



Burma Action Ireland

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Newsletter

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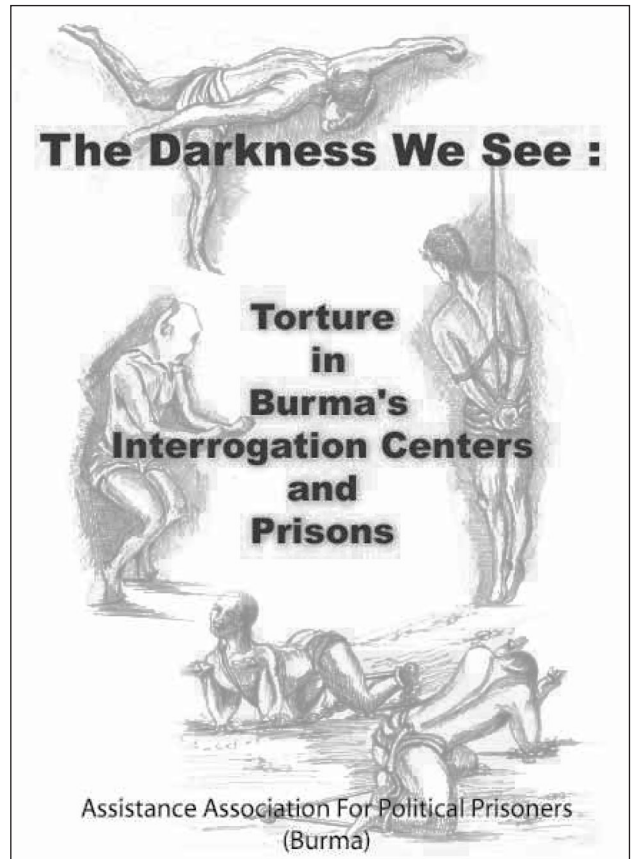
The darkness we see - report on torture in Burma published

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners in Burma (AAPPB) has published a report describing and condemning the methods of torture used in Burma's interrogation centres and prisons since March 1998. The evidence gathered in the 126-page report entitled **'The Darkness We See: Torture in Burma's Interrogation Centers and Prisons'** is based on interviews with thirty-five former political prisoners conducted by AAPP. This publication, which has been made possible through funding by the **Department of Foreign Affairs Development Cooperation Ireland** division, is divided into sections detailing the various forms of physical, psychological and sexual abuse used by the junta. The document explains how poor prison conditions combined with medical negligence are encouraged by the junta to cause a degree of suffering tantamount to torture. Appendices comprise a map of Burma's prisons, a list of 38 known interrogation centres, illustrations of torture methods and instruments, and many names both of torturers and prison doctors and of prisoners left seriously ill.

The report follows the publication on 20 September last of 'Threat to the Peace', commissioned by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the Honourable Vaclav Havel – both

Nobel Peace prize winners. In 'Threat to the Peace' they strongly urge the United Nations Security Council to "take up the situation in Burma immediately" and to place Burma on the UN Security Council agenda. (See overleaf for information on progress in this area since 16 December). This report on torture also recommends that the UN Security Council immediately take up issue. The report's Executive Summary concludes by urging immediate action – by the Burmese authorities, the United Nations, individual governments, international organisations and NGOs against such detention and abuse. It is headed by a remark by Aung San Suu Kyi: "The release of political prisoners is the most important thing for all those who truly wish to bring about change in Burma".

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The report 'The Darkness We See' has been published with financial support from the Irish Government.



Pictured is the former UN special envoy for Burma, Mr Razali Ismail.

Resignation of special envoy for Burma

The UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has accepted the resignation of his special envoy for Burma, Razali Ismail, who had held the post since April 2000 and whose resignation was effective when his contract expired on 4 January 2006. Razali, a former Malaysian diplomat who has been trying to break Burma's political impasse since 2000, said he would not renew his contract. Razali announced his resignation after being refused access to Burma for the past two years.

In a recent statement issued by his spokesman, Mr Annan expressed his appreciation for Razali's role in helping the secretary-general's good offices aimed at facilitating national reconciliation and democratisation in Burma. He also expressed his sadness on Razali's departure.

