THE ISSUES....

WOMEN'S RIGHTS—THE OFFICIAL WORD

Burma became a State Party to the United Nation's Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1997. Accordingly, the regime is expected to abide by the articles of that Convention, which address areas where discrimination may take place and the measures designed to prevent it. In January, Ambassador U Win Mra, the permanent representative of the Union of Myanmar to the UN, presented a report before the Twenty-Second Session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. In his report, Ambassador Win Mra outlined his government's plans to provide equal treatment of women in the areas of health, education and employment and to promote the advancement of women in Burmese society.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS—QUESTIONS FROM THE COMMITTEE

Following the presentation by the government of the Union of Myanmar, members of the CEDAW Committee posed hard-hitting questions to the Burmese delegation. Issues such as the role of the military in abuses of women, the regime's views on political participation of women in light of its treatment of democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and the allocation of resources to institutions charged with promoting gender equality were raised. The Burmese delegation then offered its response.

A SHADOW REPORT

Five women's organizations based along the Thai-Burma border and representing a variety of ethnic groups submitted this shadow report to the CEDAW Committee. The report directly links barriers to women's equality in Burma to the ongoing civil war in the country and the allocation of national resources to military interests. It focuses on State-perpetuated violations of women's rights, particularly in rural and conflict regions in the areas of health, education, violence against women, and poverty and refutes many of the claims made by the Union of Myanmar's delegation.
THE DEBATE

PRESENTATION TO THE
UN COMMITTEE ON THE
ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION
AGAINST WOMEN
by Ambassador U Win Mra, Union of Myanmar

IN THEIR OWN WORDS-
QUESTIONS FROM THE COMMITTEE
and the
RESPONSE BY THE
UNION OF MYANMAR

BURMA: THE CURRENT
STATE OF WOMEN -
CONFLICT AREA SPECIFIC
A Shadow Report to the 22nd Session of CEDAW

IN BRIEF

40 BURMA AROUND THE WORLD
41 BRIEFINGS & DEVELOPMENTS
INSIDE WASHINGTON
BUSINESS WATCH
SPDC SPEAKS
MEDIA RESOURCES
VOICES OF BURMA
ETHNIC VIEWS
[Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Members of the Committee, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,]

I would first of all like to convey to you, Madam Chairperson, on behalf of the Myanmar delegation and on my own behalf, our pleasure in seeing you preside over the work of the Twenty-Second Session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. As you have a wide knowledge in multilateral negotiations on women's issues and long-time experience with the committee, we are convinced that constructive recommendations will be forthcoming in considering the initial report of my country. Our tribute also goes to the members of the Committee whose expertise and experiences are respected.

[Madam Chairperson,]

Let me give you the assurance that our delegation will give its fullest possible cooperation to you in holding a constructive dialogue with the committee. We are keen to work with the committee to find better ways and means to promote the advancement of women in our country and will try our very best to respond to any queries from the distinguished Committee Members.

[Madam Chairperson,]

Allow me to start my presentation with a brief socio-demographic profile of the women in Myanmar. The Union of Myanmar comprises seven states and seven divisions and the population estimated is 47.25 million with a growth rate of 1.84. Of the total estimated population of 47.25 million the male population is 23.46 million and the female population is 23.79 million. The per capita income is 22.5 thousand kyats and the gross national product is 1045.9 million kyats.

The percentage of literate population is 83% and percentage of literate females is 78% and for males is 89%. The life expectancy at birth is 60.6 years for males and 64.6 years for females. The infant mortality rate is 47.1 per thousand live births and the maternal mortality rate is one per thousand live births. The population between 15 and 59 years of age is 13.55 million males and 13.85 million females. The total fertility rate is 2.8% and the singulate mean age of marriage is 27.5 years for males and 26.4 years for females. More than 75% of the population...
resides in rural areas, whereas the remaining are urban dwellers. The rate of unemployment for males is 3.64% and 4.76% for females.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON,

As you are aware, Myanmar became a State Party to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women on July 22, 1997. As a dutiful State Party, Myanmar submitted its initial report in March 1999 to fulfill her reporting obligation. In the report we have tried to reflect most of the recommendations of the Committee as much as possible.

Our observation of the articles of the Convention reveals that the existing laws and social practices of our country are compatible with the Convention. The successive Constitutions of Myanmar have provisions giving specific attention to sexual equality and the rights of women. In Myanmar, women legally enjoy equal rights as men in political, economic, administrative and social spheres.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON,

It is universally accepted that of all the institutions that shape a person's personality and help him or her to adjust to changing environments, the "family," a group of persons closely related by marriage and blood, is the most important institution. In Myanmar, the family is the basic unit and most of the families are extended-type. The head of the household is usually the father but it is the mother who plays a major role in rearing children. She exerts the greatest influence on the child because it is she who removes the child's tension, who gratifies the child's needs and thus she comes to be perceived by the child as exceedingly important. Thus the norms of Myanmar society inculcate in every young Myanmar child the understanding and acceptance of the debt of gratitude owed to a mother for providing life. This belief is reflected in Myanmar language, the term for parents being mi-ba (mother-father) with the mother being placed first. A wife is frequently referred to as a "home minister" of a family and it is of usual practice for the husband and wife to have a joint bank account rather than having separate accounts.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON,

In Myanmar society, traditions and customs not only expect a woman to bear and care for the children, but she is also responsible for its general well-being, keeps order and discipline, provides love and sympathy, makes sure that each member of the family is healthy, happy and if possible wise. To bear all these responsibilities, her health is a very important factor and thus, Madam Chair, I feel that it is very appropriate for this session to elaborate a general recommendation on Article 12 of the Convention on "Women and Health," and I am indeed very pleased to present the efforts being made in our country to upgrade the health status of Myanmar women.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON,

Myanmar women and men have equal access to health services. Myanmar National Health Policy is to raise the level of health of the country and promote the physical and mental well-being of the people, which includes both men and women. In implementing the National Health Policy, the Ministry of Health has taken the responsibility of improving the health status of the people, promoting the preventive and curative measures and health rehabilitative activities. The formulation of the National Health Plan has taken into account the existing manpower, budget and material to obtain the most effective and beneficial results. The National Health Plan Steering Committee and the Plan Formulation sub-committee were formed with the responsible personnel from the intra- and inter-ministries, and also from the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). With the aim towards "Health for All by the Year 2000," the National Health Plan has been systematically implemented. In its implementation, it has utilized all the available resources in preventive, curative, rehabilitative measures and also in disseminating health education, information and communication. It has six broad programs which consist of forty-seven projects including maternal and child health, birth spacing, reproductive health, nutritional development, expanded program of immunization, and sexually transmitted disease control. Health services in Myanmar are aimed to provide a holistic, lifecycle approach to health care for women, ranging from girl child, women from the reproductive age, to older women. For older women there is a health program to cater to their needs. "Health Care for the Elderly" project activities have been implemented in 11 town-
ships in five states and divisions. In other townships, they are being taken care of as part of the general health care of the population at large. The most critical issue affecting women is safe-delivery and programs have been implemented to solve this issue.

One of the statements of the National Population Policy is "to improve the health status of the women and children by ensuring the availability and accessibility of birth-spacing services to all married couples voluntarily seeking such services." Family spacing is justified on the basis of its importance to maternal-child health and not as a demographic measure. Population-related activities carried out in Myanmar included birth-spacing programs and conduct of census and surveys. Birth spacing programs are carried out by the governmental sector as well as by non-governmental organizations with assistance from international agencies.

The government is committed to a strategy of providing essential health care using the primary health care approach. The main emphasis is upon prevention of disease and promotion of healthy lifestyle. Nutrition is one of the essential elements for attaining an acceptable state of health. Policy objectives and actions related to nutrition include improving and extending nutrition programs, and adoption of a national breast feeding policy to promote exclusive breast feeding of babies up to four to six months of age. Information, education and communication regarding continuing breast feeding till two years and appropriate complementary feeding practices have been disseminated. The Ministry of Health has formed a Food and Nutrition Control Committee and task forces under the National Health Committee in 1995 aiming towards a multi-sectoral involvement in food and nutrition development activities. The prevalence of protein energy malnutrition (PEM) in the series of studies conducted by National Nutritional Centers since 1991 has constantly shown fewer girls suffering from PEM than their male counterparts (boys 33.8%, girls 28.4%). According to survey data the proportion of anemia in adolescent girls is 26.4%. The prevalence of iron deficiency anemia in pregnancy is 58.06%. As for other micro-nutrient deficiencies goiter is the most common visible form of iodine deficiency disorder (IDD) in Myanmar.

Research on HIV/AIDS has been conducted with the aim to promote and support AIDS prevention and control efforts in the country as it is now appearing in all the different social classes in the country. It is also currently seen in high-risk behavior groups in all parts of the country and is starting to spread into the low-risk population groups. The fight against AIDS has been given top priority by the Government of Myanmar and the importance of dealing with the problem in a multi-sectoral approach has also been well recognized. Participation of NGOs in AIDS control activities is being encouraged and in the coming years it is hoped that they will play an important role in the fight against this dreadful disease.

The health services delivery system is organized at three levels, the central, intermediate and peripheral level. The central level is responsible for the overall formulation of policy, planning, training, supervision, monitoring and evaluation of health services in the country as a whole. At the intermediate level,
there are state and divisional hospitals where specialists are based, and at the peripheral level there are township and station hospitals, rural and sub-rural health centers and village health posts. At all these points, services are available for women's health needs. The services are available to both men, women and children. In the rural health centers, maternal and child health clinics are organized in the afternoons, so that women and children will be able to utilize them to their full advantage. Available transportation such as bullock carts, boats, and hammocks are arranged in villages for emergency deliveries. Maternity services are delivered by doctors, lady health visitors and midwives at the maternal and child health center, or in larger towns, at the urban health center. In urban cities and towns, 462 Lady Health Visitors and 1156 Midwives at 84 Urban Health Centers and 384 Maternal and Child Health Centers have carried out the maternal and child health care including birth spacing services. In rural areas, the maternal and child care and birth spacing services have been carried out by 1,159 Lady Health Visitors, 7165 Midwives assisted by the 24,822 Auxiliary Midwives of the concerned villages throughout the total of 650 Station Health Units and Station Hospitals, 1,410 Rural Health Centers and 5,720 sub-health Centers. At the township level, the Maternal and Child Health and birth spacing activities are being provided through strong linkages between a well-established NGO, namely the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association and its branches in both urban and rural areas. Starting from the base year of National Health Plan, the implementation of antenatal, maternal and child health and birth spacing programs have been transformed into reproductive health programs including adolescent health in order to provide care for all cycle stages.

Services for reproductive health problems and birth spacing are available at the government institutions, NGO clinics, general practitioners and private hospitals in urban areas and health centers and subcenters in rural areas.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON,

Regarding abortion, there is no statutory provision for abortion services. However, if women with unsafe abortion are present at the hospital, there are provisions for emergency services and follow-up care, including post-abortion contraception. Many women also employ traditional medicine for minor complaints. Some women use herbal preparations for menstrual regulation.

From a subjective point of view, it appears that women approve of the way they are treated by the medical services; hence their subsequent or repeat visits to the hospitals or clinics. Health messages concerning tetanus immunization, supplementation of vitamins and minerals and blood testing for syphilis during pregnancy are rigorously followed. The majority of health care providers for antenatal care, deliveries or reproductive health services are women; from specialists to doctors to midwives, even up to auxiliary midwives. Culturally, Myanmar women feel more comfortable consulting a medical personnel of the same gender regarding reproductive health.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON,

Let me now present reproductive health in Myanmar. Reproductive health is one important component of the National Health Plan in Myanmar. Promotion of reproductive health includes not only safe delivery, safe motherhood, and birth spacing, but also the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS, education of women at reproductive age on health related issues, education of youths on necessary life skills, and condom promotion for safer sex. These activities are being conducted by the various departments of the Ministry of Health in collaboration with local and international NGOs, other related ministries, and the private sector as well. Although promotion of reproductive health activities are implemented under various work plans, the following are the comprehensive list of activities being carried out in Myanmar.

(1) Life skill training for women at reproductive age and youths

Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA) has conducted training on life skills for women in townships since 1997. Both urban and rural women have been given messages on AIDS/STD prevention, birth spacing, prevention of other infectious diseases and necessities for healthy living. These
women in turn disseminate this knowledge to other women in their localities. Similar programs have been conducted for youths in the same areas through members of the Myanmar Red Cross Society.

(2) Prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases

Prevention of STDs is also an important component of reproductive health. Apart from health education for the prevention of STDs, early case detection, early diagnosis and adequate treatment are also effective measures for reducing STD prevalence and prevention of further spread to their sex partners. The Department of Health has done training courses on syndromic management of STDs for general practitioners, township medical officers, doctors from the maternal and child health centers, and other basic health staff.

Following the training, the township hospitals and maternal and child health centers were provided with drugs to treat STDs. HIV/AIDS forces of the Myanmar Medical Association in both lower and upper Myanmar have also done STD syndromic management training courses for general practitioners.

