



BURMA REPORT

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

"euro_burma" <euro_burma@verizon.net> (EBO) - Euro-Burma Office -1000 Bruxelles, Belgium 12.04.2008

NLD calling for the international monitoring mechanism in the referendum

UNOFFICIAL TRANSLATION BY THE NCGUB

The National League for Democracy
No (97/B) West Shwegondine Street
Bahan Township, Rangoon

10 April 2008
7th Waxing Moon of Tagu, 1369 Burmese Era

Special Announcement No: 5/04/08

1. In order to ratify the Republic of the Union of Burma Draft Constitution (2008) through a "National Referendum", military authorities concerned and organizations backed by the authorities are given full rights to activities, including the right to organize, assemble, and deliver speeches whereas members of the National League for Democracy (NLD) are prevented from doing so.
2. In order to win support for the said draft constitution, authorities have given its affiliated organizations the right to freely distribute papers like announcements and pamphlets. At the same time, the authorities have been persecuting NLD members by seizing or attempting to seize official NLD papers, summoning NLD organizing committee members for interrogation and arresting them.
3. The authorities have been propagandizing and garnering support for their draft constitution through their radio, newspapers, and television every day while at the same time imposing control and restrictions on private publications and journalists who are prevented from exercising their freedom of expression.
4. Moreover, in recent days, members of the NLD were bushwhacked and attacked with the intention of creating an atmosphere of fear in order to intimidate the people. The situation clearly illustrates the fact that there is no freedom or fairness for the referendum even now. Hence, for the people, the situation is such that they cannot rely on the national referendum to be transparent, free, and fair.
5. Such being the case, it is hereby declared that in order to enable the people of all nationalities, including the ethnic nationalities, to freely cast their votes and regain the trust and respect of the international community, it is vital to allow international monitors, including the United Nations, to observe the referendum.

As per the decision taken at the Central Executive Committee Meeting of 9 April 2008

Central Executive Committee
NLD

Rangoon

THE IRRAWADDY http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=11530 news@irrawaddy.org
Junta Using Threats to Win Referendum Vote, Says NLD
By WAI MOE - Thursday, April 24, 2008 news@irrawaddy.org

FOR PEACE, FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA

Burmese civil servants have been told they face the sack if they fail to vote in favor of the draft constitution in the May 10 referendum, according to the opposition National League for Democracy.

An NLD statement on Thursday said that farmers who failed to vote in favor of the proposed constitution would have their land nationalized and students who voted "No" would be barred from continuing their studies.

NLD spokesman Thein Nyunt told *The Irrawaddy* that people across Burma had informed the NLD of the intimidation. Civil servants and members of the pro-government Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) were being told to vote in advance, Thein Nyunt said.

Several government officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the regime was planning to make school teachers, university lecturers and civil servants vote in advance in the presence of senior military officers.

"This is clear intimidation to vote "Yes," said Win Min, a Burmese political analyst living in Thailand. "It's unacceptable, since it violates the basic right to vote in secret. "It also shows that the authorities are worried that these civil servants are likely to vote 'No' if they're free to do so."

The NLD statement repeated an earlier call on the electorate to reject the draft constitution in the May referendum, calling it unfair.

The statement said that although the draft could be approved by a majority of more than 50 per cent, any amendment would require more than 75 of parliamentary representatives to become law.



Local Red Cross members help a disabled voter in casting her vote during a demonstration of the ruling junta for the upcoming referendum on the constitution in Rangoon on April 10. (Photo: AFP)

Members of the referendum commission and sub-commission were immune from disciplinary action if they interfered in the voting process, the NLD said.

The referendum laws excluded independent observers from monitoring the counting of the votes, and one sole individual, Aung Toe, leads the committee of the national convention and the committee of the constitution drafting, the NLD complained.

The NLD statement also complained that the electorate had not had enough time to study the constitution draft, which had been available to the public for only one month.

Associated Press - 14 April 2008 - Burma News - 15 April 2008 - "ebo" <burma@euro-burma.be> (Euro-Burma Office)

Myanmar Vote Needs International Observers, Says UN Investigator

BRUSSELS--Myanmar's planned referendum on a new constitution will be reduced to a mere "ritual" unless international observers are allowed to monitor the vote, a U.N. human rights investigator said Monday.

The military regime in Myanmar will need to allow the opposition to organize and allow more free speech rights for the May 10 referendum to have any credibility, said Paulo Sergio Pinheiro.

"How can you have a referendum without any of the basic freedoms?" he asked in an interview. "It would be important to have international observers to validate the referendum, because if not it would be just a ritual without real content."

Pinheiro said he had received reports of supporters of a "no" vote in the referendum being detained.

"How can you believe in this referendum?" Pinheiro told The Associated Press on the sidelines of a visit to the European Parliament. "I haven't seen any sign of liberalization," he said.

