



Autumn 2005

Burma Action Ireland

Newsletter

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Ten years in detention for Burma's Aung San Suu Kyi

Monday 24 October 2005 marked a total of 10 years in detention under Burma's military regime for 60-year-old **Aung San Suu Kyi**, Nobel Peace prize winner and leader of Burma's National League for Democracy. Ms Suu Kyi, who is a Freewoman of Dublin (2000) and Galway (2005), is one of the world's leading pro-democracy activists and advocates of non-violence.

Aung San Suu Kyi led Burma's National League for Democracy party to a landslide general election victory in 1990. The military government, known as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) choose to ignore the results and has retained power ever since. Daw Suu Kyi has been in and out of detention in Burma since 1989. She was held under house arrest from 1989-1995, and again under virtual house arrest from 2000 - 2002. She was then arrested in May 2003 after the Depayin massacre (in Burma), during which up to 100 of her supporters were beaten to death by the regime's militia. She is currently under house arrest in Rangoon. Daw Suu Kyi is forbidden from receiving visits from colleagues and her mail and telephone continue to be censored and monitored.

There has been much international support for

her release. In a recently published document called: *Threat to the Peace**, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the Honourable Mr Vaclav Havel – both fellow Nobel Peace prize winners - have strongly urged the United Nations Security Council to "take up the situation in Burma immediately". Speaking about Daw Suu Kyi's detention, **Ms Eileen Seymour**, Chairperson of BAI said: "The report looks at the threat that the government of Burma poses to its own people and to regional peace and security. The evidence contained within the report make it clear that the UN Security Council should become engaged with Burma as soon as possible and that Security Council action is both warranted and necessary". Ms Seymour added: "Although members of the international community, including governments, non-governmental organisations and many UN bodies have reported grave human rights violations in the country, there has been a complete failure by the Burmese military government to move forward in any meaningful way with national reconciliation".

BAI marked Daw Suu Kyi's 10 years of detention by holding a candlelit vigil at Dublin's St. Stephen's Green with the aim of highlighting

her situation and the predicament of the people of Burma. Many other solidarity groups around the world also marked the anniversary. In a statement issued on 24 October, **Mr Dermot Ahern, TD**, Minister for Foreign Affairs said: "My message to Aung San Suu Kyi today is that the Government and people of Ireland have not forgotten her and will not forget her ... Aung San Suu Kyi has shown remarkable courage in resisting attempts to intimidate her into silence. Her ongoing detention highlights the Burmese regime's contempt for human rights, democracy and the rule of law". Mr Ahern also referred to his address on behalf of Ireland at the 60th Session of the UN General Assembly in September: "The Irish Government's position on Burma is clear: Our goal, together with our EU partners and other members of the international community, remains the return of democracy to Burma, an end to human rights violations, the release and restoration of liberty to Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners, and the realisation of peace and prosperity for the long suffering people of Burma".

*See page two for a report on this new publication.

Charm Tong attends Dublin platform for human rights defenders

Front line is the Dublin-based international foundation for the protection of human rights defenders. Front line organises a conference every two years called *The Dublin Platform for Human Rights Defenders*. The aim of each conference is to provide an opportunity for human rights defenders from all parts of the

world to come together to exchange experiences and discuss relevant issues. Burmese human rights defender **Charm Tong** attended this year's gathering which was the 3rd Dublin platform held from 13 – 15 October in Dublin Castle. BAI's honorary president **John Boorman**, attended the opening session in solidarity with Charm Tong.

Charm Tong is a founding member of the Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) which works along the Burmese/Thai border. The work of SWAN may be familiar to readers of this newsletter as we have reported on their activity in a number of editions. SWAN was formed in 1999 by a group of

young women in response to human rights atrocities, such as sexual violence and forced relocation, committed by the Burmese military regime. SWAN's report *License to Rape*, brought the systematic sexual abuse of Shan women (an ethnic minority in Burma from the Shan province near the Thai border) to the attention of the world. Aged just 23 years, Charm Tong has been exposing the exploitation and violence perpetrated against the suppressed minority Shan people, for the last eight years. For her efforts, she was recently awarded a Reebok Human Rights Award. More than 100 human rights defenders from over 70 countries attended this year's conference in Dublin.

