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

EuropeanVoice.com - <http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/2009/01/ban-must-visit-burma-to-begin-the-end-game/63584.aspx>
THE BURMANET NEWS - January 9, 2009, Issue #3628 - 09. Jan 2009 - "Editor" <editor@burmanet.org> - www.burmanet.org

Ban must visit Burma to begin the end-game By Thaug Htun

09.01.2009 / 13:03 CET

A more active role by the UN's secretary-general is one of ways the international community can deepen its engagement with Burma's problems, argues the government-in-exile.

In backing a visit to Burma (Myanmar) by the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the EU's envoy, Peiro Fassino, in mid-December added to the clarion call for the UN to take a lead role in Burma.

The EU itself is already well engaged, via a range of economic sanctions. It has opened channels of dialogue on Burma with interlocutors like the Philippines. Just before Christmas it pledged a further €40.5 million to aid efforts inside Burma, focusing particularly on victims of the Nargis cyclone of last May.

But, the EU cannot enact positive change on its own. It needs concerted action from the UN, starting with a high-profile, top-level, well-focused visit by Ban himself.

Instead, the United Nations secretary-general seems to be waiting for a miracle before he is prepared to visit Burma. Like a scientist afraid of his own experiment, he aims to plot the result before he begins the process.

He is seeking, he says, an assurance that there will be an outcome.

This is an untenable position, overly cautious by far for a situation as critical as the one in which Burma finds itself. The UN is willing to allow the Burmese military junta to ride roughshod over international standards of human rights, political practice, economic sustainability and foreign relations. The global body is allowing the regime to push on towards a sham election in 2010, which will inevitably bolster their power and defer the development of democracy in Burma.

While the shortcomings of the UN indicate a global system that is failing Burma, the UN is not alone.

Regionally, a virtual free-for-all has erupted as investors from China, Russia, Korea, Thailand, and elsewhere rush into Burma. A resources and energy assets boom has given the military regime an opportunity to open the flood-gates. Sanctions in place in the EU and the US have ensured Burma's neighbours have few serious competitors, or watchdogs.

A step-by-step plan

The National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma, as the legitimate and mandated *de jure* government in Burma has outlined a step-by-step plan for more focused and successful engagement with Burma.

The first vital and unavoidable step would be for the secretary-general to visit the country – and to do so as soon as possible. That would be an opportunity to present and embody the international community's concern over widespread human rights violations and the volatile actions of the country's rulers.

Second, the UN's special envoy, Ibrahim Gambari, must go to Burma again to meet officials and to establish the infrastructure to: a) ensure the release of all political prisoners; b) facilitate open negotiations between Aung San Suu Kyi, the victor in Burma's last democratic elections, and the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), the name Burma's military regime has given itself; c) to set a permanent liaison office in Burma to pursue the direct intentions of the secretary-general and; d) to bring solutions to Burma's economic crisis.

Third, a process of on-going engagement needs to be rolled out. The generals need to be obliged to meet and engage appropriately with the UN special envoy and must grant all relevant UN officers unlimited access throughout the country.

Fourth, the UN should kick off a process of national reconciliation, capitalising on the work already done in this direction by the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), which I represent at the UN. This process must be inclusive of all opposition parties, the military and all ethnic groups. This must take place before the proposed elections in



WAITING FOR A MIRACLE Ban Ki-Moon, the UN's secretary-general. REUTERS

2010 to head off the usual ruses employed by the generals in order to exploit international goodwill, to marginalise authentic opposition voices in Burma and to ensure the irrevocably flawed 2010 election can never take place.

Fifth, all such processes need to have the full-backing of the UN and have their agenda set by the UN. This needs the backing of the UN member states, who must stand up and act on Burma more than they are, and should be a priority as the run-in to the 2010 election looms closer.

Sixth, this process has to be fully open, the dialogue made public and the results known to all, so as to ensure full accountability and the good governance of the initiative.

These are concrete steps, not idle thoughts. Such a programme could bring progress to Burma. The international community understands these mechanisms and can work within them. And yet there is inaction, a sense the rhetoric is there to knit a veil for international leaders.

Recently, Ban said that the actions of the junta are "abhorrent and unacceptable" and called for "bold action" on the generals' part to move towards democracy. But, the words will sink quickly unless they are forcefully backed up by Ban himself.

This is not the time to be overly fastidious in the interests of protocol or realpolitik, or to protect the perceived dignity of the secretary-general's office. Our people are in grave danger. We can only hope the EU will continue to provide weight to the growing movement to begin the process of lasting change in Burma.