Over the past several years, Razali has supported Kofi Annan's efforts to help reconcile the relations between Burma's military government and opposition parties including the National

League for Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Suu Kyi. He was the catalyst for the landmark contacts between the military and Daw Suu Kyi, which created excitement when they began in October 2000. Razali regularly expressed pessimism however over the prospects for change in Burma and Daw Suu Kyi's release, and repeatedly pressed the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to take a tougher stand against the junta. ASEAN and the NLD recently expressed disappointment at Burma's military junta for postponing, at short notice, a scheduled visit by the ASEAN envoy - the Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar - to the country. The reason for the abrupt postponement was because the junta claimed it was occupied with the task of moving the capital from Rangoon to Pinyin in central Burma. The Burmese capital is currently being moved to a purpose-built 'command and control' centre in the jungle by the country's military government.



First-ever Security Council discussion on Burma



Mr Václav Havel, former President of the Czech Republic – "the people in Burma need to know that the international community, represented in this case by the Security Council, did not forget their plight", he said.

Václav Havel, former President of the Czech Republic and Desmond M. Tutu, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town, have praised the UN Security Council for holding a discussion on the situation in Burma. The discussion took place on Friday 16 December. They also commended the United States, which spearheaded the effort and Romania and the United Kingdom, which provided leadership on the initiative through their service as President of the Security Council in October and December respectively.

Mr Havel and Archbishop Tutu also commended the European Parliament for calling on the UN Security Council to address the situation in Burma as a matter of urgency and to empower the UN Secretary-General to mediate in Burma to bring about national reconciliation and a transition to democracy. The first-ever discussion on Burma came almost three months after the release of a report commissioned by Havel and Tutu calling for the UN Security Council to act. The 125-page report, prepared by global law firm DLA Piper Rudnick Gray Cary, compared the situation in Burma to other countries in which the Security Council has previously intervened in internal conflicts because of the transnational issues implicated.

The document *'Threat to the Peace: A Call for the UN Security Council to Act in Burma'*, (reported in the autumn edition of this newsletter) details the deterioration that has occurred in Burma stemming from the rule of the current military regime, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

The debate was held after the United States and Romania spearheaded an international effort to organise nine votes (out of 15 total) required under UN rules to place the situation in Burma on the Security Council's agenda. Both President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice used their recent trip to the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in South Korea to press for action.

Aung San Suu Kyi's political party, the National League for Democracy, publicly called for UN Security Council action as did the leadership of Burma's ethnic nationalities. Numerous newspapers, including the *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*, *International Herald Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Baltimore Sun*, *The Nation (Bangkok)*, *Washington Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and *The Times (London)* offered editorial support for the Havel-Tutu Report. After 10 countries agreed to call for a debate, China and Russia, who had previously blocked a discussion, agreed to support by consensus a "consultation of the whole" in which the Secretary General's office would brief the Council on its efforts in Burma.

"This is only a first step, and the UN Security Council must show that it is serious about follow-up. The UN Security Council action could represent a new dawn for change in Burma," said Mr Havel. "The people in Burma need to know that the international community, represented in this case by the Security Council, did not forget their plight."

Archbishop Tutu said: "I am pleased that the Council found a way to cooperate on Burma, but I hope this can be cemented in a Security Council resolution. This should not be a one-off affair and the Council must remain vigilant. Inspired by this movement, Secretary-General Kofi Annan should vigorously pursue national reconciliation in Burma. The international community must remain engaged in pursuing a process of irreversible and meaningful dialogue that will ensure that national reconciliation is achieved in Burma." The

debate represents a breakthrough on Burma at the UN Security Council as it had been widely presumed that China and Russia would use their threat of a veto on a substantive resolution to prevent a discussion from even taking place. Instead, the Security Council signaled by consensus, that after 28 total resolutions passed by the UN General Assembly and UN Commission on Human Rights, all of which have been summarily ignored by the ruling military regime, it was time for the Security Council to hold the debate.

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

Burmese diaspora mark their Independence Day

Exiled Burmese communities throughout the world marked the 58th anniversary of Burma's Independence Day which fell on 4 January. Pro-democracy activists in Norway held a commemorative ceremony at the home of exiled elected representative (MP) Kyaw Thwin in Alesund, Norway. He said that despite Burma's freedom from the (British) colonial power, the country has been hijacked by the military dictatorship. Burmese activists in Washington DC also staged a peaceful demonstration outside the Burmese embassy to mark the historic event. The organisers urged the people of Burma to continue to fight for their rights and "second independence". Pro-democracy activists in India, Thailand, South Korea and Japan marked the day with formal ceremonies and peaceful demonstrations, demanding that the ruling junta release all political prisoners and commence genuine political dialogue. In London, activists marked the event with a political seminar and discussed the means to intensify political activities and pressure on the junta in 2006.



