

B. U. R. M. A.

BURMA RIGHTS MOVEMENT FOR ACTION

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An old woman, one of hundreds of thousands of ethnic villagers who are awaiting the genuine end of Slorc's military offensives in order to return home and rebuild life.

On November 7, Burma's state-run Radio Rangoon broadcast a speech by Major General Khin Nyunt in which he said that the regime is keeping its word and has suspended offensive military operations against ethnic minority guerrillas who have been fighting the regime for greater autonomy. (TN, November 9, 1992)

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CIVIL WAR

In April of this year the Burmese military announced to the world that they were calling an end to their military offensives against the ethnic groups in order to show the way for national reconciliation. On October 5 this pledge was again voiced by the junta's foreign minister, Ohn Kyaw, in a presentation at the United Nations General Assembly. Most of the opposition groups immediately expressed doubt in the sincerity of these statements, calling them only a sham meant to confuse the international community. Reports collected over the past months suggest that the opposition groups were correct in their assumption that Slorc's words would not be compatible with their actions. The following report lists some of the military actions Slorc has carried out during the past months.

Kachin State

During April, immediately following the Burmese military's announcement that they would end their offensive against the ethnic insurgencies, the Burmese army launched an offensive in the Kachin State against the KIA Independence Army (KIA) 3rd Brigade and overran much of the area. The Burmese army was also preparing to attack the KIA 2nd Brigade, but the attack was thwarted by a KIA 2nd Brigade counter attack.

In October and November, the following Burmese military attacks were also reported from the Kachin State:

-October 6 - The Burmese Army's 63 Regiment, led by Sergeant Shwe Uk, attacked a KIA mobile battalion.

-October 23 - Burmese Army troops led by Captain Tin Tun attacked the same KIA mobile battalion again, using heavy artillery.

-October 24 - The Burmese Army's 69 Regiment attacked the KIA 12 battalion headquarters and captured two men; Aik Yi and Brang Mai.

-October 26 - A second attack on the KIA 12 battalion headquarters was made. Both Aik Yi and Brang Mai were executed by the Burmese military.

-October 31 - Troops of the Burmese Army's 18th Regiment captured two ABSDF members; Te Tong and Aik Tu. Te Tung was reportedly executed.

-November 2 - A KIA outpost called Roi Jat was attacked by Burmese Army E Company of the 93rd Regiment led by Captain Ohn Cho.

-November 5 - The Burmese army tortured NLD member Kyaw Win and ABSDF member Aik Tu in order to extract information from them about the position of the KIA. Subsequently the KIA 5th battalion outpost was attacked by the Burmese Army's 18th Regiment.

• Source:

KIA Field Report

Karen State

According to a Karen report, 20 farmers were killed and at least another 60 wounded when Burmese military helicopters machine-gunned them as they planted rice. Four gunships took part in the attack. The farmers were all from an area near Papun in the Karen State. (BP 3/10/92) It is possible the attack was meant to frighten all Karen farmers away from their fields during harvest time. The Burmese military has a policy to cut off all food supplies to the ethnic military forces, and this involves forcibly evicting farmers from their villages and resettling them near Burmese military camps, or harassing the farmers when it is time for them to harvest their crops.

In October, the Karen camp of Zaw Hta was also overrun by the Burmese military, causing many villagers to flee the area. It is a strange coincidence that at almost the exact time that the Burmese military overran Zaw Hta, a camp which has always been under Karen control, the junta's foreign minister, Ohn Kyaw, was assuring the UN General Assembly that the regime had

truly suspended all offensives against the ethnic minorities. The camp was later retaken by the Karen.

On October 31, it was reported that the Burmese military captured a Karen camp called Maw Pasu, after 24 hours of heavy fighting. The Burmese military used 81 and 120 mm mortars and 84mm recoilless guns in their attack. At least 50 Karen villagers fled into Thailand to seek safety.

Burmese troops, who have usually shown little respect for national boundaries, entered three kilometers into Thailand in early November and took over two Thai villages in Mae Hong Son province. All food and animals in the village were confiscated by the Burmese troops, who immediately dug in, determine to stay. Sources estimated that their numbers were around 200.