On 31 October, after leaving Ireland, Charm Tong had a 50-minute meeting in Washington with **US President George W. Bush**. Daw Tong told *Agence France-Presse*: "The President said he was very concerned about the human rights violations being committed by the military regime. The President wanted to know what more can be done to help the people", she said.

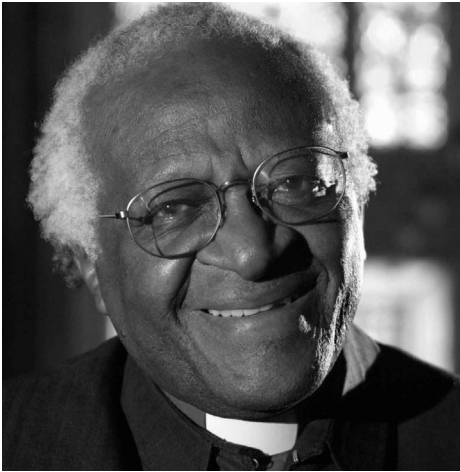
To find out more about Front line see www.frontlinedefenders.org



Pictured attending the 3rd Dublin platform for human rights defenders are (from the left) human rights activist 23-year-old Charm Tong, Dermot Ahern, TD, Minister for Foreign Affairs and John Boorman, Honorary President of Burma Action Ireland.



Havel and Tutu Report – Threat to the Peace



Bishop Desmond M Tutu, Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town. The Nobel Peace prize winner has called for peace and stability in Burma.

On 20 September, **Vaclav Havel**, former President of the Czech Republic and **Archbishop Desmond Tutu** of South Africa issued a report entitled: *Threat to the Peace: A Call for the UN Security Council to Act in Burma*.

Commissioned by the two Nobel Laureates, and prepared by the global law firm DLA Piper Rudnick Gray Carey, it sets out a comprehensive and compelling case. The first section outlines Burma's political history and describes the mismanagement by the military government of

its economy, health, education, infrastructure, inward investment and trade, as well as the destruction and suffering inflicted on its people, especially among the ethnic minorities. A second section details, firstly, abuses of human rights, in each case almost unparalleled world-wide: forced relocation, slave labour, systematic rape, drug production and trafficking, rampant and uncontrolled HIV/AIDS, and the use of child soldiers. Secondly, it reviews the threats these pose to the peace and security of the region, and the various failed attempts by international bodies and individual nations to ameliorate the situation. A third section sets out the five factors which have prompted Security Council interventions in seven other countries, and demonstrates that all pertain in Burma, plus (uniquely) its primary contribution to the spread of HIV/AIDS in Asia, now the epicentre of the virus. The report's recommendations, reinforced by an executive summary, are that a resolution of the Security Council should, principally, require the government of Burma to work with the Secretary-General's office in implementing a plan for national reconciliation and the restoration of a democratically-elected government; urge it to allow complete access for United Nations and international humanitarian organisations, and call for the immediate and unconditional release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all prisoners of conscience in Burma.

In a foreword, Havel and Tutu insist: "We strongly urge the UN Security Council to take up the situation of Burma immediately. Preserving peace, security, and stability in the region and world - as well as achieving national reconciliation in Burma - now requires nothing less".

To access a PDF copy of the report *Threat to the Peace* click on to the home page of www.burmacampaign.org.uk

Leading advocates visit Dublin

Three exiled activists from Burma who are campaigning for democracy for their country visited Dublin on 11 October last for a 3-day visit. The representatives, **U Bo Hla Tint**, **U Hlwan Moe** and **U Maung Maung** attended official engagements facilitated by BAI. These included a meeting with Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs, **Mr Conor Lenihan, TD**, meetings with members of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs and with other Dáil and Seanad members. They also met representatives from Amnesty International and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. BAI is very grateful to all those who gave of their time and met with the delegation.

Two of the representatives (U Bo Hla Tint and U Hlwan Moe) were from Burma's Government in exile - the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), which is based in Washington D.C. U Maung Maung, is the General Secretary of the National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB) and General Secretary of the Federation of Trade Unions of Burma (FTUB). The visit to Ireland coincided with the recent publication of a 70-page report called: *Threat to the Peace: A Call for the UN Security Council to Act in Burma*. The delegation visiting Dublin said that all democratic nations should urge the UN Security Council to take action on the issues facing Burma. U Bo Hla Tint said that the majority of people in Burma "are living under the poverty-line".