Condom promotion for people with high risk behavior such as people with multiple sex partners is also done in collaboration with some local and international NGOs, particularly in big cities and border towns.

(3) Community education programs for HIV/AIDS prevention

Education aiming at change in behavior is one of the major strategies in the prevention of HIV/AIDS. Information, education and communication materials (IEC) have been produced in different ethnic languages for the general community. IEC materials for targeted groups such as drug users, youths, and women at risk are produced and distributed in different parts of the country.

(4) AIDS education in schools

School youths are given AIDS education by the township health departments, school health teams and the trained persons from the Department of Basic Education. A curriculum has already been developed by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education. Orientation courses for teachers to use this curriculum have been done in 50 townships and the teachers are now teaching students for healthy living, AIDS prevention and to develop necessary skill for avoiding risk factors.

(5) Capacity building of community organizations and volunteers

Representatives from community organizations and volunteers were trained to promote community education and awareness program on AIDS/STD issues. Gender specific messages are included in the education materials produced by these organizations.

(6) Expansion of birth spacing programs

Promotion of reproductive health has been reinforced by the introduction of birth spacing programs in Myanmar since the early 1990's. By the end of 1998, birth spacing program had been extended to 117 out of 324 townships. The program activities include training of basic health staff, voluntary health workers and volunteers from Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association on birth spacing issues, community education on benefits of birth spacing and provision of contraceptive materials. In remaining townships, similar activities have been done except material support. These activities have been assisted by UNFPA, UNDP and Family Planning International Alliance.

(7) Integrated management of maternal and childhood illnesses program

The Integrated Management of Maternal and Childhood Illnesses Program (IMMCI) was developed based on the ongoing maternal child health care program which is one component of the Primary Health Care Program under the National Health Plan. Not only the treatment and prevention of common childhood diseases such as diarrhea diseases and acute respiratory infections, but also the activities for safe motherhood have been incorporated into this program. Proper management before, during and after delivery has been promoted through trained primary health care workers and voluntary health workers, particularly the auxiliary midwives in the rural areas. Traditional birth attendants were also given training on sterile and safe delivery, and on conditions requiring referral to an appropriate health center.
In Myanmar, many groups of women NGOs such as Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association, Myanmar Medical Association (Women Section) and also Myanmar Red Cross participate in health related activities. For example, the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association is a huge voluntary NGO which has many branch organizations throughout the country. Most of its members and staff are women from different social strata and they are dedicated to the health and welfare of women, children and families. Involvement of the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association at all levels of the birth spacing program promotes the coverage and outreach of the services. Cooperation between government health services and NGOs in delivery of birth spacing services make the program more effective and efficient.

The objectives set for women's health are to reduce morbidity and mortality from disease and conditions affecting mothers, school children and growing people. The following goals have been set with a view to be reached by the year 2000. These are: to reduce Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) from 47.1 to less than 45 per 1,000 live births; to halve the Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) from 1 to .5 per 1,000 live births; to achieve and maintain a full (6 antigens) immunization coverage rate of over 90 percent of all infants and all pregnant women against tetanus; to provide access to information on preventive measures against HIV/AIDS to all youths and women, to reduce iodine deficiency disorders from 33.08 percent to less than 20 percent; to increase the rate of pregnant women to accessible pre-natal, safe delivery, and referral services; to provide universal access to information and services relating to birth spacing; and to reduce iron deficiency anemia among pregnant women.

One of the areas of concern identified by the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs is Violence Against Women. Activities have been implemented to prevent violence and rehabilitate the victims. As we are aware of the impact of violence on women's health, a national workshop on "The Priority Issues Affecting Women's Health" was conducted from December 12-24, 1999 by the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs in collaboration with Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization. Training on Counseling techniques was conducted and counseling centers have been established all over the country.

Health Care has also been provided to the women in the border areas through the Border Area Development Program. In 16 such areas, 439 hospitals 75 dispensaries and eight rural health centers had been established and plans had been made for the expansion of health services for those populations.

Concerning the Environmental Health Program, the Government has laid down the National Health Policy and the program has been carried out with accelerated momentum. For avoidance of detrimental health effects upon communities due to environmental pollution, essential steps have been carried out to assess the health risks in communities due to potentially toxic chemicals, dusts, mists, fumes from occupational settings, industrial effluent and various forms and types of pesticides used for domestic and agricultural purposes. Because of these activities the expected outcome will be the development of national standards and norms and the promulgation of environmental health legislation. In the community water supply and sanitation program there are essentially two major activities namely provision of safe drinking water and provision of
adequate sanitation facilities for systematic human excreta disposal. The current situation of urban and rural water supply and sanitation is as follows: Water supply in rural areas is 42.2% and 70.1% in urban areas. Sanitation in rural areas is 44.03% and 70.48% in urban areas.

Regarding the health care given to working women, occupational health activities have been carried out with the aim for the workers to work safely, happily and at the same time increasing production. Occupational health legislation embodied in the labor laws of the country cover all working women. Pregnant women are entitled to three months' maternity leave. In the organized sector it is compulsory to provide facilities at work sites including out-patient clinics, nurseries, and day care centers. Medical care available includes prenatal care, postnatal care, and leave of up to six weeks in the case of miscarriage.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON,
I hope that my presentation will shed some light on the Government's efforts to promote the health of the people. World Health Organization has recognized health care services of Myanmar to be at the forefront in Southeast Asia. Since 1996, National Immunization Days activities have been launched with the participation of the entire population. Polio vaccines have been given to millions of children under five years old, including the children from remote border areas.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON,
The direct correlation between literacy and health, economics and decision-making ability, especially for women, cannot be emphasized enough. Education decisively determines a woman's access to paid employment, control over her fertility, family size and spacing and the education and health of her family. Thus, the Government of Myanmar is implementing programs to enable every individual regardless of sex to acquire Basic Education, and the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs along with UN organizations, local and international NGOs are collaborating and cooperating to achieve this objective.

The existing practices in Myanmar do not discriminate against women in education. Let me give you an example. The 1998-99 matriculation examination was held at 886 examination centers. Out of about 400,000 candidates in the nation 112,722 passed the examination. The 26 outstanding students who got the positions ranging from the first to the tenth have been awarded prizes by the State. Out of 26 outstanding students, 15 students are girls.

Apart from formal education, women are also educated through non-formal education. The Ministry of Education has implemented non-formal education projects with the collaboration of UN agencies. The Department of Technical, Agriculture and Vocational Education has mobile units in bor-
der areas to educate the women residing in these areas.

To improve women's access to vocational training, vocational training programs such as sewing classes, embroidery classes, livestock breeding training are held with the collaboration of UNDP and UNESCO as part of the Human Development Initiative Program. Teaching materials are also provided for a skills-based literacy program through non-formal education to ensure access to quality education and training at all appropriate levels. For adult women with little or no education, Myanmar Educational Research Bureau and Asia-Pacific Cultural Center for UNESCO from Japan have established a Literacy Resource Center especially for women and girls. To promote life-long education and training for girls and women is to ensure the availability of a broad range of education and training programs that lead to ongoing acquisition by women and girls of knowledge and skills.

The "Education For All" related activities include the skills-based literacy program for women and girls along with the Early Childhood Development Project, Education Sector Study Project, Strengthening and Upgrading of Teacher Training Colleges and Teacher Training Schools Projects.

He pointed out that in Myanmar community, women have their own honor and dignity and they have never, ever experienced the conditions such as having an inferiority complex for being a woman, being discarded or suppressed, [or the] loss of [their] rights throughout history.

At the ceremony, the prizes for the essay competition held throughout the country in honor of Myanmar Women's Day were awarded. In honor of the day, tree-planting activities were also held in many places. In Yangon Division, a total of 900 shady trees and flower plants were planted.

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Lt. General Khin Nyunt gave guidance to the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs to make efforts for further progress on women's rights...and for the emergence of a women's force on which the nation can rely.

The Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs (MNCWA) held two coordination meetings in 1999, attended by Lt. General Khin Nyunt; the Chairman of Yangon Division Peace and Development Council; the ministers and deputy-ministers from related ministries; the Chief Justice; the Attorney General; heads of departments concerned; and advisors and members of the Committee.

At the coordination meeting, Lt. General Khin Nyunt gave guidance to the Committee to make efforts for further progress on women's rights and socio-economic life, to uplift the ability of women in upholding and safeguarding the lineage, traditions and culture, dignity and moral conduct and for the emergence of a women's force on which the nation can rely.

The Secretary-1 urged the Committee to strive for the emergence of a peaceful, pleasant, developed and modern nation, to make every effort in harmony with non-governmental organizations dealing with social matters such as Myanmar Maternal and
Child Welfare Association (MMCWA) and Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) for progress of education, health, social sectors of the nation. The Committee has been empowered to give the correct leadership to the outstanding and brilliant women force of the nation.

The meeting decided to increase members of the National Committee, Working Committee and Sub-committees. As it is stated in the report the Myanmar National Committee for Women Affairs has identified six areas of concern, namely Education, Health, Economy, Violence Against Women, Culture and Girl Child. At this coordination meeting it was decided to add two more critical areas namely, Women and the Environment and Women and the Media, and thus two more sub-committees were formed, namely the Sub-Committee on Environment and the Sub-committee on Media. The reports on the activities in the six identified areas of concern of the fourteen states and divisions’ Working Committees for Women Affairs have been submitted to the meeting. The leaders of the six sub-committees...submitted their reports on the activities during the past six months. Some of the activities reported are:

The Economy Sub-committee reported conducting Computer and Auditing classes at affordable prices for young girls.

The Sub-committee on Culture held talks on Myanmar culture at an auditorium where women from all walks of life attended.

The Sub-committee of Girl-Child explained the laws that protect the women through radio programs.

The meeting reviewed the reports and adopted them.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON,

Before concluding my presentation, I would like to state that we are trying our best in implementing the National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women in Myanmar. However, it is not without difficulties. For example, there was lack of gender-wise data before 1990. In 1990, the Government conducted population studies and was able to obtain data for the population by general age groups and by employment in various sectors. It was a good beginning, though in a limited way. In 1995, the Government extended the data collection into the education domain. It was only in 1997 that at the request of the Myanmar National Committee for Women Affairs, the Government began collecting more detailed gender-wise data. We would be able to reach our goal more quickly if we could obtain technical assistance and financial resources.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON,

My delegation would like to express its sincere thanks to you and to the distinguished Committee Members for your kind attention in listening to our presentation. This is our first presentation since we became a State Party to the Convention in 1997. Although we have tried as much as possible to make a comprehensive report, there may be some areas where we might have failed to adequately deal with or others which still need improvement…. Your opinions and observations will be held in high esteem by our delegation and we will cooperate as much as possible with a view to promoting the advancement of women in my country.

Thank you.
QUESTIONS FROM THE COMMITTEE

Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

January 21-26, 2000

The following is not an official transcript. It was taped, transcribed and edited for Burma Debate.

Photo Credit: UN Photo/Evan Schneider
Chairperson Aida Gonzalez Martinez •

Mr. Ambassador, I thank you for having flagged some of the problems that you have encountered with such sincerity. We listened attentively to your introduction and the committee is happy that [two women were included in your delegation]. We are aware of the import of this decision. We do hope that the dialogue we are about to engage in will be productive and will lead to the real implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women in your country and around the world.

Salma Khan (Bangladesh) • We are particularly proud of the fact that a Myanmar woman has the distinction of being the first Asian woman to earn a Nobel Prize. I personally feel that Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi has set a positive example in the implementation of Article 7 of the convention by breaking the stereotype of our society.... I am from a neighboring country, so I know that it is a great achievement for women of any Asian country, and I hope many more Myanmar women will follow in her footsteps in shaping the political life of her country.

...Your country is going through armed conflict in some of the areas. In such situations, systematic violations of women’s rights take place which not only constitute obstacles to the full enjoyment of human rights of women, but also adversely affect the implementation of our Convention. You have extensively elaborated some activities undertaken by your government regarding Article 12, Article 10 and Article 11. But in most cases, I find there is a lack of data. When there is no data we really cannot evaluate the status of women ... or the level of progress achieved by your women since the ratification of this convention. And development indicators, such as employment, health, and education, have raised some concern in our minds.

I understand that there is also a population relocation problem in your country, maybe for obvious reasons that are not particularly stated in your report. In such cases, women are affected adversely as they often have to move to areas with poor or inadequate infrastructure. This causes a loss of livelihood for women; this affects their security to food, health, education accessibility.

...We also would like to bring up the issue of violence against women. You have said that violence does exist in your country, like in all other countries, and you have some programs for rehabilitation of these women. But you really do not say much about the type of violence to which women are subjected. It is very natural that women who have to be [displaced], who have to leave their own habitation and go to refugee camps or bordering areas, are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation or other kinds of exploitation. Refugee women particularly are obviously far more vulnerable compared to any other group. I would like to have some more information about these things from your report.