THE IRRAWADDY Bush, Brown Call for Referendum Observers

Covering Burma and Southeast Asia

By LALIT K JHA / NEW YORK Friday, April 18, 2008 - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=11452

US President George Bush and British Prime Minister Gordon Brown on Thursday reiterated their commitment to restore democracy and human rights in Burma and called on the military government to invite international observers to the May 10 constitutional referendum.

The Burma issue was discussed during the meeting of the two leaders—among the most steadfast supporters of Burma's pro-democracy movement—at the White House in Washington DC.

Emerging from the meeting with Bush, Brown told the media: "We reiterated our common stand on Burma, where it is important to repeat the call for reconciliation." Details of the discussion were not released.

A US-sponsored draft of a presidential statement is pending for discussion in the UN Security Council and is expected to be opposed by Russia and China, permanent members of the Security Council, and supporters of the Burmese regime.

Commenting on the May 10 referendum on the draft constitution, a US National Security Council spokesman said: "They [Britain] are as concerned as we are about the process leading to the referendum—the fact that groups in Burma are not allowed to express their position on the referendum freely; the fact that the referendum is a flawed referendum at this point that bars certain people from even engaging and holding public office because they were married to foreigners, or are married to foreigners; the fact that the referendum and the constitution talk about 25 percent of the seats in the legislature being reserved for the military. You know, all of these things need a free and fair airing, and that's not happening right now in Burma."

He said the military junta should invite international monitors.

"The British have called for this, and we have called for this, and the UN has called for this," he said.

"How can you make sure, in a place like Burma, where freedom has been so restricted, that the process of holding a referendum really is open," he asked.

The Irrawaddy - news@irrawaddy.org - Monday, April 28, 2008 - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=11573

UNSC Deadlocked on Burma

By LALIT K JHA / UNITED NATIONS Monday, April 28, 2008

The Security Council remains deadlocked on a presidential statement on Burma even as diplomats of the 15-member UN body met last week for the second time in a month.

Diplomatic sources told The Irrawaddy that representatives from the Security Council member nations met on Thursday to discuss the second draft proposed by three permanent members—the United States, Britain and France.

A copy of the second draft obtained by The Irrawaddy reflects the urgency on the part of the three Western powers as time seems to be fast running out in the run-up to the May 10 referendum on the draft constitution, which is heavily loaded in favor of the Burmese military junta.

However, it appears that the two staunch supporters of the military junta—veto-wielding China and Russia—are in no hurry and continue to block any effort for a discussion or move to get the non-binding presidential statement passed by the Security Council.

With both groups apparently reluctant to change their respective stands, diplomatic sources said the next meeting on the US-proposed presidential statement would be held at the ambassadorial level.

However, it is not clear when the permanent representatives of the 15-member Security Council would be meeting on the issue of Burma.

While there is little change between the two drafts of the presidential statements except for the replacement of words here and there, the second draft circulated among the member nations last week urged the Burmese military government and all parties concerned to co-operate fully with the United Nations.

Given that the time is running out, the proposed presidential statement urges the Burmese junta to take on an "urgent basis," instead of a "timely manner" (as was in the previous draft)," concrete, meaningful steps" that result in genuine, "substantive" (added this time) dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi and all concerned parties and ethnic groups in order to achieve an inclusive national reconciliation with the direct support of the United Nations.

Except for these minor amendments, there has not been any change between the two drafts, which China and Russia have opposed.

Referring to the May 10 referendum, the draft statement calls on the junta to make the process all inclusive and credible by allowing full participation of all political actors, including Suu Kyi.

It reminds the Burmese regime of its commitment to have a free and fair referendum in which all parties will be allowed to participate on equal terms. The statement stresses that this commitment must be followed by action, including the guarantee of freedoms of expression, association and assembly in the political process leading up to the referendum, as well as independent monitoring of the vote counting.

Last week, the US ambassador to the UN, Zalmay Khalilzad, acknowledged that their efforts to send a strong message to the military junta had not yet been successful.

Expressing frustration at the Russian and Chinese vetoes, Khalilzad said, "The Council cannot be silent—should not be silent—in the face of what has happened and what has not happened."

Washinton Post-05-04-08 - http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/04/AR2008050400451.html?nav=rss_world

Cyclone Will Not Delay Burma Vote, Military Says Hundreds Killed as Storm Wreaks Havoc a Week Before Referendum on Constitution

By Amy Kazmin - Washington Post Foreign Service - Monday, May 5, 2008

BANGKOK, May 5 -- Burma's military junta vowed Monday to push ahead with a controversial national referendum on a new constitution, even as the country was reeling from the impact of a cyclone that killed more than 350 and left tens of thousands homeless.

Packing winds of up to 120 mph, Tropical Cyclone Nargis slammed into Rangoon, Burma's former capital and its largest city, and the Irrawaddy Delta region Saturday.

