CREATING A CLIMATE FOR DEVELOPMENT

INTERVIEW:
Brang Seng

THE INDIGENOUS VOICE
THE ISSUES...

CREATING A CLIMATE FOR DEVELOPMENT

An argument emanating from Asia today is that stability and the elimination of poverty take precedence over democratization and the instituting of basic freedoms. This argument has gone so far as to challenge the very concept of the universality of human rights. It has also taken on implications with regard to economic development at a time when much of the region is experiencing an economic boom. Examples can be found that suggest support for both positions. The discussion begs many questions: Is the measure for the development of a society solely economic growth? Can economic reform without political reform create a climate for truly sustainable development? By allowing political freedom does a country run the risk of anarchy and chaos? And, which road is right for Burma?

THE INTERVIEW:
Maran Brang Seng

On August 8, 1994, the able and dedicated leader of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), Brang Seng, died as the result of complications from a stroke. Elected chairman of the KIO in 1976, he held the position until his death and played a key role as head of one of the country’s most powerful ethnic forces. This edition of In His Own Words is compiled from a series of interviews conducted over five years (1987-1992), perhaps the most volatile period in Burma’s recent history. Brang Seng speaks to such issues as the peace talks with the SLORC, the drafting of a constitution and his vision for a peaceful and united Burma.

THE INDIGENOUS VOICE:

Much of the recent attention paid to Burma by the international community has been focused on Rangoon: the 1988 uprising and repression of pro-democracy advocates in the streets of the city, the arrest and detention of Aung San Suu Kyi and the holding of the National Convention. Many analysts contend, however, that the role of the ethnic minorities and the need for a political solution on that front continue to be the most critical challenge facing the country. After more than four decades of armed conflict between the Burmese central government and the various ethnic groups, attempts have been made to negotiate cease-fire agreements. It remains to be seen if these agreements will effectively address the needs of the indigenous peoples who possess their own cultures, languages and have inhabited the land for centuries. Their views on the future should not be diminished in the debate. It is critical that their voices be heard.
EMPOWERMENT FOR A CULTURE OF PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT
By Aung San Suu Kyi

ON PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT IN BURMA

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BRIEFINGS AND DEVELOPMENTS
Address to a meeting of the World Commission on Culture and Development in Manila, November 21, 1994. Presented on behalf of Aung San Suu Kyi by Mrs. Corazon Aquino.

At its third meeting held at San Jose, Costa Rica, 22-26 February 1994, the World Commission on Culture and Development set itself three goals, the third of which was "to promote a new cultural dynamic: the culture of peace and culture of development". The Commission undertook to "endeavor to recommend the concrete measures that could promote, on a national and international scale, a culture of peace" and went on to state that:

...a culture of peace, culture of democracy and culture of human rights are indivisible. Their effective implementation must result in a democratic management and... the prevention of inter-cultural conflicts.¹

Peace as a goal is an ideal which will not be contested by any government or nation, not even the most belligerent. And the close interdependence of the culture of peace and the culture of development also finds ready acceptance. But it remains a matter of uncertainty how far governments are prepared to concede that democracy and human rights are indivisible from the culture of peace and therefore essential to sustained development. There is ample evidence that

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1. The exact wording of this sentence is not clear due to the image quality.
Culture and development can actually be made to serve as pretexts for resisting calls for democracy and human rights. It is widely known that some governments argue that democracy is a western concept alien to indigenous values; it has also been asserted that economic development often conflicts with political (i.e., democratic) rights and that the second should necessarily give way to the first. In the light of such arguments culture and development need to be carefully examined and defined so that they may not be used, or rather, misused, to block the aspirations of peoples for democratic institutions and human rights.

The unsatisfactory record of development in many parts of the world and the ensuing need for a definition of development which means more than mere economic growth became a matter of vital concern to economists and international agencies more than a decade ago. In *A New Concept of Development*, published in 1983, Francois Perroux stated that:

> Development has not taken place: it represents a dramatic growth of awareness, a promise, a matter of survival indeed; intellectually, however, it is still only dimly perceived.

Later in the same book he asserted that:

> ... personal development, the freedom of persons fulfilling their potential in the context of the values to which they subscribe and which they experience in their actions, is one of the mainsprings of all forms of development.

His concept of development therefore gives a firm place to human and cultural values within any scheme for progress, economic or otherwise. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) too began to spell out the difference between growth and development in the 1980s. With the beginning of the 1990s, the primacy of the human aspect of development was acknowledged by the UNDP with the publication of its first *Human Development Report*. And the special focus of the 1993 Report was people’s participation, seen as “the central issue of our time.”

While the concept of human development is beginning to assume a dominant position in the thinking of international economists and administrators, the Market Economy, not merely adorned with capital letters but seen in an almost mystic haze, is increasingly regarded by many governments as the quick and certain way to material prosperity. It is assumed that economic measures can resolve all the problems facing their countries. Economics is described as the “deus ex machina, the most important key to every lock of every door to the new Asia we wish to see”; and “healthy economic development” is seen as

> ... essential to successfully meeting the challenge of peace and security, the challenge of human rights and responsibilities, the challenge of democracy and the rule of law, the challenge of social justice and reform and the challenge of cultural renaissance and pluralism.
The view that economic development is essential to peace, human rights, democracy and cultural pluralism, and the view that a culture of peace, democracy and human rights is essential to sustained human development, may seem on the surface to differ only in the matter of approach. But a closer investigation reveals that the difference in approach itself implies differences of a more fundamental order. When economics is regarded as "the most important key to every lock of every door" it is only natural that the worth of man should come to be decided largely, even wholly, by his effectiveness as an economic tool.8 This is at variance with the vision of a world where economic, political and social institutions work to serve man instead of the other way round; where culture and development coalesce to create an environment in which human potential can be realized to the full. The differing views ultimately reflect differences in how the valuation of the various components of the social and national entity are made; how such basic concepts as poverty, progress, culture, freedom, democracy and human rights are defined and, of crucial importance, who has the power to determine such values and definitions.

The value systems of those with access to power and of those far removed from such access cannot be the same. The viewpoint of the privileged is unlike that of the underprivileged. In the matter of power and privilege the difference between the haves and the have-nots is not merely quantitative, for it has far-reaching psychological and ideological implications. And many "economic" concerns are seldom just that, since they are tied up with questions of power and privilege. The problem of poverty provides an example of the inadequacy of a purely economic approach to a human situation. Even those who take a down-to-earth view of basic human needs agree that:

...whatever doctors, nutritionists, and other scientists may say about the objective conditions of deprivation, how the poor themselves perceive their deprivation is also relevant.8

The alleviation of poverty thus entails setting in motion processes which can change the perceptions of all those concerned. Here power and privilege come into play:

The poor are powerless and have no voice. Power is the possibility of expressing and imposing one's will in a given social relationship, in the face of any resistance. The poor are incapable of either imposing, coercing or, in many cases, having any influence at all.10

It is not enough merely to provide the poor with material assistance. They have to be sufficiently empowered to change their perception of themselves as helpless and ineffectual in an uncaring world.

The question of empowerment is central to both culture and development. It decides who has the means of imposing on a nation or society their view of what constitutes culture and development and who determines what practical measures can be taken in the name of culture and development. The more totalitarian a system the more power will be concentrated in the hands of the ruling elite and the more culture and development will be used to serve narrow interests. Culture has been defined as "the most recent, the most highly developed means of promoting the security and continuity of life."11 Culture thus defined is dynamic and broad, the emphasis is on its flexible, non-compelling qualities. But when it is bent to serve narrow interests it becomes static and rigid, its exclusive aspects come to the fore and it assumes coercive overtones. The "national culture" can become a bizarre graft of carefully selected historical incidents and distorted social values intended to justify the policies and actions of those in power.12 At the same time development is likely to be seen in the now outmoded sense of economic growth. Statistics, often unverifiable, are reeled off to prove the success of official measures.

Many authoritarian governments wish to appear in the forefront of modern progress but are reluctant to institute genuine change. Such governments tend to claim that they are taking a uniquely national or indigenous path towards a political system in keeping with the times. In the decades immediately after the Second World War socialism was the popular option. But increasingly since the 1980s democracy
has gained ground. The focus on a national or indigenous way to socialism or democracy has

... the effect of stressing cultural continuity as both process and goal; this in turn obviates the necessity of defining either democracy or socialism in Institutionally or procedurally specific terms; and finally, it elevates the exiting political elite to the indispensable position of final arbiter and interpreter of what does or does not contribute to the preservation of cultural integrity.\(^{13}\)

It is often in the name of cultural integrity as well as social stability and national security that democratic reforms based on human rights are resisted by authoritarian governments. It is insinuated that some of the worst ills of western society are the result of democracy, which is seen as the progenitor of unbridled freedom and selfish individualism. It is claimed, usually without adequate evidence, that democratic values and human rights run counter to the national culture, and therefore to be beneficial they need to be modified — perhaps to the extent that they are barely recognizable. The people are said to be as yet unfit for democracy, therefore an indefinite length of time has to pass before democratic reforms can be instituted.