Your extensive coverage of Article 12 of our convention definitely shows your commitment to improve the health status of women. But at the same time, you have not indicated the kind of funds being allocated to women, and whether the women in the bordering areas, in the conflict zone, or in the refugee camps, also have singular access to some of these health facilities which have been mentioned in your presentation. You have also mentioned family planning, but Myanmar has one of the highest population growth rates, as you have indicated yourself and as is evident from other sources. So I would also like you to give us more information about the accessibility of family planning facilities and whether it is free of cost. Again, do the women in the bordering areas and in the conflict zones and women who have been [displaced] have similar access to these kinds of family planning facilities?

With regard to education, I would like to know what is the budget? And as far as our Article 10 is concerned, while we give a lot of importance to adult literacy, the basic thing here is primary education, which has not been mentioned by you at all. We would like to have more information on primary education, so we can initiate the dialogue on these areas.
• I have understood that currently there is a redrafting process of your constitution. Article 2 demands of States Parties that an Equality clause is part of the constitution, as well as an Anti-discrimination clause. I’m wondering whether these principles will be embodied in your new constitution, since they were embodied in the 1947 and the 1974 constitutions.

I would also like to know which constitution is currently in place, since I’m a bit confused now. The drafting process has been going on for quite some time. When do you intend to finish this drafting process? In your new constitution do you intend to incorporate a definition of discrimination as it is contained in Article 1? This is very, very important.

Article 2 has a number of provisions that make it very clear that it is not not only the government that is not supposed to discriminate, but also the organs of government and even individual persons, enterprises and organizations. Is there anything in your current legislation, apart from the constitution, that clearly forbids discrimination against women by these various agents and actors? Given the fact that the military plays an important role in the Government of Myanmar, is there any legislation, and also any monitoring process, to detect and to deal with potential and actual cases of discrimination against women by military personnel?

IVANKA CORTI (ITALY) • The Myanmar State Constitution of 1947 guarantees to all citizens, irrespective of birth, religion, sex or race, equal, that they are equal before the law....I’m very much interested to know in such a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, if this article has really been implemented. Because we know that not only in Myanmar but all over the world, there is an ethnic wave. Ethnic groups are all asking for their rights: the right sometimes for self-determination. How have you ensured equal rights?

And, what is the impact on women? Have you guaranteed all women members of the different ethnic groups that they can have the same rights? And that they must also respect...
...When it comes to [Article 3], there is no information on the human resources of the Ministry of Protection and Social Assistance that deals with promoting women. The World Conference on Women in Beijing identified the problem of allocation of resources to coordination mechanisms to promote women as being a priority area. Because generally what happens...
states] that a few months after the National Committee on Women's Issues was set up, the National Working Committee of Myanmar on Women's Issues was created. What is the difference between these two mechanisms? What is the level of responsibility of each of these two committees?

ROSYALYN HAZELLE (SAINT KITTTS AND NEVIS) • What is the gender composition of the National Committee for Women and the National Working Committee? How many people are employed, the job titles? In other words, I am looking to get a sense of the human and financial resources that have been assigned to this whole structure. Is there a monitoring mechanism? Who deals with the issue of accountability?

ANNE LISE RYEL (NORWAY) • I would only ask for some more clarification and information regarding the Working Committee's competence in receiving and channelling complaints. How many cases do you get per year? Last year? And also if it's possible to say something about the kind of cases you get. How do you deal with the cases? Do you have any sanctions around it or do you have to go to the courts afterwards? Also how do you give information out to the people so they know to come to this Working Committee with their cases?

YUNG-CHUNG KIM (REPUBLIC OF KOREA) • ...When you form these Working Committees, are they strictly government people? Are there any NGO representatives? If so, what criteria is applied to be chosen? [Regarding] the CEDAW convention itself, has it been translated in your country, particularly into ethnic languages? If so, in which languages? Lastly, I would like to know more information regarding women's NGOs in Myanmar. How active are they? [Did] any NGOs participate in the writing of your government's initial report?

MAVIVI MYAKAYAKA-MANZINI (SOUTH AFRICA) • ...The report is focused on those measures that reinforce the idea of women as caregivers, or as people who keep the family. Is this actually the role that is assigned to women in Myanmar, and thus there is no need to take measures in other areas to make sure women are involved in all aspects of life as requested by the convention, that women should be involved in the political, economic, social, and cultural life of the various countries?

OUEDRAOGO • ...The report says that women who occupy leadership positions are found primarily in retail, in fashion, in cosmetics, and public relations. These are what we traditionally consider responsibilities of the female gender and it shows that we have not been able to make progress in changing this traditional concept in society.... It also says that in childhood, young girls are trained to work in the household, and they also take care of animals, they harvest crops, and they work the land. Therefore, there is still the concept that women are limited to the private sphere.

In the chapter referring to employment, what is generally accessible to women is self-employment or working for state companies, because these tasks can be combined with domestic tasks, even though they do not receive adequate pay and they imply very long working days for women—13 or 14 hours or even more. So in all of these examples we see that there are still traditional and discriminatory concepts.

What is the role played by the mass media in disseminating an image of women who are fully integrated in all aspects of life, whether it be economic, social, or cultural life? And also, are there sex education programs so that women can truly exercise not only their reproductive rights, which we speak about here, but also their sexual rights?

RYEL • ...I have some questions about women prisoners. First of all, is it possible to get figures of how many women prisoners there are? Also how many women prisoners compared with male prisoners? [Do] you have prisons for women and prisons for men, or are they in the
same prisons? It says here that women are entitled to certain privileges, and I would like to know some examples. Also, I would like to know if you could tell us what kind of crimes women prisoners have committed? Does everyone imprisoned have to do hard labor, or is it only for very serious crimes? You also talk about the death sentence. How many women are getting this death sentence per year?

KHAN • All of us are aware that trafficking is a very common problem both in developed and in developing countries, so it is something we are very much concerned with in this Committee. ...You have, in your written report, extensively covered this area, but only ... the kind of laws you have, not what is the real situation of trafficking in women or women who are involved, or forced to be involved, in prostitution.

Poverty, [displacement], being forced to move to refugee camps—these situations make women very vulnerable and [make it] very easy to fall prey to things like trafficking and prostitution. On top of that, you have a very large border. Your existing laws outlaw sexual exploitation and trafficking across borders... [and] you have said that your Ministry of Immigration does not allow women 16-25 years old to cross the border. I am sure that is being done with all the good intention, but how do you implement a thing like that? The reality is that people have to move across the border because so many families are divided in and out of the country. So what mechanism does this Ministry of Immigration apply to monitor that migration?

...I know that you have signed the International on Suppression of Trafficking, but do you have any plan to ratify this convention? I would like to ask [you] to provide statistics of the number of women involved in commercial sex in your country, including estimated trafficked persons, both in neighboring countries and inside Burma. [Do] you have any kind of center where they can get psychological treatment [and] is this kind of facility also available free of charge to women who have been the victims of such crimes?

ROSARIO MANALO (PHILIPPINES) • Mr. Ambassador, the constitutions of Myanmar of 1947 and 1974 provided for democratic exercises with respect to men and women of Myanmar who could vote and run for public office. So much so that in 1990 such an exercise took place and you had a lady in the opposition, Madam Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, as the winner. Unfortunately, the government annulled those elections, and Madam Suu Kyi is right now under house arrest to this very moment. What concrete steps is the government of Myanmar undertaking to reconcile the situation in which Madam Daw Aung San Suu Kyi finds herself today?

Cui FENG (CHINA) • According to your constitution, men and women have the right to vote and to participate in elections, and to be elected. I would like to know how many women participate in these elections. That is to say, how many women have used these rights?

How many women are there in the State Peace and Development Council? Also ... in the parliament, and in your political parties, how many women are involved, and what is the ratio of women in these entities? ...

CORTI • ...There were several women that in the previous elections were elected, freely elected, [from] different parties, and then some of them had to resign. What were the reasons—were they voluntary resignations, or were they forced to resign?

... You are bound legally by our convention, and you also participated in Beijing Conference on Women and bound yourself by the Beijing Platform for Action which very clearly speaks about promoting women in decision-making posts.... How do you think to promote women, and to promote democracy in your country by promoting the right of participating in political decisions?

MANZINI • I would like the delegation to furnish us with concrete statistics. For instance, it is mentioned that within the government they now have women director generals. How
many? I would also like to know how many managing directors there are in business. Do women participate in the judiciary as judges, etcetera?... I think it would be very important to have a complete picture in order to make our assessment of the advancement of women.

SCHOPP-SCHILLING • I’m wondering whether you could enlighten us, under what conditions are women permitted to form non-governmental organizations? Is there a registration process, and if so, what does this registration process entail? I am wondering whether any woman with a concern, for instance with regard to the CEDAW convention, can establish an association freely and advocate the convention and lobby for it, and whether there are any restrictions in doing so?...

ZELMIRA REGAZZOLI (ARGENTINA) • What programs, projects, or laws exist to encourage participation of women, when history shows that when a woman wins elections, the results are cancelled. When a woman wins a Nobel Peace Prize, she is imprisoned in her country. So I don’t understand, how can you encourage the political participation of women and then violate it in all areas of government when these precedents exist?

GOONESEKERE • Your Excellency, the response to Article 9 in your report does not seem to me to have really addressed the substance of that article. The article is seeking to find out information on the right of women to pass nationality to their children, and also the right of women to get nationality for their spouses and to keep their nationality when they marry foreigners, and there seems to be no clear information on that. Can a woman transmit Myanmar nationality to her children in the same way as a man? And can she, when she marries a foreigner, get the same visa provisions and citizenship provisions for her husband, just as in the case of a Myanmar man who marries a foreign national?

SCHOPP-SCHILLING • ...It seems to me that the statistical information you have given to us in your written report refers mostly to young girls going to school in the township areas. And I was wondering whether you have any data on the literacy rate of rural women and the school attendance in primary education of young girls in rural areas.... [Is it] true that even primary education is not free of charge?

...History shows that when a woman wins elections, the results are cancelled. When a woman wins a Nobel Peace Prize, she is imprisoned...How can you encourage the political participation of women and then violate it in all areas of government?

Zelmira Regazzoli

...You also mention in your report that you have done a study on further education for girls who have not received primary education. Again this study has been done in the townships and I am wondering what is happening in the rural areas. I would also like to know more about women in the universities. I'm concerned that due to internal strife, universities are being closed. I'd like to get more data from you in order to be able to judge whether there may be prejudices, not legal, but de facto prejudices, with regard to the education of women. If institutions are closed, it's even more difficult for them to get education.

And I would like to know if it is true that there are admission criteria in some of the universities that are more restricted with regard to female students than to men students. I have some information that this is so in the case of
the engineering university. And that the forestry university does not accept women at all—I would like to have some information on that.

CHIKAKO TAYA (JAPAN) • I want to pose one question concerning the so-called forced labor in Myanmar. The justification of so-called forced labor is presumably that Myanmar finds it necessary to construct infrastructure, and there are budgetary constraints on paying for it, so the so-called forced labor is one kind of tax paid in kind by its citizens. But I wonder how many women are involved? And by what manner is the distribution of the kind of work decided? Are there any laws which regulate the so-called forced labor?

What steps are to be taken to control and prevent and punish those who engage in such practices?

CHARLOTTE ABAKA (GHANA) • I wish you could also give us information about what happens to women and girls who get pregnant as a result of rape, or even incest? This is very important. Also, these women and girls undergo tremendous mental torture. You did not address the issue of mental health of women and girls in your report, and I hope you will address this very important issue.

According to your report and other sources, 1% of the whole population is infected with HIV/AIDS. Again, going back to the major causes of maternal mortality—hemorrhage, anemia—one can presume that when women are in labor, or even after labor, they are likely to receive blood transfusions. Do you have any means of screening blood throughout your country, both in the cities and in the rural areas...?

Your report, Mr. Ambassador, is also silent on drug and substance abuse. Under Article 12, the committee is to be informed about substance abuse and drug abuse among women in your country. What steps are being taken? I would be very interested to know the kinds of substance and drugs that are being abused, whether there are any programs in your country specifically targeting women who are addicted to drugs, and whether you have any programs for their rehabilitation and reintegration into the society?

CHAIRPERSON GONZALEZ • Mr. Ambassador, the Committee has now exhausted all the questions it wished to raise with you as well as the comments, the doubts, discrepancies, criteria that the initial report of Myanmar has prompted....In keeping with the procedure about which you have been informed, we would ask you to be kind enough to meet again with us on Wednesday the 26th, in order to provide us with answers to the questions and the comments that the Committee has made. If it’s not possible, because of the distance, that is very understandable, but we hope that they will be able to be resolved in the second periodic report by Myanmar.

Also the country report [mentions] laws on minimum wage and social security. How can these laws be implemented in Myanmar, where half the national budget is allocated to the military and there is widespread so-called forced labor that is not paid at all?

