



BURMA REPORT

December 2007

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Issue N° 54

Free all political prisoners, free Aung San Suu Kyi, free Burma.

The Irrawaddy Online Newsletter for November 21, 2007- http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=9385

UN Committee Approves Burma Resolution

By Edith M Lederer/AP Writer/United Nations - November 21, 2007

A UN General Assembly committee approved a draft resolution Tuesday strongly condemning the Burmese military government's crackdown on peaceful protesters and calling on the military junta to immediately release political prisoners.

The vote in the assembly's human rights committee was 88-24 with 66 abstentions. The resolution now needs the backing of the 192-nation world body. General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding but they do reflect world opinion.

The draft resolution calls on Burma's military government "to desist from further arrests and violence against peaceful protesters" and to lift "all restraints on the peaceful political activity of all persons by ... guaranteeing freedom of peaceful assembly and association and freedom of opinion and expression."

It also calls on the junta to provide UN special adviser Ibrahim Gambari with unrestricted access to all parties—including ethnic minority representatives, student leaders and dissident monks—and to engage with him to achieve "effective progress towards the restoration of democracy and the protection of human rights in Myanmar [Burma]."

Gambari, who visited Burma earlier this month, said last week he was making progress in nudging Burma's military junta toward meaningful dialogue with the pro-democracy opposition. But he acknowledged there were "serious concerns" about "the willingness of the government to move forward in a new direction."

Burma tried to block a vote on the draft resolution, proposing a motion of "no action" instead. It was defeated by a vote of 88 against to 54 in favor, with 34 abstentions.

Burma's UN Ambassador Kyaw Tint Swe called the draft resolution, supported by the United States and many Western countries, "objectionable both on grounds of procedure as well as substance."

Procedurally, he said if it was really necessary, the issue should be dealt with by the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Swe said the draft resolution's "real intention is to manipulate Myanmar's homegrown political process and to derail the seven-step political road map that Myanmar has set for itself for transition to a democratic society."

Burma's junta has been strongly criticized for sending troops to quash peaceful protests, initially led by students and then by Buddhist monks, in late September.

At least 15 people were killed, according to information authorities provided to UN human rights investigator Paulo Sergio Pinheiro. Dissidents and diplomats suspect the true figure is much higher.

Thousands were arrested, though Swe said all but 91 "who have been found to have been involved in a conspiracy to commit acts of terrorism" have been released.

Swe said the draft resolution "is replete with unfounded allegations emanating from the exiles and remnants of the insurgents who are waging a systematic disinformation campaign against Myanmar, aided and funded by some of the powerful Western countries."

Calling the challenges facing Burma "complex and delicate," he said the UN should be allowed "time and space to play a catalytic role in consolidating the national reconciliation process."

The draft resolution calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners, including pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been in detention for 12 of the last 18 years.

Burma's military has ruled the country since 1962. The current junta took power in 1988 after crushing the democracy movement led by Suu Kyi. In 1990, it refused to hand over power when Suu Kyi's party won a landslide election victory.

FOR PEACE, FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA

International Herald Tribune- Sunday, December 2, 2007 (Paris) - lawsyd <lawsyd@tpg.com.au> - Nwe Aung <nweaung@aol.com>, "EBO" <burma@euro-burma.be>
BURMA - Published: November 30, 2007 - <http://www.ihf.com/articles/2007/11/30/opinion/edbrown.php>

Time for serious dialogue - By **Gordon Brown** and **Nicolas Sarkozy**

Just two months ago, the world was shocked and outraged by the violent repression of peaceful demonstrations that took place in Burma. The images may have vanished from our screens, but we cannot and will not forget the plight of the Burmese people.

A country that has the natural resources to be an economic powerhouse is instead the sick man of Southeast Asia. As the rest of the region advances into the digital age, Burma is in danger of retreating to the dark ages.

Cut off from the outside world and denied access not only to democracy and respect for human rights, but also to proper education and basic economic rights, its society is in a state of disarray.

The huge demonstrations and protests over recent months have shown that the Burmese people have been pushed beyond breaking point by the regime.

