

March 2010

UK Government supports referring Burma to International Criminal Court

On 24th March the British government announced that it would support the United Nations Security Council referring Burma to the International Criminal Court. Britain's Ambassador to the United Nations made the announcement after a meeting of the United Nations Security Council about the situation in Burma.

The Burma Campaign UK has been campaigning for the British government to support a UN Commission of Inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burma, with the aim of referring Burma to the International Criminal Court. Almost 200 MPs have backed the campaign.

On 5 March the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Burma, Tomas Ojea Quintana, in his report to the UN Human Rights Council, recommended that the UN consider establishing a Commission of Inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burma. The Special Rapporteur report stated that the 'gross and systematic' nature of the abuses and the lack of action to stop them indicated; 'a state policy that involves authorities in the executive, military and judiciary at all levels.'



Mublaw and her children were used as slave labour by the military dictatorship

Australia became the first country to publicly announce its support for a UN Commission of Inquiry into human rights abuses in Burma earlier in the month. In a statement at the UN Human Rights Council, Australia's representative to the council, Angela Robinson, said: "Australia would support investigating possible options for a United Nations commission of inquiry".

Burma's dictatorship has been deliberately targeting civilians in its war against ethnic minorities in Burma. More than 3,500 villages have been destroyed by the Burmese Army in the past 15 years, and the use of rape is widespread and systematic, even against girls as young five.

NLD reject Burma Elections

On 29 March, the National League for Democracy (NLD) announced that the regime's elections laws are so unjust that it will not register as a party to contest the upcoming elections.

A statement by the NLD said: the electoral laws issued by the State Peace and Development Council are unjust and therefore the Committee decided not to re-register the party unanimously without objection."

According to the regime's election laws, published on 9 March, prisoners are banned from being members of political parties. The law effectively excludes more than 2,100 political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi. Any party wishing to register to take part in the elections must expel members currently serving prison terms. A party that

fails to do so will be unable to contest the elections. This forced the National League for Democracy to choose between expelling Aung San Suu Kyi or being banned in the upcoming election.

Writing in the Washington Post, U Win Tin, a founder of the NLD and a former political prisoner, said "I hope the international community will stand with us. The governments of the world should declare that they reject the regime's election and prearranged outcome, and pressure the regime to make substantive and positive change for Burma, beginning with the immediate release of all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, and the cessation of the regime's military campaign against ethnic minorities. The regime should negotiate with Burma's democracy forces, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, and ethnic representatives for a peaceful solution toward national reconciliation and true democracy."

Burma Campaign UK called on UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to renew efforts to force Burma's generals to enter into dialogue with the NLD and genuine ethnic representatives. "With Burma's main political party not taking part in the elections, it is time to move on from the debate about reforming the regime's fake elections, and get back to pressuring the generals to enter into genuine dialogue," said Anna Roberts, Executive Director at Burma Campaign UK.

Regime increases pressure on ethnic ceasefire groups

The regime's deadline for ethnic ceasefire groups to transform their armies into Border Guard Forces (BGF) has now been extended to 28 April.

On 1 March, SPDC Army Military Affairs Security Chief Lt Gen Ye Myint sent a letter to the United Wa State Army (UWSA) leaders saying that the group had until 10 March to unconditionally accept the junta's BGF proposal or become an unlawful organisation. However, on 10 March the deadline expired with neither the UWSA nor the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) accepting the junta's terms.

The regime has been intensifying its pressure on ethnic ceasefire groups the KIO and UWSA to transform their armies into Border Guard Forces under the control of the Burma Army. Counter-proposals to the regime's ultimatum from the KIO and the UWSA have been rejected by the regime, who have instead responded with increased military troops. According to reports in The Irrawaddy, more than 70,000 regime troops have been sent to areas of North Eastern Burma, near bases of the KIO and the UWSA.

Stateless and Starving: Persecuted Rohingya flee Burma and starve in Bangladesh

A new report from Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) documents how Bangladeshi authorities have waged an unprecedented campaign of arbitrary arrest, illegal expulsion, and forced internment against stateless Rohingya refugees from Burma. Rohingya refugees from Burma face death from starvation and disease in makeshift camps because the government of Bangladesh denies them access to humanitarian aid.

The report documents the dire conditions for these persecuted Rohingya refugees and warns that critical levels of acute malnutrition and a surging camp population without access to food aid will cause more deaths from starvation and disease if the humanitarian crisis is not addressed.

"It is unconscionable to leave this vulnerable population stateless and starving," says Richard Sollom, PHR's Director of Research and Investigations. "Immediate steps are needed to prevent further malnutrition, disease, and death."

Sollom described camp conditions as among the worst they had ever seen, with people housed in ramshackle huts made of twigs and plastic sheeting, denied food aid, and living beside open sewers.

Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya, a Muslim ethnic minority, have crossed into Bangladesh since 1991 to escape persecution in Burma, where they have been subjected to systematic and widespread human rights violations, including summary executions, torture, state-sanctioned rape, arbitrary arrest, and forced labour.

Read the report here: <http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/index.php/news-and-reports/reports/title/stateless-and-starving>

Crimes against women in Burma

Although Burma is a signatory country of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, the junta continues to commit violence against women, particularly in ethnic areas. On 2 March, 12 Burmese women presented testimonies of use of rape, torture and other crimes as a weapon of war used by the military junta at a tribunal organised by the Nobel Women's Initiative in New York. On March 8, International Women's Day, the Women's League of Burma called upon the international community to urge the UN Security Council to investigate crimes against women in Burma.

The junta has consistently suppressed women political activists, arresting them and transferring them to remote prisons. There are currently 177 women political prisoners in Burma, as young as 21 and as old as 68, with serious lack of access to health care.

Burmese Army shoots 5 month old baby

On 22nd March a 5 month old baby boy, a 5 year old girl, and a 37 year old woman were killed in an attack by the Burmese Army on Khaw Hta village, Kler Lwe Htoo District, Karen State.

According to a local villager, Burmese Army Battalion 369 entered the village and opened fire without warning, shooting at any villager in sight and firing into villagers' homes. Nine houses were also destroyed. The people of the village are now hiding in the jungle, and the Burmese Army remains active in the area.

Attacks on Karen villagers have been increasing since 17th January this year. More than 2,500 people were forced to flee their homes after attacks in two areas in Karen State. In one attack a child was killed and two others injured when the Burmese Army fired a mortar bomb at a school.

Burma spotlight in One World Film Festival

The One World Film Festival, one of the leading festivals in Europe that deals with human rights issues, showed a series of documentary films all over Czech Republic, in Bucharest and is travelling to Brussels in April. Orphans of Burma's Cyclone, a film by Burmese undercover journalists from the exile media organization Democratic Voice of Burma, captured the consequences of Cyclone Nargis one year after the storm. It will be shown in the European Parliament on April 15.

Belgium MPs visit Burma border

A group of Belgian MPs from four of the five main national political parties visited the Thailand-Burma border from 22nd to 27th March this year. The delegation comprised of four MPs, including Ms Karine Lalieux, Ms Juliette Boulet, Mr Georges Dallemagne, and Mr Jean Cornil. The group was accompanied by Ms Françoise Wallemack from a national Belgium radio station and Mr Benoit Bourtembourg from Actions Birmanie, a human rights organisation campaigning for Burma. The trip was organized by Burma Campaign UK.

The delegation visited a camp for internally displaced people (IDPs) in Burma and a refugee camp on the Thai Burma border. They had the opportunity to meet with IDPs, refugees and new arrivals who fled recent attacks in Eastern Burma, including survivors of a mortar bomb attack on 19th February 2010, victims of rape and slave labour, and people who fled from other forms of human rights violations committed by the Burmese Army. The delegation also met with Burmese Army deserters, including former child soldiers, Burmese opposition leaders, MPs and ethnic leaders, activists, former political prisoners, and humanitarian and health workers.

The main messages received by the delegation during the trip were: for the international community, including the European Union, not to accept the regime's planned fake election, for the EU to support a UN Commission of Inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the Burmese military regime and to provide more humanitarian aid in Burma, including cross-border medical assistance and support for projects that promote human rights and democracy in Burma.

Answers to written parliamentary questions in UK Parliament on Gems (EU Sanctions)

17 March 2010 Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has had recent discussions at EU level on the export of gems originating in Burma from Asia to Europe.

Mr. Ivan Lewis: There have been no recent discussions on this issue among EU member states. Sanctions were agreed after the crackdown on peaceful protests in late 2008, and the EU imposed a ban on the import of gems from Burma, as well as prohibiting the provision of financial or technical assistance to entities engaged in the mining and processing of precious and semi-precious stones. These measures target the economic interests of the military regime and their cronies. Discussions will begin shortly in Brussels on the annual renewal of all EU measures against Burma, due at the end of April.

17 March 2010 Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether his Department has made a recent assessment of the effectiveness of sanctions designed to prevent the export of gems originating in Burma to the EU.

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Sanctions prohibiting the export of gems from Burma to the EU were introduced after the crackdown on peaceful protests in late 2007, on the basis that the sector played a particular role in sustaining the military and their grip on power. No formal assessment of the effectiveness of the export ban has been made by the Government, but we continue to believe that targeted sanctions are an important means of maintaining pressure for political reform and respect for human rights in Burma.

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