SILVIA ROSE CARTWRIGHT (NEW ZEALAND) • [Regarding forced labor] I would like to ask whether the government of Myanmar has taken the recommendations of the ILO seriously...
My delegation is pleased to be here today to respond to the comments, observations, and questions put forward by the distinguished committee members following the presentation of our initial report on January 21. Today, our lady delegates, who are actually handling Women Affairs in Myanmar, will also take part in a dialogue with the Committee members.

Questions posed by some Committee members included requests for information on the implementation of the National Convention process, participation of the NLD [National League for Democracy] in the National Convention process, and the status of the new constitution that the National Convention is drafting. We notice that there were some mistaken notions in connection with the political process that we are engaged in, and about Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as well.

A few questions were raised with regard to the status of women and children in armed conflict and the well-being of women in the so-called refugee camps. Some have expressed concern about the alleged forced labor in Myanmar and what the government has done regarding the implementation of ILO recommendations. I shall respond to all these questions.

...To understand the situation of women and children in areas of armed conflict and the alleged problems of forced relocation, you must first of all understand the ethnic insurgency problem in my country. The history of my country is replete with armed insurrections of the ethnic groups, resulting primarily from the "divide and rule" policy under the colonial rule. Firmly believing that lasting peace can be achieved only through unity among the national races, the government made efforts to establish peace with the armed groups of the national races. As a result of determined efforts made by the government, 17 out of 18 armed groups have now returned to the legal fold. This is the first time in our history since the gaining of independence in 1948 that so many armed groups have exchanged arms for peace. With a view to further consolidating the peace thus achieved, the government launched an ambitious plan for the development of border areas and national races, spending over 15 billion kyats on the plan. The national races are now actively involved with the government in their regional development efforts as equal partners.

Today, the only insurgent group that still continues to pursue a policy of armed insurrection is a group called the Karen National Union (KNU), which in fact is quickly diminishing, as many of its members have exchanged arms for peace. They are operating only in certain areas across the border, bringing about destruction and turmoil. It is in this regard, I think, that some Committee members have expressed concern about the welfare of women and children in these areas.

Concern was also expressed about women in the relocated villages in the border areas. The conflict in that area is primarily due to wanton and ruthless activities of the remnant KNU insurgent group. However, the government is determined to put an end to this conflict so that people in that locality, including women and children, can live in peace and tranquility. It is with this view in mind that the government has extended its offer of peace to the KNU, which still stands.

The allegations about forced relocations are not true at all. What actually transpired was that vil-
lagers are resettled to safer areas to protect them from atrocities committed by the insurgents. In resettling them, the government always looks into the welfare, seeing to it that basic human requirements, such as food, clothing and shelter, are provided for.

A question was asked about the plight of women in the so-called refugee camps along the Myanmar-Bangladesh border. There are actually no refugee camps on our side. We have transit camps along our border to facilitate the repatriation of the returnees. The returnees' basic needs, such as food and clothing, as well as health requirements, are first-attended to in the transit camps before they are sent to their homes without any further delay. I would like to assure you that there is no gender discrimination in the attention we give to the returnees.

I would like to inform you that we are implementing the repatriation program strictly in accordance with the agreement that we have worked out amicably between the two governments concerned. Although there may be some minor hitches here and there, there is no need for serious concern, as the mechanism for repatriation is already in place between the two governments concerned.

Some Committee members have asked about the National Convention process. Some have expressed concern about so-called "restrictions" on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. One or two Committee members inquired as to how she could be involved in the political process. Madam Chairperson, I would like to assure the distinguished committee members that the establishment of a democratic society is the ultimate goal of the government. The political process for achieving this goal is through the National Convention, which was agreed upon by all parties and where representatives of national races, political parties, and delegates from all walks of life are participating to draft a new democratic constitution reflecting the aspirations of the people. Here, a few questions were asked as to why the results of the elections in 1990 were annulled and what steps the government is taking to reconcile the situation in which Daw Aung San Suu Kyi finds herself today.

The truth of the matter is that the main task of the elected representatives of the 1990 elections was to frame a constitution, and not to form a government. This was clearly understood by all the political parties. The country needed a new constitution which would duly take into account the aspirations of the entire Myanmar people of today and the prevailing conditions of the country. The first constitution of 1947, written even before the country obtained independence, was too old, and generally considered obsolete. On the other hand, the second constitution, namely the 1974 constitution, was drawn up under the now-defunct one-party system. The desire of the majority of the parties was to draw up a new constitution. The responsibility of the government was none other than to provide the necessary assistance in the drafting of a new constitution, and to re-transfer state power to its rightful owners, the people of a nation.

The current political process is seen to be slow by some. It is a sincere wish of the government to accelerate the process and adopt a new constitution as soon as possible. However, in view of the sensitive nature of the issues, and the far-reaching implications for the country’s future, it is vitally important for the National Convention to proceed systematically and with the greatest caution possible to safeguard the interest of all the national races and not to repeat the shortcomings of the past two constitutions. If it is taking time, it is only because we want to achieve consensus in the process.

Democracy built on consensus will stand firmer on its foundation than one hastily built. It is worth

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reiterating that the government will transfer power to a new government, which will be democratically elected under the new constitution.

It was stated by a few Committee members that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi won the elections and that she is under house arrest. I would like to clarify this misconception.

First of all, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was never allowed to stand for elections in the 1990 elections. The Election Commission decided that she was not eligible to run in the elections as a candidate on account of her allegiance to a foreign country, under Section 10, Subsection E of the Pyithu Hluttaw, that is the parliament election law. It could be misconstrued as a deliberate attempt to discriminate against women. Well, it is not. The interesting aspect about the situation is that the legal provision to bar candidates with allegiance to foreign countries was originally suggested and written into the 1947 constitution by her father, General Aung San.

As to the remark that she is under house arrest, nothing could be further from the truth. She is free and is moving about freely in Yangon, attending social functions and even meeting with diplomats. What actually happened earlier was that on July 20, 1989, she was restrained under Section 10, Subsection B of the 1975 Law to Safeguard the State Against the Dangers of Those Desiring to Cause Subversive Acts. This action represents the most lenient legal action. As a matter of fact, much sterner legal action could have been taken against the same offense under existing criminal law.

Although the aforementioned action had to be taken against her because she was a woman and out of respect for her father, the authorities looked after her well being in every possible way during the period of restraint. The authorities arranged for doctors to visit her regularly for medical checkups or medical care she needed. Arrangements were also made for regular correspondence between Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her family. Apart from letters, her family had also sent various assorted articles to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. The authorities had allowed and helped to arrange religious ceremonies such as offering of Soon to Buddhist monks at her residence. Utmost care was taken to suit her convenience as much as possible. The house restraint order was lifted on October 7, 1995.

Soon after she was released from house restraint she started to take a confrontational stance against the government. The NLD, which had been participating in the political process of the National Convention as the largest group, unilaterally decided to withdraw from the National Convention in November 1995 and took a collision course with the government, taking a series of destructive and highly dangerous steps to hinder the peaceful and systematic process towards democracy. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi threatened the government with utter devastation unless it engaged in a dialogue with the NLD. The government, initiating to meet with the NLD with a view to eventually entering into substantive discussions, also lost an opportunity to achieve its objective when the NLD took the most irrational and perilous step of forming a ten-member parliamentary committee, against existing laws. Of course, there is no basis for the haphazardly formed committee to represent a parliament which does not exist.

My delegation would also like to state in response to a few queries that the resignation of NLD members are decisions of their own, with no intimidation or coercion by the government. They reflect frustrations felt by the NLD members over the pursuit of a policy of utter devastation by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her cause for non-investment and economic sanctions. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's confrontational policy has bred a strong sense of resentment among the people who have to suffer. There have been even reports in the international media that she expelled some of her own elected party members who contradicted her.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON, We would have liked to love and cherish a woman who also happens to be the daughter of a national hero, General Aung San. But she is obsessed with the idea of bringing about political change through creation of utter devastation.

I would like to assure the distinguished members of the Committee that in Myanmar there is no discrimination against women, and women legally enjoy equal rights with men in political, economic, administrative, and social spheres. The new draft constitution that the National Convention is
drafting, we are convinced, will contain provisions that will guarantee equality of women before the law.

Regarding the recommendations made by the ILO Commission of Inquiry under the Forced Labor Convention, I would like to inform the committee that the government has already issued Order number 1.99 dated May 14, 1999, to make the Towns Act of 1907 and Village Act of 1907 conform to the changing situations in the country. This Order effectively made defunct the offending provisions of the Towns Act and Village Act and clearly stipulates that the power to requisition forced labor under these two acts shall not be exercised. Also, any person who fails to abide by the order, shall have actions taken against him or her. The order has been promulgated in the National Myanmar Gazette, and circulated to all State bodies, government's ministries, and local administrative bodies, and also to local and international media. The order, which has the force of law, has in effect ended the requisition of personal services of the residents of village tracts and wards all over the country. The action of the government was properly reported to the ILO by Myanmar's official delegation in June last year.

D A W K H I N A Y E W I N

Regarding the organizational structure of our national machinery for the advancement of women, the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs, as stated in the report, is chaired by the Minister, Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement. This Ministry is designated as the national focal point for women's affairs because the Department of Social Welfare has a women's section taking care of displaced young women by providing occupational training as well as residential facilities. Members of this Committee are the deputy ministers of related ministries, representatives of the Attorney General and the Chief Justice, and the presidents of the notable woman-related NGOs. This committee is a high-level inter-ministerial policy-making body on women's affairs. It leads and gives guidance in implementing the programs systematically and efficiently. It is instrumental in providing the mechanism for inter-sectoral collaboration and coordination.

As opposed to the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs, which is a policy-making body, the Myanmar National Working Committee for Women's Affairs is an operational body. Its main purpose is to systematically carry out the activities for the advancement of women. This committee is comprised of representatives from related departments and NGOs. The Committee is at present chaired by a lady professor. Apart from the secretary, the six Committee members are the chairpersons of the six subcommittees, namely education, health, economy, culture, violence against women, and the girl child.

On the question of funding, the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs does not receive any budget allocations from the government. It receives donations from well-wishers and from fundraising activities. The six subcommittees are equally allotted for operational activities. However, they can request funds to carry out specific projects. All members of these subcommittees are voluntary members. Personnel of the Department of Social Welfare are engaged full-time with the Committee's activities. The Working Committee and the subcommittee are comprised of both sexes and the ratio is approximately three females to one male.

M A D A M C H A I R P E R S O N

One of the areas of concern identified by the Myanmar National Committee for Women Affairs is violence against women. The term "violence" encompasses any kind of violence that takes place against women. However, in our country, research has been conducted only on marital violence as yet. The findings are still in the process of analysis, but some initial findings have been reported. The findings reveal that although the magnitude of violence is low, women suffered both physical and mental violence. For example, in four townships in the Yangon Division, there is 3.89% of physical and 5.9% of mental violence.

Another form of violence against women is forced prostitution and trafficking in women. Myanmar is fully aware of this issue, having over 3,800 miles of border with five countries. As there have been increased activities by unscrupulous agents, the government, in collaboration with UN agencies, local and international NGOs, is trying to
combat such trafficking. Since the entire trafficking network operates clandestinely, it is impossible to get accurate figures. Although there may be some unreported cases, the known number of women who return to the homeland are 150, the number who are intercepted on their way are 110, and the cases of trafficking in women and children are 2,140. Prompt action has been taken against the perpetrators of trafficking, who were punished with up to ten years of imprisonment. There is a National Task Force on Trafficking in Women and Children and a cross-border committee comprised of representatives of relative departments such as the police force, the Attorney General's office, border areas, and immigration. This committee is headed by a woman and comprises both sexes. It made a few visits to the border areas to collect data from the judicial, police, and health departments, and will be holding a national seminar on trafficking in mid-2000.

Although there is no center specifically for victims of rape, the physical and mental health needs of the victims of rape are taken care of by the doctors and social workers. As stated in the oral presentation, training for service providers of violence against women are in progress. Plans are also underway to establish crisis centers for violence against women. The offenders of rape, whether civilian or military personnel, are tried by their respective courts, and the penalty ranges from five years to life imprisonment.

**MADAM CHAIRPERSON,**

Regarding the question on education, one of the objectives of the "Education for All" project is to ensure universal access to primary education. The government is trying its best to meet this objective by various strategies with the collaboration of the Myanmar National Committee for Women Affairs and NGOs. The "All Children in School" project is being implemented by UNDP and the Ministry of Education. Primary education is free, but the government and NGOs are aware that the expenses for text books and stationary could be one factor for the number of drop-outs. Thus, the Working Committee for Women Affairs in all states and divisions, and the NGOs, such as the Maternal and Child Welfare Association, render their assistance by providing school uniforms, textbooks, and stationery. The exact number of girl students who receive this kind of assistance cannot be cited at this time but a Japanese NGO by the name of World Federation for World Peace assisted 30 primary school girls in a village very recently. The distinguished members can see that the total number of stipend beneficiaries is 75,319 students from 192 townships, if you will refer to the booklet *Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association* in 1999.