Thaung Htun *represents Burma's government-in-exile, the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), at the United Nations.*

The Brunei Times - Saturday, December 27, 2008 (published in Print and Online) - Kukiforum News <kukiforumnews@yahoo.com>
[NLDmembersnSupportersofCRPPnNLDnDASSK] - http://www.bt.com.bn/en/opinion/2008/12/27/un_general_assembly_isnt_the_right_forum

UN General Assembly isn't the right forum - Nehginpao Kipgen

ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND - Fri, 26. Dec 2008 23:50:39 -0800

Saturday, December 27, 2008

IN A vote of 80 to 25 with 45 abstentions, the UN General Assembly on December 24, 2008 adopted a resolution condemning human rights violations by the Myanmar military regime. The resolution called for the release of over 2,100 political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi.

The world's highest body criticised the military regime's political road-map "are not transparent, inclusive, free and fair, and that the procedures established for the drafting of the (country's new) constitution resulted in the de facto exclusion of the opposition from the process."

The General Assembly also expressed concerns over continuing practice of enforced disappearances, use of violence against peaceful demonstrators, rape and other forms of sexual violence, torture and cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment."

The Myanmar military, to nobody's surprise, categorically rejected the resolution by accusing the Assembly of making a blatant interference in its internal political process. The regime in a direct challenge to the international community said it is not bound by the resolution.

The Myanmar government's representative told the Assembly that the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has made a significant political progress and the country is on its way to having a multi-party general election in 2010, the fifth stage of the seven-step roadmap toward a democratic transition.

Absence of international community's coordinated approach was again witnessed. Of the 10 Asean members, in which Myanmar is also a member, four members — Brunei Darussalam, Laos, Malaysia and Vietnam — voted against the resolution. Other four members — Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand — abstained from voting; Cambodia was not present for the vote.

While western countries, including the United States, supported the General Assembly's motion, Myanmar was once again defended by two of UN Security Council permanent members — China and Russia.

India voted against the resolution, while Israel and Japan voted in favour of the resolution. Zimbabwe, a country which is also under the radar screen of the United Nations, unsurprisingly defended Myanmar by voting against the resolution.

Resolutions in the UN General Assembly are largely symbolic and are not binding. Successive resolutions have been passed and statements have been released since 1991 by different UN agencies with little or no impact on the military

regime.

This resolution of the General Assembly, like in the past, will gradually die down after making some news headlines. One significant consequence though is that the Myanmar democratic movement is still a concern to the international community.

The UN Security Council on October 11, 2007 issued a Presidential Statement calling for the military regime to release all political prisoners and create the necessary conditions for a genuine dialogue with Daw 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. That too was not followed up with any concrete action.

UN resolutions and statements have not deterred the military from pursuing its agenda. UN special envoys come and go without achieving any substantive results. Effective UN intervention would happen when a binding resolution can be passed by the Security Council.

Article 41 under Chapter VII of the UN Charter states that: The Security Council may decide what measures not involving the use of armed force are to be employed to give effect to its decisions, and it may call upon the Members of the United Nations to apply such measures...

For any Security Council binding resolution to happen, the support of the five permanent members is necessary. This is why the Myanmar military leaders have been vigorously wooing the support of China and Russia by strengthening economic and military ties, among others.

Without Security Council's endorsement, resolutions and statements by the different UN agencies, including the General Assembly, would remain a paper tiger. The good offices of the Secretary General also has limited roles, and the Secretary General himself is as frustrated as anyone.

If there is no change in the veto power system, a unilateral action could be one other option to look into. If neither of the two actions are initiated, the international community should explore other possible pragmatic strategies.

The UN General Assembly is not the right forum that can deliver change in Myanmar.

** Nehginpao Kipgen is the General Secretary of US-based Kuki International Forum (www.kukiforum.com) and a researcher on the rise of political conflicts in modern Myanmar (1947-2004).*

The Brunei Times

Translation of U Win Tin's letter to the Journalists Association of Myanmar in Yangon.

Dated : 10th Dec. 2008

To,

**The Secretary
Journalists' Association of Myanmar,
Yangon. (Myanmar/Burma)**

Subject: Request to take action on the false news.

1. A news article appeared in the Deutsche Presse Agentur (DPA) on the 30th of November, 2008, stating that there's a split within the NLD Party regarding the approach towards the SPDC's 2010 election....., that one group is willing to participate in that election and the other group not, however U Win Tin did not mentioned about whether NLD will or will not participate.
2. The above news by DPA is contrary to the NLD's policy. According to the NLD's special announcement no. 13/06/08 to the country and the world that the SPDC's announcement no. 7/2008 of 29th May 2008 on the approval of the constitution as totally illegal.
3. UN special envoy Mr. Ibrahim Gambari was told by NLD that the Constitution of SPDC will not lead to democracy and hence the planned election of 2010 will not be considered or even discussed.....This was appeared in the NLD's special announcement no.15/08/08 and made to the country and the world. There it is evident that the above DPA news is totally false.
4. According to NLD's special announcement no. 18/09/08 U Win Tin told to media that NLD totally reject the Constitution, to call parliament and to revise the Constitution within 6 months..