The powerful winds and heavy flooding knocked out power and telecommunications lines, lifted roofs from public buildings, and destroyed tens of thousands of bamboo and thatch homes.

"It has been a catastrophic situation," said Terje Skavdal, regional head of the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "It has flattened everything in its way. It will be a major, major clean-up operation for the government."

Nevertheless, the country's military leaders stuck with Saturday's referendum on a new constitution, which they say will lay the foundations for a "discipline-flourishing democracy." Opposition groups have condemned the vote as an attempt to legitimize military rule.

"The referendum is only a few days away and the people are eagerly looking forward to voting," the government said Monday in a statement carried in the state media and reported by the Reuters news service.

State-run television reported that 351 people, including 109 on a small island off the country's southwest coast, had been killed and that two towns deep in the Irrawaddy Delta had been virtually flattened. The government declared five regions disaster zones, including Rangoon, the dilapidated colonial-era capital. An estimated 5 million to 6 million people live in these areas.

U.N. officials said that assessing the extent of the damage will probably take days, given the poor communications in Burma and difficulties moving along obstructed roads into the country's remote regions. However, one U.N. official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said tens of thousands of people are probably in need of emergency food, shelter and drinking water.

The generals' decision to push ahead with the referendum is likely to provoke an outcry from opposition groups in exile, who said Sunday that the regime should focus all its efforts on the massive amount of humanitarian relief that will be needed.

"What the people need urgently now is not a referendum but relief. More people are going to die or suffer if they do not receive relief assistance in a timely manner," said exiled Burmese academic Win Min, who lectures on politics at Thailand's Payap University.

The government's "logistical capacity will be urgently needed for carrying food and medical equipment, not ballot boxes," agreed the U.N. official.

Win Min noted that the storm's destruction of infrastructure and telecommunications would make a vote difficult to organize in any event.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/04/AR2008050400451.html?nav=rss_world

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Burma's Sham Elections

- <http://www.feer.com/features/2008/april/burmas-sham-elections>
 by Benedict Rogers – 25 April 2008

Last September, as the demonstrations in Burma were growing, I was on the India-Burma border visiting Burmese refugees. The stories I heard illustrate the horror occurring on a daily basis inside Burma. I met a man who had been arrested by the Burma Army, and hung upside down for an entire night, with soldiers beating him and banging his body against a pillar continuously. Another man was beaten so badly he is now paralyzed. Yet another described how in Burma's prison camps, prisoners are shackled and chained, yoked like oxen and forced to plough fields. One refugee

who'd been to the prison camps told how a group of prisoners who had attempted to escape were bound and hung above a fire, repeatedly stabbed, and then placed in a tub of salt water.



Reuters photo / Sukree Sukplang

'Supreme leader' of Burma's ruling junta, Gen. Than Shwe, inspects a parade in Nay Pyi Taw.

These are the barbarities faced by the people of Burma who go to the polls next month for the first time in 18 years. They will vote in a referendum on a new constitution proposed by Burma's illegal military regime. The last time it held a vote, in 1990, the regime was shocked that despite all its efforts to undermine the opposition and intimidate the voters, it still lost the elections. This time, it has learned from experience - and has introduced every possible means of rigging the ballot in advance.

It is difficult to imagine a more farcical charade. When the regime rejected the United Nation's request for international monitors during the referendum, it lost any last semblance of credibility. What kind of referendum is it where those who campaign against the proposed constitution are subject to a jail sentence of at least three years?

Millions of Burmese are disenfranchised. Buddhist monks and nuns, who number 500,000, are denied the vote - a price for their courageous demonstrations last September which were brutally crushed. Religious leaders from other faiths are also excluded. Over 500,000 internally displaced people on the run in the jungles of eastern Burma, as well as the 700,000 Muslim Rohingyas, treated as non-citizens and therefore stateless, are banned from participating. Millions living in conflict zones in the ethnic states, as well as refugees who have fled to neighboring countries and exiles further afield, will also be excluded.

The junta's game plan is not subtle. It plans to rubber-stamp its new constitution which, in turn, will enshrine military rule. The constitution drafting process completely excluded Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy, as well as the major representatives of the ethnic groups. Most of the members of parliament elected in 1990 are in prison or exile, and Ms. Suu Kyi is in her 12th year of house arrest. The National Convention, which drafted the guidelines for the constitution, involved no debate among the handpicked delegates, and none of the proposals made by the few ethnic representatives who did participate were adopted. Law 5/96 imposed prison terms of up to 20 years for discussing the constitution process.

The end product is a constitution which offers no improvement in human rights and democracy - and simply enshrines military rule. The commander-in-chief of the Burma Army will appoint 25% of the national legislators. He will also appoint the minister of defense, who will report to him. The army chief can seize power at any point, if he happens to believe that national security is threatened. There will be no independent judiciary, and the constitution cannot be amended for 10 years.

