amphetamine pills. David Johnson, Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement said, "Burma's military government has done little to deal with what has become Asia largest illegal amphetamine industry."

Aung San Suu Kyi awarded Freedom of Dundee

On 3 September Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the Freedom of the City of Dundee in Scotland. Councillors in the city unanimously agreed to grant the rare tribute at a meeting in June. Lord Provost of Dundee, John Letford, who hosted the ceremony said: "For many years Aung San Suu Kyi has been the best, and perhaps the only, hope, that Burma will be free from oppression." The Freedom of Dundee, made in recognition of her achievements in the service of democracy, is highest honour that the city can bestow, and signals the council's support for Aung San Suu Kyi's immediate release from house arrest and the restoration of democratic government in Burma.

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FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
AND DEMOCRACY IN BURMA**