The first form of attack is often based on the premise, so universally accepted that it is seldom challenged or even noticed, that the United States of America is the supreme example of democratic culture. What tends to be overlooked is that although the USA is certainly the most important representative of democratic culture, it also represents many other cultures, often intricately enmeshed. Among these are the "I-want-it-all" consumer culture, megalcity culture, superpower culture, frontier culture, immigrant culture. There is also a strong media culture which constantly exposes the myriad problems of American society, from large issues such as street violence and drug abuses to the matrimonial difficulties of minor celebrities. Many of the worst ills of American society, increasingly to be found in varying degrees in other developed countries, can be traced not to the democratic legacy but to the demands of modern materialism. Gross individualism and cut-throat morality arise when political and intellectual freedoms are curbed on the one hand while on the other fierce economic competitiveness is encouraged by making material success the measure of prestige and progress. The result is a society where cultural and human values are set aside and money value reigns supreme. No political or social system is perfect. But could such a powerful and pow-erfully diverse nation as the United States have been prevented from disintegrating if it had not been sustained by democratic institutions guaranteed by a constitution based on the assumption that man's capacity for reason and justice makes free government possible and that his capacity for passion and injustice makes it necessary?\(^{14}\)

It is precisely because of the cultural diversity of the world that it is necessary for different nations and peoples to agree on those basic human values which will act as a unifying factor. When democracy and human rights are said to run counter to non-western culture, such culture is usually defined narrowly and presented as monolithic. In fact, the values that democracy and human rights seek to promote can be found in many cultures. Human beings the world over need freedom and security that they may be able to realize their full potential. The longing for a form of governance that provides security without destroying freedom goes back a long way.\(^{15}\) Support for the desirability of strong government and dictatorship can also be found in all cultures, both eastern and western: the desire to dominate and the tendency to

It is often in the name of cultural integrity as well as social stability and national security that democratic reforms based on human rights are resisted by authoritarian governments.
adulate the powerful are also common human traits arising out of a desire for security. A nation may choose a system that leaves the protection of the freedom and security of the many dependent on the inclinations of the empowered few; or it may choose institutions and practices that will sufficiently empower individuals and organizations to protect their own freedom and security. The choice will decide how far a nation will progress along the road to peace and human development.\(^{16}\)

Many of the countries in the third world now striving for meaningful development are multiracial societies where there is one dominant racial group and a number — sometimes a large number — of smaller groups: foreign, religious or ethnic minorities. As poverty can no longer be defined satisfactorily in terms of basic economic needs, "minority" can no longer be defined merely in terms of numbers. For example, it has been noted in a study of minorities in Burmese history that:

\[\text{In the process of nation-building... the notion of minority in Burma changed, as one group defines itself as a nation those outside the group become minorities... There were, of course, minorities in traditional Burma — people close to the power elite who considered themselves superior and people estranged from the power elite who were considered inferior. These criteria for establishing majorities (who might in fact be a small portion of the population as, say, white people in South Africa today) were not based on race or even ethnic group, but on access to power. Minorities, thus, are those people with poor access to power.}\(^{17}\)

Once again, as in the case of poverty, it is ultimately a question of empowerment. The provision of basic material needs is not sufficient to make minority groups and indigenous peoples feel they are truly part of the greater national entity. For that they have to be confident that they too have an active role to play in shaping the destiny of the state that demands their allegiance. Poverty degrades a whole society and threatens its stability while ethnic conflict and minority discontent are two of the greatest threats to both internal and regional peace. And when the dispossessed "minority" is in fact an overwhelming majority, as happens in countries where power is concentrated in the hands of the few, the threat to peace and stability is ever present even if unperceived.

The Commission for a New Asia notes that:

\[\text{...the most rapid economic transformation is most likely to succeed within the context of international peace and internal political stability, in the presence of social tranquillity, public order and an enlightened and strong government; and in the absence of societal turbulence and disorder.}\(^{18}\)

This comment highlights the link between economic, political and social concerns. But there is a danger that it could be interpreted to imply that peace, stability and public order are desirable only as conditions for facilitating economic transformation rather than as ends in themselves. Such an interpretation would distort the very meaning of peace and security. It could also be used to justify strong, even if unenlightened, government and any authoritarian measures that such a government may take in the name of public order.\(^{19}\)

If material betterment, which is but a means to human happiness, is sought in ways that wound the
human spirit, it can in the long run only lead to
greater human suffering. The vast possibilities that a
market economy can open up to developing coun-
tries can be realized only if economic reforms are
undertaken within a framework that recognizes
human needs. The Human Development Report
makes the point that markets should serve people
instead of people serving markets. Further:

... both state and market should be guided by the
people. The two should work in tandem, and peo-
ple should be sufficiently empowered to exert
effective control over both.20

Again we come back to empowerment. It decides
how widespread will be the benefit of actions taken
in the name of culture and development. And this in
turn will decide the extent of the contribution such
actions can make to genuine peace and stability.
Democracy as a political system which aims at
empowering the people is essential if sustained
human development, which is "development of the
people for the people by the people", is to be achieved.
Thus it has been rightly said that:

National governments must find new ways of
enabling their people to participate more in gov-
ernment and to allow them much greater influ-
ence on the decisions that affect their lives. Unless
this is done, and done in time, the irresistible
tide of people's rising aspirations will inevitably
clash with inflexible systems, leading to anarchy
and chaos. A rapid democratic transition and
strengthening of the institutions of civil society
are the only appropriate responses.21
The argument that it took long years for the first democratic governments to develop in the West is not a valid excuse for African and Asian countries to drag their feet over democratic reform. The history of the world shows that peoples and societies do not have to pass through a fixed series of stages in the course of development. Moreover, latecomers should be able to capitalize on the experiences of the pioneers and avoid the mistakes and obstacles that impeded early progress. The idea of "making haste slowly" is sometimes used to give backwardness the appearance of measured progress. But in a fast developing world too much emphasis on "slowly" can be a recipe for disaster.

There will be as many kinds of democracies as there are nations which accept it as a form of government. No single type of "western democracy" exists; nor is democracy limited to a mere handful of forms such as the American, British, French or Swiss. Each democratic country will have its own individual characteristics. With the spread of democracy to Eastern Europe the variety in the democratic style of government will increase. Similarly there cannot be one form of Asian democracy; in each country the democratic system will develop a character that accords with its social, cultural and economic needs. But the basic requirement of a genuine democracy is that the people should be sufficiently empowered to be able to participate significantly in the governance of their country. The thirty articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are aimed at such empowerment. Without these rights democratic institutions will be but empty shells incapable of reflecting the aspirations of the people and unable to withstand the encroachment of authoritarianism.

The democratic process provides for political and social change without violence. The democratic tradition of free discussion and debate allows for settlement of differences without resort to armed conflict. The culture of democracy and human rights promotes diversity and dynamism without disintegration; it is indivisible from the culture of development and the culture of peace. It is only by giving firm support to movements that seek to empower the people through democratic means that the United Nations and its agencies will truly be able to promote the culture of peace and the culture of development.

Let me in conclusion summarize my argument. The true development of human beings involves much more than mere economic growth. At its heart there must be sense of empowerment and inner fulfillment. This alone will ensure that human and cultural values remain paramount in a world where political leadership is often synonymous with tyranny and the rule of a narrow elite. People's participation in social and political transformation is the central issue of our time. This can only be achieved through the establishment of societies which place human worth above power, and liberation above control. In this paradigm, development requires democracy, the genuine empowerment of the people. When this is achieved, culture and development will naturally coalesce to create an environment in which all are valued, and every kind of human potential can be realized. The alleviation of poverty involves processes which change the way in which the poor perceive themselves and their world. Mere material assistance is not enough; the poor must have the sense that they themselves can shape their own future. Most totalitarian regimes fear change, but the longer they put off genuine democratic reform the more likely it is that even their positive contributions will be vitiated: the success of national policies depends on the willing participation of the people. Democratic values
and human rights, it is sometimes claimed, run counter to "national" culture, and all too often the people at large are seen as "unfit" for government. Nothing can be further from the truth. The challenge we now face is for the different nations and peoples of the world to agree on a basic set of human values, which will serve as a unifying force in the development of a genuine global community. True economic transformation can then take place in the context of international peace and internal political stability. A rapid democratic transition and strengthening of the institutions of civil society are the sine qua non for this development. Only then will we be able to look to a future where human beings are valued for what they are rather than for what they produce. If the UN and its agencies wish to assist this development, they must support these movements which seek to empower the people, movements which are founded on democracy, and which will one day ensure a culture of peace and of development.

NOTES


2. It has been pointed out that the idea of growth not as an end in itself but as a performance test of development was put forward by economists as early as the 1950s: Paul Streiten et al., First Things First: Meeting Basic Human Needs in the Developing Countries, Oxford, 1982 ed.


5. "Growth normally means quantifiable measure of a society's overall level of production or incomes such as GNP or GDP per capita, while development involves qualitative aspects of a society's advancement such as under- and un-employment, income distribution pattern, housing situation, nutritional level, sanitary condition, etc."


8. "The logic of an economy governed by solvency and by profit, subject to the increasing value attached to capital and to the power of those who command it is to reject as 'non-economic' everything which cannot be immediately translated into quantities and prices in market terms." Paul-Marc Henry (ed.), Poverty, Progress and Development, London, 1991, p. 36.


15. "The best government is that which governs least" are the words of a westerner, John L. O'Sullivan, but more than a thousand years before O'Sullivan was born it was already written in the Lao Tzu, a Chinese classic, that "the best of all rulers is but a shadowy presence to his subjects." The notion that "in a nation the people are the most important, the state is next and the rulers the least important" is to be found not in the works of a modern western political theorist but in that of Mencius.

16. Ethran Naraghi has shown in his memoirs, From Palace to Prison: Inside the Iranian Revolution, London 1994, that a critical attitude towards the monarch, decentralization of power and division of responsibilities were part of oriental tradition. His fascinating conversations with Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi throw into relief the dangers of cultural and development policies divorced from the aspirations of the people.


19. "Practically any human behavior can be, and historically has been, rationalized as threatening to damage the security of the nation", Scoble and Wiseberg (eds.), Access to Justice, p. 58.


21. Ibid., p. 5. Scoble and Wiseberg (eds.), Access to Justice, p. 5, point out the difference between fundamental reform that "involves a redistribution of power, a broadening of participation and influence in the making of authoritative decisions" and contingent reform that "involves a sharing of the benefits of power holding, or the uses of power, in order to avoid the sharing of power itself."
ON PEACE & DEVELOPMENT

Excerpts from the Statement of U Ohn Gyaw, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Union of Myanmar

IN BURMA


Mr. President,

Myanmar firmly believes that the United Nations plays a pivotal role in promoting international cooperation for development and for the maintenance of peace and security. There is a close link between peace and development. It is therefore the view of my delegation that the Agenda for Peace and the Agenda for Development must go hand in hand. Now that the Cold War is over and the avenues for peace and development are more pronounced, we would like to call upon the international community to create a favorable environment that ensures sustainable development. My delegation shares the view that the search for security and peace in the world at present lies in development, not in armaments. For most people throughout the world and particularly in developing countries, the feeling of insecurity arises more from anxieties about daily subsistence than from the dread of a cataclysmic global malnutrition, environmental degradation, etc., collectively leading to civil strife, ethnic conflicts and eventually, collapse of peace and security. These problems may be confined within national borders in some instances. However, some will definitely have international and even world ramifications and consequences.