At least 3,000 Karen refugees also fled into Thailand at the same time to escape the Burmese military's campaign. They took refuge in a forest, and Thai soldiers of military Unit 35 were ordered to the area to control the refugees. No orders were given by the Thai Third Army to move against the Burmese invading troops. (BP 7/11/92)

On November 8, the Burmese troops were reported to have withdrawn from Thai soil. However, the refugees remained, fearful of returning to the Burma side while the Burmese army is still in control. (BP 8/11/92) As the Burmese army moves through the area, they use Karen villagers as porters and mine sweepers.



ECONOMICS

An Economy Gone Wild

In Rangoon today, a simple Thai-made T shirt sells for 700 or 800 kyats. A 14" Toshiba television will set the buyer back 33,100 kyats, and one bag of cement needed for construction will cost 630 kyats. What does that translate to in terms of US dollars? Well, that depends on what rate you use to make the conversion. A foreign tourist entering Burma and changing some money on the illegal market would get at least 100 kyats for each dollar. For that tourist, the T shirt would cost US\$7 or \$8, the television US\$331 and the bag of cement around US\$6.30. That does not sound so bad.

However, a citizen of Burma who has to live with a kyat valued by the military regime at only 5.6 kyats per dollar would have to pay the equivalent of US\$125 to \$142 for the T shirt, US\$5,910 for the television and US\$112.50 for each bag of cement needed to repair a residence!

It is, therefore, no surprise that only those Burmese who have a lucrative government position, or have opportunity to travel abroad, own a television, stereo and other luxury goods. For the vast majority of the people, simple survival is an all-consuming activity.

Government figures put the GDP for 1991/92 at 176.6 billion kyats. At the official exchange rate that equals about US\$28 billion which translates into a per capita income for Burma's 42 million people of about US\$673. At the more realistic kyat rate as reflected by the illegal market exchange rate, the per capita income in Burma falls down to only about US\$42.

Some Burma observers say the inflation rate is at least 50%. Official figures are so confusing that a reliable figure can perhaps never be really determined. A foreign embassy economic report on Burma recently stated that "Government deficits are financed mainly by borrowing from the state banking system and, ultimately, by printing more currency. Continuing the trend of monetary ex-

pansion in which currency in circulation more than tripled during the three years following the September 1987 demonetization, the money supply increased about 25 percent in 1991/92."

Thus the illegal money market continues to be a booming trade. Visitors to Burma are often approached by people who quietly offer to buy any spare US dollars they might have. They are willing to pay 100 or more kyats per dollar. The dollars purchased in this way are then usually smuggled to the border with Thailand or China where necessary consumer goods, such as cloth, medicine, soap, etc., are purchased and smuggled back into the country to be sold on the streets. Although the military regime has attempted to end this underground trade by legalizing cross-border trade, the underground market still seems to flourish and perhaps is still one of the most important sources for the necessities the people need to buy.

Following the September 1988 military coup, the military junta tried to improve the country's appalling economy by ending the "Burmese Way to Socialism" and opening the door to international investments. Although it was somewhat successful, few if any benefits seem to have reached the common people. Exports over the past few years have risen to approximately US\$508 million. Forestry products, mainly logs, remain the largest single foreign exchange earner (about one-third of total exports). Thailand continues to be the main destination of these forest products. Other major export markets include China, India and Singapore.

Imports have increased to about US\$862.7 million during the past few years. This imbalance between imports and exports has cut Burma's foreign exchange reserves from US\$560 million in 1990 to about \$260 million presently. The foreign debt now stands at about four billion dollars.

Principle imports are consumer electronics and electrical appliances, motor vehicles, and heavy equipment

(mostly for the oil drilling companies). The main import sources are Japan, China and Singapore.

To create more confidence from the international community, the military rulers have finally drafted a four-year economic plan. The plan is meant to give some guidance to the country's economic development, and provides more possibilities for foreign investors. For example, a foreign investor is now permitted to receive up to 5,000 acres of land for 30 years for agricultural development. Foreign investments may also be wholly foreign-owned or, with minimum 35 percent foreign ownership, be in joint ventures with local private companies, state-private sector joint venture corporations, or state-owned economic enterprises.

However, as long as the economy is being controlled by military men who have little, if any, economic sense, international confidence in Burma as an investment opportunity will probably not grow. What foreign investments are actually carried out will most likely continue to be those which provide fast returns for the investor, and a safe withdrawal in case of too many problems.

In the meantime, the people of Burma continue their struggle to buy the basic food items needed to feed their families. When they enter the hospital, they are forced to purchase the medicines they need on the illegal market at exorbitant prices. Education facilities for their children continue to be poorly equipped and staffed. What has gone wrong with an economy which was once the strongest in the region? "Incompetent leadership" is what most people of Burma will say, and until this leadership steps aside and allows more able people to lead the country, the suffering will continue.

