

The Burmese military regime's actions have been condemned by the international community through repeated consensus resolutions of the **UN General Assembly and the UN Commission on Human Rights**. The European Union, the United States and Canada have underscored their condemnation with selective sanctions. ASEAN governments, however, maintain a policy of "constructive engagement" towards Burma, which became a member of ASEAN in July 1997.

Burma continues to refuse visits by the **Special Rapporteur of the UN Commission on Human Rights**. The Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, Alvaro de Soto, visited Rangoon in January and November of 1998 but there are no signs yet of progress towards a political dialogue.

CANADIAN POSITION

In July 1997, at the ASEAN meetings in Kuala Lumpur, **Foreign Affairs Minister Axworthy** presented the Burmese Foreign Minister with a list of eight suggested actions that the military regime could take to improve the human rights situation in Burma. The Burmese Foreign Minister did not respond to any of these proposals. On 7 August, Mr. Axworthy announced economic measures against Burma to convey Canada's concerns over the suppression of political freedoms in Burma and our frustration with Burma's failure to curb the production and trafficking of illegal drugs. The Canadian Government **withdrew Burma's General Preferential Tariff eligibility and placed Burma on the Area Control List**, thereby requiring all exports from Canada to Burma to have an export permit.

At the **ASEAN meetings in Manila in July 1998**, Mr. Axworthy joined six other foreign ministers in meeting informally with the Burmese Foreign Minister Ohn Gyaw to impress on him the international community's concerns over the safety of Aung San Suu Kyi. Canada's Ambassador to Burma, based in Bangkok, has visited Burma five times since presenting his credentials in September 1998 and has raised Canada's concerns directly with Burma's military leaders.

Canada has limited relations with Burma. **CIDA bilateral aid was suspended in 1988** after the army's massacre of thousands of pro-democracy demonstrators in Rangoon. Canada does not support multilateral assistance to Burma through the international financial institutions. There is no resident Canadian diplomatic presence in Burma. No encouragement is provided to Canadian firms doing business in Burma, military sales are not allowed, and all exports are scrutinized closely. **No Canadian export programs are open for Burma**. Bilateral trade remains minimal. In 1997, Canada's exports were worth \$3.5 million and imports \$19.9 million (mostly textiles and seafood). With the accession of Laos to the 1993 Canada-ASEAN Economic Cooperation Agreement, Burma remains the only ASEAN member not a party to the Agreement. Burma will not be included under any new or ongoing Canada-ASEAN regional development projects. Since 1991/92, Canada has provided approximately \$11.5 million in aid to Burmese refugees in Bangladesh and Thailand.

For the last two years Canada joined consensus but withheld its traditional co-sponsorship of the **UN General Assembly resolution** on human rights in Burma after finding that it was not possible to strengthen the text. In Canada's view the resolution was weaker than the CHR resolution, particularly on meaningful political dialogue with the NLD, implementation without delay of the recommendations of the ILO commission of inquiry on forced labour, respect for and protection of the rights of women and children, and on allowing the CHR Special Rapporteur to visit Burma and meet with any person he deemed appropriate.