Update on Burma

ROADBLOCK TO SUU KYI'S HOUSE LIFTED

The roadblock outside Aung San Suu Kyi's house on University Avenue in Rangoon has been removed since 16 January. Daw Suu Kyi, leader of Burma's National League for Democracy (NLD) has spent the last 10 years in and out of detention in Rangoon. A local resident told the radio station – the *Democratic Voice of Burma* (DVB), that barbed-wired security checkpoints at Hledan and Kokekine Streets, situated on each end of University Avenue have been lifted. The roadblock was set up by the ruling military junta, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in 1997 with only military vehicles and residents of the area allowed through the area. "You could say that the situation has changed extraordinarily," NLD spokesman Myint Thein told the DVB. "But if you ask me if it is the sign for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, I dare not answer it. The reason being, this kind of thing happened quite often like this before. But whatever it is, we live with hope."

FORMER KOREAN PRESIDENT CALLS FOR DEMOCRATISATION OF BURMA

Kim Dae-jung, former South Korean President and 2000 Nobel Peace Laureate has reiterated his call for an early democratisation of Burma, expressing his concern for the worsening situation there, according to a report in the *Korea Times* (16 January). In an article titled, the *Dire Situation in Myanmar (Burma) must be Improved*, he urged Burma's military government to guarantee the free political activities of political dissidents. "Since 1988, the dark shadow of military dictatorship has grown thicker and thicker in Myanmar," the retired statesman said.

Despite international concerns, however, the situation has "not in the least improved", he added. Kim Dae-jung stressed that the international community should make the SPDC take appropriate measures to render hope and relief for all the people upholding human rights and democracy in the world as well as those in the country. "I, along with the Korean people, pledge to do my utmost so that Madame Aung San Suu Kyi and other democratic fighters are freed and the situation in Myanmar improves, to bring a new age of hope and development in the future of Myanmar," he said.

BURMA ARMY'S RELOCATIONS LEAVE SHAN PEOPLE AT RISK OF STARVATION

Local people at Mong Nai (Mo-ne) Township, Shan State in eastern Burma, have abandoned more than 10,000 acres of paddy fields due to forced relocations of their villages by the Burmese military, and they are facing imminent danger of starvation, according to a report issued on 17 January. The report called 'Deserted Fields: The Destruction of Agriculture in Mong Nai Township, Shan State,' was jointly issued by *Shan Women Action Network (SWAN)*, *Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF)* and *Shan State Relief and Development Committee*. A spokesperson of SHRF, Yan Murg told the *Democratic Voice of Burma* that Burma's military junta, the State Peace and Development Council's troops have not only been relocating villages, but also restricting the movements of the villagers making them impossible to tend their farms situated in southern, central Shan State. He added that the SPDC is responsible for the dramatic decrease in rice production in southern Shan State and the

flight of thousands of Shan villagers to neighbouring countries over the past decade. The report is based on two years of field research and documents cases of land confiscation, forced relocation and labour, and restrictions on local trading and movement.

OUT OF SEASON RAINS DESTROY CROPS

Late arriving monsoon downpours and frosts have been causing severe damage to cold season bean and lentil crops grown along River Irrawaddy in central Burma. As it is too late to grow new crops for recuperation, farmers are now in serious danger of losing their investment and accumulating debts. The majority of the farms affected are situated along both sides of the river between Mandalay and Prome, according to local residents. The disaster is said to be the worst in 50 years. Farmers are not likely to receive compensation from the authorities. As a result of the monsoon downpours, Burmese consumers are also in danger of facing the scarcity of beans, together with rising inflation.

NATIONAL CONVENTION RESUMES IN BURMA

The repeatedly postponed, suspended constitution-drafting National Convention of Burma's military junta resumed in December. According to the Convention organising committee chairman Lt-Gen Thein Sein, the Convention was reconvened at Nyaung Hnabin (Two Banyan Trees) Camp near Hmawbi, situated north of capital Rangoon. Hand-picked delegates discussed administrative and judicial issues and power sharing. The main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD) and Shan National League for Democracy (SNLD) which won most seats behind the NLD in the 1990 election, boycotted the convention.

Daw Suu Kyi as UN Secretary General?