Speaking about their visit Ms Eileen Seymour, Chairperson of BAI said: "We hope their visit has further heightened awareness of the situation within their country - which together with its human rights abuses, has almost 700,000 refugees living on or near its borders - as a result of the grave conditions created by the current government. The country also has a major problem with drug production and trafficking".

Simon Coveney TD MEP, calls on Irish Government to support UN Security Council intervention on Burma

Simon Coveney, the TD and MEP has reported (4 November) on his recent visit to North Eastern Thailand and the Karen State in Western Burma, where he visited refugee camps, emergency health clinics and voluntary organisations working with the tens of thousands of refugees fleeing conflict in Burma. "A military dictatorship, whose sole focus is on retaining power at all costs, is brutalising and raping the country, which they have renamed Myanmar, while imprisoning, intimidating and attacking legitimate voices for change and democracy," he said.

"The consequences are dramatic and tragic. Mass displacement of persons within ethnic areas of Burma is clearly documented. 2,700 villages have been burnt to the ground since 1996 by government forces in an effort to crush opposition. Human rights violations are clear. Rape and forced labour on a massive scale are inflicted by Burmese authority troops. Tens of thousands of refugees flee into neighbouring countries such as Thailand, Laos and India. Almost 700,000 refugees have poured out of Burma into neighbouring countries in recent years, causing a political and humanitarian mess". Mr Coveney said that what is required for Burma

at this stage is an end to all conflict and in its place tri-partite talks between the military, ethnic groups and Aung San Suu Kyi. "Perhaps most importantly Burma needs a new constitution based on a federalist structure whereby ethnic groups can achieve a certain amount of autonomy within their regions, while keeping Burma as a whole together through a central democratically elected government in Rangoon". Simon Coveney hopes that as a consequence of his visit, he will be able to increase the pressure in the European Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee for action on Burma.

For further details, including images of Mr Coveney's visit see: www.simoncoveney.ie



Simon Coveney, TD and MEP on his recent visit to North Eastern Thailand and the Karen State in Western Burma. (Picture credit, dalypix.com).



Update on Burma

APPARENT MOVE OF THE BURMESE CAPITAL

According to The Independent (UK, 8 November) and other media sources, the Burmese capital is being moved to a purpose-built 'command and control' centre in the jungle by the country's military government. General Than Shwe, the country's most senior leader, has apparently shifted the capital from Rangoon, up 250 miles to a quiet trading town called Pyinmana. Unmarried civil servants from nine government ministries have been ordered to move to the new location. In Rangoon, residents are baffled by the sudden exodus. Not everything, however, has changed that radically: roadblocks are still in place outside the lakeside house of Aung San Suu Kyi.

Pyinmana has become the recent focus for new construction. The town has been refortified over the past three years by the Burmese generals. There are reports that a new military complex now extends over 10 square kilometres and that the infantry is already in place. It seems that fear of a US invasion has prompted this move - immediately after the US-led war in Iraq, Burmese exiles circulated rumours that the US would surely back regime change in south Asia next.

The new capital will be officially named **Yan Lon**, which translates as "secure from strife," a close resemblance to "Yan Gon", or "end of strife", the official name for **Rangoon**. In Rangoon, the new capital has been redubbed as "Escape City".

THE PRICE OF FUEL RISES NINE-FOLD IN BURMA

On 19 October, Burma's energy ministry announced a nine-fold increase in the official price of petrol and diesel in the country, without any prior warning. "When it was 180 kyat a gallon, they sold it on for more than 2,000 kyat (in the black market), and now it is going to be 1,500 kyat at the official rate. You can imagine what the outside (black market) price will be," one driver told the radio station the *Democratic Voice of Burma*. He added that the price hike will affect trade and commodity prices in Burma. "The (situation of the) country will become more complicated and uncontrollable. The rulers and supervisors are so wretched", he said.

JUNTA PREPARES TO LEAVE ILO AS DEATH THREATS ISSUED TO LIAISON OFFICER

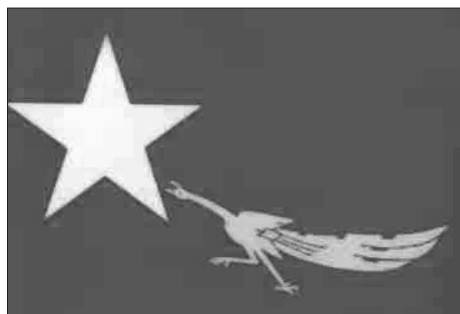
The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has confirmed in its latest report, the Burmese military government's intention to withdraw from the organisation. The report details the military's attempts to undermine the ILO and includes an example of a death threat received by the ILO Liaison Officer in Rangoon, Richard Horsey.