Political prisoners will be barred from contesting elections, and the president must be a person with military experience who has not married a foreigner. Ms. Suu Kyi is by definition ruled out.

The junta hopes that this sham will fool the international community into a belief that it is changing, so that pressure will ease. The international community, especially Burma's neighbors, must not fall for this trick. If the regime proceeds with this plan, and continues to ignore calls from the U.N. for dialogue with the democracy movement, tough action should follow. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon should take charge of Burma policy. Burma's best friends - China, India, Russia, Thailand and Singapore - should end their policies of appeasement. Other Asian nations, such as Malaysia, Indonesia and Japan, must speak out more forcefully. A universal arms embargo should be imposed, with their support.

FOR PEACE, FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA

And the U.N. Security Council should refer Burma's military leaders to the International Court for investigation into crimes against humanity.

This is a regime guilty of every possible human rights violation, including a campaign of ethnic cleansing involving the widespread, systematic use of rape as a weapon of war, forced labor, the use of human minesweepers and the destruction of over 3,200 villages in eastern Burma since 1996. There is arguably a case of genocide to be examined. Over 70,000 children have been taken off the streets and forced to join the Burma Army - the highest proportion of child soldiers in the world. More than 1,800 political prisoners are in jail, subjected to horrific torture. Burma's neighbors, and the rest of the world, should not be prepared to tolerate this any longer.

Mr. Rogers works for the human rights organization Christian Solidarity Worldwide, and serves as deputy chairman of the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission. He has made over 20 visits to Burma and its borders, and is the author of A Land without Evil: Stopping the Genocide of Burma's Karen People (2004, Monarch Books). The REVIEW will publish a longer article on Burma by the author in our upcoming May issue.

Associated Press - 08 May 2008 - **Burma News** - 09 May 2008 "EBO" Euro-Burma Office <burma@euro-burma.be>

UN secretary-general calls on Myanmar to delay referendum

UNITED NATIONS — The U.N. secretary-general is calling on Myanmar to postpone its constitutional referendum and focus on cyclone relief.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said Thursday that he is "deeply concerned about the welfare of the people of Myanmar at this time of national tragedy."

He is asking Myanmar's government to postpone its planned referendum on a new constitution two days from now and "focus instead on mobilizing all available resources and capacity for the emergency response efforts."

Myanmar's military junta has postponed voting in some parts of the country, v including Yangon, some outlying areas and parts of the delta heavily damaged by the storm.

Mizzima News, May 10, 2008 -THE BURMANET NEWS: - Issue # 3463 Sat, 10. May - "Editor" <editor@burmanet.org>

Facts about voting today in Burma

Mizzima News has found out the following facts in today while voting is in progress in many parts of the country.

- * Voters were asked to leave the polling booths as the counting began but some of the junta's supporters were allowed to remain.
- * Residents are forced to vote only 'Yes' (tick) votes
- * One person can vote for the whole family (no one vote for one person system)
- * Police and security forces standing by near pooling booths
- * Secret voting takes place inside pooling booths
- * No foreign and local journalists are seen in and around pooling booths
- * People not aware of contents of the draft constitution and yet they are voting
- * Advanced voting was done taken some days before 10 May and today voting is just a show
- * Residents arriving at polling booths found that their votes had been cast in advance voting (only their names and IDs were noted down)
- * Voters are asked to tick 'Yes' by security and official staff
- * Army gave notice to its soldiers and family members to vote 'Yes' only
- * Voters were asked to leave when the counting began before the closure of the pooling booths though junta's supporters were allowed to count the votes.

THE IRRAWADDY Massive Cheating Reported from Referendum
 Covering Burma and Southeast Asia **Polling Stations**

By YENI AND MIN LWIN Saturday, May 10, 2008 - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=11923

Burma's constitutional referendum went ahead as planned on Saturday in areas not affected by Cyclone Nargis, amid accusations of massive cheating at the polling stations and reports of a very low turnout.

Many voters in several Rangoon townships, Mandalay, Pegu, Sagaing and Magwe divisions told The Irrawaddy that referendum officials had handed out ballot papers already filled in with a tick, indicating approval of the government's draft constitution.

They also complained that the referendum was not free and fair, saying they cast their votes watched by officials, including members of the government-backed mass organization Union Solidarity and Development Association and militias such as Swan-Ar-Shin. Officials of the organizations sat close to the ballot boxes and advised people how to vote.

Voter turn-out was reported to be very light, despite fevered attempts by the regime to persuade people to participate. State TV broke into programming throughout the day with a video showing a group of smiling young women singing a ditty in support of a "Yes" vote. "Let's go vote with sincere thoughts for happy days," they sang.