5. It can be regarded that the DPA had misunderstood and wrongly reported the news, however, they had based on the "Thar Ki Nwe, Myanmar politics, News, Myanmar Events and News" who had issued totally manipulated and untrue news or lie. Therefore I appeal to the Association to take action on the Thar Ki Nwe.

6. The said Nwe Tha Ki News had mentioned that; "U Win Tin wants to participate in the 2010 election"; "..... if Constitution will be amended U Win Tin is willing to participate in the election"; "..... U Win Tin is influencing the Youth Faction of NLD and when the election is near he will lead the faction" Etc, are totally untrue. In addition, there were attempts to mislead the readers that there is split within the NLD. I myself had for about 20 years had strongly believe in the NLD's policy of anti SPDC, their sham National Convention(NC) and the Constitution resulted from that National Convention. NLD had strong policies regarding the followings: The Party registration Act resulted from the NC and opposition to the Act on forming Parties: the election Law and the election to be conducted in accordance with that Act and etc. The work of New Tha Ki News is to weaken the above NLD's policies.

7. The above mentioned work is not mere journalistic misunderstanding but intentional lies. It was planned cooperation of the SPDC and the DPA. As a veteran journalist myself, I honestly believe that such act should not be ignored by the media people. Therefore I request you to take appropriate action .

8. I was freed from SPDC prison on the 23-9-2008. Immediately following my release, I met with media and announced my political stand to the country and the world. They appeared in the world media the same evening of 23. 9. 08 the following points.

a/ I oppose the sham NC of SLORC and SPDC since 1993. I had stated this to Mr. Bill Richardson in the presence of Military Intelligence in the prison when he visited me.

b/ Since that time to date, I strongly accept to free Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and political prisoners, to call for parliament of 1990 election and for political dialogue.

c/ I reject the sham NC of SPDC and oppose the Constitution resulted from that NC.

d/ In line with that, I totally oppose the 2010 election and even refuse to consider or discuss about it.

U Win Tin
NLD Headquarter

U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE - <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2009/01/113556.htm> Press Statement
Sean McCormack,
Spokesman Washington, DC January 2, 2009

Burma's Independence Day

Sunday, January 4, 2009 marks the 61st anniversary of Burma's independence from British rule. We wish to express our warmest wishes to the people of Burma on this occasion. As we reflect on Burma's independence struggle, led by General Aung San, we are reminded of our own history.

We support the peaceful efforts of people everywhere to exercise freely their universal human rights. We stand with the Burmese people today in honoring Aung San's vision for an independent, peaceful, and democratic Burma and look forward to the day when Burma's citizens will be able to enjoy the fruits of freedom and democracy. We earnestly hope that day will come soon.

2009/002

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The Irrawaddy - http://www.irrawaddy.org/print_article.php?art_id=14868

THE BURMANET NEWS - January 1-2, 2009 Issue # 3623 - "Editor" <editor@burmanet.org> - www.burmanet.org

New Year's Resolutions for the NLD

By MIN ZIN

Friday, January 2, 2009

The Burmese military junta is at its happiest when history repeats itself. Under the leadership of Snr-Gen Than Shwe, the regime replays its old maneuvers—content that its strategy has for so long been unbreakable.

A recognizable play in the regime's game plan has long been the tactic of combining brute force and naked aggression through harsh crackdowns with political offensives aimed at weakening the opposition and defusing international pressure.

But if the regime's policymakers are so predictable, surely the question is what the opposition will do to counter their plans and achieve the two most important results for political transition— constitutional reform and the release of political prisoners.

FOR PEACE, FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA

Take, for starters, the case of the 2,100 political prisoners languishing in Burma's jails—234 of whom were arrested during or after the nationwide protests in September 2007 and have received sentences of up to 68 years imprisonment each since November 2008.

The goal of the harsh sentencing is clear—to eliminate potential opposition in the run-up to the 2010 election, which is the fifth step in the regime's master-plan known as the "Seven-Step Roadmap to Democracy."

The intended effect of the brutality is a "shock and awe" campaign—terrorizing the public and creating an environment of fear ahead of the election. The junta hopes the Burmese population will become depoliticized and will meekly allow the military to steal the election.

International outcry has pronounced loud again. Sources in United Nations said that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is even considering the option for "temporary suspension of his good offices mission on Burma". Some sources close to Burmese Foreign Ministry confirmed that China and Russia are pressing the generals in Naypyidaw to cooperate with Secretary-General's good office and show a "positive gesture" to calm down mounting international criticism before the scheduled 2010 election in Burma.