The government pays very close attention to the enrollment and retention rates of children from both rural and urban areas. As mentioned in the report, non-formal education is available for illiterate women. The Working Committee for Women's Affairs and NGOs, like the Maternal Child and Welfare Association, are conducting learning and reading circles in collaboration with the communities concerned.

The following figures may satisfy one of the queries. The female percentage of enrollment in universities and professional institutes is 59.7%. The percent of female primary and middle-level teachers is 72.9%, the percentage of high school teachers is 70.5%, and the percentage of woman faculty members in universities 69.4%. The medium of teaching in primary and middle level is Myanmar language. But English is the medium of instruction in high school and tertiary level. The young children have to study English as a second language from kindergarten in both rural and ethnic areas. The ethnic groups have their own dialect and are encouraged to promote it outside the school.

With regard to the admission criteria for women to attend universities, it depends entirely on the performance in the basic education high school examination. That is, they need to score high marks. Some institutes inhibit female access, but gender restrictions work both ways. For example, the Institute of Nursing accepts only 20% of its capacity for males. The disciplines that restrict entry of women are: for the dental institute, 20%, for the Institute of Technology, 20%, for the Institute of Agriculture, 25%, for the Institute of Forestry 10%, for marine biology, 20%, for geology 10%. The only reason for the restriction is that the pursuit of many of these disciplines requires physical hardships. The majority of the students, male or female, enter the profession they have been trained for upon gradu-
Myanmar women have entered many non-traditional fields: 49.8% of doctors, 57% of medical technologies, and 52% of pharmacists are women. There are also women engineers and architects. A recent success story is that the first two Ph.D. degrees in a Myanmar university were awarded to women. More significantly, their degrees were in the science discipline, Chemistry.

Regarding the question on the number of computer and auditing classes held by the Subcommittee on Economy, a total of six sessions were held in Yangon with 50 girls in each session for last year. Similar classes were held in other parts of Myanmar as well.

Madam Chairperson, with your kind permission I would like to pass on the floor to my colleague, Dr. Khin Ohn Thant. Thank you.

**DR. KHIN OHN THANT**

**THANK YOU MADAM CHAIRPERSON.**

Allow me to continue our response by taking up the topic of women at the decision-making level. [The following] data and information may indicate the present status. First, female judges: judges in intermediate courts are 52, judges in lower courts 399, and advocates are 952. There are no legal impediments or any form of restriction. Myanmar women have been aptly represented in international fora. In 1930 a Myanmar woman participated in the drafting of a constitutional reform in London. In 1947 women participated in the drafting of the Myanmar constitution. A lady was appointed director general in the International Organizations and Economics Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1978 to 1987. Since then, a number of women have been appointed director general in such departments as trade, cooperatives, accounting general's office, national planning and historical research departments. At present, women represented 27% of the home-based staff and 20% of the diplomatic core abroad. The 1990 Labor Force Survey may shed more light on the mid- to top-level positions in the government service. There were over 331,000 males, comprising 61% of the total force and over 212,000 females, 39% of the total labor force.

It is evident that more progress is called for in spite of women's equal access to higher education and professions. To cite an example, there are only two women rectors, two pro-rectors, in a total of 47 universities.... Our report said that the man is the head of the family. Traditionally, the man is the sole breadwinner and the woman is the housewife. As time changed women began to work. The tradition also changed. There are women who are heads of families. There is more sharing of family responsibilities between husband and wife as co-partners. The burden of household chores and raising a family is not as demanding on women as it used to be. A Labor Force Survey in 1999 revealed that 20.9% of urban and 19% of rural families are headed by women.

For now, the percent of women in the top level is low, 33.88% in 1996-97. After the completion of the constitution and with a multi-party democratic system, there will be no way of stopping women from running in elections and taking up high posts.

**MADAM CHAIRPERSON,**

Regarding laws concerning Myanmar women, the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs requested the Attorney General's office to review all laws concerning women. The outcome is the publishing of the booklet on laws relating to women. As to the question of whether ethnic women enjoyed the same legal protection as others, the answer is positive. But in some cases, in the remote and far-reaching areas, the mores of the society prevail. These social laws will change as women become more educated and the areas become more accessible.

The labor laws are applicable only to those from the formal sector. However, a woman from the informal sector can file a complaint to the local authorities and also to the Myanmar National Working Committee for Women's Affairs and the letter will request the Township Working Committee for Women's Affairs to handle the matter. This committee, together with the Township Peace and Development Council, will settle the dispute. There were 326 complaints in Yangon for the latter six months of 1999, ranging from marital conflicts, disputes over property, embezzlement, and so on.

A married woman has the right to change the property into her name if there is a partition of property in a divorce case.
The legal age for marriage is 20 years for both sexes, when they can marry without their parents' consent. Reproductive health talks are given to communities to enhance awareness in the girls about the dangers of young pregnancy.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON,

To respond to questions raised in connection with women in rural areas, income generating programs have been conducted as a measure to alleviate poverty. Small loans are given to poor women engaged in microenterprise by NGOs to promote their economic capacity. The Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association provides vocational training to young girls and women. Agricultural loans are disbursed to applicants regardless of sex.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON,

We would like to thank the distinguished member of the Committee for her kind suggestion to include mental health in the report, which was inadvertently left out.

Integration of mental health into community health care has begun by training medical officers and basic health workers. The Ministry of Health has appointed psychiatrists to hospitals all over the country and has plans to employ clinical psychologists. By the end of 2001, 75% of existing health personnel will be able to render services for the promotion and protection of mental health for both sexes.

I would now like to give additional information on women NGOs in Myanmar. Apart from the NGOs mentioned in the report, there are many other women NGOs, as Myanmar women have the tradition of actively taking part in NGOs.... The criteria for membership is determined by the organization concerned. These NGOs have to register annually at the Home Ministry. There are no registration fees, but an annual report of the organization has to be submitted.

I would now like to briefly mention the government's endeavors in combating drug abuse. The State Peace and Development Council has considered drug abuse as a national concern ever since its assumption of the State responsibility. In light of this commitment, the Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances Law was enacted in January 1993. Drug abuse prevention and control committees were formed at the central, divisional, township, ward, and village levels throughout the country.

[Regarding] CEDAW, it has been translated into Myanmar language as a first step. The Myanmar National Working Committee on Women's Affairs has been disseminating information on CEDAW through magazine articles and talks in various townships. We are fully aware of the need to disseminate more to the ethnic community in their regional ethnic languages.

Finally, concerning questions on women prisoners. We do not have with us at this time the number of women prisoners, the ratio of female prisoners out of the women population and the ratio of female to male prisoners. We suspect both ratios to be small.

Women prisoners are segregated from the men prisoners. Examples of privileges enjoyed by women prisoners are that the death sentence is reduced to life imprisonment for pregnant women. A woman prisoner may keep with her a child under age four if she so desires. Except for a crime punishable with death or life imprisonment sentence, a first time woman culprit may be freed on a guarantee of good conduct, depending on the age and character of the culprit, and the seriousness of the crime.

Thank you for your kind attention.
I. INTRODUCTION

Overview
This report was prepared and written by the Women’s Organizations of Burma’s Shadow Report Writing Committee. This committee is comprised of representatives of five women’s organizations based along the Thai/Burma border: the Karen Women’s Organization, the Karenni Women’s Organization, the Shan Women’s Action Network, the Burmese Women’s Union, and the Tavoyan Women’s Union. The report was written with the participation of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) Women’s Affairs Department and with the support of the Women’s Rights and Welfare Association of Burma (WRWAB) and the Rakhine Women’s Union. All representative of this committee are themselves refugee women from Burma who have fled the persecution and oppression they experienced in their country.
The authors wish to highlight two significant issues concerning the State Peace and Development Council's (SPDC) report to the CEDAW Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). First, the SPDC fails to acknowledge the continuing civil war between the military junta and ethnic nationalities fighting for their rights to autonomy, democracy, and human rights. Ethnic strife is central to the country's political deadlock and is a major impediment to democratic change. As long as the SPDC refuses to acknowledge the civil war and the rights of ethnic nationalities, the situation for women throughout Burma will continue to deteriorate. Second, the SPDC demonstrates its misinterpretation of the principles of the CEDAW through its claim that women are entirely equal in Burmese society, a claim that is significantly at odds with the experience of most women in Burma. The first step in eliminating discrimination against women is acknowledging that such discrimination exists. Until the SPDC recognizes that traditional stereotypes, institutions, policies, and practices work to subordinate women in Burma, the situation of women will not improve.

**Demographics**

Burma's multiethnic population is estimated at approximately 47 million people, of which ethnic Burmans are considered to comprise two-thirds.¹ There are an estimated 135 national groups: Karen and Shan groups are considered to comprise about 10% of the population while Akha, Chin, Chinese, Danu, Indian, Kachin, Karenni, Kayan, Kokang, Lahu, Mon, Naga, Palaung, Rakhine, Rohingya, Tavoyan, and Wa peoples each constitute 5% or less of the population.² There are over 100 ethnic linguistic groups and sub-groups. The majority of the population is Buddhist, with Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Animist minorities.³ It is estimated that between 1.5 to 2 million people from various ethnic groups currently live as refugees outside Burmese borders in Thailand, China, Bangladesh and India.

Burma's diverse and resource-rich terrain covers approximately 676,000 square kilometers and is bordered by India and Bangladesh to the west, China to the north, and Laos and Thailand to the east.
Politically, Burma is divided into 7 states, 7 divisions, 320 townships, 22,190 wards, and 13,756 village tracts. In 1998, Burma was declared a least developed nation in light of its chronic state of underdevelopment and in 1999, Burma ranked 128 out of 174 in the UNDP [United Nations Development Programme] Human Development Index. Life expectancy at birth is 62.6 years for women and 59.1 years for men. The average age for women to marry in largely urban areas is mid-to-early 20's, and married women are thought to comprise approximately 13% of the population. The legal age for marriage for women under Burmese customary law is 16 years with and 18 years without parental consent.

According to the 1983 census, the rural/urban breakdown is 25% urban to 75% rural, and although it is difficult to ascertain these percentages today, Burma remains a predominantly agricultural nation with a high percentage of subsistence farmers.

**Government and the Status of Women**

...There has been a noticeable decline in the number of women reaching medium to high positions in their various careers after 1962. This makes sense, as the government is a military junta; women are not permitted to be part of the military, and are therefore effectively blocked from all positions of leadership or power in the country.

As an indication of the government's level of interest in women, very little data exists on the health, educational, economic, political or social status of women, particularly women in ethnic rural and conflict areas. The little available information is often generalized by the government to reflect the situation throughout the country, thus giving a misleading picture of the true situation of rural women in Burma. Information collected by non-governmental organizations that operate inside Burma is restricted from being published under conditions signed in Memoranda of Understanding.

The creation of the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs, a committee comprised largely of military men, and the non-independent, non-governmental Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association, have both acted as vehicles for the promotion of national patriotic values rather than the empowerment of women. Programs created to provide services and information to women are afflicted by the same difficulties as other institutions, namely, lack of funding, training, freedom of information, and corruption. No government body or committee specifically dedicated to achieving gender equality exists in Burma.

**Conditions of Civil War**

...Cease-fire zones are non-Burman ethnic areas with a history of conflict where, in recent years, the SPDC and the local army have signed a cease-fire treaty. The conditions of cease-fires vary markedly from treaty to treaty. Who politically controls a particular cease-fire area is often uncertain: the local insurgency group, the SPDC, or degrees of both. In some areas, treaties remain solid, while in others, the situation is on the verge of dissolution. In many cases, the cease-fire agreements have broken down and fighting resumed even though the government publicly claims cease-fire conditions are maintained. This is the case with the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) in Karenni State, and the Shan State Army in central Shan State.

Forced Relocation Zones are large tracts of land within ethnic civil war zones where the SPDC employs counterinsurgency tactics designed to separate insurgency groups from their civilian base. Known as the "Four Cuts" Strategy, the SPDC aims to cut insurgents off from their supplies of (1) food, (2) funds, (3) intelligence, and (4) recruits by forcibly relocating entire tracts of villagers into army designated relocation sites. Many internally displaced people (IDPs) remain hiding in the jungles rather than move to relocation sites, often for months at a time or sometimes permanently.

In "black areas," people seen by patrolling SPDC troops can be shot on sight. On several occasions in Shan State during 1997, SPDC troops massacred large groups of people including women attempting to return to their original villages. When enforcing the relocation program, the SPDC violates "The Guiding Principles of Internal Displacement" drawn up by the Representative of the UN Secretary General on Internally Displaced Persons.

