

The Special Rapporteur concludes that "the situation of human rights in Myanmar is worsening, and the repression of civil and political rights continues unabated." He recommends that the resources of the international community be mobilized to address humanitarian needs and that political dialogue "has become urgent in order to prevent a worsening of the present humanitarian disaster."

Burma's humanitarian and political crisis is also a regional crisis, as increasing numbers of refugees have fled to neighbouring countries. In Thailand, there are currently 112,000 registered refugees living in refugee camps. As many as one million more Burmese have sought asylum or sustenance as undocumented refugees in Thailand, India, China and Bangladesh.

The flow of refugees has fueled considerable tension in receiving countries. Since 1995, Burmese troops and their proxies have regularly crossed into Thailand to attack refugee camps. The most recent cross-border incursions were in 1998 when three refugee camps were attacked and burned. In an attempt to prevent attacks on its territory, the Royal Thai government has deployed troops in the border region. Tensions also exist in India and Bangladesh where refugees live in appalling circumstances. In 1999, the refugee crisis continues - in the first several months of this year an estimated 5,000 more refugees crossed the border into Thailand.

The situation in Burma also has international implications, most evident in Burma's status as the world's leading producer of opium. Between 1948 and 1992, opium production in Burma increased by 8000 percent.¹ Since the SLORC/SPDC came to power in 1988, production has doubled. The 1992-93 harvesting season in Burma yielded at least 2,575 tons of raw opium.² Heroin from Burma began to flood the North American market in 1990; by late 1991, 56 percent of the heroin reaching the United States originated in Burma. According to the RCMP, most heroin reaching Canada is from Burma. The U.S. State Department says that the drug trade has become an "entrenched" part of Burma's political and economic life. Burmese military officials are complicit actors in the trade and the junta continues to provide protection to known drug-lords. The profits of the drug trade are channeled into public and private enterprises, helping to underwrite the equipping and the threefold expansion of the army since 1989.³

The costs of the drug trade to the Burmese people are high, in terms of increasing addictions and the criminalization of vast sectors of the rural economy. These problems are also spreading to Burma's neighbours via its borders with India and China as sharply-increased drug abuse is reported in these areas.⁴

¹ Lintner, Bertil. *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency Since 1948*; Westview Press, 1994.

² Ibid, pg. 1

³ Burma Debate, March/April, 1996.

⁴ *Out of Control*, South East Asian Information Network, 1998.