TO ACHIEVE GENUINE NATIONAL RECONCILIATION ALL PARTIES AND INDIVIDUALS MUST WORK TOGETHER.

The present crisis in Burma occurs in all parts of Burmese life and is most apparent in the current political standoff between the military government and its political opposition.

Today, Burma faces the following obstacles to national reconciliation: one, the regime is not representative of the people; two, a decades old civil war; three, political tension between the regime and the opposition; four, the military rules without a constitution; five, widespread human-rights abuses; six, rapid inflation; seven, a poor education system; and eight, unemployment and lack of food and medical care, etc.

These problems all stem from a political crisis, which is also a national crisis. The responsibility for solving these problems belongs to Burmese of all nationalities. These problems are faced by all of society and are not the responsibility of one person or organization, but of all Burmese. When society joins together to address these issues, they will be solved. The first step in resolving the situation is to identify the causes of the current problems.

The national solidarity, fostered by Gen Aung San, was essential for the independence movement. But, before independence was gained, he was assassinated. This was the first step towards national disintegration. Afterwards a power struggle ensued among disparate interests trying to articulate their vision of post-colonial Burma, but their methods were neither peaceful nor beneficial for the nation. As negotiations broke down, political factions resorted to violence rather than compromise. The outbreak of civil war ended national solidarity. As a result the democratic rights of the people were weakened and the power of the military increased, finally leading to a dictatorship.

During the last ten years, neither the military regime nor opposition forces has been able to make a clean sweep of the other. As a result of their inability to end the conflict by themselves, both sides have looked outward to international interests for intervention. The regime has sought support from abroad to assist in maintaining their monopoly of power instead of negotiating with the opposition to resolve conflict. It seems that the government would prefer to make reforms tailored to international interests, rather than make political compromises in accordance with the demands of the people.

Since 1997, the regime has offered to participate in talks with members of the National League for Democracy in exclusion of Aung San Suu Kyi, U Kyi Maung and U Tin Oo. This has prompted some critics and opponents of the government to ask questions about future NLD and SPDC dialogue. One question is, "without Suu Kyi, could the NLD engage in a dialogue with the SPDC?"

Some consider that the lack of progress in negotiations between the NLD and the SPDC is due to Suu Kyi. Also they say, "there is a delay in the dialogue because of Suu Kyi."
It has become clear that the military's attempts to initiate dialogue with the NLD without Suu Kyi and other NLD leaders are intended to divide and weaken it.

In August 1998, while Suu Kyi was on a roadside outside of Rangoon involved in a standoff with the military, U Aung Shwe, chairperson of NLD, met with Lt Gen Khin Nyunt in accordance with the decisions of leading NLD members still in Rangoon. However, the dialogue did not lead to any progress. Recent meetings between the military and the ethnic groups, participating in cease-fire agreements, have led nowhere; instead, they were used by the government to intimidate these groups into maintaining support for the SPDC.

Demands for national reconciliation have been loudly voiced by both sides -- the military regime and democratic forces -- for a long time. But, it has yet to be obtained, despite the fact that it is such a pressing issue. To objectively consider why national reconciliation remains elusive and how to succeed in fostering it, we have to put aside personal attachments, arrogance, and self-interest.

First, we should not simply go through the motions of some hollow process of "national reconciliation", but work towards it in earnest. This means that national reconciliation can not be used as a tactic to garner popular support from the people or assistance from abroad. The present National Convention, sponsored by the SPDC, is not based upon the goal of national unity. Absent from the convention are representatives of non-military political interests such as ethnic minorities and opposition groups. In their place are the stooges of the military. As the SPDC only represents the interests of the military clique, its members should meet to talk with representatives of other political parties and Suu Kyi. In the absence of these groups and other interests, a national convention held by a government, ruling by force, will hardly lead to national reconciliation.

Recent threats by the military to the ethnic minority cease-fire groups are dangerous for national reconciliation. In the past the SPDC could pressure these groups because they were weak and divided, but now they are stronger and potentially more emboldened. The cease-fire agreements are the first step towards peace, which will be destroyed if the ethnic minorities are pressured into resistance.

Secondly, the terms for initiating dialogue should not be conditional. We should practice mutual understanding to reach a solution to the political deadlock, rather than sign an incomplete agreement for the purpose of having a document to show.

Currently, the military regime has again asked to meet with NLD leaders except for Suu Kyi, U Tin Oo and U Kyi Maung. This issue is not for the military to decide, but an internal decision of the NLD. This type of conditionally is unacceptable. It forces groups necessary for reconciliation into a corner. All persons, regardless of ethnicity and political affiliation, should participate in national reconciliation.

Finally, we should accept past events, move beyond our divisive political grudges and stop accusing each other of previous offenses. We must focus on finding a peaceful solution to the conflict and national reconciliation, rather than become mired in petty disputes.

In conclusion, these three points are essential for national reconciliation. Only national reconciliation can improve the economic and political situation. The present situation is a historical turning point
for Burma. Efforts should be made to solve domestic conflict by ourselves, instead of looking for solutions from international intervention.

In the struggle for peace and national reconciliation, all the nationalities of Burma have to participate. The current political standoff is not only a conflict between NLD and SPDC, but a general crisis, affecting all of Burma, that should be the concern of all its nationalities.

It is urgent that we all work towards national reconciliation, so that we can prevent further social upheaval, unrest and the spread of civil-war.

We must work together.