It is very difficult to ascertain the numbers of people affected by armed conflict in Burma today, although it is undoubtedly in the several millions. Despite the alarming scale of displacement, little reliable information exits. Nevertheless, the Burma
Border Consortium estimated in February 1999 that there may be as many as one million internally displaced people (IDPs) in border areas in Burma. Along the eastern side of Burma, there are an estimated 100,000-200,000 IDPs throughout Karen State. This figure, combined with the number of Karen in refugee camps in Thailand, means an estimated 30% of the rural Karen population are displaced. In 1999 in Karenni State, there were an estimated 70,000 IDPs. Of the approximately 300,000 people displaced from central Shan State, it is further estimated that 104,000 have fled to Thailand, 100,000 moved to relocation sites, and 50,000 have hidden in "black area" forests.

In Arakan State, on the western border, between December 1991 and March 1992 an estimated 250,000 Rohingya left and fled to Bangladesh because of rapes, killings, forced labor, other human rights abuses, religious persecution and confiscation of Muslim-owned land by members of the SPDC army. The situation in Chin and Kachin States is not well known. The Chin National Front reports 40-50,000 displaced people, many of whom have fled to Mizoram State, India, while in Kachin State, around 67,000 people alone were said to be displaced in 1994. Despite a cease-fire agreement between the Kachin Independence Organization and the Government of Burma, there continue to be problems of land confiscation and displacement.

II. HEALTH

Introduction

The armed conflict in Burma affects the health of women in two primary ways: it renders health, and in particular, the reproductive health concerns of women, subservient to the requirements of a militarized state; and it creates myriad new health problems for women. Because the SPDC delegates massive resources to what it describes as the maintenance of civil order, military expenditures necessarily trump health care costs. The result is a national health infrastructure with too little funding, too few trained health professionals, insufficient public health facilities, inadequate rural services, and deficient health education programs.

...To their credit, the SPDC has recently recognized the importance of women's health issues, as evidenced by the creation of a health sub-committee of the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs. These structures, however, are ineffective because they do not function independently from the SPDC: the leaders of this Committee and sub-committee are SPDC officials and their wives. Furthermore, decades of civil war have caused a crisis in the national health care system, particularly in areas populated by ethnic minority groups. Consequently, an improvement in Burma's health care emergency will require a far greater effort and commitment than the SPDC has demonstrated thus far: independent leadership and accountability, significant funding, strong and concerted action, and an enhanced political will.

Government Expenditures

That no comprehensive survey of the health sector in Burma exists is eloquent testimony to the SPDC's insufficient attention to health concerns. In the 1995 financial year, the SPDC spent 0.5% of GDP on health. In contrast, military expenditures totaled 7.6% of the GDP, and represented 222% of all combined health and education outlays.

While the SPDC is to be commended for its goal of spending 5% share of its GDP on health by the year
2000, such goal is likely to remain unmet. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the Government of Burma is estimated to spend US$9 per person per year on all health care, while the basic minimum health care system requires expenditures of US$12 per person. By choosing to allocate resources to bombs and not beds in hospitals, missiles and not medicines, the SPDC is waging a war against women as well as men on the battlefield of health care.

A Healthcare System in Crisis: Access to Health Care Facilities

The SPDC fails to meet CEDAW's requirement that States Parties ensure women access to health care services. This failure takes a particularly heavy toll on women living in rural and conflict areas because they are unable to maintain their roles as primary care givers without the assurance of good health.

There are no regular medical facilities available for the women and children in most of the relocation sites. Frequently, only one clinic serves a cluster of seven to eight villages, and no extra health care facilities are established in or near the sites. Existing clinics do not often have trained medical personnel or sufficient facilities to meet the special problems of relocated villagers, which include malaria, anemia, Hepatitis B, respiratory failure, and dysentery. Seriously ill people are forced to travel to hospitals in nearby towns. Where barriers including poor roads, nonexistent communications, and difficult transport can be overcome, they will be lucky to find a qualified medical professional, since there is only one doctor per 12,500 people.

For internally displaced women hiding in free-fire areas, there is simply no access to health care services. Women living in the jungle have no choice but to rely on their own knowledge of traditional medicines.

Women and Family Planning

CEDAW also requires access to family planning services, a requirement unmet by the SPDC's current programs. Most women interviewed had little or no knowledge of family planning and no access to family planning methods.

Traditional beliefs concerning childbirth are widespread, leading many women to reject contraception or family planning of any kind as unnatural. At most, traditional herbal medicines are used occasionally by those who feel they have had too many children and wish to prevent more. Particularly rural women and women in conflict areas trust information passed down through generations over new information from outsiders who come and go. Many of these women believe that nature decrees the number and spacing of children, and that their responsibility is simply to feed them as they come.

Maternal Health

Estimated maternal mortality rates for Burma reach approximately 517 per 100,000 live births, compared with 80 in Malaysia and ten in Singapore. High maternal mortality rates indicate a plethora of unmet reproductive health needs throughout the country.

Nationally, around 80% of births occur in the home, and only 32% of these occur in the presence of trained health practitioners. However, anecdotal evidence from interviews conducted by the authors of this report suggests that nearly all women in rural and conflict areas give birth at home with the assistance of TBAs [Traditional Birthing Assistants]. Although the Department of Health does provide some training to TBAs, the UNFPA study found that it was unclear to what extent, how recently, or how comprehensively they had been trained. For example, a medic from Karen State interviewed in Mae Sot told how she received government midwife training in her township in 1998. She had to pay 3000 kyats per month for six months plus expenses. Afterwards, she was awarded a certificate and sent to engage in field work without medicine or medical supplies. It was not until she started training as a medic at the Mae Tao Clinic in Thailand that she was surprised to find how much she did not know.

In the experience of medics working on both sides of the Thai-Burma border, anemia caused by poor prenatal nutrition is one of the leading causes of complications at birth. At least 23% of all babies born alive weigh 2,500 grams or less, and around 2.5% of babies are born pre-term (37 weeks or less) in rural areas. These statistics are likely to be much worse for women and children living in conflict areas, as they are subject to long-term food insecurity.

Access to emergency obstetric services is also very limited in many parts of rural Burma for a variety of reasons, including: cost, late referrals, poor roads which are often impassible in the rainy season (June-
November), difficulty in accessing vehicles, and excessive distances....

Abortion
According to Burmese Penal Codes S312 and S315, induced abortion is illegal in Burma and can incur imprisonment terms of up to seven or ten years and/or fines, depending on the time of termination.

Research indicates that these Penal Code sections are widely ignored. Studies of government hospitals have shown that abortion is a major cause of maternal deaths, accounting for between one-third and one-half of all maternal deaths.\textsuperscript{24} UNICEF also estimated that 58 women per week died due to illegal abortion and that fifty percent of all maternal deaths result from illegal abortion.\textsuperscript{25} Finally, according to hospital studies conducted in urban and semi-urban areas, up to one-third to one-half of maternal deaths in Burma are cause by induced abortions, largely conducted under unsanitary conditions.\textsuperscript{26}

Women and HIV/AIDS
Through its inconsistency, at best, and its policy of denial, at worse, the SPDC refuses to confront one of the country's greatest health crises to affect women in Burma: HIV and AIDS. This failure continues the SPDC's woeful record of providing adequate, accessible, and equal health care to women. For example, in July 1999, the Minister of Health, General Kyat Sein, acknowledged that the problem of AIDS has become serious in Burma. However, the Secretary 1 of the SPDC, General Khin Nyunt, one of the SPDC's most powerful leaders, told the \textit{Sunday Times} newspaper in September 1999 that the problem of HIV/AIDS does not yet constitute a serious health threat in Burma.\textsuperscript{27}

Such denials fly in the face of credible evidence. UN AIDS [Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS] director Peter Piot confirmed at the Southeast Asia HIV/AIDS meeting in April 1999 that 440,000 out of Burma's total population of 47 million are infected with HIV. In his opinion, the main problem in preventing the spread of the virus is the lack of government recognition.\textsuperscript{28} This assessment that AIDS is a health emergency is not new: in 1996, it was estimated that in Burma, approximately 175,000, or one-third, of all people diagnosed with HIV are women.\textsuperscript{29}

Women and Landmines
While landmines do not discriminate between men and women when they detonate, women suffer their consequences in some ways that are different from the experience of men. Landmines' most visible impact occurs when women die and become disabled as their result, which is happening more and more frequently. But in addition, women are affected when their male relatives are injured or killed by landmines. In these cases, the women are typically left to shoulder the burden of caring for their families alone, a burden that is often increased by the addition of a landmine-disabled relative....

In the areas of conflict between armed ethnic minority groups and the government military, landmines are used increasingly by both sides.\textsuperscript{30} Areas known to be heavily mined are the Bangladesh/Burma and Thai/Burma border passes, the ethnic Karen, Karenni, Shan, Kachin, Arakan, Mon and Chin states, and the Tenasserim Division.\textsuperscript{31} Landmine Monitor researchers found evidence that the SPDC uses landmines directed against the civilian, non-combatant populations, "notably in the mining of villages to prevent resettlement and mining of border areas to prevent refugee flows."\textsuperscript{32}

III. EDUCATION

Introduction
For most girls in Burma, a good education is a remote fantasy. In fact, the state of education throughout Burma is so catastrophic that fewer than one-third of all girls who enroll make it through primary school.\textsuperscript{33} Though education for girls in most of Burma's sub-cultures is highly valued, securing adequate food—the first priority—is so time-consuming that it takes girls out of the classroom. Girls suffer this fate more frequently than boys since it is girls' perceived role to help with the family duties. Consequently, education for large numbers of girls is simply not an available choice.

At entry level of governmental decision-making, education is given short shrift. The SPDC spends less than 1.1% of GDP on education. The SPDC's indifference to the importance of education is illustrated by the fact that most universities have been shut down since the 1988 student-led civil uprising. Specifically, with the exception of military universi-
ties, the universities in Burma have been open for only three out of the past 11 years, and many four-year curricula have been reduced to two-to-three month courses. The government's refusal to reopen the schools on the pretext that they must maintain "political stability" calls strongly into question their commitment to education.

Given the dire state of the Burmese economy, many families are forced to trade their daughters' long-term educational future for short-term daily survival. Girls are forced to work or help scavenge for basic necessities. In rural and conflict areas, basic education is difficult and, in many cases, impossible. In border regions, where most conflict occurs, girls face a multitude of educational barriers: lack of educational infrastructure; too few teachers; physical dangers which render travel to school impossible; constant transience due to forced relocations; and Burmanization policies that force the closure of non-Burman schools in ethnic areas.

The dearth of accurate information makes the poor state of education for girls virtually invisible. To the extent information does exist, it is overly general, outdated, incomplete, and conflicting. That the government of Burma still references 1983 literacy rates as definitive is case in point. Information collection on the situation of women's education, independent from the State, is not possible under the present political conditions. Therefore, the silence surrounding girls' lack of education is unlikely to change until the SPDC changes its style of governance dramatically.

**Government Expenditure**

The SPDC claims a strong commitment to developing human resources as they prepare to integrate into the global economy, a commitment that will be difficult to meet under the present spending limitations. The gap between SPDC spending on defense as compared to education is enormous by Asian standards. While the UNDP states that education spending rose from 1.4% of GDP in 1986-87 to 2.6% in 1991-92, it has been in steady decline since then, to just 1.1% in 1995-6. Data about government spending on education in rural and urban conflict areas, and more specifically, on women's and girls' education in conflict areas, is simply not available.

**Barriers to Access in Urban Areas**

Notwithstanding the lack of hard data, anecdotal evidence indicates that girls' and women's access to education is restricted in many ways. Access to schools is highest in urban areas where more schools, more teachers, and less threat of violent conflict exist. In the urban context, the most important barrier to enrolling and remaining in schools is poverty: families cannot afford the formal and informal costs of keeping girls in school, and families need girls to contribute to the family income.

**School Costs**

Cuts in government spending for education have translated into increased costs to families in the form of a series of taxes and donations paid to the education department, the school, and teachers. As a result of these cost increases, primary school enrollment has declined so much that an estimated two-thirds to three-quarters of children in Burma drop out of school before fifth grade. The table to the left enumerates the prohibitive school fees incurred by the family of a student in Tavoy, and demonstrates why families simply cannot afford to educate their children.
Education of Women in Conflict Areas

All the problems described above are exacerbated by warfare for girls living in conflict areas. Where there is extreme poverty caused by that conflict, which is almost universally true in these areas, education is deferred to physical survival and the struggle for food security. The Government of Burma not only fails to ensure girls’ access to education, but also fails to respect basic rights through its policies and practices of forced relocation, rape, extortion, forced labor, and warfare against ethnic minorities. These hardships disrupt schools and cause a climate of instability and fear severely detrimental to the educational process.

Civil War Zones

Every aspect of human existence for civilians is rendered more difficult in Burma’s conflict zones. Education for girls is no exception.

At best, some schools manage to function in these conflict areas: either schools run by the SPDC, with government-sanctioned teachers seeking to inculcate “Burman” values in their students; or local community schools which must rely on self-help measures to survive. At worst, there are no schools whatsoever.