● Sources:

Various foreign embassy economic reports



HUMAN RIGHTS

The following is a very brief report on human rights abuses in Burma during the past year. B.U.R.M.A. has tried to collect as many accounts of human rights abuses as possible to make a fuller report. Anyone interested in the more lengthy report may request a copy from B.U.R.M.A.

Karen State

Last year, the Slorc offensive against the Karen was one of the biggest ever, and the coming dry-season will reveal another all-out attempt by Slorc to destroy the Karen resistance. Slorc's oppression of the Karen is especially intense, widespread, and long-lasting, as their capacity to resist has proven uniquely durable. Following are some of the human rights abuses perpetrated against the Karen by the Burmese military during the past year.

- **forced labor** - Karen villagers in Bilin Township are used as human minesweepers. An 8-10 mile stretch of road between Kyat Thaungse and Kyo Waing is swept for mines by women and children from local villages each time the Army transports want to pass through (approx. 1x/week). First the women walk through sweeping with brooms, followed by elderly men who are forced to drag heavy logs over the road with their bullock carts. Women, children, and the elderly are recruited since the men have deserted the villages, because they will be shot on sight by the Army, as rebel guerrillas. Village women have also been used at least 4 times (April 21, 1992 being one documented incident) as human shields for army patrols who suspect a possible rebel ambush. (OFA/11A/042)

- **violence** - A 12 yr. old boy from Pynma Bin Seit village, Bilin Township, was shot and killed by an Army patrol. His 6 yr. old brother was captured also. His fate is unknown. The Army has been known to execute captured children or teenagers, to keep them from "growing up to be rebels". (OFA/11A/042)

- **forced relocation** - In Kyauk Kyi Township, after any fighting has occurred nearby a village, the Army will arrive in 2-3 days to forcibly relocate the villagers to a new Army location. Villagers must carry all their own food, which is then taken from them

and rationed out, one meal a day. The army also consumes a good portion of villager food. Villagers attempting to return to their homes will be shot on sight as "rebel sympathizers". (OFA/11A/042)

- **forced labor** - In Hlaing Bwe Township, local Army officers demand a quota of porters from each village. If the village headmen does not deliver enough of the strongest villagers, the town is attacked and burned to the ground. Recruited villagers often must do the most dangerous jobs of running messages, and clearing jungle around the Army camps. (OFA/11A/042)

- **extortion** - Also in Hlaing Bwe area, women and girls are kidnapped by soldiers, and a ransom of 5000 kyats is demanded for their return. The demand goes up 1000 kyats each day. If no payment is made the women are taken away as army porters. (OFA/11A/042)

- **internal refugees** - 552 displaced persons, who escaped the Army's relocation campaign in the Mergui-Tavoy area, are now living in Kaserdoh Township, a KNU liberated zone, and are struggling to live on insufficient supplies from the KNU. (KNU report)

- **forced labor and violence** - Reports from villagers who escaped from the Army camp in Thayetchaung Township, describe conditions of forced labor. The people must work 5 days a week for the Army, leaving only 2 days for them to make their own living, and support their families. They are forced to build roads, barracks, and serve as porters. 4 people of Eh Eh village were murdered by the Army. (KNU report)

- **forced relocation and refugees** - In Feb. 1992 3 Karen villages in Lerdoh-soe village tract were relocated along the Ye-Tavoy highway. This campaign resulted in many refugees fleeing across the border to Thailand, with over 1000 ending up in 5 border camps. Others remain internally dis-

placed and in need of food and medicine. (KNU report)

- **violence** - 9 Karen villages in Bogale Township, in the Delta region, were destroyed by helicopter and gun ship fire, and at least 60 wounded civilians executed in the mop-up operation that followed. (Amnesty International, Oct. 16, 1992)

- **internal refugees** - The KNU reports that around 6000 Karen internal refugees from Mudraw Province are in desperate need of food, clothing, and medicine. The Slorc offensive against Manerplaw has ravaged their fields, destroyed generations-old betel nut, coconut, and fruit plantations, and burned down their homes and rice barns. (KNU Urgent Appeal, June 3, 1992)