About 27 million of Burma's 57 million population are entitled to vote.

Nyan Win, spokesman of the opposition National League for Democracy told The Irrawaddy that most polling stations closed at about 11 a.m. Officials then went to the homes of people who had not voted and made them fill in registration forms indicating they had handed in ballots that had already been filled in with a tick.



-Voting in a nationwide referendum in Hlegu Township of Rangoon. Burma's junta Saturday held a vote on a new constitution, ignoring pleas to focus on delivering urgently needed food supplies to 1.5 million cyclone victims facing disease and hunger. (Photo: AFP)

Rangoon-based Burmese journalists said security at polling stations was very strict. No foreign news agency correspondents or independent journalists were allowed near.

The cheating and intimidation observed on Saturday confirmed claims by human rights activists and western governments that the referendum would be a sham and neither free nor fair.

The regime had used both intimidation and vote-buying to assure itself of a "Yes" vote and would predictably resort to vote-rigging if it lost, observers said. Widespread rumors say the

results have already been fixed to deliver an 84.6 percent vote in favor of the charter, an AP report said.

The government has also been widely criticized for pressing on with the referendum while the country is still reeling from the catastrophic effects of Cyclone Nargis.

"Instead of putting all resources toward saving the lives of the victims, the military is concentrating on legalizing military rule in Burma forever through a sham constitutional referendum," said a joint statement from the All Burma Monks Alliance, the 88 Generation Students and the All Burma Federation of Student Unions.

Mizzima - (Breaking News) **April 26, 2008** - [Shan-EUgroup] Shan-EU <shaneu31@yahoo.com>

Monk led group fail to gather on Shwedagon

<http://www.mizzima.com/MizzimaNews/Breaking%20News/26-April-2008.html>

A clutch of people led by monks tried to gather to demonstrate against the junta in front of the Shwedagon Pagoda this afternoon.

Authorities have prohibited Buddhist monks from entering the historic pagoda precincts. Monks travelling by buses were interrogated on their way to downtown Rangoon from the suburbs and other neighbouring cities.

This is first surprise attempt to assemble at around 1 p.m since the Saffron Revolution last year failed. A majority of the monks who planned to take part in the demonstration today were stopped by the police.

Meanwhile, overseas Burmese protested in front of respective Burmese embassies lobbying voters to vote 'No' on the polling to approve the draft constitution in the referendum today.

Mizzima News - Tuesday, 08 April 2008 -

Suu Kyi sends floral basket at Ludu Daw Amar's funeral

- Written by **Nam Davies** - <http://www.mizzima.com/MizzimaNews/News/2008/April/21-April-2008.html>

New Delhi: A group of unidentified persons among the crowd which attended Ludu Daw Amar's funeral left a floral basket sent by Aung San Suu Kyi last night.

The unknown persons left the floral basket containing over 100 rose buds at her residence located on 38th Street where her remains were kept at about 11:30 p.m.

"Yes, it was confirmed that Daw Su sent the floral basket. They were all red rose buds. I suppose that this was arranged by friends from Mandalay. I have no idea who brought it. The floral basket sent by Daw Aung San Su Kyi had a phrase written on the basket," Ludu Daw Amar's son, writer Nyi Pu Lay, told Mizzima.

There was no confirmation how the Nobel Laureate and leader of the NLD, Daw Aung San Su Kyi, sent the floral basket as she is under house arrest. "No one at the funeral saw people who brought it," a source said.

"We sent a floral basket and a floral ring. One was sent by the NLD and the other by Daw Aung San Su Kyi. What we sent were received. It was arranged in coordination with the Mandalay NLD. I have no idea who arranged the basket Daw Aung San Su Kyi sent," NLD spokesperson Nyan Win said.

With her body at her residence on 38th Street there were more than 1,000 people who paid their tributes to Daw Amar. Among them were people from the Burmese literary community.

Although about five people were monitoring the events outside her residence and were taking pictures of people who brought floral rings or floral baskets no one was disturbed in anyway.

Political activists from Rangoon are travelling to Mandalay in order to reach the funeral service on time.

Ludu Daw Amar was 92 years old when she died. Wednesday (02.04.2008) at 10 a.m. her body will be cremated at Kyar Ni Gan.



Aung San Suu Kyi (Photo: Steven Shaver/Getty Images)

Rangoon.

By REUTERS - Friday, April 25, 2008

**THE
IRRAWADDY**
Covering Burma and Southeast Asia

US Senate Approves Top US Honor for Suu Kyi

-http://www.irrawaddy.org/highlight.php?art_id=11537

The US Senate voted on Thursday to award Burma's democracy advocate Aung San Suu Kyi the Congressional Gold Medal, America's top civilian honor.

The House of Representatives overwhelming approved similar legislation on December 17 to confer the honor on Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, who is being held under house arrest in

Past recipients of the gold medal include Winston Churchill, Pope John Paul II, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela and most recently, Tibet's Dalai Lama.