The SPDC frequently uses education as a tool of Burmanization in conflict areas. In these cases, non-Burman schools (that is, where school is conducted in an ethnic language other than Burmese) are forced to close while only schools employing state-sanctioned teachers are allowed to remain open. The practice of Burmanization through the education system is evident in many cease-fire zones, where some primary schools have been allowed to open under the joint guardianship of the government authority and local ethnic party. For example, following the cease-fire agreement in Mon State, the government shut down Mon language schools. As many as 6000 Mon students lost their opportunities to learn their native languages and literature as a result. Likewise, it has been reported that in Shan State, Buddhist temple schools have been ordered to close and forced to remain so through enforcement of the State Security Act that forbids more than five people from gathering without government permission.

...The lack of full technical and financial support by the government results in acute shortages of trained teachers and teaching materials as well as increased educational costs. Under the extreme conditions imposed by long-term conflict, generations of girls have lost their chance to be educated. By denying girls the education they deserve now, the SPDC is stealing their future from them.

Education and Forced Relocation

Educational opportunities for girls in relocated sites are extremely limited, as the SPDC rarely offers government schools in relocation camps. On the rare occasions when government teachers are sent to relocation camps, the camp residents are required to provide the building materials for the school, build the school, pay the teacher, and buy teaching supplies.

Similarly, education for the huge numbers of internally displaced (IDP) and transient peoples is almost impossible. Because internally displaced people are focused on survival, and because they have to change their location so frequently, they simply cannot dedicate themselves to education.

IV. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Introduction

While the subject of violence against women is not addressed by name in a specific article of CEDAW, it has been recognized as a significant impediment to women’s full equality under Article 1. In Burma, violence against women unfortunately is present in all three realms of human society: the family, the community, and the State. It is exacerbated by the highly militarized nature of Burmese society and the ongoing civil war. In this report, we choose to focus on one direct and one indirect result of the armed conflict in the context of gender violence. In the case of the former, rape perpetrated by the military is an obvious consequence of warfare. As for the latter, the internal conflict in Burma has led to a devastat-
ed economic environment, creating fertile conditions for the trafficking of women on a widespread basis.

By focusing on State-sponsored violence in the forms of rape and trafficking, this report's authors do not mean to suggest that domestic violence and other types of violence against women do not exist in communities throughout Burma. Rather, we feel that state-sponsored violence requires the focused attention of this CEDAW Committee because it is inextricably linked to the SPDC's policy of maintaining "civil order" through armed conflict. As such, until the civil war ceases, it is unlikely that this important barrier to women's equality will be eradicated.

Rape

Hundreds if not thousands of individual incidents of rape have been documented by SPDC soldiers against ethnic women in particular. The rape is perpetrated by both officers and rank-and-file soldiers, all of whom commit these crimes with impunity. ...[T]he rape targets women from the ethnic nationalities at war with the SPDC, including the Karen, Karenni, and Shan....[I]t is intended to send a signal to the communities that the women inhabit, and that signal is that the SPDC is more powerful than the ethnic people. It is also intended to demoralize ethnic communities by terrifying the potential victims, and by leaving the entire communities to feel powerless in their ability to "protect" the women and girls.

The frequency of the rapes against ethnic women suggests that these rapes must be perceived as more than random acts perpetrated by rogue soldiers. By committing such acts regularly, the SPDC army instills fear not only in the villages where women are actually raped, but also in all ethnic communities where women might be raped. This is particularly true because women are raped during their normal, daily activities. The message sent is that all ethnic women are at risk every day, and that it is impossible to avoid the circumstances under which the rape might occur.

...Furthermore, multiple women are often raped at one time, confirming the theory that these crimes are not single, random acts committed against unlucky individuals.... The frequent rape of girls and young women is particularly demoralizing to ethnic communities, as it conveys the notion that the community is unable to protect even its most vulnerable members.

Another practice many villagers believe is intended to obliterate their ethnic minority societies is "Burmanization." In the view of ethnic villagers, Burmanization is principally achieved through rape and forced marriage. Under this theory, SPDC soldiers intentionally try to get ethnic women pregnant so they will bear "Burman babies" as a means of increasing the Burman majority population and preventing the women from bearing children whose parents are both from ethnic minority groups.

Impunity for the Rapists

That soldiers who rape are infrequently punished sends a further signal that the SPDC is indifferent to the problem of State-sponsored violence against women. Attempts by rape survivors, their families, and communities to seek justice from the SPDC army are generally ignored, at best, or met with retaliation, at worse. It is common for officers or commanders to claim either that their men have not committed a crime, or that their men cannot be controlled.

...If villagers fail to believe that authorities will punish the wrongdoers, and therefore refuse to report these crimes, the effect is to grant impunity to the rapists. If there is no legal deterrent to such action, soldiers are free to engage in repeated acts of violence against women without repercussion....
Trafficking of Women

CEDAW Article 6 obligates the SPDC to "take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women...." While legislation does exist in Burma aimed at suppressing trafficking of women, including The Suppression of Prostitution Act, 1949; The Law Amending the Suppression of Prostitution Act, 1949; The Child Law, 1993; and The Penal Code, 1860, these laws are flawed for two reasons: they too frequently are directed toward those who are victimized by trafficking, and they are ineffective to stop the burgeoning sex industry in Burma. Furthermore, the laws may be overly restrictive; for example, unless immediate relatives sponsor the visits, young women are not allowed to travel outside the country. A young single woman reportedly under 30 years of age is not allowed to travel abroad with the purpose of getting employment. Studying abroad was not allowed until 1996. While these laws are intended, in theory, to curtail the trafficking trade, they instead impinge upon women's right to travel.

The phenomenon of trafficking, common to many developing countries where economic development is uneven, is intensified in Burma by civil war. Attempts to introduce liberalizing, open-market policies by the Government of Burma in 1988 have been counteracted by the SPDC’s action to nearly double the size of the armed forces over the past decade. The resulting economic crisis, in combination with the halt of international aid since the 1988 civil rights massacre and diversion of state funds away from the development of a social infrastructure, has forced the majority of the population to fend for themselves in whatever way they can. A thriving sex industry both in Burma and across the border in Thailand has presented many women with their only option for employment.

While it is impossible to calculate the number of women from Burma engaged in the sex industry, it is estimated as many as 40,000 are working as prostitutes in Thailand alone. In some cases, women and girls know they will be working in the sex industry, but have little understanding of the consequences in terms of personal and social self-worth, the physical conditions in which they will be working, or the health risks of STDs, including HIV/AIDS. Pressure to provide for the family's financial well-being and a dearth of alternative employment opportunities overrides many women's strongly socialized tendency to protect her virginity from violation outside marriage.

In other cases, family members knowingly sell girls to trafficking agents for money. Doctors at Mae Tao clinic in the Mae Sot area, Thailand have noticed a change in this trend. The increased demand for virgin girls in Thai brothels has led to an increased number of young girls sold into these brothels by families for short periods of time for considerable amounts of money, until the "value of their virginity" has expired. After this time, the girls are often returned to their families in Burma.

V. POVERTY

Poverty is one of the most serious impediments to women's full equality in Burma. Isolationist policies and gross economic mismanagement of the Burmese economy for almost 50 years by army generals determined to build their military fighting capacity has resulted in a country-wide economic crisis. Furthermore, the military junta's preoccupation with maintaining "national unity" by force has provided them with a pretext for practices that increase the lack of food security already engendered by a poor economy. This report chooses to concentrate on those practices—forced relocation, land confiscation, extortion, and forced labor—that result in the extreme impoverishment of women by removing them from their homes and, therefore, their only option for employment.

When present, food scarcity affects all members of the community with malnutrition, hunger, stress-related illnesses, and other hardships. However, women, as primary food preparers, suffer from an intensified burden to fulfill this role under difficult conditions. Addressing the fundamental issue of food scarcity for women in conflict areas is vital before other issues of women's empowerment can be properly broached....
The SPDC should:

**Health**
- Increase the national budget for health care;
- Provide reasonable salaries to health professionals so as to recruit and retain qualified individuals;
- Provide comprehensive training to more health professionals, particularly doctors, nurses, and traditional birth attendants;
- Open more well-equipped public health facilities, particularly in rural and conflict areas;
- Ensure that access to free public health facilities is available to people in need;
- Develop and implement an effective national family planning education program, including contraceptives, that takes the traditions and physical barriers of women in rural and conflict areas into consideration;
- Make pre-natal care, at no cost, if necessary, available to all women, but especially to those in rural and conflict areas;
- Provide free maternal and post-natal care to all women in need, but especially to women in rural and conflict areas;
- Legalize abortion;
- Develop and implement an effective national AIDS education program;
- Ratify the Landmines Treaty;
- Cease to use landmines, and undertake a campaign to clean up existing mines;

**Education**
- Conduct comprehensive nationwide research on women's educational status including a focus on non-Burmese speaking women's literacy rates, education, and performance in schools;
- Allocate sufficient funds to education throughout the country, including towards schools in rural, ethnic areas. Make budget figures publicly available;
- Increase teachers' salaries to be CPI-adjusted;
- Open all universities, colleges, and schools immediately;
- Immediately lift all international travel restrictions on women preventing the pursuit of educational opportunities not available in Burma;
- Introduce educational reforms and programs to eliminate cultural, political, and economic barriers in education for women;
- Address the issue of poor teaching, learning, and assessment methods through adequately funding and upgrading teacher-training colleges. Ensure that gender sensitivity training is included;
- Research and introduce special action plans to close the gap between rich and poor women's access to education;
- Introduce women's studies programs in colleges and universities;
- Pass legislation to protect and promote women's right to education;
- Incorporate ethnic languages in standard curricula in public schools;
- Research, design, and implement special action plans and projects to eliminate illiteracy among girls and women in disadvantaged areas, particularly conflict zones;
- Research, design, and implement public outreach and advocacy campaigns to promote women's higher education and professional achievement in non-traditional careers;

**Violence against Women**
- Establish and enforce strict legislation criminalizing rape in every context, including by the military;
- Offer training to military officers and rank-and-file soldiers on the issue of violence against women;
- Punish severely any SPDC military officer who himself fails to punish known instances of rape by his own soldiers, under the principle of command responsibility;
- Establish an impartial team of investigators to fully investigate all complaints of rape by the military;
- Cease the practice of forced labor for military and development projects;
- Conduct a country-wide investigation into the prevalence and conditions leading to trafficking, and be prepared to implement effective legislation to combat the sex industry;
- Reallocate some of its resources from military expenditures to effective job-training programs for women, particularly those in rural areas;
- Institute economic reforms that improve the economic situation of women in rural areas;

**Poverty**
- Comply immediately with the recommendations of the 1998 ILO Commission of Inquiry into Forced Labor to stop the use of all forms of forced labor;
- Close all relocation sites and allow women and their families to return to their villages immediately;
- Discontinue the Four-Cuts policy;
- Enter into legitimate negotiations with the National League for Democracy and the ethnic nationalities;
- In the short-term, allocate the army adequate rations and supplies; in the long-term, withdraw them from ethnic areas.
1 The last national census was conducted in 1983. Data from this census is still used as the basis for calculating many basic statistics. Given the degree of civil war and the underdevelopment at that time, these figures may not be representative of the situation of women in ethnic rural and remote areas.


9 Ibid.


17 Interview #4.

18 Ibid.


21 Interview #6.

22 Ibid.


30 While it is true that both sides - the government's troops and the armed ethnic resistance groups - use landmines, it is also notable that the ethnic resistance troops try to inform the nearby villagers of the landmines and clean the areas first. However, this does not excuse any party from causing the casualties or deaths of innocent villagers.


37 Interview #1.

38 In accordance with recent strong SPDC ideological campaigns, the term "Myanmarization" could be substituted for Burmanization as the SPDC attempts to impose its idea of a single nation by re-labeling all languages, cultures, and traditions in Burma as "Myanmese." Nonetheless, this report shall continue to use the term "Burmanization" to denote this campaign of homogenization.

39 Interview #5.


44 Interview #3.
IN BRIEF

BURMA AROUND THE WORLD

CANADA — The current focus of members of the Toronto Burma Roundtable has been on obtaining legislative recognition of the Committee Representing the People’s Parliament (CRPP) by the Canadian government and exploring possibilities for a selective purchasing law in the Toronto Council.

The Toronto Burma Roundtable meets monthly to discuss issues relating to Burma and plan educational and political events. For more information contact Elizabeth Shepherd by phone: (416) 465-3458 or email: mandalay@sprint.ca, or Paul Copeland by phone: (416) 964-8126 or email: paulcope@interlog.com.

LONDON — Gustaaf Houtman, Robert Taylor, and Rachel Goldwyn spoke at a March 16 Roundtable on "The Crisis in Burma," held at the Center of South East Asian Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies.

On February 3, Robert Gordon (former British Ambassador to Rangoon) and Pam Gordon also shared their discoveries of Burma while exploring areas from Mergui to Shan State and Mrauk-U. Cambridge anthropologist Naoko Kumada who spent two years in an Irrawaddy village discussed Buddhism and its fusion with all aspects of social life, on March 7 at the Medical Society of London.