- **internal refugees** - Villages in Pa'an Province have also been looted and destroyed by the onslaught of the Slorc's Manerplaw offensive. Thousands, including women and children, have been used as army porters. Uncooperative villages have been shelled by mortar fire. 20% of the locals have fled to Thailand, but approximately 8000 remain in a desperate condition of displacement inside Burma. (KNU Urgent Appeal, June 3, 1992)

- **forced labor and extortion** - In Loh Baw village of Pa'an Province villagers must produce 5 messengers, 8 porters, and 48 kg. of meat a day for the Army, or pay monthly the equivalent of 51,000 kyats, or 255 kyats per family. (KNU report, Sep. 11, 1992)

- **forced conscription** - Every village in the Kyone Pyaw region must provide at least one person every month to the Army to replace troops killed in battle, and for use in the Army's "Human Wave" assaults at the front. (KNU report, Aug. 13, 1992)

- **violence** - 7 Karen women were killed, after being raped and beaten by soldiers of the 59th LIB, at Wah Kee village, and all the homes there were burned down, also. Three other Karen women of Tee-per-kee village (Naw Loh, 40; Naw Gai, 28; and Naw Gay, 12) were gang-raped by soldiers of the 108th LIB. (The Nation, Apr. 4 1992)

Karenni State

The Karenni, or Kayah, or "Red Karen", are close cousins of the Karen, and like them have their own State within Burma. There are two small Karenni rebel groups fighting Rangoon.

- **forced relocation** - On May 21, 1992 Slorc ordered 76 villages in the Pruso, Deemawso, and Loikaw Township of Karenni State to relocate. Over 20,000 people were affected, but thousands fled to Karen and Karenni rebel areas, or to relatives in the cities. Around 7000 villagers were interned at Deemawso camp, and another 7000 at Pruso. Many had to walk 35 miles to reach the campsite, bringing only a supply of rice, and leaving all else behind. Deprived of medicine, over 50 elderly and children died from dysentery in the first month alone, as a result of the camp's unclean water supply. Others have died from starvation, since they only had one month of rice supply, and cannot plant new crops. (Karenni Report, Aug. 10, 1992)

- **forced labor** - Each month 1000 new people from the Deemawso and Pruso concentration camps are taken to work on the Loikow-Aung Ban railway project. Some railway workers were beaten to death, or died from diseases, and all were malnourished. This project has received money from the UNDP, under its "Border Areas Development" program, whose projects mainly serve to provide Slorc with better access to jungle insurgents via new roads etc.. Hundreds of others in these two camps have been taken to the front as army porters. (Karenni Report, Aug. 10, 1992)

- **internal refugees** - as conditions in these camps become unbearable, many escape into the jungle to hide. The KSNLF and the KNPP (both Karenni rebel groups) are struggling to support 1500+ refugees a piece, and at least a 1000 more are hiding in the isolated jungle. (Karenni Report, Aug. 10, 1992)

- **forced labor** - Maung Thu, 35, one of 8 escaped Karenni army porters, claimed that, of 200 porters being used to support 80 Slorc troops, only about 100 survived. The rest were beaten to

death, or starved, or died from disease. (Bangkok Post, Oct. 13, 1992)

Shan State

- The Shan, ethnically close to the Thai people to the south, have been one of the historically dominant groups in Burma, along with the Burmans and the Mon. The Shan State is probably most known for producing the world's largest supply of opium and heroin, though this is not the cause of conflict, since the Slorc closely cooperates with the groups involved in the lucrative drug trade.

- **violence** - The following men were tortured, or shot, to death from the village of Nar Naung, in the Shan State, in Jan. 1992: Saing Sai, 33; Saing Shwe, 22; Pu Sarn Shwe, 40; Loong Sarm, 30; Pui Loi Kaw, 40. Earlier, 15 women from this same village were kidnapped and raped by the Army. (OFA/11A/017)

- **forced relocation** - 70 households from the Wan Loi village, Northern Shan State, were ordered by the 33rd LIB to relocate. These 300+ people were forced to abandon their farms and crops. 1 man, Seng Nong, 25, was beaten and thrown into the river, from which he died. (OFA/11A/017)

- **forced relocation** - Villagers from Nowng Noon, and Keng Tung, had all their land taken, their homes destroyed, and were forced to move elsewhere, leaving all possessions behind. (OFA/11A/024)

- **forced labor** - In Mounng Pyin town, villagers were forced to cut down teak forest to generate money for the Army, and clear land for army barracks. No pay or rations were given, and those who didn't work paid 50 kyats, and food packets. Housing material was also taken for free, and complaints led to torture. (OFA/11A/024)

Kachin State

- The Kachin also have their own State in the mountainous north of Burma, and the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) is a significant resistance force in the allied minority front against the Slorc.