The US Campaign for Burma, a rights group, welcomed the Senate vote. "She richly deserves this award and the Burmese people are so proud that one of our own has been honored in this way," said Aung Din, co-founder of the group.

"The Burmese military generals have tried to isolate Aung San Suu Kyi from her own people and from the international community by keeping her under house arrest for over 12 years," Aung Din said.

The European Union will call next week for an international arms embargo on Burma's junta and warn of tougher sanctions if the generals fail to improve human rights conditions, according to a statement drafted by EU ambassadors on Thursday.

The EU resolution repeated a call for the release of more than 1,800 political prisoners, including Suu Kyi, and called on the junta to account for all casualties and missing people from the September 2007 crackdown.

anil verma <anilverma7@yahoo.com>, <nldmemberssupportersofcrppnldndassk@yahoo.com>, THE BURMANET NEWS - April 29, 2008 Issue # 3454" Editor" <editor@burmanet.org>

The IRRAWADDY COMMENTARY - Tuesday, April 29, 2008 - news@irrawaddy.org - www.irrawaddy.org

A 'No' Vote Means 'Let's Have a Dialogue'

By KYAW ZWA MOE - http://www.irrawaddy.org/opinion_story.php?art_id=11637&page=2

The word "No" has become increasingly popular in Burma since February 9, the day the ruling generals announced the constitutional referendum would be held on May 10.

If the majority of the Burmese people cast a "No" vote—as expected—it doesn't really mean "no" in political terms: it means "let's have a dialogue" to resolve the country's decades-long political impasse.

About 30 million enfranchised citizens—out of an estimated 55 million population—are called on to vote on the draft constitution, clearly a flawed document written by the junta's handpicked delegates during a 14-year process.

In the past two decades, the regime itself has always responded with a "no" to the people's dreams of living in a truly democratic country as an accepted member of the international community. The people are now in a position on May 10 to respond with a "no" to the military regime.

Strategically, a "No" vote opens at least a possibility for positive change. Maybe—just maybe—if the people's vote of "No" is accepted, a real dialogue between the military, opposition leaders and Aung San Suu Kyi might occur. A "No" vote will also give more legitimacy to calls by the international community for an inclusive dialogue, hopefully followed up by more concrete pressure.

On the other hand, after the referendum, the junta—as many observers predict—could manipulate the vote count, claim victory, and simply ignore cries of foul play and the protests of opposition groups and the international community.

Regardless of the actual outcome—a victory for the opposition or a rigged "Yes" victory for the junta—the country will enter a dangerous period in which anything could happen. Based on my experience with the junta, I believe we are about to witness more civil strife and bloodshed.

Politically, economically and socially, the once proud Burmese people have been beaten down by the 46-year rule of the military. People in the cities are subjected to constant intimidation by the military government's intelligence units. Special security police and goon squads monitor daily life. People in ethnic states along the borders have endured decades of war and countless villages have been uprooted.

In 1988, when the military regime staged a bloody coup, thousands of citizens, including monks and students, were gunned down by the junta's troops. The majority of the people's representatives who were elected in the 1990 general election were imprisoned, and the democratic vote was thrown out by the generals.

Recent images from the 2007 civil uprising are still fresh in the world's memory, showing the military's determination to hold on to power at all costs. About 1,800 political prisoners currently languish in prisons across the country. It is the tip of the iceberg of the generals' gross human rights violations.

The flaws of the junta's draft constitution are legion. It guarantees the military key leadership positions in the government. The constitution says the president would be the head of the state, but the real power would lie with the military commander in chief, instead of being derived from citizens in line with democratic principles.

The commander in chief is given the power to appoint 25 percent of the seats in both the upper and lower houses of parliament from among military officials; the offices of president and two vice presidents are controlled by the commander in chief; the commander in chief is granted a political position on the same level as a vice president; and the commander in chief is given authority to declare a "state of emergency" at any time and assume all legislative, executive and judicial powers.

A special clause in the constitution was inserted to deny Suu Kyi, the nation's long-suffering democracy icon, the right to seek public office. It bars anyone from contesting an election if they receive the benefits of citizenship from another country or are spouses of foreigners. Suu Kyi was married to a British citizen.

"If the draft constitution isn't approved, the people of Burma will have to struggle for some decades. But if it is approved, the people will have to suffer for many generations," said Nyan Win, a spokesperson for the National League for Democracy, which Suu Kyi heads.

Recently, the UN special envoy to Burma, Ibrahim Gambari, told The Irrawaddy, "I do not see an alternative to dialogue." Unfortunately, we see many alternatives to a dialogue—all of them bad for Burmese citizens.

The May 10 referendum may well be a springboard to more bloodshed, pain and suffering. Or, it may offer some hope for positive change.