According to the report, Mr Horsey received 21 threats in August and September this year, which

were delivered to his home through Rangoon's postal system. One letter is quoted: "If you interfere (in) our internal affair(s), your head will be cut off and our people will crush you and poison you. Be careful, danger is everywhere for you". Steps have been taken by the ILO to increase security for the staff and despite sending several letters to the Burmese authorities, (including the Prime Minister General Soe Win) regarding the threats, they have received no response. Mr Horsey also discussed the matter in August with the Minister for Labour, U Thaug, but later received more threats. In respect to Burma's efforts to tackle forced labour issues, the report was perhaps the most critical to date by the ILO. Burma is the only country in the ILO's 86-year history to be subjected to sanctions by the body in 2000, (which were subsequently reactivated in June this year). This latest report recommends a stepping up in action against the Burmese military government, ahead of a meeting of the ILO's governing body in November.

BIRD OF FREEDOM

Copies of 'fighting peacock' images with a caption saying: "The fighting peacocks are back", were found on walls and doors inside the campus of Dagon University in Rangoon recently, causing considerable panic among the local authorities. The fighting peacock is the adopted identity of the National League for Democracy led by Aung San Suu Kyi. The authorities do not know who placed them there and are looking for the 'culprits' who distributed them. The authorities have also tightened security measures in other campuses to prevent similar 'incidents' from occurring again.



The fighting peacock of Burma.

BURMA STILL AMONG LEAST PRESS FREE

Burma under the rule of a military junta, maintains its almost bottom-of-the-table position at 163 out of 167 countries, when it comes to press freedom, only ahead of Korea, Eritrea, Turkmenistan and Iraq, according to the latest annual report by Paris-based *Reporteurs Sans Frontiers*. The report points out that the junta's new secret services have refused visas, intimidated journalists, maintained advance censorship and continue to mount surveillance on journalists suspected of being critical of the Burmese

military - or with links to Daw Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy.

BURMA AMONG MOST CORRUPT STATES

In the Annual Report of the Berlin-based *Transparency International* issued on 19 October, the organisation states that Chad, Bangladesh, Turkmenistan and Burma are perceived as the most corrupt countries in the world, according to the organisation's '2005 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)'. (Among the least corrupt are Iceland which topped the list with a score of 9.7, followed by Finland (9.6) and New Zealand (9.6)). Bottom of the list is Chad (1.7) followed by Bangladesh (1.7), Turkmenistan (1.8) and Burma (1.8).

MON SCHOOLS PRESSURED TO CLOSE DOWN BY BURMA JUNTA

Burma's military government has been pressurising Mon national schools under the supervision of the New Mon State Party (NMSPP) - an armed ethnic national group which signed ceasefire agreements with the junta more than ten years ago. Within the last year, more than 30 Mon national schools were forced to close down and the latest school under pressure is the middle school at Lamaing Village, Ye Township in southern Burma, according to an Independent Mon News Agency.

MORE EXPLOSIONS IN RANGOON

A bomb exploded at the *Traders Hotel* in downtown Rangoon on 21 October. There was not much damage and no casualties. This bombing is the latest in a number of explosions. The junta has been unsuccessful in finding those responsible for a bombing on 7 May which killed scores of people.

SOURCES: (News gathered from the radio station - the Democratic Voice of Burma and from Irawaddy and Mizzima - Burmese expatriate newswires)

BURMA ACTION IRELAND EXPRESSES ITS REGRET AT THE PASSING OF FRANK JENNINGS

Burma Action Ireland (BAI) was saddened to hear of the death on 1 October of **Frank Jennings**. Frank, a human rights defender, was Head of Research with Front line and a Campaigns Manager for many years with Amnesty International. He was also key to the setting up of Burma Action Ireland in 1996.

Frank made a substantial contribution in very many ways to the development of human rights activism in Ireland and internationally. He was gravely concerned at the situation in Burma and was always both enthusiastic and generous with his advice to BAI about how we could continue to raise awareness of the situation in the country, here in Ireland.