Last week a new generation of leaders gathered in Singapore to mark an important milestone: 40 years of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or Asean. We welcomed that celebration: Asean today represents a proud and prosperous region standing at the heart of the global economy, its voice heard and respected across the world.

Asean's leaders faced the twin challenges of enshrining a charter that commits them to respect democratic and human rights and dealing with the ongoing crisis in Burma. The Burmese government was sent a clear message: There is no going back. We agree.

It is obvious now that the country is in a downward spiral of poverty and unrest. Like the European Union, Asean has always understood that economic growth and open markets cannot be pursued in isolation: Good economics are founded on good politics. But the politics of Burma are poisoned and now need urgently to be transformed for the wider health of the region.

We welcome the positive and conciliatory statement issued on Nov. 9 by Aung San Suu Kyi, holder of the Nobel Peace Prize and figurehead of the Burmese opposition. She signaled her desire to begin soon a meaningful and time-bound dialogue with the Burmese regime. She also emphasized the need for a growing role of the UN in Burma and underlined the need to engage with other political forces including Burma's ethnic nationalities. Those are welcome steps.

It's time the regime engages in a genuine dialogue. In this respect, the regime must remove restraints on Aung San Suu Kyi, give unfettered access to Ibrahim Gambari, the UN secretary general's special envoy, and heed the recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights, Paul Sergio Pinheiro. And they must enter wholeheartedly into dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi as well as with other opposition groups and ethnic leaders.

The goal must be genuine reconciliation and political transition. Nobody imagines that this process will be quick or simple. Burma is a complex mixture of ethnicity, religion and culture. The process will need to be broadly-based and inclusive, taking careful account of the need to build a lasting stability that includes Burma's key political and ethnic groups.

The neighboring countries are well placed to support and encourage such a process. And, although the military dictatorship must end, the military itself must continue to play an important role in any future government, as Aung San Suu Kyi herself has acknowledged.

Faced by the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Burma, the international community, and in particular the EU, has already extended its aid to address the needs of the most vulnerable people. The EU has also decided to reinforce existing sanctions against Burma in order to send a strong political message and has consequently established a new series of targeted sanctions against the military regime.

The EU also made clear that it stands fully ready to review, amend or reinforce existing restrictive measures in the light of developments on the ground and the results of the good-offices mission of Ibrahim Gambari.

We believe that positive change will be best encouraged by following a carrot and stick approach: a combination of restrictive, targeted measures on the one hand and the alleviation of these measures as well as the prospect of a comprehensive economic initiative on the other.

However, this move will become possible if, and only if, there is a clear signal that a genuine transformation leading to a new, democratic government of Burma is under way.

The prize for Burma's long-suffering people, and for neighbors who have suffered too long from the problems of refugees, narcotics and instability that spill across Burma's borders, is great indeed: a prosperous, stable Burma living up to its economic potential and adding to the region's economic dynamism.

But achieving that prize will require sustained engagement and real mobilization by the international community. We will

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continue to stand by the Burmese people as they prepare to mark 60 years of independence.

We hope that 2008 will finally bring peace and reconciliation to Burma.

Gordon Brown is prime minister of Britain, and Nicolas Sarkozy is president of France.

November 21, 2007 - The First Post November 20, 2007 - <http://www.newsdeskspecial.co.uk/2007/11/gloria-backs-su.html>

Gloria backs Suu Kyi - Philippines president issues ultimatum

Burma's opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, confined to her home for 12 of the past 18 years, has found a powerful new woman ally in her fight for freedom, writes Edward Loxton for The First Post.

Alone among the 10 government heads of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo of the Philippines spoke out strongly on Suu Kyi's behalf at the just-concluded Asean summit in Singapore, warning that the association's credibility could be destroyed unless the Burmese Nobel laureate and other Burmese political prisoners were freed.

Arroyo (right) issued an explicit threat - saying that unless Burma's military junta freed all its political prisoners, including Suu Kyi, and entered into a meaningful dialogue with the opposition, her government in Manila would find it difficult to ratify Asean's new charter. The charter, tabled for signature at the Singapore summit, is Asean's prize achievement, a document that gives the organisation legal standing as a political and economic entity in Asia. If the Philippines now blocked ratification, Asean would suffer a heavy blow to its credibility on the international scene.