The real power to determine the country's future remains in the hands of the junta and the upper-level officer corps, which has remained loyal to misguided dictators since 1988.

We are living in dangerous times, but a "No" vote is the best option for Burmese citizens to bring about a dialogue.

This commentary will appear in The Irrawaddy's May print magazine.

The Irrawaddy - NEWS ANALYSIS - Thursday, May 1, 2008 - news@irrawaddy.org

Burma's Political Transition Needs People Power

By **MIN ZIN** Thursday, May 1, 2008 - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=11695

The notion of political transition initiated by a country's elite has been a dominant discourse in Burmese politics since the late 1990s. The model advocates that a peaceful transition can be facilitated by negotiations between the regime's "doves" and opposition moderates. It would involve the opposition initiating a concrete proposal to the military in order to persuade the latter to sit at the negotiating table.

This political strategy gained currency in the early 2000s since it coincided with the political ascendancy of former Intelligence Chief Gen Khin Nyunt. At the time, talks between opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and the junta seemed to offer a glimmer of hope. However, simultaneously, the opposition movement was losing its strength in "people power" campaigns, such as the unsuccessful Four Nines (September 9, 1999) Mass Movement, and in armed struggles due to ethnic armies signing ceasefire agreements and the fall of the Karen National Union stronghold in 1992.

Any optimism in Burmese politics is never sustained for long. However, the transitional model remained popular as the only way out for the Burmese people. Proponents claimed there was "No alternative!"

"Many diplomats who we met always encouraged and even pressured us to initiate a proposal to the regime," said Nyan Win, a spokesperson for the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD). "In fact the party has always called for dialogue and has always been ready to negotiate."

In early 2006, the NLD proposed a transitional plan urging the junta to convene parliament with the winners of the 1990 elections in return for giving the regime recognition as an interim executive power holder. Though the party's call for a negotiated transition was rejected by the regime, the opposition forces—including the 92 MP-elects from the 1990 election and notable veteran politicians—continued to offer flexible transitional packages to the junta. None of them worked.

The proponents of the transition model often downplay the role of public action and mass movement. Some believe it will not happen because more than 20 percent of the population has been born since the uprising in 1988 and are therefore much less affected by the people's power movement of those times. Others worry that mass movement could be counterproductive to a possible negotiated transition—often the momentum of a protesting crowd will spiral out of control and threaten the careful process of negotiation. They all conclude that the army doesn't respond to public pressure.

Then, all of the sudden, the September protests broke out. The so-called "experts" and "policymakers" failed to see it coming. In the wake of the crackdown, UN-led mediation efforts were revived and Snr-Gen Than Shwe and his generals, once again, were called on to sit at the negotiating table. And once again they declined.

The question now to the advocates of the elite-driven transition model is what to do when the regime refuses to negotiate with the opposition? What is to be done when the military insist on a referendum to approve a constitution that will allow the perpetuation of military rule in the country?

Almost all supporters of the model say the people of Burma must accept whatever offer the junta makes. They say "something is better than nothing." Some suggested using the generals' flawed model of democracy as a starting point from which to pursue a more acceptable long-term solution.

"We must give consideration to possible generation change within the military," said Harn Yawngnwe, a well-known lobbyist and director of the Brussels-based Euro-Burma office. "The new blood of the army must have options available on the table when their time comes. This constitution and referendum, though they are flawed, can give reform options to a new generation of military officers. It will create a new dynamic for the country to get out of the current deadlock."

That's why many advocates of the elite-initiated transition advise the Burmese public to accept the constitution and hope it will lead to amendments with the objective of the military's gradual withdrawal from politics at a later period.

Tun Myint Aung, a leader of 88 Generation Students group, disagrees.

"It is such disgraceful advice. The so-called experts and policy makers are pushing our people to live in slavery," he said from his hideout in Burma. "We do not accept the military's constitution; not because we don't want gradual transition, but because the constitution is too rigid to make any change possible. The military holds a veto over any amendments."

Critics said it is now clear—after a series of rejected proposals from opposition groups and the UN—that rather than political carrots, it is much more likely that effective public action will compel the new military generation to choose the path to reform.

"Unless a mass movement challenges the corrupted military leadership, divisions within the military will not surface," said Kyaw Kyaw, head of the Political Defiant Committee under the National Council of Union of Burma, the umbrella opposition group in exile. "Besides lacking local and international legitimacy, the corrupt leadership is now losing its loyalty from within military ranks since the September protest. In a historical Burmese context, public action, or mass movement, has played a decisive role ever since the struggle for independence to the 1988 democracy uprising to the monk-led protests last September. It will continue to do so until we gain a genuine resolution."