We express our deepest sympathy at this time to his wife Angela, his two daughters, his sister and brothers. He will be sadly missed.



Burma Action Ireland Newsletter

Statement on UN Security Council from European Burma Network

On the 8 and 9 October, BAI Chairperson, Eileen Seymour and Coordinator, Flavia Tully attended a meeting in London of the European Burma Network (EBN). Members and observers present at the meeting unanimously welcomed the report: *Threat to the Peace – A Call for the UN Security Council to Act in Burma* (see also article on page two of this newsletter).

The EBN has called on members of the United Nations Security Council to pass the following resolution proposed in *A Threat to the Peace*:

- Outline the major reasons for the Security Council intervention, focusing on the threat to the peace caused by the major issues described in this report;
- Require the government of Burma to work

with the Secretary-General's office in implementing a plan for national reconciliation and a restoration of a democratically-elected government;

- Request the Secretary-General to remain vigorously engaged with the dispute resolution process and require that he report back to the Security Council on a regular basis;
- Urge the government of Burma to ensure the immediate, safe, and unhindered access to all parts of the country for the United Nations and international humanitarian organisations to provide humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable groups of the population, including internally displaced persons; and
- Call for the immediate and unconditional release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all prisoners of conscience in Burma.

The European Burma Network also called on the European Union and other European countries to support the proposed resolution.



Pictured are attendees at the European Burma Network meeting in London. The speaker (standing) is U Maung Maung, General Secretary of the National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB) and General Secretary of the Federation of Trade Unions of Burma (FTUB). U Maung Maung was also a recent visitor to Ireland (see page two of this newsletter).

Burma Action Ireland wishes all its members and supporters a very happy and peaceful Christmas.

Nollaig Shona agus Athbhliain faoi Mhaise Daoibh.

What can you do?

GET INVOLVED

BAI is always pleased to welcome new members. Members are encouraged to become active in one of BAI's four voluntary sub-committees: **political, awareness raising, campaigns and fundraising and assistance.**

MEMBERSHIP

Membership letters are enclosed in this edition of the newsletter. BAI is always looking for people to volunteer and help in all kinds of ways. We appreciate that you may be busy, but if you do have some free time, we would be delighted to have your assistance. Please fill out the form and send it back to us. If you are currently a member and wish to renew your fee until autumn 2006, please do so. If you have questions about becoming more active in BAI, please contact us (number given at the end of this page).

In addition, there are other ways you can help the people of Burma:

POLITICIANS

Write to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, **Mr Dermot Ahern, TD** (Iveagh House, St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2), your local TD and MEP to let them know of your concern for human rights in Burma. Urge them to raise the Burma issue at every level of the political process and:

- Take all necessary measures toward a speedy restoration of democracy in Burma,
- Demand the immediate release of Aung San Suu Kyi.

REGARDING THE CENTRAL ISSUE OF THE OPPRESSION OF THE BURMESE PEOPLE

Write appeals to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) the Burmese military regime, calling for the safe release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all Burmese political prisoners. In addition to asking for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, please ask the SPDC to take action on the following:

- To end the continuing violations of the

human rights of women, in particular forced labour, forced relocations, abuse, torture, sexual violence, exploitation and abuse in detention and summary executions, often committed by military personnel,

- To end the systematic forced displacements of persons and the flow of refugees to neighbouring countries and create adequate conditions for their safe and voluntary return and complete reintegration, and to allow humanitarian personnel safe access to assist their return and reintegration.

Please address your action letters to the following:

Lieutenant General Soe Win
Prime Minister;
State Peace and Development Council
Ministry of Defence, Signal Pagoda Road
Dagon Post Office, Yangon
Union of Myanmar

BAI would appreciate it very much if you could send us a copy of your letter(s).

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Disclaimer: The views expressed herein are those of Burma Action Ireland and can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of Development Cooperation Ireland.

Thank you to Máire Hoctor, TD, Senator Paschal Mooney and Senator Brendan Ryan for the posting of this newsletter. Their support is appreciated.

Burma Action Ireland is a voluntary group established since May 1996 to raise awareness in Ireland of the current situation in Burma and the nature of the ruling regime.

Hon. President:
John Boorman

Chairperson:
Eileen Seymour

