



Summer 2004

Burma Action Ireland

Newsletter

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Daw Suu Kyi spends 59th birthday under detention

Burma Action Ireland (BAI) was one of a number of pro-democracy groups around the world that marked the 59th birthday, under detention, of Aung San Suu Kyi, Nobel laureate and leader of Burma's National League for Democracy (NLD).

BAI marked the occasion, which was also *Women of Burma* day, with a release of balloons outside the Lord Mayor of Dublin's residence. Daw Suu Kyi was officially awarded the Freedom of the City in 2000 from the then Lord Mayor, CCLR Mary Freehill. On that occasion, Daw Suu Kyi was not at liberty to sign Dublin's *Roll of Honorary Freedom*. Four years on, she is again in detention and Burma's ruling regime, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) reject all moves toward meaningful democratic reform.

On 17 May, the SPDC, took the first step on their 'roadmap to democracy' by holding a *National Convention* with severe restrictions on discussion. (See *article on page two*). They also refused to allow the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and senior colleagues in the NLD from detention. The 'roadmap' has since been met with almost universal censure. World leaders have renewed calls to release Daw Suu Kyi and hold meaningful tripartite talks with the NLD and representatives of the

ethnic nationalities of Burma. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said the convention "lacked credibility" and UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights, Professor Paulo Pinheiro - denied entry to Burma since last year - described the regime's 'roadmap' as "a meaningless and undemocratic exercise". The EU under Ireland's Presidency, also responded to the failure of the regime's 'roadmap'. In June, an ASEM Finance Minister's meeting was cancelled following the EU's refusal to permit representatives of Burma's military regime to attend, citing the release of Aung San Suu Kyi as a minimum pre-condition of such a meeting.

Speaking about Aung San Suu Kyi's detention, BAI's Chairman, Hugh Baxter said: "Aung San Suu Kyi has spent yet another year under house arrest despite the support of the overwhelming majority of the people of Burma. She is firmly committed to dialogue toward a peaceful transition to democracy, but the regime continues to treat her like a criminal".

Burma's military has among the world's worst human rights records. Among its excesses are forced labour, conscription of child soldiers, political prisoners, torture, extra-judicial executions, systematic rape and forced relocation of ethnic minorities. In June,

the International Labour Organisation called upon the regime to end the widespread practice of forced labour among adults and children. Daw Suu Kyi's NLD represents by far the biggest pro-democracy opposition group, having won the last free election in Burma in 1990 by a landslide 82% vote. They have been denied power by the military ever since.



Sophia and Jeseta Kelly, daughters of BAI's Aung San Phyoo marking the 59th birthday of Aung San Suu Kyi at Dublin's Mansion House on 19 June. Other support events were held in the UK, USA, New Zealand, South Korea, Japan, India, Bangladesh and Thailand.

ASEM meeting scheduled for Hanoi – concern over Burma's possible representation

The biennial Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) of Heads of State, planned for Hanoi in October will proceed as scheduled. This meeting was in jeopardy due to insistence by the EU that Burma should not join this meeting with the other nine countries who form the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). ASEAN countered that if Burma could not participate, neither could the EU's 10 new member states.

The decision to allow the October meeting to proceed was reached at a sideline meeting in Jakarta on 2 July, attended by top EU, Vietnamese and Japanese delegates, who were in Jakarta for the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). A definitive solution has not yet been reached on the question of Burma's attendance, but according to an EU official, following the 2 July meeting, the issue of concern now lies with the level of representation

that Burma will be allowed.

In a press statement issued on 1 July by the Burmese Government in Exile, (the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma) said: "Lest it be forgotten, the NCGUB wishes to remind ASEAN countries that the Burmese generals that they have been coaxing are none other than the ones who ordered the murderous attack against the members of the National League for Democracy (NLD), the detention of the NLD leaders, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the closure of all NLD offices, and are currently proceeding with a convention to establish a dictatorial regime which will assume the Chair of the ASEAN Standing Committee in 2006".

ASEM was formed in 1996 with the aim of strengthening relations between Europe and Asia. The ASEM meetings provide a forum for

communication between Asia and Europe, with the most recent one held last April at the K Club in County Kildare as part of Ireland's EU Presidency. (Coinciding with this, BAI held a peaceful demonstration outside the K Club to signal its opposition to Burma's possible admission to ASEM).

