

CANADIAN POSITION

Canada recognized Burma at the time of independence in 1948 and established diplomatic relations in 1958. The Canadian Embassy in Bangkok is accredited to Burma. Burma opened an embassy in Ottawa in 1966, closed it in 1978 and reopened it in 1985.

Canada's relations with Burma are limited because of our human rights concerns. The bilateral aid program was suspended in 1988 and no export permits on sensitive materials have been issued. Moreover, Canada does not promote trade with Burma.

The Canadian position on Burma can be characterized as one of "critical engagement". Canada remains concerned over Burma's human rights record and its lack of concrete commitment to democratic reform. We will continue to express our displeasure with SLORC until it demonstrates that it is ready to respect fundamental human rights and return to democratic government. Canada is urging SLORC to proceed with constitutional reforms enabling the transferral of power to the National League party, lead by Aung San Suu Kyi, winner of the 1990 elections. At the same time, Canada recognizes that other countries, including those of ASEAN, may have a stronger influence on SLORC and therefore Canada wishes to cooperate with them. Canada will pursue any productive avenues which could influence SLORC to move towards democracy.

During the 1994 ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference in Bangkok, some Western governments, including Canada and Australia, endorsed the idea of developing a set of "benchmarks" to monitor Burma's progress toward democracy. These benchmarks for SLORC would include the unconditional release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all other political prisoners, and the pursuit of a political dialogue with her, unrestricted access for the ICRC and the UNHCR to political prisoners and to refugees, SLORC's acceptance of a transitional constitutional process with a timetable, legal guarantees for minorities, abolition of forced labour, and the repeal of censorship laws.