The Asean summit did urge Burma to release Suu Kyi and other political prisoners, but failed as a group to support its plea with any persuasive measures. Cambodia and Laos broke ranks by arguing that the Burma question was a domestic issue outside Asean's terms of reference.

Burma continued to manipulate its friends within Asean, and managed to offer a further snub to special envoy Ibrahim Gambari by persuading the organisation to bar him from delivering a planned address on his recent Burma mission. Gambari did get to meet individual government leaders, telling them he thought his efforts in Burma were making some progress.

While Asean leaders gathered in Singapore, the Burmese junta pulled off another public relations trick by taking Suu Kyi from her home for a third, apparently inconclusive meeting with the junta's liaison minister, Kyaw Kyi. The state-controlled media gave the one-hour meeting equal billing with the Asean summit, but offered no details about what the two discussed.

"It was just a tactic by the regime to deflect attention from any discussion of the Burma issue at the Asean summit and give the impression that political progress is being made," said Burma commentator Aung Naing Oo. "It won't have fooled the Burmese people."

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News Summary: Euro-Burma Office "EBO" <burma@euro-burma.be>

ASEAN leaders sign landmark charter

Associated Press - 20 November 2007

Leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations on Tuesday signed a landmark charter for the first time in its 40-year history that will give a legal identity to the bloc as it prepares to create an ASEAN Community by 2015 that could eventually expand to include East Asian countries such as Japan, China and South Korea.

Wrapping up their annual meeting in Singapore, the leaders of the 10 ASEAN countries signed the charter, which promises, among other things, to respect and protect fundamental freedoms and human rights with the setting up of a body on human rights.

For most civil society groups, however, the charter, which has been leaked on the Internet, falls much below expectation as the provision for a human rights mechanism is ambiguous and provides neither deadline nor details.

The charter pledges commitment of ASEAN to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms of the people in the region. However, it merely stipulates that the ASEAN foreign ministers will determine the terms of reference for setting up the regional human rights body, and without any specific timeframe.



Arroyo

Some ASEAN diplomats admitted that it may take a long time for the bloc to finalize the terms of reference if members insist on forming a body with investigative power.

The charter also retained the group's principle of noninterference in the domestic affairs of member states, which has been blamed for making ASEAN helpless in helping to resolve political conflicts in the region, and also retained its consensual way of decision-making instead of introducing a voting system.

It has no provision for the imposition of sanctions, suspension of membership or expulsion of erring members.

Hindustan Times - New Delhi, November 26, 2007 - **Burma News** - "EBO" <burma@euro-burma.be>-www.euro-burma.eu

India stops arms sales to junta

THE BURMANET NEWS - November 24-26, 2007 Issue # 3350 - "Editor" <editor@burmanet.org> - www.burmanet.org

India has put all sale and transfer of arms to Myanmar on hold. The decision follows the suppression of pro-democracy protests in that country, South Block officials told HT.

India believes contact with the junta is in its strategic interest, but also wants to send out a message that it's not quite business as usual any longer.

India gave Myanmar three British-made Islander aircraft last year.

In Myanmar's capital Naypyitaw in January, External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee said India was willing to expand military ties. "We have decided to give a favourable response (to the request for military equipment)," he said. That deal — for some Dorniers — is now frozen.

On Wednesday, PM Manmohan Singh told Myanmarese counterpart Thein Sein in Singapore the reform process must not exclude pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The Irrawaddy - Fri 30 Nov 2007 http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=9472 -

Monastery closure makes mockery of Junta's Buddhist claims - Wai Moe-

THE BURMANET NEWS - November 30, 2007 Issue # 3354 - "Editor" <editor@burmanet.org> - www.burmanet.org

The Burmese junta often claims it believes deeply in Buddhism and encourages the growth of the faith. It's a claim that has the Burmese people shaking their heads in disbelief in view of the junta's latest crackdown, on Rangoon's Maggin Monastery.