- **violence** - On Jan. 7, 1992, Kareng La Tawng, 34, was beaten to death by

Ser. Maj. Maung Pu, of the 29th Reg. In Nov. 1991, the same officer had murdered another Kachin villager. (OFA/11A/055)

- **violence** - On Feb. 2, 1992, a platoon of the 15th Reg. entered Mohryin village and burnt down 25 Kachin homes. Myin Ting, 37, was shot to death at that time. (OFA/11A/055)

- **forced relocation** - In March, 1992, the village of Shwe Gu was burned and the villagers forced to move to the Army-controlled town of Bhamo. (OFA/11A/055)

Political Prisoners

Amnesty International estimated in Jan. 92, that there are 1500-2000 political prisoners being held in Burma. A pro-Aung San Su Kyi demonstration at Rangoon Univ. in Dec. 91 led to the arrest of 1000 students, Dec. 10-11. (OFA/11A/079)

- **violence** - There are around 500 political prisoners at Mandalay Prison. New arrivals are kept in "dark cells" indefinitely. These cells are 1.3 mt. sq., with no room to stand up, and prisoners must defecate on the floor where they live and sleep. Occasionally, they are taken to other cells to be tortured. After sentencing they are moved to "normal" cells with 4 other prisoners each. Frequent punishments often involve a return to the "dark cell". (OFA/11A/079)

- **violence** - Torture techniques for political prisoners include being hung upside down from a spinning ceiling fan, the degrading "motorcycle game", electric shock, water treatment, sleep deprivation, starvation, beatings, rape, and inhuman living conditions. (OFA/11A/079)

- **political prisoners** - On Oct. 15 1992, 9 political prisoners were given 10 yr. jail terms for producing anti-government leaflets. 5 were students. (OFA/11A/037)



● Source Abbreviations:

OFA--B.U.R.M.A. Documentation Center

KNU--Karen National Union

TN--The Nation (Thailand)

BP--Bangkok Post (Thailand)

SOCIAL ISSUES

Political Prisoners in Burma

Since the proclamation of the Burmese military's constitution of 1974, the junta has considered all political prisoners as common criminals by reasoning that they had committed crimes against the State. In 1980 the junta issued a decree ordering all administrative and prison authorities to release all political prisoners under their command. About a week passed without a single response from the lower authorities concerned. Instead of releases to comply with the order, a series of messages came up reporting that there were no political prisoners under their jurisdiction. The junta had to issue an awkward order in which they pronounced a newly invented definition of the term "political prisoner".

Today history is repeating itself once again. When the international community along with the people of Burma demanded the release of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and all other political prisoners, the junta reacted quickly by claiming that Aung San Suu Kyi is not a political prisoner. They further reiterated that there is not a single political prisoner in Burma. Yet, recently, they made a big public show after releasing several well-known political detainees.

There are about fifty prisons in Burma; one third of which are large enough to accommodate thousands of prisoners. Although most of the prisons were built by the British, all prisons have gradually been extended with the walls rising ever higher. Insein prison is the largest of all. It is situated in Insein, 16 kilometers north of downtown Rangoon. Covering over 120 acres of land, it consists of two separate units called the main prison and the annex. Inside the main prison there are five large two-story buildings, each 440 feet long. They are arranged to form five radii of a circle. The center of the circle is a tall watch tower under which rests the main kitchen. Each of those five wards consists of eight large rooms, four on each floor, each measuring 110 feet by 20 feet. In the early days the govt used to

put about 50 political prisoners in each room. Since 1974, after all political prisoners were categorized as convicts, as many as 200, sometimes even 250, were packed into a single room. Thus the five wards, officially called ward number 1, 2, 3 etc., could hold as many as 10,000 prisoners at a time.

Apart from those five wards, there are two smaller wards, no. 6 and 7, in which women prisoners are usually held. There are also eight low buildings with twenty cells in each building. Moreover there still are quite a number of other cells called special cells which are used to detain former VIPs of the junta; dark cells which remain totally dark in day time but are brightly lit at night; water cells with rounded floors which look like basins filled with 2 to 3 ft of water; sound proof torture chambers; special isolated prison houses reserved for imprisoned VIPs in which former generals and ousted ministers are placed.