As history has its proof, it is now time for Than Shwe to pull out a card and play magic with his international supporters. One possible prospect will be the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, the opposition leader and the only imprisoned Noble Peace Prize winner, in near future – as earliest as by May or as latest as November 2009 – which in itself presents what the junta considers to be several favorable conditions.

First, the junta knows that releasing Suu Kyi could be well enough to relieve the concerns of China, Russia, Asean and other apologists for the junta that have found it hard recently to defend the Burmese regime in the international arena.

If the military rulers were sublimely tactful, they could even invite either UN Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari or Secretary-General, and allow the Good Offices to take credit for Suu Kyi's release.

In this manner, the junta could use the release of Suu Kyi to fend off international criticism against the systematic crackdowns, forcibly ratified constitution and scheduled election for 2010.

In fact, the military generals believe they can afford to release the opposition leader without compromising with her. Indeed, in accepting her freedom Suu Kyi could find herself in a Catch-22 situation where she cannot criticize the government without finding herself back in a cage.

No political transition is likely to take place within the framework of the current constitution. Even amendments made to the constitution in the hope of gradual reform will not be possible within a military-dominated parliament and the junta's foreseeable power arrangement in a post-2010 Burma.

The question, therefore, is what the opposition can do to counter military's strategy and achieve two most important results needed for political transition—constitutional reform and the release of political prisoners.

Over the past 20 years, the opposition parties in Burma have shown an unyielding faith in the power of principles. Now it is time for them to learn the principles of power.

Paradoxically, the first principle of power that the opposition should pursue is a moral strategy. The National League for Democracy (NLD) and other opposition parties should declare that they will not take part in the 2010 elections unless the junta agrees to engage in political dialogue with the opposition to negotiate a constitutional review and to release the political prisoners.

This is not only a righteous strategy that will create a feel-good factor among opposition members, but it can be used as a playing card to achieve three concrete political gains.

First of all, it could motivate the opposition's own bases—NLD organizers throughout the country and its supporters, as well as legitimate ethnic political parties—most of whom have taken back seats in recent political debates due to the NLD's defensive, reactive and passive policy.

NLD Chairman Aung Shwe, who has always avoided public communication, should make himself available to Burmese-language shortwave radio stations abroad to address the public to articulate why the NLD has decided not to take part in the 2010 election and what the NLD demands are.

The party leadership should not take for granted that their cause is self-evident. They must publicize their agenda and promote it with clarity as a moral offensive.

Second, an election boycott could narrow the regime's bases—in particular, the full participation of ethnic minority groups that reached ceasefire deals with the military over the past 20 years.

All ethnic groups know the military's constitution is far below their acceptable thresholds.

Although groups such as the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and the United Wa State Army (UWSA) may be

planning to take part in the 2010 election through their proxy ethnic parties, they will be afforded the chance NOT to throw their weight behind the regime's terms and conditions, especially it involves the disarmament of their troops.

The opposition's rejection of the 2010 election will, therefore, lend ceasefire groups political justification and strategic space (as the regime will be busy dealing with the NLD) to resist the regime's disarmament plan.

This will complicate the junta's political ploy or, in a worst case scenario, lead to a resumption of localized arm conflicts between certain ethnic ceasefire groups and the Burmese army. Such a situation would alarm China since the most volatile areas are around the Sino-Burmese border where formidable Wa and Kachin ethnic groups are based.

The third political gain the opposition could muster from a moral boycott strategy is that it will force the international community—particularly those who want to expedite the junta's "road map"—to side with opposition's reasonable demands.

However, before all that comes into play, the opposition parties must show flexibility and articulate that it is not rejecting outright the regime's road map.

If the junta accepts a constitutional review and the release of political prisoners, the opposition can consider lending legitimacy to the road map. The opposition should also make it clear that it welcomes international humanitarian assistance to Burma, which is severely impoverished and falling into deeper humanitarian crises.

All in all, this is high time for the opposition to occupy the moral high ground and translate it into power and advantage. Of course, the route will not be an easy one as the regime will impose its nastiest crackdown on the opposition.

Some skeptics might also argue that it is nothing new for the Burmese opposition to take up a righteous policy and yet still lose the game.

However, what the opposition has so far adopted is a reflexive and ungainly position. What the opposition needs now to use the moral high ground wisely and publicly, and transform it into strategy, well-timed and coordinated toward achieving well-defined political gains.

This is the first principle of power the opposition should pursue and should constitute its New Year resolution for 2009.

Min Zin, a Burmese journalist in exile, is a teaching fellow at the University of California, Berkeley, School of Journalism.

myint khaing <myint_khaing@yahoo.com> - [8888peoplepower] Latest News <http://8888newgenerations.blogspot.com/>

Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) - <http://english.dvb.no/news.php?id=2039> **24 December 2008**

CRPP call for unity in Burma - *Reporting by Nan Kham Kaew*

Dec 24, 2008 (DVB)-The Committee for Representing People's Parliament during a monthly meeting yesterday called for unity in Burma.