Since becoming a member of ASEAN in 1987, Burma's reluctance to allow political freedom has strained EU-ASEAN relations. The EU is a critic of Burma's military regime, and has imposed some trade sanctions in a bid to pressurise the regime into giving up power and to release Aung San Suu Kyi and members of her party. In contrast to the EU, ASEAN has adopted a much lower-profile stance in dealing with Burma, who (as mentioned above) is due to take leadership of ASEAN in 2006.



NLD welcomes extension of US sanctions

(Unofficial translation from DVB Burmese radio, 9 July, 2004)

The National League for Democracy has welcomed the US Administration's decision to extend its economic sanctions against the military junta one more year.

"The Party welcomes President Bush's announcement to maintain US economic sanctions until the time when NLD leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi were free from detention and NLD offices were allowed to

reopen, because it is very practical and necessary in current situation", said U Lwin, NLD spokesperson.

The spokesperson continued: "According to the law adopted by the US Congress and agreed by the President, the US will maintain the sanctions to push for democratisation in Burma. It is very clear that the US will lift the sanctions only if Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is free, and the NLD will be able to exercise its political functions freely".

Rights for the Rohingya

Amnesty International has issued a report detailing the denial of fundamental rights to the Rohingya - a muslim ethnic minority in the west of Burma near the Bangladeshi border. The report outlines the various violations by the Burmese authorities against the *Rohingya* including severe restrictions on their freedom of movement, forced eviction and house destruction, land confiscation and various forms of extortion and arbitrary taxation. These include financial restriction on marriage, taxes on firewood, fees for the registration of deaths and births in family lists, on livestock and fruit-bearing trees.

The SPDC, Burma's military regime, rejects the existence of this separate ethnic group. It does not recognise them as a national race but rather considers them permanent residents. Under existing discriminatory citizenship laws, the vast majority of Rohingyas cannot qualify for

citizenship even though their ancestors have resided in the country for many generations.

The Rohingya must routinely apply for permission from the authorities to leave their villages. They are often unable to trade goods and produce, unless they have official permission. Amnesty International estimate that half of the Rohingyas are poor day labourers and so these restrictions greatly affect their ability to find work. While human rights abuses are common-place in Burma, Amnesty international reports that the Rohingya are particularly targeted.

Amnesty International has called on the SPDC to end the particularly harsh treatment of the Rohingya and in particular, calls for the amendment or repeal of the harshly restrictive citizenship laws that discriminate against them and other ethnic minority groups. See www.amnesty.ie for more details.

National Convention adjourned

The constitution-drafting **National Convention** billed by Burma's military regime - the SPDC - from 17 May at Nyaung-Hnabin-Kwin near Rangoon was adjourned on 9 July. It is not clear why it was adjourned and when it is to be resumed. The Convention was attended by 1,076 delegates and apart from around 80 ceasefire delegates, the rest are said to have been handpicked delegates chosen by the junta to support its agenda.

The Convention was boycotted by elected representatives of the NLD. According to some observers, the Convention was adjourned because there was a dispute between the junta and the ceasefire groups on the matter of power sharing. According to Sao Kai Pha of Shan State Army (North) - one of representatives of the ceasefire groups attending the Convention - there had been a clash of opinions on the six restrictive aims and 104 principles of the junta. The 104 principles (or a long list of military prerogatives to be rubber-stamped at the Convention), aimed to ensure that the military remained the dominant player in the country.

Others have attributed the adjournment to the junta's desire to discuss the views of the ceasefire groups that are opposing the Convention, off the record.

The junta cited the weather as the reason for adjourning the Convention, which will be reconvened, it seems, in the dry season.

Anonymously Yours - sex trafficking in Burma

Anonymously Yours, a film directed by Gayle Ferraro, was screened at University College Dublin (UCD) on 9 and 10 July, as part of the Women's Education, Research and Resource Centre (WERRC) *Global Feminism Conference*. This documentary provides a harrowing insight into the world's fastest growing industry - sex trafficking, which enslaves as many as 40 million women world-wide. This piece of work, clandestinely filmed in Burma, conveys the individual stories and experiences of four Burmese women, who expose their life experiences inside the dangerous world of sex

trafficking. In the film, the women's intimate testimonies are combined with footage of daily life in Burma, where corruption and impoverishment allow for wide acceptance and support of this lucrative practice. Gayle Ferraro and her crew, recorded the interviews and footage in Burma in November and December 2000. The world premiere of the film was screened at the 2002 Montreal World Film Festival and since then, there has been widespread interest and acclaim for the film. The film is available for rental or purchase from Aerial Productions: <http://www.aerial-productions.com>



Pictured is Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of Burma's National League for Democracy. Daw Suu Kyi's party represents by far the biggest pro-democracy opposition group, having won the last free election in Burma in 1990 by a landslide 82% vote.