In December 1963, the junta abolished the traditional segregation of the prisoners into different classes, viz. (A) class, (B) class, (C) class etc., saying that such segregation contradicted with the Burmese Way to Socialism (BWS). Since then the Jail Manual, a guideline based on the British system, was completely ignored and all prisoners were treated equally, irrespective of their background, whether they were political leaders or tax payers or former high ranking officials, of old age or under age. All were vulnerable to torture by any bad-tempered soldier or drunken guard. Prisoners were kept in isolated rooms or cells for months, sometimes even years. Medical treatment was scanty. Officers from the military intelligence were assigned to manage the prisons. They were empowered to do anything they liked.

Many prisoners have fallen victim to the mismanagement of the junta. The first prominent victim was Sao Shwe Thaik, an ethnic Shan leader and the first president of independent Burma. He died in Insein prison in 1963, as a result of mental torture and restricted medical treatment. Another prominent figure was U Mya Sein, an

Arakanese Director General of Post and Telecommunication. He was accused of illegally interchanging 100 kyat notes, canceled by the regime, with smaller currencies from the state funds of the P & T, and was arrested in May 1964. A disciplined bureaucrat who was brought up under the British Govt, he felt extremely humiliated. He was kept in isolation in a narrow dark room. Three months after his arrest he was found dead in the room. The authorities said he hanged himself.

After the 1988 uprising, a number of politicians have died in the prisons:

-U Maung Ko, age 52, a manager of the Rangoon Port who led the port workers and officials in the 1988 uprising and became a leader of the NLD, died in Ye Kyi Aing military interrogation camp on Nov. 9, 1990.

-U Sein Win, age 54, a former student leader (EC of the central committee of the All Burma Federation of Students' Unions ABFSU, 1956-60, vice chairman of the Rangoon University Students' Union, RUSU, 1961-64), died at Insein prison on Jan. 8, 1991.

-U Tin Maung Win, 51, a former student leader (EC of the RUSU 1961-64, Chairman of the Students' Rights Committee 1963-64), an NLD leader and an MP from Khayan Township, Rangoon Division, died at Insein prison on Jan. 18, 1991.

-U Ba Thaw (Maung Thaw Ka), a retired navy commander, a prominent writer and a senior leader of the NLD, died in June, 1991, at Rangoon general hospital, three days after he was moved out of Insein prison.

-Mahn Dah Weik, a former chairman of the All Burma Karens Organization (ABKO), died in Insein prison in 1992.

All the deaths were related to torture. The above are the names of those whom the outside world might already know about. No one can know exactly how many others have already died or have become invalids in the prisons of Slorc.



POLITICS

ASEAN, South East Asia's most powerful organizational bloc, once again came under international attack for its dubious policy of "constructive engagement" towards the Siorc regime in Burma. This time around the "heat" of international pressure was directed by the European Community at the annual ASEAN-EC Ministerial meeting in late October of this year. The EC has repeatedly crashed into a brick wall in its attempts to encourage ASEAN to flex its significant collective muscles, and put some pressure on Siorc to change its oppressive ways. Human rights organizations worldwide, and many Western governments, have increasingly been expressing their desire to see ASEAN officially condemn the Siorc's well-documented and widespread human rights abuses against its own citizens. Furthermore, it is believed that a major force for change could be brought to bear on the unstable and cash-strapped Siorc junta, if only the ASEAN nations would begin to withdraw their substantial trade, investment, and aid from Burma until genuine developments of peace and democracy emerged internally.

Also highlighted at the EC-ASEAN meeting was Thailand's continuing dance of obfuscation and rationalization with regards to its next door neighbor in Burma. Of all the ASEAN nations, Thailand has the closest economic ties to Burma, with heavy investments along the Burmese border in teak logging, gems, cattle, etc.. Bangkok also harbors future hopes of a steady stream of natural gas and hydro-electric power flowing from Burma to its energy-starved economic growth engine. These entrenched economic interests, which involve many top government officials personally, have resulted in Thailand establishing itself as the most active defender of Burma in the region, often protecting Siorc from international criticism and economic sanctions like a buffer.