Mr. President,

Both the Agenda for Peace and the Agenda for Development are top priority tasks before the United Nations; and they deserve to be given equal attention and equal allocation of resources. Just as the United Nations peace-keeping missions are stretched out across the globe, so also are its agencies for development and humanitarian affairs fanned out even wider. Myanmar shares the view that economic and social developments are prerequisites for lasting peace and security. We would therefore like to see a strengthening of the Economic and Social Council in tandem with the call for a restructuring of the Security Council to respond adequately to the new challenges of international peace and security that have emerged in the wake of the cold war. The United Nations, with the purposes of maintaining international peace and security and of promoting development and of safeguarding human rights, was born fifty years ago against a political setting which was different from today. Now that the cold war is over and the international community is free from superpower rival-
ry, which had very much crippled the United Nations in the past, the Organization should be restructured to meet the needs and challenges of the present world....

Mr. President,

After years of recession and stagnation, the world economy has resumed a modest growth. However, this recovery remains fragile and uneven and it is in the interest of both the developing and developed countries to strive for accelerated growth and sustainable development. While a number of developing countries have acted as the main engine of world economic growth, most of them are beset with a deteriorating economic and social situation. Developed countries are also facing slow growth and high unemployment. In this era of growing globalization and interdependence, concerted efforts by the world community are urgently needed to resolve the acute economic and social problems.

We welcome the Secretary-General's Report entitled "An Agenda for Development" for being most timely and appropriate. The report has highlighted economic growth as a crucial dimension of development and has singled out a supportive and a favorable international economic environment for sustained growth. We fully share the view that the advancement of developing countries is hindered by such obstacles as external debt problems, declining external resource flows, sharply deteriorating terms of trade and mounting barriers to market access. We hope that a programme of action on the implementation of the agenda will be agreed upon at this session.

Our aspirations for a new world economic order which is equitable and non-discriminatory have not yet been realized. Major challenges of the decades, namely, acceleration of development, alleviation of poverty, and narrowing of the widening gap among countries need to be redressed urgently. We fully support the call by the Group of 77, the Non-Aligned Movement and this August Assembly for the resumption of the stalled North-South dialogue. A constructive dialogue based on common interests and mutual benefits should enhance international economic cooperation for development.

We also welcome the successful conclusion of the Uruguay Round, although our aspirations are not fully realized. We have hoped for an open, equitable and transparent multilateral trading system which would benefit all countries. We are most concerned with new forms of protectionism, particularly the attempts to impose social and environmental conditionalities that discriminate against developing country exports. These protectionist measures will adversely affect world trade and growth.

We are heartened by the Naples Summit Communiqué of the Group of Seven which stated that the Seven would continue efforts to enhance development assistance, trade and investment in developing countries. It also stated that the Seven favor a reduction in the stock of debt and an increase in concessionality for those countries facing special difficulties.
large number of nations differing in size, resource endowment and stage of economic development. It is a region that is faced with all the conceivable environmental problems of the world — deforestation, desertification, climate change, etc. While several countries of the region, particularly those in Southeast and Northeast Asia have registered remarkable economic growth in the last few decades, others have yet to achieve their objectives. In many of our countries eradication of poverty and greater equity in income distribution remain major challenges. Poverty and environmental degradation are closely related. Alleviating poverty therefore is no longer simply a moral issue but a practical imperative. At the same time achieving sustainable development will require that all countries, particularly the developed, change their consumption patterns.

In the past we have tended to focus more on remedial measures than on the causes of environmental degradation. But if we are to overcome the challenges we face, we must deal with the underlying causes. As in health care, prevention is equally if not more important than the cure. We must therefore formulate strategies that will set out to alleviate poverty and provide the basic needs of food, water, clothing, shelter, energy and health care for our peoples while protecting the environment. Aware of the fact that poverty is the fundamental cause of environmental degradation, we in Myanmar are concentrating on breaking the vicious cycle of poverty and environmental degradation. With a view to remedying the situation, the Government in 1989 launched a program for the development of border areas and national races. This integrated approach is expected to generate higher incomes and productivity by providing employment opportunities and increased welfare. The border areas, inhabited by the national races, have lagged far behind in all aspects of development owing mainly to the difficult terrain and lack of adequate infrastructure. The situation is being rapidly improved. Roads, bridges, schools, hospitals and reservoirs, are being built extensively. The Government's support for the development of mini-
hydroelectric power plants will provide to promote rural industries, and at the same time, lessen their dependence on fuelwood. This integrated rural area development programme will not only have positive effects on the socio-economic environment but also drastically reduce the area under shifting cultivation, resulting in conservation and regeneration of forest resources in the fragile mountain ecosystem.

Sustainable management and conservation of forests have long occupied a place of pride in Myanmar's environmental efforts. Sustainable production of forest resources and conservation of biodiversity are assured by a Forest Working Plan and a time-tested selective felling system. About fifty per cent of Myanmar's total land surface area is still covered by natural forests. Even though the forest area is about 33 million hectares, the prescribed annual allowable cut is less than 3 million cubic meters for teak and other hardwoods. This volume of commercial extraction is significantly less than that harvested by other countries in the region. The current development activities of the Government in the forest sector include the special project for greening of the nine driest districts of the country; extension of the area under reserved forests; establishment of new plantations; overall reforestation of the dry zone to provide much needed timber and fuelwood for rural communities and measures to improve the water-sheds.

Myanmar attaches high importance to population issues and recognizes the close link between population and sustainable development. We have participated in the Cairo Conference and heartily welcome the adoption by consensus of a non-binding twenty-year Programme of Action. Our population policy focus is on voluntary birth-spacing to promote the health of the mother and child. The Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association, a non-governmental organization is actively carrying out the assigned task in this field.

Mr. President,

As a responsible member of the United Nations and as an unwavering advocate of the values it represents, the Union of Myanmar has all along upheld and adhered to the basic norms of human rights enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As confirmed by the Bangkok Declaration, the principles of national sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in internal affairs should be respected by all nations and attempts to use human rights to encroach on the essentially domestic jurisdiction of states should be avoided. We do not mean by this that human rights can be systematically violated behind the barrier of non-interference. We wish to see the promotion of human rights through cooperation and consensus building, and not through imposition of values which we do not share. We believe that even as we seek universality of human rights, diversity in historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must never be minimized or forgotten. We are also against double standards and the temptation to use human rights as a means to achieve political ends.

The right to sufficient food, clothing and shelter; the right to decent quality of life; the right to live peacefully and in security; are often neglected in the clamor for individual rights. At this delicate juncture of our history, when Myanmar is in the market economy, the interests of its 45 million people must take precedence over the interests of any one individual. Confrontation and incitement for unrest and instability have no place when the nation is in the process of reconciliation and reconsolidation. In keeping with the aspirations of all the national...
races, Myanmar is also presently at the critical stage of drafting a firm constitution. My government would certainly not like to see the present momentum of the constitutional process and the efforts for national reconciliation impeded in any way. Nor can it allow a return to the chaos and anarchy of the incidents of 1988.

The Myanmar Government does not condone human rights abuses. In fact, it is totally against human rights abuses.

The Myanmar Government does not condone human rights abuses. In fact, it is totally against human rights abuses. We have cooperated fully with the United Nations in every field, and in this regard, with the Commission on Human Rights, by providing information in connection with communications and queries concerning the situation in Myanmar. Not only have we provided information sought by the Commission but have also received the Independent Experts and the Special Rapporteur appointed by the Human Rights Commission. The Special Rapporteur, Professor Yozo Yokota, was received in 1992 and in 1993. In deference to the United Nations, and as a gesture of our goodwill and cooperation, we will receive him yet again this year.

Mr. President,

Myanmar is a Union made up of over a hundred different national races residing in Myanmar. Unity among the different national races is essential for the preservation of our independence and sovereignty as well as for the economic and social progress of our country. Since regaining independence in 1948, Myanmar unfortunately had to face internal strife started by various armed groups. Because of this, the country had suffered immensely and lagged behind in economic development in comparison with other nations of the region.

Under these dire circumstances, it would only be natural that the State Law and Order Restoration Council would place the utmost importance on the preservation of independence and the strengthening of unity and national solidarity among all the national races of Myanmar. Since the time it took over responsibilities of the State, the State Law and Order Restoration Council has been giving priority to the achievement of national reconciliation. Beginning from 1989, less than one year after it assumed responsibility, the Government made overtures to the armed groups to return to the legal fold. Since April 1992, the Armed Forces have suspended military offensives against the armed groups in the interest of national reconciliation. Internal strife for over four decades has not brought benefit to anyone. It has only caused death and destruction and untold suffering for the people. No one appreciates peace more than a soldier. It is therefore most gratifying that a total of 12 groups having trust in the sincerity of the offer by the government have returned to the legal fold, and are working together with the Government for the development of their regions. These groups are also being provided with the opportunity to participate in the national political process namely the National Convention to shape the country’s future. With the Shan State Nationalities Peoples’ Liberation Organization group which returned to the legal fold on 9 October 1994, the number of armed groups back into reconciliation process is now 13. They will be integrated in the same manner as previous groups who are participating in the National Convention. To the remaining groups who still have yet to return to the legal fold, the Myanmar Government reiterates its call to them not to miss this golden opportunity but to join hands in building a peaceful, democratic and modern Union. Guns have fallen silent in the country as never before in the history of modern Myanmar and these groups should look at the greater interest of the country and work for the benefit of all the national races as they themselves have been proclaiming for so long.
Among Burma's armed opposition leaders, Maran Brang Seng (1931-94) always stood out: an intellectual who rose through civilian ranks to become chairman of one of the country's most powerful insurgent forces, the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO).

Although an ethnic minority Kachin, many contemporaries believe that, in a more peaceful world, he would have made an able leader of the country.
Born on 16 June 1931 in Hpa Kant in the Kachin State, Brang Seng's early interest was in education. At Rangoon University in the early 1950s he was elected vice-president of the students' union and general-secretary of the faculty of education, before graduating to become headmaster of the Baptist Mission High School in Myitkyina. Here, in 1958, he established the Kachin Cultural Enhancement Youth Organization to counter what he believed was the deliberate neglect of ethnic minority areas by the government in Rangoon. An important influence on his thinking was the experience of his uncle, the Lawdan Duwa Zau La, who had been a delegate at the historic Panglong conference in 1947.