"We need unity not only among political parties but also with the (ruling military junta) State Peace and Development Council," CRPP's secretary Aye Thar Aung said.

"Trust is important in building unity and unity is essential if the SPDC is to build a modern nation. Only by enshrining democracy in the constitution would it be possible to achieve true national unity."

Aye Thar Aung is also secretary of the Arakan National League for Democracy and an ethnic people's representative in the CRPP.

The meeting was held at the National League for Democracy headquarters, and it was attended by all members including recently added NLD leaders Win Tin and Khin Maung Swe, except U Lwin and Loon Tin on grounds of ill health.

The CRPP was formed on 16 September, 1998 with an initial 10-member committee which was made up of nine NLD members, led by party chairman Aung Shwe, with Aye Thar Aung to represent the ethnic nationalities.

After initial successes, CRPP's activities were curtailed by further arrests, including of Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and Aye Thar Aung, but after she was released in October 2001, it was strengthened with new members.

Nevertheless, it went into decline again, after Aung San Suu Kyi was rearrested in 2003, until recently when renowned journalist Win Tin was released in September after 19 years behind bars.

Email Press Review – Radio Netherlands Worldwide – *English* <http://www.radionetherlands.nl/thestatewherein/otherstates/tswi-090103-Burma-Bo-Kyi>

Burma: life behind bars by Phil Thornton 31-12-2008

Living and working in Burma is tough. Writing stories and poetry, telling jokes or criticising the military regime risks a Draconian jail sentence. In early November a prison court sentenced 14

FOR PEACE, FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA

activists to 65-year jail sentences.

One Burmese man has made it his life's work to ensure these prisoners will not be forgotten.

In a small wooden house inside a tree-lined compound in the Thai border town of Mae Sot a group of men and women tap computer keyboards, talk on cell phones and show guests around a tiny airless room filled with photos. It is a reconstructed Burmese prison cell. The men and women work for the Association Assisting Political Prisoners (AAPP) and all are former prisoners. Their sentences ranged from fourteen years for writing leaflets to five years for attending a student protest.



Bo Kyi at the AAPP office

Award

A founding member and now secretary of AAPP, Bo Kyi was jailed three times for a total of seven years and three months. Since his release from jail in 1998, Bo Kyi has campaigned to free all Burmese political prisoners and for this work he was recently recognized by the New York based Human Rights Watch and accredited with their Human Rights Defender award.

Bo Kyi says while it is nice to receive awards, it is critically important to continue to keep international pressure on the regime to release all Burma's political prisoners:

"Burma is a silent killing field. By putting political opponents in jail they [the military regime] are systematically killing our activists, our writers, our poets and our artists. In jail there is no hospital care and no doctors. Prisoners are being put in jails in remote areas far from their families. Many are sick and can't get help."

He was jailed for the first time in 1990 for leading a demonstration for the release of political prisoners.

"I was sentenced to three years hard labour. I was interrogated and tortured for 36 hours. I was given no food or water and was kept handcuff and blindfolded."

Blood spots

Bo Kyi was denied access to his family and says they did not know what had happened to him.

"I was put in a small cell, I could see blood spots and many names, including those of my friends. I was not allowed to shower for nine days."



Bo Kyi: "Jail taught me to live in the present"

In spite of the torture and beatings he was determined to stay positive.

"I wanted to study. I had an English dictionary smuggled in. I ate the pages as I learnt them. I ate a lot of dictionary when I was in jail",

he laughs, adding on a more serious note,

"I also learnt I had no future. It [jail] taught me to live in the present, other wise I would have gone crazy thinking about the future."

Cynical stunt

The Burmese regime's State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) rules Burma with an iron fist. The Association Assisting Political Prisoners estimates Burma currently has 2,123 political prisoners in its jail.

In spite of international condemnation the regime continues to jail its opponents, ***in September this year 140 people were arrested for political reasons.***

In what was seen as a cynical stunt to disrupt international events planned to commemorate last year's monk and civilian protests in Rangoon, the regime released 9002 prisoners, only seven of these were political, the rest were classified by AAPP as 'petty criminals'.

In spite of his experiences in jail, Bo Kyi is not after revenge.

"Those who tortured me are also victims of the system. Sooner or later Burma will change, the people want change, but in the

meantime people will have to speak out. International NGOs working inside Burma have been silenced, but they have to speak out. We can't let our brothers and sisters rot in jail because they had the courage to protest for change."