Current Thai Foreign Minister Prasong, an elected Bangkok MP from the "angelic" Palang Dharma party, stated a week before the EC-

ASEAN meeting that "there will be no change in bilateral Thai-Burmese relations." (TN, Oct. 24, 1992) Prasong sees Thailand's role to Burma as that of a close, older friend, who will generously help Siorc improve its image in the world's eyes. He explained his position saying, "Thailand is in the position to help its neighbors develop into strong nations with recognized status in the international community." (TN, Oct. 24, 1992) Prasong's stance is a surprising one since it directly contradicts his campaign pledges during the August election, when he was one of the strongest critics of Thailand's constructive engagement policy towards Burma.

However, since the US election of Bill Clinton to the presidency, Prasong has changed his tune yet again. With reference to the Thai decision to round-up Burmese immigrant students into a "safe-camp", Prasong is now asking Interior Minister Chavalit to reconsider the ramifications the action may have on Thailand's international image, asking "How can we tell the world about it?". He continued, "Burmese students are not criminals but political dissidents who should be treated properly." (BP, Nov. 9, 1992) Deputy Interior Minister Chamni pointed out the source of Prasong's rediscovered concern for the plight of the Burmese, admitting that Thailand's foreign policy of constructive engagement towards Burma was being reviewed in light of the Clinton victory and Clinton's more active concern about human rights. Reuters quoted a "highly-placed government source" as admitting that Thailand has increasingly been aware of criticism by the West, and the Burmese opposition against its support of Siorc and its appalling human rights history. "We will have to overhaul the policy on Burma. I am against all measures that contribute to prolonging the power of Siorc," Reuters quoted the source as saying. (BP, Nov. 9, 1992)

A strong voice of opposition to constructive engagement recently emerged from the director of the Institute for Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) in Thailand, which

hosted the First ASEAN Congress this year in Kuala Lumpur, on the occasion of ASEAN's 25th anniversary as a regional organization. He challenged ASEAN to make itself "relevant" in the area, by pressuring countries like Burma to halt human rights abuses. "To make ASEAN relevant, ASEAN must choose to make its stand on many questions which it has not touched on before - the questions of human rights, the environment, and democracy", he explained. Singapore's Foreign Minister Wong, an ASEAN ministerial member, agreed later in an off-the-record discussion, saying that Thailand should take the lead in exerting such pressure. "Thailand, being the closest neighbor, should show the way.", he concurred. (TN, Oct. 11, 1992) Indonesia's former foreign minister also joined in the chorus calling for Thailand to take the initiative for change in Burma, believing that the Thai know Burmese thinking best. Singapore's Foreign Minister Wong also went on to describe a recent collective ASEAN encounter with Burmese Foreign Minister Ohn Gyaw at the UN in October. After Ohn Gyaw presented the Siorc line, Wong admits, "we being Asians, just listened to him, and we'll wait to see what happens next." (BP, Oct. 11, 1992)

The growing international consensus seems to be indicating that constructive engagement in Burma must go. As the experience of South Africa vividly demonstrated in the 1980's, economic sanctions are probably the most powerful instrument outside nations can use to facilitate progressive change in a context of widespread human rights violations.



ACTION

Economic sanctions and political pressure continue to be urgent issues in the struggle for peace and human rights in Burma which need international support. The following actions from support groups are requested:

UN Initiative

In mid-December, the United Nations General Assembly may discuss the situation in Burma, and there is a possibility the General Assembly will condemn the appalling human rights situation inside the country. This might help pave the way for future sanctions against the military junta. Cables, phone calls and letters to UN representatives encouraging tough UN actions against the Burmese military regime would help move this process along and speed up the chance for an end to the civil war in Burma.

Economic Boycott

Pepsi continues to carry out its production and distribution within Burma. Many of the opposition groups have been calling for a total boycott of Pepsi and all of its other products until they close down their factory and move out. We urge you to initiate campaigns to get Pepsi and related products off of college and university campuses until Pepsi recognizes the horrible human rights abuses being done against the people of Burma and ends its business there.

Christmas Campaign

Light a Christmas candle in your church or office to remember the thousands of people in Burma who languish in prisons, those who have lost their homes and live deep in the jungles or as refugees in Thailand, and those who are tortured, raped and

forced to do slave labor. Involve the lives of these suffering people in your Christmas programs this year.

American Campaign

Encourage Clinton to take Burma seriously in his new foreign policy. It has been suggested that Clinton has expressed concern over human rights abuses inside Burma and would be willing to take more concrete actions to pressure for positive change. Letters and phone calls to his office would help insure that Burma is a central issue to him as he plans his new government.



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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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