The monastery was forced to close by soldiers on Thursday. No responsibility was taken by the authorities for the resettlement of the monks and lay people ejected from the compound.

The Alliance of All Burmese Buddhist Monks condemned the action as an "assault" on Buddhism and called on all Buddhists in Burma to defend their faith against regime actions they said threatened its survival.

In the Burmese ruby-mining town of Mogok, Mandalay Division, about 300 monks attempted to march from their monastery to a pagoda on Friday. They were stopped by the authorities.

Phyu Phyu Thin, a prominent Burmese activist, who used to work at Maggin Monastery's treatment center and hospice for HIV/AIDS patients, told The Irrawaddy that the authorities in Rangoon had denied a request by the oldest monk at the monastery, the 80-year-old father of its detained abbot, to allow the monks and other residents one or two days to leave.

"The authorities forced monks and everybody else from the monastery," Phyu Phyu Thin said. "The monks had to leave their belongings on the street. People who live near the monastery tried to help the monks move their things, but authorities stopped them giving any assistance."

One resident said the authorities had warned that legal action would be taken against anybody found helping the evicted monks or giving them shelter. People who went to help the monks were warned to stay away.

The 80-year-old monk spent the day on the street, until he was granted refuge at a monastery in Thingangyun Township in Rangoon. But he can only stay there temporarily.

One resident of Thingangyun Township said he was sad because Buddhist monks were being displaced in a "Buddhist land".

The renewed harassment of monks drew condemnation from the US State Department.

State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said in a statement that the junta's "repression belies the regime's claims to cooperate fully with the United Nations, which has repeatedly sought an end to the detention of political activists."

He said continuing arrests "bring into serious question" Burma's commitment to talks on moving toward democracy.

"Apparently, it was ordered closed. No one knows why," Shari Villarosa, the top U.S. diplomat in Burma, told on Friday

reporters in Bangkok, Thailand. "Arrests are continuing. We are getting reports on a daily basis of people being picked up," Villarosa said.

Maggin Monastery has been raided by soldiers four times since the September demonstrations. Its abbot, U Indaka, a former political prisoner, is still being detained at an unknown location.

In 1990, he was arrested and sentenced to five years imprisonment and defrocked for his role in a "patam nikkujjana kamma"—the boycott of alms from members of the military regime, which followed the junta's raids on monasteries in Mandalay. He was released in late 1994.

Maggin Monastery also sheltered a hospice and treatment center for HIV/AIDS patients who came from all over the country to seek help there.

The Irrawaddy Online News Alert:-November 19, 2007 - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=9357

No compromise, says junta mouthpiece - Wai Moe

THE BURMANET NEWS - November 17-19, 2007 Issue # 3345 - "Editor" <editor@burmanet.org> -www.burmanet.org

Burmese state-run newspaper, The New Light of Myanmar reported on Monday that there was "no reason to hold further discussions with any person or any organization except at the National Convention," despite the ongoing meetings between pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and the Burmese Minister for Relations, Aung Kyi.

Suu Kyi was taken on Monday from her Rangoon's villa where she has been held for the past four years to a state guesthouse, a Reuters report said. "They are supposed to be meeting every week," a Western diplomat at Burma's old capital told Reuters.

However, the statement was attributed to so-called "ethnic groups," slamming detained democracy leader for her role in the national reconciliation process. The state media have been launching similar statements against Suu Kyi since November 14 after she issued a statement following her meeting with UN special envoy Ibrahim Gambari on November 8.

The newspaper report said that the only dialogue that would resolve the crisis in the country is the National Convention.

The press in Burma is completely controlled by the junta. All articles that appear in newspapers are only published by permission of the state authorities. Publishing without permission can earn those responsible up to 20 years imprisonment under Act 19/20.

On November 17, The New Light of Myanmar reported junta head Snr-Gen Than Shwe's hardline speech at the 2007 annual general meeting of the Union Solidarity and Development Association. In his speech Than Shwe said, "The prevalence of peace and stability of the state, the economic might of the people, and state and human resources development are essential requirements in building a new state. While understanding these requirements we have declared a 'Seven-Step Road Map' towards a democratic state. The Seven-Step Road Map is the only means to smooth transition towards a new state."

