# Canadian NGO Policy Paper on Burma

## 1) Overview

There is little debate about Burma's status as a pariah within the international community of nations. A country that once showed enormous promise, Burma has been impoverished by almost four decades of military dictatorship. Not only impoverished, the people of Burma have been brutalized by a junta determined to crush any opposition to its rule.

UN Special Rapporteur, Rajsoomer Lallah, did not resort to diplomatic nuance in the language of his 1999 report on Myanmar. His report is a blunt assessment of the human rights situation, and cites a long list of abuses, including arbitrary arrest and imprisonment; systematic repression of political opposition groups; torture; inhumane, cruel and degrading treatment of prisoners; forced displacement; arbitrary killings of civilians; impunity; and the confiscation of property.

The Special Rapporteur reports that:

> "...violence against civilians would appear to be a fundamental component of the overall military strategy. In flagrant violation of the basic rules of humanitarian law, civilians living in rural settlements have been attacked...this has resulted in massacres...in disorderly flight to safety, often separating families. Those who are captured are often subjected to rape and arbitrary killing, or held captive to grow food for the army, or made to provide forced labour or porterring for the army."

The UN Special Rapporteur outlines the magnitude of the crisis inside the country. Counter-insurgency operations and forced relocation programs have dislocated more than half a million people in ethnic minority states, resulting in a massive humanitarian crisis in which people have little access to food, shelter or basic health care. People caught attempting to leave relocation sites are often shot on sight – there are numerous, well-documented reports of massacres of unarmed civilians. The Special Rapporteur also comments on the situation of women and girls in relocation sites, where sexual violence committed by military personnel is common.