Tags: [AAPP](#), [Association Assisting Political Prisoners](#), [Bo Kyi](#), [Burma](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), [State Peace and Development Council](#)

The Irrawaddy, January 7, 2009 http://www.irrawaddy.org/print_article.php?art_id=14886

[NLDmembersnSupportersofCRPPnNLDnDASSK] NCGUB: News & Articles on Burma - Zin Linn <zinlinn@cscsoms.com>

Karen Girl, 7, Raped and Killed: KWO

By **LAWI WENG**

Wednesday, January 7, 2009

The Karen Women's Organization (KWO), which is based in Mae Sot on the Thai-Burmese border, reported on Monday that a seven-year-old Karen girl was raped and murdered by a Burmese soldier in Pegu Division on December 27.

Speaking to *The Irrawaddy* on Wednesday, KWO Assistant Secretary Blooming Night Zan said that the girl was playing outside her house in Ma Oo Bin village in Nyaunglebin Township at 5 pm. At around the same time, a Burmese soldier from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 350 was seen entering the village. Villagers said they heard a girl scream for help a short time later, followed by gunfire.

"The victim's uncle ran to the scene and found the girl's body. She had been shot three times in the chest and she had been raped," said Blooming Night Zan.

The family of the victims and the village headman urged the battalion commander to investigate the crime. However, the commander didn't take any action, she said.

The incident follows a report on January 6 by a Mon human rights group that in November a 17-year-old Mon girl was gang-raped in Yephu Township, northern Tenasserim Division, by seven Burmese soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 107.

Aue Mon, a member of the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM), said the victim was raped while working alone at her family's betel nut plantation on November 13.

The HURFOM reported the victim's mother as saying: "Both the captain and his soldiers raped my daughter. She nearly died. My daughter was crying when she told the story. Those soldiers are not human. They are like animals."

According to HURFOM, the victim's family was afraid of the army and has since left the village.

Both organizations have previously accused the Burmese military of using systematic rape as a weapon to terrorize ethnic people living along the borders.

In 2004, KWO published a report titled "*Shattering Silences*" which claimed that Burmese troops systematically raped Karen women. The report documented 125 cases of sexual violence committed between 1988 and 2004. The report said that half of the rapes were committed by military officers, 40 percent were gang-rapes, and in 28% of the cases the women were killed after being raped.

"Women are not safe in the Karen conflict zone. We want the UN to put pressure on the Burmese military to stop using rape as a weapon of war," said the assistant secretary of KWO.

Women's organizations in other ethnic areas have reported similar incidents. In 2002, the Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) released a report titled "*Licence to Rape*," which detailed testimonies from 173 ethnic Shan women who had been raped or encountered sexual violence at the hands of Burmese soldiers.

The Irrawaddy - January 9, 2009 - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=14898

THE BURMANET NEWS - January 9, 2009, Issue #3628 - 09. Jan 2009 - "Editor" <editor@burmanet.org> - www.burmanet.org

Teenage Activist Transferred to Labor Camp

By **MIN LWIN**

Friday, January 9, 2009

A teenage political activist, who was sentenced last month to three years imprisonment for taking part in the 2007 monk-led demonstrations, was transferred last week from Insein Prison to Shwe Tathay labor camp in Twante Township, according to a source close to his family.

Prisoners in Burmese labor camps have to endure harsh conditions and brutal treatment, and are compelled to work long days in chain-gangs at highways, dams, irrigation canals, special agricultural projects and rock quarries.

Kyaw Zaw, 19, a second year student at Yangon Eastern University, was arrested some months ago by Burmese Special Forces at his residence in Bahan Township, Rangoon Division, for his involvement in the 2007 pro-democracy uprising.

Sources in Rangoon said that in another case, political prisoner Zaw Naing Htwe was transferred last week to Lay Mine labor camp in Taungoo Township. He is currently serving a nine-year sentence for smuggling a letter from his brother—political prisoner Kyaw Kyaw Htwe, aka Marki—out of Insein Prison.

Speaking to *The Irrawaddy* on Thursday, Bo Kyi, the joint secretary of Thailand-based Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma), said that his organization is worried for the lives and health of the political prisoners who have been transferred to labor camps across Burma.

“Several political prisoners, especially NLD party members, have been transferred to labor camps,” said Bo Kyi. “Some were killed working as porters during fighting at the front lines.

“Transferring political prisoners to labor camps is like pushing them into their graves,” he added.

He said that prisoners at Burmese labor camps are exposed to terrible health conditions and torture.

The Burmese military government has been exploiting prisoners in chain-gangs since 1962, when they were forced to work on the Pale-Gangaw road construction project. The junta later conscripted prisoners to work as porters in offensives against ethnic insurgency groups.

According to Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma), a total of 17 political prisoners, including one Buddhist monk, who were arrested after the 2007 protests, have been transferred to labour camps across the country.