Following General Ne Win's military coup in 1962, Brang Seng followed his students underground to join the KIO which had been established the previous year. A skillful organizer and popular speaker, Brang Seng was rapidly promoted through the party administration, and in 1967 he led the first KIO delegation to the People's Republic of China where he met with the late Premier Zhou Enlai.

In 1976 Brang Seng was unanimously elected chairman of the KIO during a leadership crisis that followed the assassination of his predecessor, Zau Seng, by disgruntled followers on the Thai border. In a critical policy change which continued until his death, Brang Seng guided the KIO away from a policy of secession to one of federalism and building bridges with other political and ethnic forces. The same year, a military alliance was agreed to between the KIO and the Communist Party of Burma, then the country's largest insurgent force, and in 1980-81 the KIO held peace talks with Ne Win's Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) government in Rangoon.

Following the failure of these talks, in 1983 the KIO joined the ethnic minority alliance, the National Democratic Front (NDF). In 1987 Brang Seng walked down to the Thai border for the first time to meet with Karen, Mon and other NDF leaders before heading on to London and other parts of Europe to make an international appeal for support to end the civil war. Subsequently, he travelled frequently, visiting Japan, Pakistan and Afghanistan, among other countries.

In 1988 Brang Seng played a leading role in the complex reorganization in Burmese politics that took place following the failure of the democracy uprising. In November that year he was elected first vice-chairman of the 23-party Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB) which was set up to coordinate action against the new State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). Following the victory of the National League for Democracy (NLD) in the 1990 general election, he once again became convinced of the need to try and make peace. He advocated the concept of a National Convention of all parties, although he later rejected the meeting as organized by the SLORC. His privately-expressed view was that if the KIO could make the first breakthrough, then hardliners on all sides would eventually follow suit. This led to a growing estrangement from the Karen National Union and several of his former allies in southeast Burma who feared that the KIO would make a unilateral deal with the SLORC.

The ultimate success of Brang Seng's strategy for peace is perhaps too early to judge. After a succession of meetings, a military cease fire with the SLORC was about to be agreed to by the KIO in October 1993 when he suffered a stroke. While he was still recuperating in China, the cease fire was subsequently signed by his deputy, Zau Mai, in Myitkyina on 24 February 1994. However complications set in, and on 8 August Brang Seng died while being carried back to his headquarters at Pajao. His body was entombed with full military honors on 12 August at a mass KIO ceremony attended by representatives of various ethnic groups and student armed opposition organizations as well as SLORC officials. He is survived by his wife and seven children.

Brang Seng left no published literature, but in the following interviews conducted between 1987-92, during the convulsive period which included the repression of the pro-democracy uprising, Brang Seng gave some insight into his views to Martin Smith, who wrote this biography, and Larry Jagan, the BBC World Service news and current affairs editor for the Asia/Pacific.
NOVEMBER 1987
ON NE WIN AND THE BSPP

MARTIN SMITH • Why have you made this long journey to the West?

BRANG SENG • The door of Burma is closed, so we have to go to the outside. People don't realize what is happening in Burma. The situation can be compared to Kampuchea under Pol Pot. The Burmese army has destroyed so many villages and killed so many thousands of ethnic minority peoples. The only difference is that in Kampuchea the bodies can all be found in one place.... What I want to tell the world is please send international observer teams to the minority areas of Burma so that the world can know exactly what has been going on for the last 25 years. Then they can judge whether what minority leaders or the Burmese government are telling is true.

SMITH • In 1980-81, the KIO held peace talks with the BSPP. Can you describe these talks and your meetings with Ne Win?

BRANG SENG • Yes, we met two or three times. I found him quite nice, quite approachable. He said, "Let's try our best." But then he flew off to Beijing and left the peace talks to his deputy San Yu and other officers. We made every concession we could, but they only called on us to surrender — to abolish our party organization and army — without solving any political problems.... What they offered us were jobs and positions, but we wanted to solve political problems by political means. If the government side doesn't agree, then we minorities have no choice but to struggle on with the armed resistance movement.

SMITH • The Kachin people live in one of the opium growing areas of Burma and the KIO has been accused of drug trafficking. How do you respond to such charges?

BRANG SENG • The KIO is not involved. We have the death penalty for trafficking. We also have jade; jade is so valuable. Why would we be so stu-

pid to carry opium?... Opium has been grown in Burma for hundreds of years and long been a problem. During the Second World War I saw with my own eyes that the British forces air-dropped opium for medicinal purposes or as money payment. From 1964 we stopped opium cultivation in our areas and introduced substitution crops and care for addicts. We've done it without taking one dollar from the US Drug Enforcement Agency. The only places where it is still grown are in refugee areas along the China border and in the Shan State where people are faced with starvation. When the Burmese army attacks, people run into the hills. For these people, opium is the only cash crop; it's all that's left. If the civil war is not stopped, it is not even worth talking about opium eradication. The country is devastated. So many big villages have been burnt down. People are hiding in remote mountain areas and are growing opium, but they are very poor. Even with this money from opium they can hardly buy food. It is the rich who do the trafficking. How can so much opium reach the Thai border if they don't get the cooperation of the local Burmese army commanders or authorities? They are the ones who make the money.

AUGUST 1988
DURING THE DEMOCRACY UPRISING AND THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT OF DR. MAUNG MAUNG

SMITH • What is the KIO and NDF attitude to the current political situation and the democracy protests in the towns?

BRANG SENG • At present we have stopped all offensives. If in this situation of crisis we launched an offensive, it would seem we were taking advantage of the current breakdown in the cities and towns. For the last 26 years we have been fighting for our freedom and democracy but also for peace. A lot now depends on the up and coming government. We are prepared to talk and participate. We are very eager to get a peace process going. But if not, we are ready to fight on.... When the student protests first started (in
March) we got a lot of letters from them asking why we were watching while students were dying in the cities. So to show our support for their aims, we did make some military actions in the Kachin and Shan States, but many elders advised us not to continue. Burmese army morale is very low now. Fighting could slow down the student movement and deflect attention.

SMITH • If political change comes to Burma, how would you summarize the aspirations of the ethnic minority peoples?

BRANG SENG • Burma is a multi-national state. All the ethnic groups want their own right of self-determination in their own areas. Whether by the creation of autonomous territories, federalism or self-determination, they want to be free in their own areas — free to decide and run their own education and economic policies by themselves. Where they are not capable or where they need central government help, then they will ask. But otherwise in education, economy and language, they must be free to promote their own cultures.

SMITH • What kind of country would you want Burma to become in the international community?

BRANG SENG • Burma is still a backward country and a lot needs to be done. The present kind of socialist system in Burma is not suitable. In the NDF view, we need a more open system of government like other democratic or developing countries such as Thailand where there is a free enterprise system. But in foreign policy we should stay non-aligned. Burma is a small country between major powers and blocks so we have to be careful. This policy started in U Nu's time and continued through the last 26 years of BSPP rule.

JANUARY 1989
UNDER THE FIRST SLORC GOVERNMENT OF GENERAL SAW MAUNG

SMITH • How would you describe the affects of the educational and economic systems imposed on Burma by Ne Win since 1962?

BRANG SENG • It is already clear that Ne Win has destroyed the economic progress of the country, making Burma one of the most poor nations in the world. And he is not only responsible for this; he and his clique are responsible for destroying an entire generation of this country with regard to their education and their character over the last 26 years. To rebuild the economy or to rebuild the economic structure is easy, because we have a lot of natural resources. But to revive the character of this generation will not be easy. In this regard we suffer the most....

SMITH • General Saw Maung has said that he will defeat the ethnic forces in insurgent areas. What do you say about this?

BRANG SENG • Well, all have seen that during the last 26 years Ne Win has spent half the nation's budget in this — in wars against the ethnic revolutionary fighters. But he cannot do that — he cannot win the war. Although we cannot capture Rangoon and Mandalay, he cannot defeat us. So the problem of ending the war is not on the battlefield, it should be on the table. On the table we have to discuss, he or they — the military regime — have to discuss, must discuss with the leaders of the freedom fighters and NDF leaders with the spirit of national reconciliation and national healing. Unless such a thing develops, the civil war cannot be ended. If the civil war cannot be ended, there can be no unity, no peace. If there can be no peace and no unity, however the economic policy is changed, it will get nowhere.

JULY 1990
ON THE 1990 GENERAL ELECTION

SMITH • How do you see the result of the May election?

BRANG SENG • We welcome the election result. Although we freedom fighters, such as the NDF and DAB, were not represented, we accept the...
victory of the NLD and other parties. In our areas, we have a good understanding with the MPs; we know them. As legally elected representatives, we are happy to let them begin drawing up a new constitution. But for real unity they must be able to consult with the KIO, the DAB and other political parties. That is why we support a National Convention at which all parties can put up their ideas. For the KIO, the most important thing is that we become a legal party during this period of constitutional change. We have already lived through three different periods of government since 1961, so we know what it is like to be forgotten. For over thirty years, we have been described as terrorists or opium smugglers, and we have never been recognized. But we have the real mass support of the people, so at least we want to get our voice into the historical record. That is our duty.

JUNE 1992
ON THE SLORC UNDER GENERAL THAN SHWE

LARRY JAGAN • First, can you tell me a little bit about the proposed constitution that the DAB and the NDF have been discussing?

BRANG SENG • Our constitution is based on the federal system that we have seen the world over in many countries. This idea came in the few years after the death of General Aung San. While he was alive, he spoke with the ethnic leaders that in the future our union will be a federal union, and the rights of the states and the center will be shared according to a federal system. That is what our leaders understood in the past.

But after the death of General Aung San, the 1947 constitution became effective, and in that constitution the ethnic leaders found out that some of what they were promised had been excluded. From then on, there were arguments and discussions in the parliament up until 1956. And in 1956 the ethnic leaders and minority leaders met in Taunggyi and drafted a federal constitution. While this drafting of the constitution was in progress, in 1958 General Ne Win took over the country with a military coup and this process was disrupted. After that in 1960, when General Ne Win gave back power to U Nu, the discussions started again. And it is said that U Nu nearly agreed to approve that federal constitution. Then came 1962 and General Ne Win again took over the country with a military coup. From then on, talk about federalism was stopped and disrupted.

