

## Preface

The year 2007 represented a turbulent year in the history of Burma. It was a year in which we witnessed people from all walks of life coming together in the largest public display of dissatisfaction with the military regime in almost 20 years. Regrettably, it was also a year in which we witnessed the brutal and bloody crackdown on those peaceful protests, including the unforgivable and unforgettable attacks on and killings of Buddhist monks. In reference to the colour of the robes worn by the monks, the international media named this peaceful mass movement the “*Saffron Revolution*”. These protests represented the biggest demonstrations conducted in Burma since the popular democratic uprising of 8.8.88.

Responding to the brutality visited upon the protestors and dedicated to the memory of the monks and laypersons who lost their lives during the Saffron Revolution, late in the year, the Human Rights Documentation Unit (HRDU) commenced work on a report documenting the events leading up to, during, and following the September protests. This comprehensive report, entitled: *Bullets in the Alms Bowl: An Analysis of the Brutal SPDC Suppression of the September 2007 Saffron Revolution*, was based on over 50 eyewitness testimonies to the protests who had fled the country following the crackdowns as well as information gathered by a team of researchers working clandestinely within Burma.

The situation of human rights in Burma largely disappeared from the international limelight for about a year during the transition from UN Human Rights Commission into UN Human Rights Council in 2006. Meanwhile, human rights violations in Burma continued unabated without the notice of the new UN Human Rights Council. It was not until images of the brutality visited upon the participants of the Saffron Revolution were broadcast worldwide by local and international media that the Council was compelled to act and convened a Special Session on 2 October 2007, thus bringing the human rights situation in Burma back onto agenda again.

The year 2007 also witnessed the first time in almost four years in which the regime had permitted the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation on Human Rights in Burma, Professor Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, to return to the country. However, by his own admission, little was accomplished in what was to become his final visit to the country in his role in the mandate. Professor Pinheiro resigned as the Special Rapporteur on Burma in early 2008. Perhaps reflecting some of the frustration associated with the mandate, in his final report to the UN Human Rights Council, Pinheiro stated that the systematic and widespread human rights violations that have continued to be committed in Burma “*are not simply isolated acts of individual misconduct by middle- or low-ranking officers, but rather the result of a system under which individuals and groups have been allowed to breach the law and violate human rights without being called to account*”.

The consistent non-compliance of the Burmese military regime to the 30 consecutive resolutions adopted by the UN General Assembly and UN Human Rights Council (previously Commission) undermines the credibility of the UN system and the prevalence of international law. However, since the international community bore witness to the ruthless crackdown on the September 2007 Saffron Revolution, we have heard the voices of increasingly more of the world’s respectable citizens and leading human rights advocates advocating for international intervention from the perspective of the Responsibility to Protect principle.

The systematic and widespread perpetration of rape and sexual violence against women, enslavement (forced labour), religious persecution and torture in combination of the litany of other human rights abuses being committed in Burma with near complete impunity constitute crimes against humanity according to Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

The Burmese Generals should no longer be permitted to hide behind the wall of national sovereignty as they have done so for years. It is time for the United Nations and the international community to draw the legal conclusion that the human rights violations being committed in Burma are tantamount to crimes against humanity and that the SPDC's leaders must be held to account for these crimes.

In my capacity as the Coordinator of the Human Rights Documentation Unit, it is my honour to introduce the *Burma Human Rights Yearbook 2007*. This, the 2007 edition, marks the fourteenth annual publication of the *Burma Human Rights Yearbook* on the situation of human rights in Burma that has been produced by the HRDU. I sincerely hope that the records which the staff of the HRDU have systematically compiled over the years will serve as useful tools not only in the arena of international advocacy in the present day, but also as a credible and reliable body of evidence which may one day be used as a leading resource in seeking justice for the human rights crimes that have been committed in Burma.

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