In September, a 28-year-old monk, Ashin Pannasiri, escaped from Lantalang labour camp in Chin State while he was serving a three-year sentence.

Comedians Par Par Lay, Lu Zaw, U Htwe and U Aung were transferred in 1996 to a labor camp in Kachin State, where prisoners constructed the Myitkyina Airport. Later, they were sent to Sumprabun labor camp in Kachin State to build a road.

In 1997, the military authorities forced 18 NLD political prisoners from Taungoo Township in Pegu Division to serve as military porters at the front line of military operations in an offensive against the insurgent Karen National Union. One prisoner, Saw Htun Nwe, 75, died of physical exhaustion while other NLD members were severely wounded.

NGCUB: News & Articles on Burma - Wednesday, 14 January, 2009 - Zin Linn <zinlinn@cscsoms.com>

The Irrawaddy - http://www.irrawaddy.org/print_article.php?art_id=14924

Mark My Words - Mark Canning

Wednesday, January 14, 2009

British ambassador to Burma, Mark Canning, talks to The Irrawaddy about the role of the UN and Asean in Burma, the Cyclone Nargis relief effort and his expectations for the election in 2010



Mark Canning

Question: *How do you assess events in Burma in 2008?*

Answer: It was a bad year on almost all fronts. It was especially cruel that on top of all their other problems, the people of this country had to cope with the devastation caused by Cyclone Nargis—but at least there we've seen some good progress. After a difficult start, relief reached those who needed it, a creative mechanism was established for overseeing the operation and a number of tricky problems were overcome.

Elsewhere, there was no movement, in fact quite the opposite. The UN secretary-general himself said very recently that the degree of cooperation between Myanmar and the UN had been unsatisfactory. There was no move towards any sort of dialogue between the government and the opposition. There was continued repression.

The number of political prisoners doubled, and more than 200 activists, who've done nothing but espouse peaceful protests, were given massive prison sentences. Aung

San Suu Kyi remains locked away and prevented from playing the conciliatory role she could fulfil if allowed. The various concessions made at the turn of the year, like the series of meetings between her and the labour minister came to nothing. The population has been told to expect the introduction of “disciplined democracy” in 2010—they’ve seen plenty of the former but not much of the latter.

Q: *Many critics, including Burmese both inside and outside the country, believe that Gambari’s mission has been a failure. What can he do to win greater credibility for his mission and to achieve political reconciliation in Burma?*

A: The UN is playing a key role and we support it 100 percent. Dr Gambari has been working the problem extremely hard, but, as he and the secretary-general have made clear, the level of cooperation from the government has simply not been good enough.

There’s always been a tendency to criticise the envoy—you saw the same with Razali Ismail, you see it now with Dr Gambari, but that’s a mistake. It’s quite clear where responsibility lies for the lack of forward movement. The priority for 2009 therefore is to rebuild more solid international backing for what the UN is trying to do. The secretary-general’s personal engagement is a great asset and should help achieve that, and we hope very much to see him back here once conditions allow. We have now a clear assessment of where things have got to on which to build. It’s crystal clear there’s not been the kind of progress over the past 12 months which a number of countries claim to have seen. In fact, the situation has gone backwards and will continue to do so until there is clear and unambiguous backing for the UN. Issues like the release of political prisoners, rather than being internal matters, are central to what the UN is trying to achieve—political reconciliation.

Q: *The UK played a major role in the cyclone relief operation—where do you see things going now?*

A: The operation is going far better than we feared at the outset. The Tri-Partite Commission Group mechanism has proved a great success, and there has been excellent collaboration between the government, Asean and the UN. Most of the affected population is getting some form of support, a wave of secondary deaths has been avoided, and the operation has been instrumental in saving hundreds of thousands of lives. As you say, the UK has been the largest contributor, and we’re proud of that. Most of all though it’s been a fantastic co-operative effort which has involved a range of donors, agencies, and local and international NGOs, all of which has rested on the hard and innovative work of the three TCG partners.

Our ministers are now in the process of assessing what more we might do. Looking ahead, we—and I think most donors—hope to see the TCG mandate extended beyond July so that it can build on what’s been achieved. We hope also that in partnership with government, some of the underlying policy issues in the area of agriculture and livelihoods, that affect the ability of those in the delta and elsewhere to make a sustainable living, can be considered. There’s good work going on there too, but there’s probably more that could be done. The key point is that there’s no point bandaging the patient if you then send him back into the environment that helped cause the problem in the first place.