Update on Burma

WORLD REFUGEE DAY

Burmese refugees living in Karenni, Karen and Mon refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border marked *World Refugee Day* on 20 June. A ceremony held at a Karenni refugee camp near the northern Thai town of Mae Hong Son, was attended by local authorities and UN High Commissioner for Refugees representatives. Similar ceremonies were held at Mae La-U, Mae La, Ohn Phyan and Htam Him refugee camps in western Thailand. According to UNHCR statistics, there are more than 100,000 Burmese refugees living in the camps along the Thai-Burma border and a similar number of people are hiding in the jungles as internally displaced people (IDP). Despite 'reported' ceasefire agreements between armed ethnic groups and Burma's military junta, the number of Burmese refugees is increasing due to systematic oppression by the junta.

PRISONERS NOT ALLOWED TO SEE FAMILY MEMBERS IN BURMA

Members of the NLD, U Tin Myint and Daw Than Than Htay who have been detained for their democracy activities, have not been allowed to meet their family members despite a written request asking a meeting.

The families of the two political prisoners went to Insein Prison in Rangoon with their lawyer from the NLD Legal Support Group on 12 July and requested a meeting.

U Tin Myint, the secretary of Thinganggyun Township, Rangoon NLD and Daw Than Than Htay, a member of Magwe Division NLD Women, were arrested on 7 June by the military intelligence agents. They have not been allowed to meet with their families since that time. Although the existing law clearly says that anyone arrested with suspicion must be transferred to a police department and allowed to meet family members and lawyers within 28 days, the military intelligence has been violating the law, according to the lawyer of the families.

THIRTY-ONE MORE BURMESE REFUGEES HEADING TO USA

Thirty-one Burmese refugees from nine

different families based at the Thai border town of Mae Sot, boarded planes (from their local airport) for the United States on 15 July. They stopped at Don Muang International Airport in Bangkok before flying on to the US for permanent resettlement with the help of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organisation of Migration (IOM).

In January 2004, the US entered into discussions with the Thai government over the possible resettlement of up to 4,000 Burmese refugees. The US Embassy in Bangkok began processing applications for the resettlement of 2,000 UNHCR-recognised Burmese refugees that month. The first 2,000 are scheduled to leave for the US before the end of the year. The first group of Burmese from Bangkok left for the US in May. Most of refugees travelling to the States are affiliated to Burmese political opposition groups who took part in the 1988 nationwide uprising in Burma and fled to the Thai-Burma border. They have expressed mixed feelings about resettling in the US - sadness at leaving comrades behind in the jungles. Many admitted that: "The exodus could affect Burma's struggle for democracy in the short-term, but it is necessary for those who left to receive protection of a third country as it is unsafe for them to live in Thailand anymore". Thai authorities, who have important trade and economic relations with Burma, only reluctantly permit the refugees to remain in their country, and every year impose more restrictions on them to appease the Burmese regime.

FRESH ATTACKS LAUNCHED AGAINST KARENNI VILLAGERS

In recent weeks, Burma Army Light Infantry Brigade (LIB) 135 has launched several attacks on villages in Karenni State, according to a relief team assisting those displaced by the offensives. In one incident, Burma Army troops decapitated Ler Moo, an elderly Karenni man. They also murdered a 27-year-old school-teacher in Western Karen State, Burma. Some 500 people were displaced after these attacks, and are

terrified of returning to their land on the Karen/Karenni border. The attacks are the latest in a series of fresh offensives against the Karenni this year. In January, more than 5,000 Karen and Karenni people were displaced in this area and there are reported to be an estimated 50,000 internally displaced people in Karenni state and a total of at least one million in Burma. A further one to two million are refugees in neighbouring Thailand, India and Bangladesh.

