

NLD Statement 1(5/01):

National League for Democracy Statement on Democratic Change in Burma
[Unofficial translation]

The National League For Democracy
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Statement No 1(5/01)
World Workers Day.

1. The first day of May has been commemorated worldwide as May Day/Workers Day ever since 1890 in accordance with the decision of the 1889 Worldwide Workers Conference held in Paris (France). This day was chosen because American workers in their struggle for their rights shed blood on that day. It has been declared a public holiday. Eight-hour working day and overtime payments have been the outcomes of that struggle.
2. From then on, the workers movement grew till the end of the First World War (1914-1918) when unemployment and homelessness created big problems for the worker.
3. As a result, the then League of Nations realizing that peace is fundamentally associated with social and economic justice, created the International Labor Organization (ILO) in which the allies joined forces.
4. The ILO is not just an organisation to prescribe wages, working hours, rules and regulations to be observed at work places internationally. It is also at this organisation that workers, employers and governments can meet to discuss and resolve conflicts and disagreements.
5. The ILO continued to exist during the Second World War (1941-46). After the establishment of the United Nations, the ILO was recognized as one of its specialized agencies.
6. Burma obtained her independence from the British in January 1948 and obtained sovereign state status as the Union of Burma. It became a member of the United Nations and worked in conjunction with the ILO. It approved and signed the 19 ILO Conventions.
7. Acceptance of the ILO Conventions was followed up with enactment of laws for workers rights by the government, which were distinctly and clearly enforced.
8. But after the second of March 1962, when the army assumed state power and annulled the constitution, it established the Burmese Socialist Program Party (BSPP) government. Then in 1964 the Law establishing Workers Basic Rights and Duties was promulgated which overshadowed the rights guaranteed to workers under existing laws. Workers affairs came under the direct control of the central authority.
9. Commencing from that day, ILO Convention 87, that gives the worker the right to freely form unions and associations, has been violated. In 1981 the ILO asked the government to observe the provisions of ILO Convention 87, but it refused.

10. The spontaneous uprising and demand for restoration of democracy by students, workers, monks and civilians countrywide that occurred in 1988 was brutally crushed by the government.

11. The army again seized power, annulled the constitution promulgated by the Burma Socialist Progressive Party and formed the State Law and Order Restoration Council composed of the big Tatmadaw bosses.

12. The plight of the workers, farmers and cultivators is absolutely tragic.

(a) Forced labor is required from the whole country (including the townspeople). Men, (women and youths are not exempted) are forced to act as porters.

(b) Factory workers and dock laborers suffer exploitation by the employers and have no choice but to accept the wages paid to them. They enjoy no rights, no benefits or security.

13. Because of the depressing conditions of the workers in Burma, the ILO authorized an inspection and report and at its 87th annual meeting in 1999 resolved to punish the government if changes were not put into effect. But the government denied the existence of forced labor in Burma and repudiated the ILO resolution.

14. In June 2000, at the 88th annual general meeting of the ILO it was decided that if the military government did not change its practices of forced labor the governing body of the ILO would take effective action under the provisions of its law 33. An inspection team to investigate the situation had reported that no real change had taken place, that the Towns and Village Acts (Law 107 and 108) had not been revoked and forced labor practices still continued. At the meeting of the governing body of the ILO in November a vote was taken on the matter.

15. The Director General of the ILO called on all international organizations to review their association and activities with the military government so as not to encourage the practice of forced labor. Also to implement the recommendations set out in the ILO Inquiry Commission Report. Resolutions taken with regard to the violations were:-

(a) To place these matters on the agenda for consideration at the ECOSOC meeting in July 2001.

(b) That the UN General Assembly should carefully examine whether the activities of the UN agencies in Burma are in any way directly or indirectly associated with forced labor practices.

16. In the 81 years of the lifetime of the ILO that is composed of 178 countries there has never been such rebuke and punishment of a member government.

17. Democracy is the only system by which full human rights and workers rights can be obtained. Strong and firm political, social and economic advancement will follow when there is democracy. Therefore the military government (SPDC) which has assumed state power has the greatest responsibility to bring about changes that will

make Burma into a new democratic country. We ask and urge them to heed to this request.

Central Executive Committee

National League for Democracy
1st May 2001