He urged people to join the junta's road map in building a new state.

Than Shwe also claimed that the economic and social standards of people in Burma had improved. He said that the literacy rate had increased to 94.75 percent and that life expectancy of Burmese people had risen due to the development of the military government's healthcare system.

Than Shwe did not mention the role of the UN in Burma's inclusive national reconciliation process in his speech, nor did he mention the meetings between Suu Kyi and the junta's liaison officer, Minister of Relations Aung Kyi,

However, UN agencies and experts say that up to 40 percent of Burmese children leave school every year to work for their family's welfare, because of poverty. And although hundreds of thousands of people are living with HIV/AIDS, the junta invests only about 2 percent of GDP for education and health. 90 percent of Burma's population is living on less than US \$300 annual income, the lowest rate among all Southeast Asian nations.

Monday 3 December 2007 - [Shan-EUgroup] - Shan-EUgroup <Shan-EUgroup@yahoo.com>

Burma: Wheels In Motion *Monday 3 December 2007 Garry Woodard*

Although Australia is not a member of the Security Council, it has options on the international stage, particularly in a 'good cop, bad cop' scenario. In opposition, Labor supported taking the SPDC leaders to the International Criminal Court, or the international Court of Justice.

The Saffron Revolution has set change in motion inside Burma, even though it may be imperceptible from outside. Under the surface, people feel deeply about the military action against the Buddhist monks, who had been demonstrating peacefully against hardship, under ground rules informally agreed to by the local military commanders. There is now a

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split between many of the regional military commanders and the hardline top leadership.

The international reaction to the way the Saffron Revolution was put down was also quite profound. It was rejected by ASEAN countries, which have been trying unavailingly to persuade the inaptly named State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) that it should act more humanely in controlling demonstrations of dissent.

While ASEAN's will to do something about Burma has cooled down since it condemned the SPDC's actions in the UN Security Council, the organisation recognises that it has a problem which tarnishes its own reputation, now that it has adopted a Charter whose pillars are democracy, human rights and good governance.

Another problem is the international action generated by smart sanctions, which Australia joined after Howard appeared to overrule Downer on the matter, perhaps after a call from the White House. Singapore is in the front line here, being very sensitive about its international business reputation.

The third important factor is the influence of public opinion in some ASEAN countries, which has been considerably boosted by the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar caucus. Public opinion on Burma supports greater activity by Indonesia as a developing democracy, and probably Thailand, the next chair of ASEAN.

Up to now the main action has been in the United Nations. That much maligned organisation comes out of it well, although Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has to feel his way in exercising the ambivalent authority given by a Security Council in which China and Russia are adamantly opposed to change through international pressure or indeed force. The UN special envoy to Burma, Ibrahim Gambari, a Nigerian, has visited Burma twice and human rights rapporteur for Burma, Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, has been allowed to make his first visit in four years. Gambari has achieved quite a lot against the odds.

On his second visit he was snubbed by the top leadership. But he turned this to advantage in the best judo tradition by seeing democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi just before his departure and securing a statement that he was able to promote to the world. It is a statement that government and NGOs can get behind. She essentially commits herself to negotiations without preconditions, except that talks should be soon and tripartite - that is, in the presence of the UN as facilitator.

The SPDC knows that there are carrots as well as sticks, but it is clearly unsure that they will not be equally unpalatable, and even destabilising. It therefore rejected Gambari's offer of a poverty alleviation commission. Another sign of the regime's extreme sensitivity was that it gave UN resident coordinator Charles Petrie his marching orders for a mild reference to economic conditions. Petrie will be at the Australian National University update conference on Burma on 10 -11 December, along with Australian Richard Horsey, who recently left Rangoon after an outstanding term as International Labour Organisation resident representative.

Economic hardship sparked the Saffron Revolution, just as it did the 1988 demonstrations which led to thousands of deaths, and the preceding U Thant riots in 1974, which had been preceded by worker demonstrations when dictator Ne Win left the country. In the two previous cases, Western governments and business were forgiving, but unavailingly, for the Burmese military habitually reject expert economic advice. The experience provides a warning against simple economic appeasement, which has been advocated in Australia, although it cuts no ice with the private sector.