BURMA JUNTA RELEASES THREE MORE PRISONERS

Burma's military junta released three more political prisoners from Insein Prison on 12 July. They are: Dr. Maung Maung Kyaw, lawyer U Thar Bann and Ma Suu Suu Win who were all arrested for their part in writing the history of political activities of Burmese students. Dr. Maung Maung Kyaw was originally detained at Moulmein Jail, in southern Burma and transferred to Insein prison earlier this year. U Thar Bann was first arrested in 1990 and imprisoned at Insein until 1995 and rearrested again in 1998 for trying to help write the historical document. Ma Suu Suu Win was first arrested in 1991 for her involvement in December 1991 student activities and released in 1992. She was rearrested again in 1998.

EX-TENNIS ACE SERGIO TACCHINI SUSPENDS BURMA SOURCE

Burma Campaign UK has welcomed the news that former tennis-star-turned sportswear-manufacturer Sergio Tacchini, is to stop sourcing from Burma. In a statement Sergio Tacchini said production would be suspended as of 31 July, due to "the difficult situation in Burma". Sergio Tacchini joins a growing list of retailers and manufacturers refusing to source from Burma. Last year, two other Italian sportswear companies, Kappa and Lotto, pulled out of Burma following boycott campaigns. Most clothing companies and retailers refuse to source clothing from Burma because of human rights concerns. They include Adidas, Calvin Klein, Nike, Gap, Reebok, Puma, Tesco, M&S and over 100 others.



AGM News

The BAI Annual General Meeting was held in Loreto Hall, St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2 on Monday 17 May. The meeting commenced with a viewing of BAI's new ten-minute video presentation - Burma - Democracy Denied. BAI hope to use the video as a communication tool, to further highlight the situation in Burma. The agenda items included reports by the outgoing chairperson and treasurer and a report from the group's part time co-ordinator John Copley. Amendments were made to the BAI

constitution and the election of new officers and executive committee was held. New members elected are: Victor Dixon, Sr. Bernadine Rush, Derbhail Ryan and Monica Manning, Sara Franch and John McEntagart - members of the outgoing executive - were also elected.

Hugh Baxter was re-elected chairperson and **Eileen Seymour** is vice-chairperson. **Michelle Hocht** was re-elected secretary and **Jennifer Keyes** is the group's treasurer.

A note of thanks on the night was expressed to **John Boorman**, Honorary President of Burma Action Ireland and to Loreto Hall for use of the

premises for meetings throughout the year.

BAI would also like to take this opportunity to thank all those who helped them with their work during the course of the year: the Department of Foreign Affairs; politicians across all parties, who have kindly given their time to meetings during the year; funders Trocaire and Development Co-operation Ireland (DCI); members and donors; Amnesty International (Ireland); Frontline; Community Action Network; National University of Ireland, Galway, NUI, Dublin and the press.

What can you do?

There are many ways you can help highlight the situation in Burma. You could consider undertaking some of the activities outlined below:

Politicians

Write to the Minister for Foreign Affairs (c/o Iveagh House, St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2), your local TD and/or your newly elected 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 and all other activists arrested on 30 May 2003,
- Urge a strengthening of the EU Common Position on Burma to include targeted sanctions against regime-controlled enterprises,
- Persuade UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to raise support for a UN Security Council resolution on Burma that supports an inclusive process of national reconciliation.

Here are the contact details for Ireland's newly elected MEP's representing Dublin, East, North West and South respectively:

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E-mail: pderossa@europarl.eu.int

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Regarding the central issue of the oppression of the Burmese people

Write appeals to the State Peace and Development Council (the Burmese military regime), calling for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all Burmese political prisoners.

In your letter, please ask the State Peace and Development Council to do the following:

- To immediately implement a nation-wide ceasefire to stop increased militarisation and anti-insurgency campaigns in the ethnic states,
- To allow representatives of the non-Burman ethnic nationalities to participate in talks with Daw Suu Kyi, which would facilitate broad-based and inclusive national reconciliation and the restoration of democracy,
- 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 and unhindered access to assist their return and reintegration.

Please address your action letters to the following:

General Khin Nyunt

Prime Minister, State Peace and Development Council

Ministry of Defence, Signal Pagoda Road

Dagon Post Office, Yangon

Union of Myanmar

Burma Action Ireland

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Web: www.freespeech.org/bai

The mailing of this newsletter is courtesy of Máire Hocht TD. and Senator Paschal Mooney

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:
Hugh Baxter