Q: *Do you think that the “humanitarian space” in the delta can be expanded to other areas of the country? What makes you believe that this will be possible, and what obstacles do you foresee?*

A: That’s certainly the hope of all of us who are involved in the operation. The Nargis operation has helped build confidence and trust between the government and the donor community. We’ve seen good co-operative working, and both local and international NGOs play a fantastic role. All this has been excellent, but, as you say, the rest of the country is out there and it’s important in coming months that collectively we start to raise our eyes from the delta to address some of the serious situations elsewhere. Whether we’ll succeed, and the environment will almost certainly be difficult and unpredictable in the period up to 2010, remains to be seen, but it’s essential we try to build on the gains and keep up the momentum.

Q: *The UK has tended to take a hard political line on Burma. Why in this case were you willing to donate so generously? And how would you respond to sceptics who say that aid organisations cannot operate effectively in Burma because of government restrictions? You recently asked the Burmese military government to increase its assistance to the Burmese people. Do you think that they have increased their aid to people who are in need?*

A: We’ve always believed that, while the search for a political solution goes on, the people of this country should not be made to suffer further. We’ve steadily extended our humanitarian work in-country, particularly in health, but in other areas too, like livelihoods and primary education. Our role in the relief operation was consistent with this, and we hope that the success it’s enjoyed will encourage other donors to work in this country, which remains one of the most under-aided in the world.

To the sceptics you mention, I’d say that while this is not always the easiest of environments, good work can and is being done. The Three Diseases Fund is a good example. It’s delivering real health benefits to vulnerable populations, has benefited from excellent cooperation from the Ministry of Health and has at all times operated within the guidelines

donors set at the outset. We very much hope to see more donors come in and are more than happy to share our experience with them. We hope to see the government's contribution increase—that not only makes more funds available for the delivery of health, education, etc, but it also sends a signal of commitment that helps draw in new donors and encourages those already here to provide more assistance.

Q: *Turning back to politics, what about Burma's neighbours? Apart from the members of Asean, what do you think other countries, such as India, China and Russia, can do to bring about positive change in Burma?*

A: There's a key role for the countries of the region. Everyone understands the intractable nature of this problem. There are no easy solutions, and it must be tempting at times, when the issue is on your doorstep, to give up on it. Regional integration is hard enough at the best of times, yet alone when one of the members is moving in the opposite direction in political and economic terms. For the members of Asean, the situation poses an obvious reputational challenge—at the very time they are launching the human rights charter, we have a member flouting the standards it is designed to promote and as the situation declines—and it will—the practical effects on the neighbours, are likely to become more pronounced.

The fundamental question for the region therefore is whether the course on which the government is embarked is going to deliver the sort of stability and prosperity they have achieved in their own countries? There's very little evidence in my view that it is. Nobody is under any illusions about the scale of the challenge, and a number of countries in the region have been working to address it, but the key in coming months is to build a more unified backing for what the UN is trying to achieve. It's essential that the government should constantly be reminded, by those that have influence, of the need for change and meaningful cooperation with the UN.

Q: *There has been a great deal of speculation that Aung San Suu Kyi could be released this year. If so, what do you think she will be able to achieve?*

A: Whether she'll be freed we obviously don't know, but she should be. She has made clear repeatedly her willingness to work with the government and other political and ethnic nationality forces to address the challenges this country faces. She has made clear her wish to work for gradual, stable, evolutionary change, and change which takes account of the interests of the many different parties involved, including the military.

The fact that she's under house arrest suggests she's regarded as a threat. But she's actually an opportunity in the sense that she could be instrumental in helping to forge the sort of broad-based dialogue with government that is the only way that progress is going to be made. If she's not allowed to play that role, then it's difficult to see how this will be done.

Q: *The regime has accused the British and other Western embassies of meeting with NLD members. How do you respond to this charge?*

A: We keep in touch with as wide a range of opinion as we are able. That includes government, as well as a range of other actors, and that's very much the role of an embassy.

Q: *How do you see Burma's political landscape in 2010 and beyond? What is the UK government's stance on the 2010 election?*

A: The coming year will obviously be dominated by preparations for the elections in 2010, and we'll presumably soon get some more detail of what the SPDC will allow in terms of participation. This can all represent a healing process, and a step on the way to resolving longstanding political difficulties—or it can be the opposite—as has been the case till now.

There's clearly time to make the process more inclusive. We hope to see that happen. The European Union has always made clear that it is willing to respond to movement in a positive direction. Clearly, you can not have a credible electoral process without certain things happening—the release of political prisoners, engagement between government, opposition and the ethnic nationalities—and those are the criteria against which it should be judged.

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 e-Mail: <burmabureau@t-online.de> - <http://www.burmabureau.com> <http://www.burma-report.de>

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# Ten Years On

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Burma Büro e.V., P.O. Box N° 27 03 66, D-50509 Köln, Germany.

Tel: 0221-9522450 Fax:0221-9522470

e-Mail: <burmabureaugermany@t-online.de>