Persuading the SPDC to pursue more rational economic policies and to radically change priorities is obviously going to be a difficult and delicate exercise. Burma's best friends - such as Indonesia, which can speak from a relevant 40 year history; and China, which has changed economic causes over the last 30 years and constricted the military role in business and so can provide even more powerful lessons - have opportunities for an active diplomacy of quiet persuasion. China has already successfully played a similar role with its other introverted and unpredictable neighbour, North Korea.

The roles that China and Indonesia can play should engage Australia. There may be scope for partnership, just as the Australia-Indonesia partnership brought about a settlement on Cambodia. The Indonesian Foreign Minister at the time, Ali Alatas, is still an active player in regard to Burma. Regional activity provides the best ever Australian diplomacy.

Although Australia is not a member of the Security Council, it has options on the international stage, particularly in a 'good cop, bad cop' scenario. In opposition, Labor supported taking the SPDC leaders to the International Criminal Court, or the international Court of Justice. If ASEAN should decide to suspend Burma's membership, as is mooted from time to time, this could lead to action on its UN membership.

Greater international publicity, in the region and in the UN, for the military regime's appalling record of gross economic mismanagement, unprecedented corruption and distortion of priorities, could prove a powerful pressure within as well as outside Burma. Many Burmese felt profoundly humiliated when, in the year before the 1988 uprising, the UN declared resource-rich Burma one of the world's 10 least developed countries.

Downer's foreign policy on Burma was a characteristic justification of inaction. Nothing could be done, he would say, because the military regime was impervious to advice and Burma was a colony of China, which would be news to leaders in both countries. We can look forward to Burma providing an opportunity for a more active Australian middle power diplomacy and to the reactivation of the Parliamentary Friends of Burma group.

About the author: **Garry Woodard** is a former Australian ambassador to Burma.

Reuters – India - Thu Dec 6, 2007 - <http://in.reuters.com/article/southAsiaNews/idINIndia-30852820071206?pageNumber=2&virtualBrandChannel=0>

Ignoring Myanmar grievances a recipe for more unrest - By Darren Schuettler

Shan-EUgroup <Shan-EUgroup@yahoo.com>

BANGKOK (Reuters) - Myanmar's ruling generals may face another "explosive" situation if they ignore the deepening domestic economic crisis which triggered mass protests against the regime this year, an expelled U.N. official said.

Charles Petrie, the top U.N. resident diplomat kicked out for highlighting the former Burma's economic woes, said the regime's refusal to acknowledge the grievances that fuelled the protests was a "pretty bad cocktail" that could lead to further unrest.

"There is this growing impoverishment and growing inability of people to meet their daily needs, which has the potential to be explosive," he told Reuters after leaving Yangon this week.

"The more people are impoverished, the less educated they are, the more they have to confront diseases that push them more into poverty, the more difficult the situation is to govern".

"If you take all these elements together, you don't necessarily have a train on a train track," said the 48-year-old Paris-born son of a British diplomat.



Petrie, whose five-year posting was due to end in next July, was told in November that his statement on U.N. Day the previous month had damaged Myanmar's image and he was no longer welcome.

The statement said the protests that began in mid-August against shock increases in fuel prices and snowballed into a monk-led uprising against the junta were indicators of the dire state of the economy after 45 years of military rule.

"That is something I think is very dangerous for the regime not to understand," said Petrie, fearing that the generals could use violence again to clamp down on public anger.

"Some would argue that my expulsion was part of that intimidation, basically making the point that if others champion your cause, we can also take care of them," he said. At least 15 people were killed in the junta's crackdown against the biggest anti-junta protests in nearly 20 years, drawing unprecedented international criticism and pressure to embark upon meaningful reforms.

However, the generals have made clear they do not intend to do anything outside the framework of their seven-step democracy roadmap, which the West dismisses as a sham to solidify the army's grip on power.