Now we ethnic groups and ethnic leaders in the liberated areas as well as those democratic brother Burman groups in the liberated areas — as well as in foreign countries — came together to discuss about this constitution again. And recently our third draft was finished and very soon it will be put to the DAB central committee meeting. After the DAB central committee approves, it will have to go to the people in the National Convention. On that side, we still have to work hard.

JAGAN • Why is it so important that the ethnic issue needs to be resolved?

BRANG SENG • Burma is now facing two problems. One, the people need democracy back in the country. Two, even if we have democracy in the country, it will not be enough. There is one important thing that needs to be done — national unity. To get that national unity, the ethnic problem should be solved. Now the civil war in Burma has been continuing for some 40 years — mostly between the central government and the ethnic groups. All these ethnic groups are demanding federalism in the country. So if these ethnic problems are not solved, democracy alone will not do. For example, during prime minister U Nu's time, there was parliamentary democracy and yet we could not get national unity because the ethnic problem had not been solved as General Aung San had intended it to.

JAGAN • Many of the NLD leaders are under arrest or are in Rangoon and haven't been participating in the discussions on a federal constitution. Do you know what the NLD leaders who are still inside Burma feel about a federal state?
BRANG SENG • I understand that some small parties already openly support a federal constitution in Burma. So I hope that all the far-sighted political leaders in Rangoon — whoever they may be, whether NLD or other parties — if they think about the national unity seriously, they will come to find that national unity can be based on this federal constitution. Only then, all ethnic people will be satisfied, and then we can build the national unity.

JAGAN • Some critics would say that the democratic forces adopting a federal constitution will still only represent those people of Burma outside the country — those who are based on the border or in the ethnic areas... How would this constitution be put into the political arena inside Burma under the control of the SLORC?

BRANG SENG • This side or both sides have still to try much. For example, the SLORC leaders should know that by suppression by force of arms they cannot get national unity. If they cannot get unity, the future country will be unstable. So to get national unity, since the federal constitution is very important... this constitution has to go to the people. To reach that stage, the first thing the SLORC should do is a nationwide cease fire and invite all the political parties — whether inside the country or outside the country — to participate in the National Convention and discuss about the future constitution. I think the people inside the country will not find it very hard to understand why we should need a federal constitution in this country.

JAGAN • Since April, when Than Shwe came to power, the government has announced the forming of its own National Convention and has been releasing political prisoners. What is your reaction to these changes?

BRANG SENG • Many people believe and openly say that this is just cosmetic — it is not a real thing — that the SLORC is not doing this with a pure heart. That may be. In my opinion what they have done is a little bit good, then we should say that part is good; and what they still need to do, we have to show them. We have to talk to them and show them that you still need to do that part. For example, the release of some of the political prisoners is good — but they still have to release all the political prisoners whose names the KIO put forward.... All political prisoners must be released, including Aung San Suu Kyi and other leaders. That part they still have to do.

JAGAN • How optimistic are you that things are going to change in the near future. Do you see the possibility of talks?

BRANG SENG • For peace talks, I have been trying so hard during the last three or four years. Whenever I visit foreign countries, I only request help to solve this Burma civil war. And I wrote two or three letters to the SLORC leaders also to solve this political dispute on the table. I don't know whether they will listen to this or not. If they do not listen, then the civil war will be going on and that will do no good for the country or the people as a whole. So the SLORC leaders, if they are really thinking of establishing a peaceful country, they must realize that the civil war should end first. If they rely on their armed strength alone, they cannot achieve this. We know that we will not be erased out; we cannot be crushed by their armed strength. We have been fighting for over 30 years.... We are fighting along with our people with the mass support and with the people's support. So the solution is only to talk at the table.
Human Rights Across Borders: KAREN EXPERIENCES in Thailand and Burma

LONG OPPRESSED BY MORE POWERFUL OTHERS, the Karen in both Thailand and Burma have only recently begun to express their outrage through a discourse of human rights. An ethnic minority group numbering roughly 300,000 in Thailand (Department of Public Welfare, 1991) and perhaps as many as four million in Burma (Smith, 1991), the Karen have been fairly peacefully integrated into the Thai state, but they have been engaged in a 45 year civil war for political autonomy in Burma.¹

While the historical and contemporary experiences of the Karen in Burma and Thailand have varied, what the Karen share is a pattern of suffering and disenfranchisement under political regimes which frequently have not honored Karen individual and collective rights. Because of their isolation in mountainous areas and border regions, many Karen are unaware of the international discourse about human rights. Thus, they suffer in silence, often interpreting their misfortunes as due to fate or ancestral retribution, and never imagining that some members of the international community would be willing to publicize and work against such abuses.

In this paper, then, I address three related issues. First, I discuss the different types of human rights abuses experienced by three sets of Karen; namely, Karen inhabitants of Burma, Karen refugees on the Thai-Burma border, and Karen inhabitants of Thailand. Second, I consider the importance of the articulation of experiences of oppression through the discourse of human rights, and third, I explore how abuses of human rights in Thailand and Burma have been facilitated by international actors.

Karen history since 1949 has consisted of an endless series of battles and failed negotiations with successive Burmese governments, who will accept nothing less than total surrender. Because Karen military headquarters (Manerplaw) is a primary organizing center for anti-SLORC activity and the Karen are one of the few remaining groups to refuse to sign a ceasefire agreement with SLORC, Christina Fink has recently completed a PhD in Anthropology at the University of California at Berkeley. Her research deals with issues of ethnic identity and nationalism among the Karen in Thailand and Burma.

This paper is an abridged version of a paper presented at the American Anthropological Association Meeting in Atlanta on December 1, 1994.
the Karen have continued to experience extreme human rights abuses. Besides launching dry season military offensives against Karen soldiers, the Burmese Army has sought to intimidate and demoralize Karen civilians. Members of the Burmese Army regularly torture and execute Karen villagers suspected of collaborating with the Karen National Liberation Army. There are no trials. SLORC troops also routinely rape women, loot homes, and take adults to work as porters and human mine-sweepers (see Karen Human Rights Group and KNU reports for detailed accounts).3

Karen villagers in Thailand and Burma, then, are subject to a number of abuses which tend to go unreported. When the Karen are the victims of torture, rape, or forced relocation, rarely are there any journalists on hand. Unlike in Los Angeles, Beijing, or Bangkok, no local people own video cameras which could be used to document events or fax machines which could be utilized to broadcast accounts of abuses. Karen voices and images do not explode on television screens around the world, and the Karen are left to flee or make do as best they can.

Why are Karen human rights abuses so underrepresented in international coverage when compared to human rights abuses elsewhere? One reason is the inaccessibility of many of the areas where the abuses take place, but another significant problem is the culturally specific ways in which the Karen tend to interpret and present their suffering.

As I stated earlier, what all Karen share is a history of being imposed on and mistreated by others. Preserved in poetic verse ("uta" Sgaw Karen; "tay" Pwo Karen) and in myths, and known to all Karen, are the stories of the Karen's inferior place in relation to others. Most important of these is the Karen origin myth which tells of three brothers who are each given a book of knowledge by God. Because the Karen did not take care of their book, they lost the knowledge which other groups have since used to develop more powerful political and economic systems. This myth and other stories like it, which compare the Karen to orphans and tell of the abuses Karen have had to suffer under exploitive Thai and Burmese princes, serve an explanatory function for the Karen. Their lived experiences and the myths
reinforce each other, as the Karen expect to be treated badly by the Thai and Burmese and when they are, they remember the myths which tell them it is their fate. What is important here, is that the Karen, in expressing their suffering in a culturally-specific way, do not get attention from the international public. Because they do not talk about their experiences in terms of "human rights abuses", Karen suffering is often not treated as a case of human rights abuse.

For example, when the evictions of the Karen from a wildlife sanctuary in Thailand were proposed, the Karen did not make public appeals to protect their rights but seemed resigned to their fate. One Karen went so far as to say "if we are evicted, we will have to put the blame on our ancestors. They protected this forest so that today, it is a World Heritage Site. And because of that, we cannot stay here anymore."

This language does not resonate with human rights discourse in which there is no place for non-materialistic explanations for human rights abuses. The Karen man did not clearly identify Thai authorities as the source of the problem, and he did not present himself as suffering a "human rights abuse". Because the Karen have typically told their stories of suffering using references to fate, sin and ancestors, their accounts are not given attention or legitimacy by outside sources. The abuses are not considered "facts" unless they are presented in a language which makes sense to Western or Western-educated audiences.

For this reason, concerned Thai lawyers and NGOs went to Thungyai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary in early 1994 in order to "help teach them about their rights under the law — a fuzzy concept among the Karen — and generally bolster their self-esteem." Sympathetic outsiders realized that until the Karen could present themselves as suffering human rights abuses and communicate their experiences to outsiders, the Karen in wildlife preserves would continue to be treated unjustly by the Thai government.

Similarly, in January 1993, the Karen Human Rights Group was established with some Karen in Kawthoolei (the Karen State in Burma). Recognizing the need for Amnesty International-style documentation, the group has trained a number of Karen in the techniques of gathering and writing up accounts of abuses in ways which will be accorded legitimacy by Western governments. These reports are then typed on a computer and distributed by mail and on the internet to concerned individuals, journalists, human rights groups, and sympathetic politicians all over the world. Another NGO bought video cameras and trained selected Karen to use them for documenting human rights abuses and torture wounds on victims' bodies as well as for recording victims telling their stories. The introduction of the concept of human rights and the provision of the tools to document and publicize abuses is critical if the abuses are to be internationally recognized and condemned.

The Burmese military regime has followed the example of China, Singapore, and other Asian countries in asserting that human rights discourse is a Western cultural invention which has no place in
Asia. These countries insist that their cultures value communal rights and stability over the individual, and that the West cannot impose its cultural practices on Asian countries.

Should we accept such explanations? I argue that we should not. While it is true that the discourse of human rights was developed in the West and privileges the presentation of information in a particular format, it is also true that the victims of such abuses do not believe that their suffering is justified because they are Asian. Indeed, massive student protests occurred in 1988 in Burma precisely because Burmese civilians refused to accept the legitimacy of a government which committed incessant human rights abuses. It must be recognized that SLORC and other repressive regimes use the argument that human rights are not universal as a tactic to prevent outside intervention in their domestic affairs.