In fact, only when mass movement with strategic leadership rises up against the current military top brass, then the elite's calculations, regime defection and international pressure will become relevant issues in facilitating a negotiated transition. In other words, political transition is not likely to take place within a framework of proposed constitutional means. Even amendments to the constitution with the hope of gradual reform will not be possible within a military-dominated parliamentary debate. It will happen only when the people challenge the status quo with public pressure.

However, although mass action is believed to be necessary to bring about change in Burma, its inherent dangers mean the possibility of its success remains a big question.

"The calls for public action are getting louder since the prospect of elite-initiated negotiation became impossible," said Nyan Win. "If the regime rigs the referendum result, it could spark mass protests."

A recent history of democratization shows that vote-rigging and stealing elections create favorable conditions and the opportunity for the outbreak of a democratic uprising or, in a worst case scenario, violence.

In fact, vote rigging might not only trigger public outrage in Burma, but also test the loyalty of the regime's staff. It could create divisions and weaken the standing of Than Shwe, who is solely responsible for the decision to move ahead with the unilateral implementation of the current political process by ignoring the UN's call for inclusiveness.

Whether or not public action leads to a negotiated transition depends on the opposition's leadership. No process of democratization has evolved purely and solely from a civil movement or people's uprising.

It would nevertheless be shortsighted to exclude the role and power of the people in a Burmese political context where elite-driven transition is no longer relevant.

Xinhua - 05 May 2008 - "Burma_news" (EBO) Euro-Burma Office <burma@euro-burma.be>

At least 15,000 killed in violent cyclone in Myanmar

YANGON-- At least 15,000 people have been killed in two divisions of Yangon and Ayeyawaddy in a violent cyclone storm Nargis that swept Myanmar's five divisions and states on last Friday and Saturday, according to official sources Monday evening.

It is estimated that the casualties in Ayeyawaddy division's Bogalay alone will exceed 10,000 and at least 1,000 in Laputta in the same division.

Earlier official figures show that 3,880 people were killed in Ayeyawaddy division including 20 in Bogalay and excluding

Laputta, and 59 in Yangon division.

The sources said that 2,375 people in Ayeyawaddy division and 504 in Yangon division are missing.

In Haing Kyi island in the Ayeyawaddy division alone, nearly 20,000 houses were destroyed, leaving 92,706 people homeless, earlier report said.

The deadly cyclone, which occurred over the Bay of Bengal, hit five divisions and states -- Yangon, Bago, Ayeyawaddy, Kayin and Mon.

Myanmar has declared the five divisions and states as disaster-hit regions.

The government has formed a national central committee for prevention of natural disaster to promptly and effectively carry out relief and resettlement tasks.

Zin Linn <zinlinn@cscoms.com>, nld group member <nldmembersnsupportersofcrppnldndassk@yahoo.com>, Datum: Thu, 08. May 2008 08:

National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma - May 7, 2008 - For Immediate Release

Burmese Military Condemned For Delaying Aid For Cyclone Victims

What is it with the Burmese generals and their sense of priority? Even when the death toll from Cyclone Nargis is now over 22,000 people and more than 40,000 people are missing and a million left homeless and starving, they still had the gall to delay the visas of officials from international agencies who are visiting Burma to help.

International aid agencies and those in the field are reporting about "survivors in desperate in need of help" but the generals are dragging their feet. In some areas, there are reports of soldiers preventing aid workers from distributing food and forcefully taking over the distribution process.

Lest these generals forget, we would like to remind them that the enormous problems facing the country today are humanitarian and not political. The devastation on a national scale caused by the cyclone is already causing havoc, particularly in areas of Irrawaddy Division, where people are literally fighting for food.

The cyclone is bound to have a long-lasting impact on the country and many challenges need to be tackled now. Burma, which has never seen natural disasters of this magnitude since time immemorial, neither has the capacity nor the capability to handle the situation. The generals must open up the country now to international agencies and governments and enable the disaster relief programs to begin on a massive scale now.

The National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) also wish to urge governments and international agencies to strategically coordinate the delivering of aid and rehabilitation efforts, and if needed, to force the Burmese military to cooperate immediately. Cyclone victims have suffered enough and a day delay in the assistance program will only threaten more lives.

We have also been receiving reports about the generals incredulously ordering the building of polling stations in some areas instead of helping rebuild homes. Legitimizing military rule through the national referendum is definitely not an answer to the challenges facing the country now.

The NCGUB, therefore, calls on the Burmese generals to place their political ambitions on the backburner, at least for the foreseeable future, and devote their attention on using all resources available to tackle more pressing national issues.

Disaster relief and humanitarian assistance for the cyclone victims must be carried out now and on a massive scale with the help of the international community. The national referendum must be postponed until the situation in the country is stabilized so that cyclone victims will also be able to exercise their rights like the other people in the country.

The NCGUB is constituted and endorsed by representatives elected in the 1990 elections in Burma
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