Critics say the regime's decision to restrict the drafting of a new constitution to a government-appointed panel was a clear snub of the U.N.'s effort to promote national reconciliation by including opposition and ethnic groups.

Myanmar Information Minister Kyaw Hsan told reporters in the new capital Naypyidaw on Monday that "no assistance or advice" from others was needed.

Petrie said the mission of U.N. Special Envoy to Myanmar Ibrahim Gambari, who visited twice after the protests and is expected to return this month, "is becoming more complicated" but he did not see a loss of momentum.

"I think it's important that we continue banging at the same door, continue making the same points, continue attempting to engage, because there may be an aligning of different things that will allow for a breakthrough," he said.

December 11, 2007 - **The Irrawaddy** - <http://www.burmanet.org/news/2007/12/11/irrawaddy-burmese-delegation-on-mission-to-us-lalit-k-jha/>

Burmese Delegation on Mission to US - Lalit K Jha

THE BURMANET NEWS - December 8-11, 2007 Issue # 3360 - "Editor" editor@burmanet.org - www.burmanet.org

A five-member delegation of Burmese leaders—living in exile in Thailand—arrived Sunday on a two-week mission to the United States to lobby their cause, seek more support and resources to accelerate the pro-democracy movement inside Burma, and to counter the junta's propaganda that only the military can keep the country united.

Representing a variety of ethnicities and including exiled leaders from the National League for Democracy, the delegation held face-to-face talks with members of the Washington DC-based think tank, the Center for Strategic and International Studies—the policymakers, lawmakers and academics who influence US policy on Burma.

The members of the delegation are: Khaing Soe Naing Aung, vice-president of the Arakan Liberation Party and vice-president of the National Council of the Union of Burma; Rimond Htoo, secretary of the Karenni National Progressive Party; Win Hlaing, an elected member of parliament and secretary of NLD (Liberated Area); Maung Maung, the general secretary of Federation of Trade Unions-Burma, as well as the National Council of the Union of Burma; and Lway Aye Nang, the president of the Palaung Women's Organization.

A sixth member, Bo Hla Tint, finance minister for the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma and an NLD spokesman in Washington, joined the delegation in the US.

The tone and tenure of their maiden public appearance and their agenda for the next two weeks was set by Burmese Prime Minister-in-exile Sein Win, who made an unexpected and unscheduled appearance at the meeting and briefly addressed the delegates on Monday afternoon.

Responding to charges that the pro-democracy leaders would not be able to keep the nation united and that Burma would disintegrate into various ethnic regions once the present regime lost power, Sein Win alleged that it was, in fact, the military junta which was following a policy of "divide and destroy" in the country.

"Our policy is the opposite of theirs. It is very important for us to have ethnic harmony if we want to move ahead with development, freedom and democracy. We are very worried that the military is trying to divide the country on ethnic grounds. We [support] human rights, democracy and ethnic harmony," said Sein Win, who had just arrived from Norway and other European nations where he was campaigning for the Burmese pro-democracy movement.

Observing that the situation in Burma was now very critical, the Prime Minister said, "We all have to work together and solve this problem. We are now at the stage of getting together and working together for ethnic harmony."

Speaking in Burmese—which was translated into English for the audience—delegate Win Hlaing alleged that the military junta did not want to engage in genuine dialogue. While the NLD stands for peaceful resolutions to the civil unrest and restoration of democracy in Burma, it is the junta that is indulging in violence and atrocities against the people of the country, he said.

"We request the international community to increase the pressure on the junta," Sein Win concluded, adding that allowing the regime to continue its atrocities is destroying the unity of the country.

Addressing an audience for the first time in the US, Rimond Htoo initially came across as nervous, but was soon at ease, making people laugh with his humor. Representing the ethnic Karenni community, he said that the Karenni originally wanted independence from Burma. "But this is not the case now," he said. "Ethnic communities are not trying to cause the country to disintegrate as is being propagated by the military junta."

Rimond Htoo said the ethnic communities first took up arms for protection against the junta which had unleashed a reign of terror. "The policy of the Ethnic National Council is to remove the regime and establish a genuine democracy in the country. We would work together to achieve federal democracy," he said.