It is true that the Burmans began abusing the Karen long before there was Western involvement in the region or the term "human rights" had been coined. This does not mean, however, that we should not address the way in which human rights abuses are facilitated by international actors today. The growth of international investment and the steady supply of weapons to Burma has enabled SLORC to carry out increasing human rights abuses. Over the past three years, China has given the Burmese government over one billion dollars worth of weapons in return for teakwood and other natural resources. Open international arms sales have also allowed SLORC to purchase great numbers of weapons from Singapore and Western countries, which has made it much easier for the previously poorly equipped army to harass and coerce unarmed Karen villagers. As SLORC has begun to liberalize the economy and to invite transnational companies to invest in Burma, the government has been able to significantly increase its financial resources, boosting its ability to oppress enemies of the state. Moreover, some of the projects in which transnational companies are involved have resulted in SLORC using slave labor to do most of the work (see reports by the Karen Human Rights Group). The production of human rights abuses is facilitated by international actors through their investments in and sale of weapons to governments which routinely commit human rights abuses as well as by their denial of human rights abuses or their willingness to work with such governments despite the abuses. This being the case, it is critical that those who suffer human rights abuses document and publicize their experiences of suffering by using the discourse of human rights, which is accorded legitimacy and is more likely to receive international attention. The discourse of human rights must be recognized as a discourse of empowerment that allows local groups to connect with the international community to put pressure on oppressive regimes.

NOTES

1. Estimates of the Karen population in Burma vary widely. The Burmese government, in an attempt to deny the size of the non-Burman population in Burma, systematically understates the Karen population by counting Buddhist Karen as Burmans. Estimates by the Karen, however, may be overstated. In Burmese Smith (1991:30) notes that the 1931 census conducted by the British recorded 1,367,673 Karen, but the Japanese during World War II came up with a population figure of 4.5 million. The Burmese government in 1988 said that the Karen numbered less than 2 million while the Karen National Union put the population at 7 million. Smith says that neutral estimates suggest there are presently 3 to 4 million Karen in Burma.

2. Karen Human Rights Group reports are posted regularly in the electronic newsletter Burmanet.


INTRODUCTION

The history of the Chin is one of a proud and independent people whose territory, until the later part of the 19th century, had never been under the control of an outside force. Recognized by the United Nations as one of the indigenous people of the world, the Chin traditionally inhabited an area of over 80,000 square miles. Having tremendous attachment to their original motherland, our forefathers sacrificed many lives in defense of their territorial soil and society.

Not until the British occupation did Chinland fall under the hands of a foreign power. After invading from three fronts in 1871, 1888 and 1889 respectively, the British put the Chin territories under the administrative control of each military front. The territories were dissected into three separate pieces: Bengal (now Bangladesh), Assam (India) and Burma.

The right of the Chin Chiefs to continue in their status as the heads of their respective areas was recognized so long as taxes were paid and peaceful passage and transport were given to British authorities.

The British took the responsibility for protecting and defending the distinct national identity of the Chin and the integrity of their territories from the intrusion of any foreigners outside their frontiers as it had been protected and defended by the Chin people themselves before the British annexation. This agreement was reflected in the Chin Hills Regulation of 1896 and its amended version in 1919. The Chief Commissioners or the Governors from British India and Burma administered the Chin territories with special commissioners operating through their respective Chin Chiefs, outside the control of Indian and Burmese provincial legislatures and governments. This system of governance was maintained throughout the British occupation until after the second World War.

The Chin National Territories joined the Union of Burma under the Panglong Agreement signed by representatives of the Burman interim government and representatives of the Shan, the Kachin and the Chin on 12 February 1947. It is...
important to understand that the heartland of the Chin National Territory was never a part of Burma under any of the successive Burmese kings prior to the annexation of Burma by the British. Even after the annexation, the British governor was directly responsible for the administration of the Chin people in the Chin Hills and the Naga Hills through the Chiefs of their respective local areas.

PANGLONG AGREEMENT

The core of the Panglong agreement indicates that the signatory nationalities, if they so wished, could establish their respective independent States unconditionally after freedom was achieved from the British. This interpretation is supported by the provision of a secession clause in the 1947 Constitution of the Union of Burma.

A nation, as generally accepted, is a group of people who agree to live together under the same laws voluntarily. Voluntary association can only arise among peoples who have confidence in one another and who feel that by living together they have much to gain and nothing to lose; that their welfare and progress will be helped, not hindered.

The secession clause was included to ensure that the Union was formed voluntarily, according to the core of the Panglong Agreement and to ensure the equality of all the signatory nationalities in the 1947 Union Constitution. Any conditional clauses provided to limit the right of secession of Panglong signatory nationalities from the Union go against the core of the Agreement. It provides for equal footing and status for each nationality.

Equality also applies to states within a union. Just as a large size adult has the exact same vote in number as the small size adult, the more populous Burman nationality shall have an equal vote with the nationality of a smaller size population. This is what is meant by saying that the Panglong Agreement signatory nationalities, no matter they be Chin or Burman, signed the Panglong Agreement on an equal footing and in equal status. Thus the Burmans as a nationality, by agreeing to be part of the Union, are not entitled to have more representatives or more votes than any other recognized single nationality of the Union. This should hold true in any constituent assembly or national con-

Thus the Burmans as a nationality, by agreeing to be part of the Union, are not entitled to have more representatives or more votes than any other recognized single nationality of the Union.

ASSERTION OF BURMAN RACIAL SUPERIORITY

The core of the Panglong Agreement, however, has not been observed by the successive military regimes, including the present one, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). By overthrowing the 1947 Union Constitution and refusing to readopt it, the military regime has been in gross violation of the Agreement. Moreover, the signatory nationalities are treated as conquered colonial people and made to become third-class citizens.

An attitude of racial superiority by the Burmans can be traced through history. The British, in ascribing a feeling of inferiority and subordination among the people of its colonized nations, had them address any white man as “master” or “lord.” In fighting the colonialists, the Burman politicians popularly adopted this doctrine, putting the honorific “thakin” (master or lord) before their names. This was done in order to raise the morale of the Burmans and show them to be equal to the British.

This tendency toward nationalism was enhanced when the revered Burman “Thirty Comrades”, which included Ne Win, received military training from the Japanese at a time when that country was promoting extreme racial superiority and nationalism. The “Thirty Comrades” were thus very vulnerable to such indoctrination.

Following the assassination of General Aung San in 1947, questions were raised about the core of the Panglong Agreement and the framework for the Constitution that had been laid under his leadership. General Ne Win (in whom the racist attitudes had been well imbedded) overthrew the Union Constitution and its constitutional government by force of arms. The reason given was the need to suppress the Panglong Agreement signatory nationalities and other nationalities because they
would not accept Burmese supremacy. More recently, the SLORC has launched many programs both directly and indirectly aimed at wiping out the minority indigenous peoples in the Union. The indigenous minorities have been forbidden to learn their own languages and histories. These prohibitions are enforced so that minorities might forget their heritage as a people and to obstruct them from living in accordance with their own culture and beliefs. Such acts threaten the existence of the indigenous peoples in the Union.

After the 1947 Constitution was overthrown, the successive military regimes refused to give inherent fundamental democratic rights to the Chin people. Many of the Chin customary laws are drastically out of date. But the successive military regimes have not permitted the Chin their inherent right of amending their customary laws. Therefore the people, especially women, are not adequately protected by their customary laws.

The successive military regimes forced the unarmed Union population at gun point to vote for and adopt the 1974 Constitution of rigid Unitary form. This deprived the minorities of their respective autonomous legislatures and governments, making them non self-governing territories according to the Charter of the United Nations. Thus, the minorities have not been able to pass laws that suit their cultures, their ways of life and their local regional environments. To force the minority nationalities to adopt the Unitary form of a constitution for the Union against their will is an attempt to forcibly assimilate the minority indigenous peoples of the Union into Burmese. This act has really amounted to committing cultural genocide.

Even the language used to describe the people inhabiting the territories of the Union reflects the extent to which the SLORC wishes to impose its superiority over the various nationalities. The names Burman, Burmese, Myanmar, etc. have always been used to refer only to the Burmans themselves in the Burmese language, exclusive of the Chin and their fellow minorities in the Union long before the Union was founded in 1947. The British administrators seemed to initiate using the name Burmese to include all the people in British Burma. But when it is used to describe the people under "the Burmese kings," the latter interpretation can not be applied to the Chin. People like Chin in their national territorial heartland, as well as other minorities, were never under the Burmese kings.

In Burmese the term pyidaungsutha has been widely used to refer to all the people in the Union of Burma, and in English this means "The People of the Union." So to use the term Burma, Burmese, Myanmar, Burmans inclusive of the Chin people and other minorities in the statutes is an act of the SLORC to assimilate them by force into Burman or Myanmar society.

The SLORC's proposal to change the present names of the States in the Union to other, purely
numerical designations unconcerned with the States, or other "neutral" names in the statute also is an act to assimilate the Union nationalities by force — to wipe out the recognizable existence of the Union minorities.

**NATIONAL CONVENTION AND PEACE TALKS**

The calling of a National Convention composed mainly of the SLORC's hand-picked delegates has made it quite clear that it is not a true national convention. This Convention has been called in an attempt to pave the way for the minority indigenous peoples, and indeed the whole population of the country, to vote for and adopt the rigid unitary form of constitution by force as was done in the referendum in 1974. The constitution they are drafting now is meant to be adopted as a weapon to obliterate the minority indigenous people in the Union of Burma.

The primary objective of the SLORC in holding this National Convention is to prolong their military dictatorship and to enshrine the present military regime as the ruling class in order to enslave the Union population forever. It is the same with the peace talks — these are likely to be a mere pretense like the National Convention.

It is therefore necessary for those negotiating the peace talks with the SLORC to be certain of its motives. If the SLORC is really sincere in calling the peace talks as an end to the political crisis, they have to consider the core of the Panglong Agreement.

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**PANGLONG AGREEMENT: A MUST FOR THE CHINS**

The Constitution of the Union of Burma being drafted by the SLORC is designed to be an effective weapon to wipe out the existence of the Chin people and their fellow indigenous minorities in the Union.

Yet SLORC plans to have it ratified in a referendum, by force if necessary, much in the same way to what its predecessor military regime did in the case of the 1974 Socialist constitution.