Britain-Burma Society meets seven times per year, with an interest in cultural, historical, and academic exchange. For more information contact Hon. Secretary Derek Brooke-Wavell by phone: 44 118 947 6874, fax: 44 118 954 6201, or email: d.wavell@dtn.ntl.com.

NEW YORK — Four refugee women representing ethnic groups on the Thai-Burma border gave a special briefing, "The True Situation of Women in Burma: A Rejoinder to Myanmar’s Initial Report" on January 19. They discussed the findings in the Shadow Report submitted to the 22nd Session of the Convention to Eliminate all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) at the UN, and presented a video message from Aung San Suu Kyi. The briefing was sponsored by the International League for Human Rights and the Burma UN Service Office.

The New York Roundtable holds periodic meetings of organizations and individuals interested in Burma. For more information contact the Burma UN Service Office by phone: (212) 338-0048 or fax: (212) 338-0049.

WASHINGTON, DC — "Burma into Millennium: Facilitating Policy Options for the Democratic Transition," a January 29-31 conference featured experts from Australia, Sweden, the US and British Columbia, and was sponsored by the Burma Fund, the National Endowment for Democracy, the Open Society Institute, and the School of International Service at American University.

The National Endowment for Democracy held a February 10 briefing on "Political Developments in Burma’s Ethnic States." Dr. Christina Fink, an expert on the ethnic minorities of Burma and the author of a forthcoming book, together with Naw May Oo, president of the Karen National League, discussed the leadership change of the Karen National Union, relations between the ethnic groups, and the recent hospital takeover in Thailand.

Sanctions on investment in Burma were a main topic at a symposium called "Sanctions Reform? Evaluating the Economic Weapon in Asia and the World" organized by Georgetown University Law Center on February 23. Panelists discussed the Supreme Court case on the Massachusetts Burma Law.

The December 16 Washington Burma Roundtable hosted Senior Advisor Bradley Babson of the World Bank who presented findings of the draft World Bank report on the Burmese economy.


LOS ANGELES — The Burma Forum of Los Angeles coordinated a Weekend of Prayer for Burma, March 10-12, as a means to raise awareness about Burma in communities of faith. Christians Concerned for Burma, based in Chiang Mai, Thailand, was also involved in the effort, calling for a Global Day of Prayer for Burma.

The Burma Forum of Los Angeles meets on the second Wednesday of every month. Contact Heidi Quante by phone at (323) 653-4571.

SEATTLE — The Seattle Burma Roundtable met on March 6 with updates on a number of topics, including the tense situation for refugees on the Thai-Burma border and Burmese refugee resettlement in Seattle, recent US government reports on Burma (Human Rights Country Reports and Counternarcotics report), and a corporate withdrawal from Burma.

The Burma Interest Group is a non-partisan forum attended by representatives of NGOs, business, academia, and other interested parties that meets monthly to discuss Burma-related topics. For more information contact Larry Dohrs by phone: (206) 784-5742 or fax: (206) 784-8150.
**BRIEFINGS AND DEVELOPMENTS**

**REBELS TAKEOVER THAI HOSPITAL**

Armed gunmen seized a hospital in Ratchaburi, Thailand on January 24 taking hundreds of patients and medical personnel hostage. The takeover was orchestrated by members of a Karen rebel faction known as "God's Army." The rebels demanded medical care for their soldiers injured during fighting with Burmese government troops and that the border be opened to allow in refugees fleeing the conflict. Thai police stormed the hospital during the early morning hours of January 26, killing all ten of the rebels. All the hostages were unharmed. The manner in which the Thai government handled the takeover has sparked controversy in the press and among citizen's groups in Thailand as some hostages claimed that the Karen gunmen were killed execution style, even after they had surrendered to authorities.

**NEW PUBLICATION LAUNCHED IN RANGOON**

With the approval of Burma's military regime, the premier issue of The Myanmar Times & Business Weekly found its way to newsstands February 12. Touted as an "independent" English-language publication and described as both a newspaper and a journal, it will carry local and foreign news about politics, business, social affairs and sports. Although the weekly claims to be the first "truly free press" in the country for over three decades, it has been sponsored by Burma's military intelligence establishment. According to the editor, Australian Ross Dunkley, "self-censorship" will be exercised. The fact that the regime has approved the new publication is seen as a reaction to the way the junta has been perceived by the international community through its official newspaper, The New Light of Myanmar. According to Col. Thien Swe of the Office of Strategic Studies, "The Myanmar Times will be different, more flexible."

**BUSINESS WATCH**

**CANADIAN COMPANY INVESTS IN BURMESE OIL AND GAS**

A Canadian company has signed an agreement to exploit gas and oil reserves in western Burma. The production-sharing agreement between the regime's Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise and Prime Resource Management (Cyprus) Ltd., which was signed January 24, calls for the Canadian company to explore an area 280 kilometers northwest of Rangoon, and produce natural gas and oil.

**HARVARD'S KENNEDY SCHOOL STUDENT GOVERNMENT PASSES FREE BURMA SELECTIVE-PURCHASING POLICY**

The student government of the John F. Kennedy School of Government (KSSG) at Harvard University passed a "Free Burma Resolution" aimed at companies that do business with the military regime in Burma. The motion, which passed unanimously, bars the KSSG from purchasing any goods or services sold by companies conducting business in Burma or with the Burmese government. It calls upon the Kennedy School itself to resolve the same, as well as Harvard University. In addition, it calls upon Harvard to disclose all ties with companies linked to Burma, to support shareholder actions related to withdrawal from Burma, and to remove funds from all financial institutions with outstanding loans to Burma.

**BURMA JOINS NEW TOURISM CAMPAIGN OF ASEAN NATIONS**

At the summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in November, the foreign ministers of Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos created a new tour package called "Swannabhumi!" The tourism campaign aims to promote the countries' tourist spots (in Burma, the Mandalay area), increase foreign revenues, and further develop air and road transport links between the countries. Meanwhile, the Xinhua News Agency reported in February that the number of foreign tourists to visit Burma in the first ten months of 1999 dropped by 3% from the same period in 1998. Foreign tourism in Burma earns 30 million US dollars annually.

**INSIDE WASHINGTON**

**US OFFICIAL VISITS BURMA**

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Ralph Boyce, the highest-ranking US official to visit Burma in the past five years, spent February 17 in the country meeting with the military regime and members of the democracy movement. During his one-day stop in Rangoon, Mr. Boyce held meetings with Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the National League for Democracy, as well as Khin Maung Win, deputy foreign minister of the State Peace and Development Council, and international aid workers. In a statement released by the US Embassy in Bangkok the day following Mr. Boyce's trip, the US government reaffirmed its policy toward Burma: "Until we see movement toward democracy, respect for human rights, and cooperation on counternarcotics efforts, the United States will continue to apply broad sanctions against Burma."

**BURMA BRIEFINGS HELD ON CAPITOL HILL**

The Congressional Human Rights Caucus sponsored two briefings during the month of February highlighting the current situation in Burma. A February 1 event, held in conjunction with the Asia Pacific Center and the Protection Project of the Kennedy School of Government, featured representatives from a number of ethnic women's organizations speaking on the issue of women's rights in conflict areas. On February 15, the briefing "Current Religious Liberty Violations in Burma, Laos, Vietnam and Indonesia" included testimony by Stephen Dun, an ethnic Karen human rights monitor.

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Burma Debate Winter 1999/2000

Esteeled national brethren.

...Myanmar regained the status of a sovereign and independent Union in 1948, as the national brethren were able to clear and wash away all the suspicions which were the consequences of the colonialists divide-and-rule policy, in accord with the basic principle of the Union Spirit, “In times of emergency, blood inspires unity,” putting up fierce fights against the colonial government and firmly showing the Union Spirit and national solidarity at the Panglong Conference on February 12, 1947.

When compared with some neighboring countries, Myanmar lagged behind in progress in the economic and social sectors, as national development undertakings could not be carried out due to lack of national peace and stability resulting from the wounds of the divide-and-rule policy and new forms of instigation made by neo-colonialists after regaining of independence. It is required for all the national people to strive in harmony for the success of the task to build a peaceful, pleasant, modern and developed nation in accord with the political, economic and social objectives so as to pay back the nation’s historical debt of lagging behind in development despite richness in natural resources.

The State Peace and Development Council laid down the national policy or national belief or national conviction—non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of national solidarity and perpetuation of sovereignty—in carrying out profound and extensive organizational work for the perpetuation and flourishing of Union Spirit.

...The main requirement in building a peaceful, pleasant, modern and developed nation is the firmness of the strength of the national forces. Thus, the government laid down strategies for the emergence of good and vital foundations such as perpetual propagation of Union Spirit, uplifting of cultural standards and moral conduct, proportionate progress of agricultural and other economic sectors, development of human resources and betterment of the transport sector.

The national people themselves have witnessed and heard the launching of perpetuations in various forms by destructive elements from inside and outside the nation to intensify the disturbances and distinctive and terrorist acts at a time when peace and stability, which is the most important and essential requirement of the Union, is being built up firmly and efforts are being made with added momentum for national economic development.

The entire Union people must ward off the danger of internal and external destructionists who are attempting through various means to ruin and undermine the national peace and stability and development which have already been achieved.

I hereby profoundly urge the national brethren to consolidate the national forces, national people, the government and the Tatmadaw and to collectively strive to realize the following objectives of the 53rd Anniversary Union Day:

• For all nationals to safeguard the national policy—non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of national solidarity and perpetuation of sovereignty;
• Perpetual flourishing of Union Spirit among all nationals;
• For all the nationals to strive in harmony and unison for the emergence of an enduring State Constitution leading to the emergence of a new discipline-flourishing nation;
• And for all nationals to ward off with national solidarity the danger of destructionists from inside and outside the nation who are disturbing the State stability, peace and development.

Media Resources

Burma: Political Economy Under Military Rule
Edited by Robert H. Taylor
February 2000

C. Hurst & Co. Ltd.
38 King Street
Covent Garden
London WC2E 8JZ
Phone: (44 171) 240-2666
Fax: (44 171) 240-2667
Email: hurst@atlas.co.uk

An international group of Burma experts (including Martin Smith, David Steinberg, Joseph Silverstein, Robert H. Taylor, and Seng Raw Heinze) attempt to explain the long life and vigor of the “temporary” military regime installed in 1988.

Whispers at the Pagoda: Portraits of Modern Burma
By Julie Sell
October 1999

In the US:
Weatherhill
41 Monroe Turnpike
Trumbull, CT 06611
Phone: (800) 437-7840
Fax: (800) 557-5601
Email: inims@weatherhill.com

Traveling from the literary circles of Rangoon to the hill regions that are officially off-limits to foreigners, American writer Julie Sell set out to understand Burma through the stories of individuals interviewed, among them scholars, journalists, Buddhist monks, doctors, teachers, and a long-serving military man. Also contains photographs, including some rare images of the pro-democracy movement.

Earth Rights: Linking Human Rights and Ecological Protection
October 1999

EarthRights International
202 Massachusetts Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (202) 466-5188
Fax: (202) 466-5189
Email: eri@igc.org

Booklet published as a tool for education and advocacy, in the effort to strategically link the human rights and environmental movements.
ETHNIC VIEWS

MESSAGE OF U LUN TIN FOR UNION DAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2000

I am U Lwin, a central executive committee member of the NLD. I am of Mon nationality. The reason I became involved in the struggle for democracy in Burma was because we needed a democratic system of government and I wanted to stand for the people. I took part in the independence movement led by General Aung San when I was a student at the age of 21. Our slogan at that time was that independence must be first and final. It meant our one and ultimate goal was independence. After independence, our slogan changed, so that independence was the priority, and democracy had to follow.

When the country became independent, parliamentary democracy was introduced. Unfortunately, the country fell into the hands of the military dictatorship in 1962. Since the 1988 struggle for democracy, I have been participating in the democracy movement by joining the National League for Democracy (NLD) which is led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of General Aung San. I believe that my actions are those of a noble person who loves his own country. In our democratic struggle, the slogan we have been using until now is democracy is priority, and after democracy, we can address the requirements of states and divisions. We believe that after we achieve democracy we will be able to discuss our needs among ourselves. As a person, an ethnic Mon, and a patriotic revolutionary, I absolutely believe this slogan.

The above is reprinted from Burmanet News.
THE OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE (OSI) was established in December of 1993 to promote the development of open societies around the world. Toward this goal, the institute engages in a number of regional and country-specific projects relating to education, media, legal reform and human rights. In addition, OSI undertakes advocacy projects aimed at encouraging debate and disseminating information on a range of issues which are insufficiently explored in the public realm. OSI funds projects that promote the exploration of novel approaches to domestic and international problems.

The Burma Project initiates, supports and administers a wide range of programs and activities. Priority is given to programs that promote the well-being and progress of all the people of Burma regardless of race, ethnic background, age or gender.

OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE
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Maureen Aung-Thwin, Director, The Burma Project

website: http://www.soros.org/burma.html