Referring to military government propaganda that without the regime the ethnic communities would seek independence, he said: "This is incorrect. It is also incorrect that all the ethnic groups would continue fighting if the military were not in power."

Representing the Arakan Liberation Party, Khaing Soe Naing Aung listed various agreements reached by the ethnic communities for a united and federal Burma. "We want a democratic federal system and we are all working towards this," he said.

In a forceful presentation, Bo Hla Tint argued that, when the time came, the pro-democracy and ethnic leaders would show the world that they are capable of governing the nation more effectively than the junta. Referring to recent steps taken by the military government towards national reconciliation and starting dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi, he said: "The military is indulging in window dressing. It is not interested in a genuine dialogue.

"We want the US to be assertive and send a clear message, not only by statements, but by deeds," said Khaing Soe Naing Aung, adding that, first and foremost, the European Union, the US and Asean should have strategic consultations on this issue and try to bring China on board. "Once China is on board, India would come automatically," he said.

Maung Maung, general secretary of the NCUB, said that in order to carry the movement forward inside Burma there would constantly be a need for resources. "We need more funds for setting up training camps and underground networks inside Burma. Unfortunately, this is not coming through. We need more now. Help us get more funds," he said.

December 11, 2007 – **The Irrawaddy** - <http://www.burmanet.org/news/2007/12/11/irrawaddy-us-congress>
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US Congressional Gold Medal for Aung San Suu Kyi? - Lalit K Jha

THE BURMANET NEWS - December 8-11, 2007 Issue # 3360 - "Editor" editor@burmanet.org - www.burmanet.org.

A resolution has been moved in the US Congress to award Aung San Suu Kyi a Congressional Gold Medal—the highest US civilian award, which is bestowed only on the rarest of individuals, such as the Dalai Lama and Nelson Mandela.

The resolution (H.R. 4286) was moved in the US House of Representatives last week by Congressman Joseph Crowley (D-NY). It is co-sponsored by as many as 237 lawmakers in a house of 453 members.

The resolution, which has now been sent to the House Committee on Financial Services, recommended that Burmese democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi be awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in recognition of her courageous and unwavering commitment to peace, nonviolence, human rights and democracy in Burma.

The resolution recollected the achievements of Aung San Suu Kyi, who has spent more than 12 of the past 17 years under house arrest. She is the world's only imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize recipient.

"For her efforts on behalf of the Burmese people, she was awarded the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought in 1990, the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2000, and the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991," the statement read.

As Suu Kyi continues to fight on behalf of the Burmese people, the resolution noted that she even donated the \$US 1.3 million from her Nobel Prize to establish a health and education fund for Burma.

"Despite an assassination attempt against her life, her prolonged illegal imprisonment, the constant public vilification of her character, and her inability to see her children or to see her husband before his death, Suu Kyi remains committed to peaceful dialogue with her captors, Burma's military regime, and Burma's ethnic nationalities towards bringing democracy, human rights and national reconciliation to Burma," stated the resolution.

Congressional sources told The Irrawaddy that given the level of support Aung San Suu Kyi carries in the Congress it is expected to be passed soon by both the House of Representatives and the Senate. The Dalai Lama was the last foreign national to receive this highest American civilian award. Despite opposition from China, the award was bestowed on him in October this year.

Also in October, Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded honorary citizenship of Canada by the Canadian Parliament—the highest civilian award in the country. She was only the fourth person in Canada's history to receive this award.

Ten Years On

The Life and Views of a Burmese Student Political Prisoner

by **Moe Aye**

(Former Burmese Student Political Prisoner)

(170 pages) in German Euro 10.- + Postage
Burma Büro e.V., P.O. Box N° 27 03 66, D-50509 Köln, Germany.

Tel: 0221-9522450 Fax:0221-9522470

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Published by : Burma Buero e.V., P.O.Box 27 03 66, DE-50509 Cologne Tel: + 49 (0) 221-9522450 Fax: + 49(0) 221-9522470
e-Mail: <burmabureaugermany@t-online.de> - <http://www.burmabureaugermany.com>