Let us not forget the events surrounding the imposition of that constitution. Over 50 political leaders from the Chin heartland and different parts of the country were taken to military detention camps without trial and only released several years after the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma was forcefully adopted in their absence in 1974. Those arrested included former members of Parliament, leaders of various political parties — the Chin National Organization, the Union Party, Anti-fascist People's Freedom League and the regional party leaders of the ruling party, the Burma Socialist Programme Party. Many civil service officers, doctors, lawyers, ex-army officers, Chin student leaders as well as farmers and workers were also included in the arrests.

The reason cited for the arrests was that leaders who represented the whole Chin population had submitted 150 suggestions for a draft constitution. The draft proposed a Union in the federal form in which the Chin State would be one of the constituent units. The Burmese military regime misrepresented this expression of the Chin population as a plan for the disintegration of the Union.

The mass arrests and intimidation are evidence that the Chin population had never willingly accepted any constitution that excluded the Panglong Agreement as the cornerstone in constituting the Union. Without the core of the Panglong Agreement, including the secession clause of the Union Constitution, there could never have existed the Union of Burma in the first place.
FORCEFUL INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE NEEDED

The democratic forces and all the nationalities in Burma are indeed struggling for the restoration of democracy and the rights of self-determination to all the nationalities in the Union and to be free from the bondage of militarism. But their goal has not been achieved as some countries and international organizations are turning deaf ears to the brutalities of the SLORC, describing them as internal affairs. Meanwhile, the SLORC is being allowed to build up its armed forces with immense aid from some countries. Expanding the armed forces, in the absence of an external threat, is an attempt to carry on the repression of its own citizens, who will surely protest the SLORC-drafted, undemocratic constitution.

Due to international pressure the SLORC has relaxed, though only slightly, its grip on its own citizens. For the democratic forces and the Union's indigenous peoples to achieve their goal of restoring democracy and the inherent rights of self-determination of the minority peoples it is critical that the United Nations and the democratic countries impose forceful international pressure on the SLORC through arms embargoes and economic sanctions.

1947 UNION CONSTITUTION

The political crisis in Burma today is constitutional rather than ideological. It is most important for the indigenous peoples, the pro-democratic forces and international communities to watch whether the inherent right of self-determination is fully restored to minorities.

India, the nearest neighbor and a contemporary of the Union of Burma, which attained independence from the British almost at the same time, is also the largest democratic country in the world. It has amended its constitution not less than eighty times within just four decades by peaceful, democratic means according to the amendment provisions in their Constitution.

The peoples of the North East frontier of India are regarded as kinsmen and brothers of the Chin people because of the close affinities they have ethnically, culturally and linguistically. Those North East frontier peoples of India, despite the smallness of their territory and population in comparison to other States of the country are given full fledged autonomous statutes, in order to allow them internal self-determination according to the Indian Constitution. They now have their own legislatures and government.

Some Burmese or Burmans who claimed themselves as true democratic forces say that the Constitution of Union of Burma of 1947 shall neither be amended nor readopted, without having any regard for its legitimacy and any implications for the democratic legal process. Such people fail to take notice of the very fact that not to readopt the 1947 Constitution is tantamount to justifying and legalizing the criminal act of overthrowing the constitution and the constitutional government by a handful of military personnel waging war against the Union.

The Chin people are neither against their exclusion in or expulsion from the Union. What they are totally against is Burmese or Myanmar imperialism and act of colonizing the territories of the Chin people and their fellow minorities in the Union.

Actually, the Chin national territories are being illegally dominated by the Burmese military regime, in the absence of a democratic constitution of the Union which embodies the core of the Panglong Agreement. This means the Chin national territories are really under the domination of an alien power against their free will. Such an act in a sense is not that different from the colonization of the Chin people by the British.

CONDITIONS FOR RE-JOINING THE UNION

The Chin people are prepared to join the federal Union of Burma, but only voluntarily according to basic democratic principles.

Retaining the core of the Panglong Agreement, which will create liberty and equality for all the Union nationalities, is the only answer to the political crisis we are facing. In the same way that the many different flowers indigenous to the land that comprise the Union bloom in their own colors, beautifying in their own way, so too the richness of the various cultures of the people must be permitted to endure.
The following excerpts are from a memorandum issued by the Government of Myanmar to the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on the subject of last year’s UNGA resolution on the “Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar” and the drafting of the resolution to be put forth under the current UNGA session.

BACKGROUND

The Third Committee of the 48th General Assembly adopted draft resolution A/C.3/48/L.70 entitled “Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar” on 6 December 1993. First, the draft flagrantly attempted to interfere in the internal affairs of the Union of Myanmar. Second, it completely ignored the principles reaffirmed in the Vienna Declaration, namely, the principles of impartiality, objectivity and non-selectivity, on the promotion and protection of human rights. Thirdly, it was characterized by the glaring negativism as regards the historic and significant developments taking place in Myanmar. For these reasons, the draft resolution was totally unacceptable to the Government of Myanmar and the Myanmar Delegation dissociated itself with the adoption of the draft resolution...

NATIONAL RECONCILIATION (PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF MINORITIES)

The resolution urges the protection of the rights of persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities. Contrary to the allegation, this is the area in which the government has made the most dramatic achievements.

Since Myanmar is a Union made up of over a hundred different national races, unity among the national races is vital for the preservation of the independence and sovereignty of Myanmar as well as for the economic and social progress of the country. Beset with internal strife started by various armed groups immediately after independence, Myanmar had lagged in economic development far behind other nations in the region. The State Law and Order Restoration Council therefore attaches great importance to the strengthening of unity and solidarity among all national races. Since its inception, the State Law and Order Restoration Council has been giving priority to the achievement of national reconciliation. One year after assumption of State responsibilities, the State Law and Order Restoration Council made overtures to the armed groups to return to the legal fold. In parallel with these overtures, the SLORC strived for the development of border areas and national races. To demonstrate its genuine goodwill to the armed groups, the Armed Forces has unilaterally suspended military offenses against the armed groups since April 1992. With full trust in the sincerity of the Government, the following armed groups have returned to the legal fold as of 9 October 1994:

1. Myanmar National Democracy Alliance (MNDAA) 31-3-89
3. National Democracy Alliance Army Military & Local Administration Committee (NDAA) 30-6-89
4. Shan State Army (SSA) 24-9-89
5. New Democratic Army (NDA) 15-12-89
6. Kachin Defence Army (KDA) 11-1-91
7. Pa-O National Organization (PNO) 18-2-91
8. Palaung State Liberation Army (PSLP) 21-4-91
10. Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) 1-10-93
11. Kayinni National Liberation Front (KNLF) 3-5-94
12. Kayan Pyithit Party 26-7-94

All these armed groups have agreed to renounce the armed projects for regional peace and tranquility and progress. There remain only two armed groups in Myanmar, namely, "Mon" and "The Karen National Union." The Mon group has had three rounds of peace talks with the Government.

Over forty years of internal strife has impeded the progress of the country. As a legacy of the colonial past, mistrust ran deep among the national races. The loss of life and property from insurgencies were immense. The present leadership has therefore realized that the progress of the country is inconceivable without solving the question of national races. Hence, achievement of national reconciliation has become the priority task on the national political agenda. The return of 13 armed groups to the legal fold is a significant political breakthrough which must be given due recognition.

The demands for the protection of the so-called ethnic minorities appear to have stemmed from prejudice against the Myanmar Government rather than the genuine concerns about human rights. Instead of making such undue demands, the Government of Myanmar should be given full encouragement to enable it to build upon the achievements in the national reconciliation.

BUSINESS WATCH

U.S. CLOTHING FIRM, LIZ CLAIBORNE, ENDS BUSINESS WITH BURMA

Liz Claiborne has announced that it will stop making and purchasing apparel made in Burma because of its authoritarian government. The company's Chairman, Jerome A. Chazen issued the following statement:

"Based upon a recent examination of the circumstances in Burma, at this point in time Liz Claiborne, Inc. has decided not to give new orders to factories in this country. Though the facilities with which we work have complied with our strict human rights standards, we cannot support the activities of this country's current government. We are therefore in the process of an orderly cessation of manufacturing with contractors in Burma.

It has been and will continue to be our hope to promote change from within wherever possible. Though this does not appear to be the best course of action in Burma right now, we hope that it will be at some time in the future."

MYANMAR PROMOTES TRADE FAIR '95

As a follow up to the 1994 Trade Fair held in Rangoon last April, the government is planning Myanmar Trade Fair '95 from January 14-22, which will include a new dimension of inviting exhibitors from abroad. Exhibitors will be made up of manufacturers, sales representatives, agents, associations and public organizations from both inside Burma and overseas.

Those interested should contact: Myanmar Trade Fair '95, Fax: 951-89578 or telex: 21338 TRAPRO BM.
Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948
by Bertil Lintner
Westview Press
5500 Central Ave.
Boulder, Colorado 80301-2877
Tel: (303) 444-3541 Fax: (303) 449-3356

Describing the inextricable links among Burma's booming drug production, insurgency and counterinsurgency, the author offers an explanation as to why the country has been unable to shake off thirty years of military rule to build a democratic society.

Twilight Over Burma: My Life as a Shan Princess
by Inge Sargent
University of Hawaii Press
2840 Kolowalu Street
Honolulu, Hawaii 96822
Tel: (808) 956-8698 Fax: (808) 988-6052

The author, a native of Austria, recounts her nearly 12 years in Burma as the wife of Sao Kya Seng, the Prince of an autonomous state in Burma's Shan mountains known as Hsipaw. Ms. Sargent vividly describes her unique experience from her arrival in Rangoon in January 1953 through the violent military coup in 1962 which resulted in the presumed execution of the Prince and ended the rule of one of Burma's most popular local leaders.

The Mon: Persecuted in Burma, Forced Back from Thailand
December, 1994
Human Rights Watch/Asia
485 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10017-6104
Tel: (212)972-8400 Fax: (212)972-0905

This report investigates the continued human rights abuses against the Mon ethnic minority, particularly in light of major infrastructure projects such as the preparation for a natural gas pipeline. According to the report these projects are resulting in the use of forced labor, massive displacement inside the country and an outflow of refugees into Thailand. Also examined is the plight of refugees and migrant workers who once in Thailand increasingly face arrest, imprisonment, deportation and refoulement, as demonstrated in the forcible push back of refugees from Halockhani camp earlier this year.