Aung San Suu Kyi is being seen as one of a number of women who could succeed Kofi Annan as Secretary-General of the United Nations. Mr Annan's second term expires at the end of 2006, but there is some speculation that he may step down before the General Assembly's next meeting in September 2006. Daw Suu Kyi's name is being promoted by *Equality Now* - an organisation founded in 1992 to work for the protection and promotion of the human rights of women around the world. Over the UN's sixty years, the post of Secretary-General has been held by three Europeans, two Africans, one Latin-American and one Asian (- U Thant, who was Burmese). All have been men, and all four candidates who have now stepped forward are also male. Moreover, despite a resolution adopted by the Assembly that calls for gender balance in the Secretariat's staffing, only six of its 37 under-Secretaries-General are women. (They have since been joined by Inga-Britt Ahlenius of

Sweden). It is in this context that the international group *Equality Now* has produced a list of 18 women sufficiently prominent and able to fill Kofi Annan's shoes. A full-page article in *The Times* of London (4 January) bore the headline: *UN under growing pressure to appoint a woman leader*, and featured a large photograph of **Aung San Suu Kyi**. Its New York correspondent said that she was *Equality Now's* "most provocative proposal", but her appointment, as he added, is "unlikely to say the least".

Some of the other women seen as possible successors include: **Sadako Ogata (Japan)** the Former UN High Commissioner for Refugees; **Helen Clark**, Prime Minister of New Zealand; **Tarja Halonen**, President of Finland; **Louise Arbour** (Canada) the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and Chile's new President **Michelle Bachelet Jeria**.

The resurgent Asian countries insist that it is Asia's turn to take the post. Ms Suu Kyi

undoubtedly has the necessary stature, vision and integrity. After graduating from Delhi and Oxford, she served the UN in New York from 1969 to 1971 and in Bhutan the following year. Whatever the outcome, *Equality Now's* promotion of her, and the



Pictured is 60-year-old Aung San Suu Kyi.

reaction in *The Times*, are new reminders, not least to Burma's junta, that the eyes of the world are still focused on its legitimate leader.

Equality Now has offices in New York, London and Nairobi. Their web address is www.equalitynow.org



Books for Burma

Burma's education system is in a state of decline. Resources are very poor and library facilities scant. Children and students have therefore a great need for books - a need Ms Genette Dagtoglou has been trying for six years to begin to meet.

Based in Britain, Ms Dagtoglou previously collected and dispatched books by road, sea and air, as cheaply as possible, to village schools in Bhutan, Georgia and parts of Africa. Since 1999 she has been sending books in to Burma, at a current rate of about 5,000 a year. Distributed from Rangoon by Burmese colleagues, most go

to the Millennium Centres in different parts of the country set up in 2000 by the late Graham Millington (of the British Council). Genette describes the Centres' work as: "a real exercise in grass roots democracy, mini economics and organisation".

At this time, Genette is urgently appealing to individuals and businesses for any publications which can be donated to her Burma book scheme. The following publication types are particularly useful:

- English language teaching materials and dictionaries;

- Books for children and teenagers;
- Play-scripts for adults;
- Novels, books on nature, geography, first aid, hygiene, medical journals, computer magazines, copies of Reader's Digest etc.

"Students in Burma can use everything you have to spare", she says.

If you would like to send some books to Burma please contact Genette directly by email at dagtoglou@aol.com

Information on this initiative was supplied to BAI by Prospect Burma, the non-political educational charity based in the UK.

The darkness we see - report on torture in Burma published

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Most political prisoners in Burma are arrested for publicly expressing or otherwise indicating opposition to the ruling military junta. The human rights record of Burma's junta, known as the State Peace and Development Council, is among the worst in the world. Among its excesses – in addition to torture - are wide-scale forced labour, conscription of child soldiers, extra-judicial executions, systematic rape and forced relocation of ethnic minorities.

Speaking about 'The Darkness We See', Eileen

Seymour, Chairperson of BAI says: "The interviews for this report on torture have been conducted by the AAPPB with male and female former political prisoners as they attempted to re-establish their lives and identities. It concludes that Burma's prisons have become institutions whose primary function is to deliberately shatter the identity of political activists and other civilians deemed threatening by the junta".

The report reveals, for the first time, the chain of command and individuals responsible for torture in Burma. The Minister of Home

Affairs, Minister of Defense and Minister of Foreign Affairs all serve on a three-person committee responsible for overseeing the detention of prisoners charged under section 10 (A) and (B) of the junta's State Protection Act, which provides the "legal" basis for which many prisoners are held.

For more information on the work of the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners in Burma and to download a copy of the report see web address www.aappb.org

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.** 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 (Bishop's Square, Redmond's Hill, 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:

- o Take all necessary measures toward a speedy restoration of democracy in Burma,
- o 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 Hctor, TD 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