Burmes Font
A computer font in the Burmese language is available through:
The Information Office
National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma
815 15th Street N.W. Suite 609
Washington, D.C. 20005

Enclose a disk (any size or density), a self-addressed envelope and an international mail coupon if to be sent outside the U.S.
The font is named after Daw Aung San Suu Kyi (suukyi.ttf) and works with Windows 3.1 application. It must not be sold or modified and should be used, whenever possible, to advance the cause of democracy.

Burmes Font

Voices of Burma
Burmes Ethnic Groups Ally to Demand Reforms
BANGKOK, Dec 6 (Reuters) - Four ethnic minority groups which signed ceasefires with the Burmese government have now formed an alliance to back their demands for swifter progress towards democracy, rebel sources said on Tuesday.
The Peace and Democratic Front (PDF) alliance was formed over the weekend after weeklong talks between the groups involved, the sources told Reuters.

Kyauk Nyi Laing, the Wa ethnic leader, was appointed chairman of the PDF which also comprises the Lahu, Kokang and Palong ethnic minorities.
The Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), one of the main rebel organizations which have signed ceasefires, did not participate in the talks, which took place in northern Shan state bordering China, but sent a letter to support the formation of the alliance, sources said.

"PDF was formed because many armed factions who reached a ceasefire with the government felt upset over delays with the development of democracy in the country," one of the sources said. At its first meeting the PDF agreed to demand that the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) speed up development of a democratic system and recognize the results of Burma's 1990 general election.

It also demanded the release of political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi, the National League for Democracy (NLD) leader who has been held under house arrest since July, 1989.

SLORC, the military-backed government which took power in 1988 after the brutal suppression of a pro-democracy movement, ignored the results of the 1990 election won convincingly by the NLD despite Suu Kyi's detention.
The rebel sources said that as well as forming an alliance on the political front, the PDF had agreed on military cooperation in case one of its members was attacked.

The four PDF groups have more than 40,000 armed men in rebel armies which have not been disband ed despite the ceasefire pacts.

"The forming of PDF indicates that the SLORC has failed to develop a democratic system as it promised to the rebels. I believe it will expand into one of the main opposition organizations against the SLORC," a Shan rebel source who monitors Burma said.

Kyauk Nyi Laing is also a former leader of the Burmese Communist Party (BCP), which denounced communism in the early 1980s and also signed a ceasefire agreement.

In April, 1992, the SLORC declared a unilateral suspension of hostilities against dozens of rebel ethnic minority groups who had been fighting for autonomy from central government since Burma gained independence from Britain in 1948, and offered peace negotiations.

Thirteen armed factions have signed ceasefires with the SLORC to date.

The above article appeared in the December 7, 1994 edition of The Nation in Bangkok.

Notables & Quotables

"...[they] planned to give me the Burmese treatment..." Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka was quoted as saying after learning of plans by government authorities to put him under house arrest. According to an article that appeared in the Washington Post on November 22, 1994, Soyinka, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature made reference to fellow Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi as he was forced to flee Nigeria for France.
WASHINGTON, DC — The Roundtable held on November 21 featured Janelle Diller, Legal Advisor to the International Human Rights Law Group, who discussed developments around the National convention taking place in Yangon. She also commented on the drafting of a constitution in the context of the UN resolution on Burma which is to be put before the United Nations General Assembly in December.


NEW YORK — The guest speaker at the New York Roundtable of November 1 was Kevin Heppner of the Thailand-based, Karen Human Rights Group. Mr. Heppner briefed the group on the current situation at the border and human rights abuses within Karen state.

The New York Roundtable is a periodic meeting of organizations and individuals interested in Burma. For more information contact Human Rights Watch/Asia by phone: (212) 972-8400 or fax: (212) 972-0905.

MASSACHUSETTS — The documentary film, "The Burma Deception", depicting the struggle for human rights in Burma will be shown at the meeting of the Massachusetts Roundtable scheduled for December 12.

The Massachusetts Burma Roundtable is an informal group of individuals and organizations working to promote human rights and democracy in Burma. Meetings are held the second Thursday of every month. For information contact Simon Billenness by phone: (617) 423-6655 or fax: (617) 482-6179.

SAN FRANCISCO — The Bay Area Burma Roundtable is held the third Wednesday of every month. Due to the holidays, however, there is no roundtable scheduled for December. For information on future meetings contact Jane Jerome by phone: (415) 967-3457 or e-mail: jjerome@igc.apc.org

SEATTLE — The guest speaker at the November meeting of the Burma Interest Group was Brenda Belak, Burma Specialist for Project Ecological Recovery which is based in Bangkok. The meeting scheduled for January 9 will feature a special report by University of Washington students who are involved in getting University support for shareholder resolutions and selective purchasing rules against companies doing business in Burma.

The Burma Interest Group is a non-partisan forum attended by representatives of NGOs, academia and other interested parties that meets monthly to discuss Burma related topics. For more information contact Larry Dohrs by phone: (206) 784-6873 or fax: (206) 784-8150.

LONDON — The Burma Briefing, a periodic meeting of NGOs working on Burma, will meet on December 13 to discuss the situation in Burma and progress reports from various groups concerned with Burma issues. Those invited to present reports include: Evelyn Aris of Prospect Burma, Baroness Cox of Christian Solidarity International, Zunetta Liddell of Human Rights Watch and Fiona King of Save the Children.

For further information contact Edmond McGovern by phone: (44-392) 876-849 or fax: (44-392) 876-525.

BRUSSELS — The Paris/Brussels Roundtable of October 25, which took place in Brussels, featured a briefing by Harn Yawngiwe and Maureen Aung-Thwin on the Burma Donors Forum held in Bonn earlier that month.

For information on future meetings contact Lotte Leicht of Human Rights Watch in Brussels by phone: (32-2) 732-2009 or fax: (32-2) 732-0471.
VISIT OF U.S. DELEGATION TO BURMA PROMPTS DEBATE ON POLICY DIRECTION

The visit of the most senior level US delegation to Burma in six years left some with a sense of ambiguity as to the direction of US policy toward the military regime. Comments made by both the head of the delegation, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, Thomas Hubbard, following the November 1-2 visit, and later by Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, were interpreted by the media to show a major shift from the hardline that the US has towed since 1988. An editorial in the November 24, 1994 edition of the New York Times entitled "Don't Cave In on Myanmar" prompted the US Administration to set straight its stand on Burma. This Letter to the Editor was printed in the New York Times on December 6:

TO THE EDITOR:

We write to take issue with your description of American policy toward Burma as "deny reality, declare things are getting better, and lower the pressure." (editorial, Nov. 24) Secretary of State Christopher did not suggest that the Administration would take a more conciliatory approach to Burma's State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) in the absence of meaningful change in that country. Quite the contrary.

What Secretary Christopher did say two weeks ago in Bangkok is that we have offered the Burmese regime "two visions of the future." If the SLORC does not move forward, relations will deteriorate further. If it takes concrete steps to improve its performance on human rights, democratization, and counternarcotics, relations with the United States could improve. That was the message we delivered during our recent talks in Rangoon.

As Secretary Christopher noted in terming these talks "somewhat positive," some modest steps were taken or promised by the Burmese regime. Senior Burmese Government official Lt. General Khin Nyunt pledged that his dialogue with Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi would continue, that Burma would soon reach agreement with the International Committee of the Red Cross on prison visits, and that it would allow US government experts to conduct an opium yield survey next February. In the next few months, we will be observing the situation in Burma carefully. In particular, we will look to Aung San Suu Kyi, whose party won an overwhelming mandate in Burma's 1990 elections, for a judgement on whether political reconciliation is making real progress.

In short, the United States wants a more constructive relationship with Burma — but the choice is up to Burma's leaders.

Sincerely,
Winston Lord
Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs
John Shattuck
Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor

SOUTHEAST ASIA

FORUM FOR DEMOCRATIC LEADERS PASSES RESOLUTION ON BURMA

The Kim Dae-Jung Peace Foundation For The Asia Pacific Region (KPF) held the second in a series of informal discussions focusing on critical issues facing Burma. The topic for this session was humanitarian and development aid and featured Steve Lanjouw, who negotiated and helped to implement the projects of Medecins Sans Frontieres/Holland in Burma. Also featured were representatives of other NGOs working inside the country and along its borders, as well as representatives of various ethnic minority groups. The discussion centered on the humanitarian needs of the people and, drawing from the practical experience of those working in the area, the challenges faced in meeting these needs.

UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADOPTS STRONG RESOLUTION ON BURMA

In a consensus decision the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on the situation of human rights in Myanmar on December 13. While welcoming some steps taken by the Government of Myanmar, such as the discussion with the Secretary-General and the meetings with Aung San Suu Kyi, the resolution remains highly critical of the regime's continued human rights abuses. Specific mention was made of the summary and arbitrary executions, torture, forced labor and displacement, as well as the serious restrictions on fundamental freedoms and the imposition of oppressive measures directed in particular at ethnic and religious minorities.

OSI HOSTS SECOND IN SERIES OF BURMA FORUMS

On November 30 the Burma Project of the Soros Foundations/Open Society Institute (OSI) held the second in a series of informal discussions focusing on critical issues facing Burma. The topic for this session was humanitarian and development aid and featured Steve Lanjouw, who negotiated and helped to implement the projects of Medecins Sans Frontieres/Holland in Burma. Also featured were representatives of other NGOs working inside the country and along its borders, as well as representatives of various ethnic minority groups. The discussion centered on the humanitarian needs of the people and, drawing from the practical experience of those working in the area, the challenges faced in meeting these needs.

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UC BERKELEY TO HOLD CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

The University of California at Berkeley will be hosting its annual Conference on Southeast Asian Studies February 25-26, 1995, with a focus on human rights. Areas to be explored will include civil and political liberties, the survival of cultural and ethnic minorities, the preservation of environments and the protection of minority and/or small scale religious traditions. For more information contact: Dr. Eric Crystal, Coordinator, Center for Southeast Asia Studies, 2223 Fulton St., Room 617, University of California at Berkeley, Berkeley, CA. 94720-2318. Tel: (510) 642-3609 Fax: (510) 643-7062.
Burma Debate is a publication of The Burma Project of the Open Society Institute.

Mary Pack, Editor

THE OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE (OSI), the latest entity of the Soros Foundations, 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.