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HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN BURMA

ISSUE

Burma has one of the worst human rights records in Asia. Torture and extrajudicial executions remain commonplace. Over 1500 political prisoners, including Nobel Peace Prize winner Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, remain in detention.

BACKGROUND

The military established direct control in Burma in September 1988, creating the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) following violent protests earlier in the year which left thousands dead and led to the resignation of General Ne Win and the demise of the military-backed Burma Socialist Program Party. Although elections were held in 1990 and the National League for Democracy won a landslide victory, the SLORC has held on to power. They claim that a Constitution must be passed before they can hand over power - a process which could take years.

Since the change of SLORC leadership in April 1992, there have been a number of developments including the release of over 1000 prisoners (some political), the announcement of the convening of a National Convention on the drafting of the constitution and the lifting of martial law. Despite these developments, human rights abuses continue unabated. The military remain wedded to maintaining power and have systematically eliminated political opposition.

The UN General Assembly passed a resolution unopposed in December 1992 expressing grave concern at the serious human rights situation and lack of democratic development in Burma. The resolution calls on the SLORC to fulfil its responsibilities under the 1949 Geneva Convention, allow free participation in the political process and ensure full respect for human rights including those of ethnic and religious minorities.

The UNCHR Special Rapporteur to Burma, appointed in 1992, tabled a damning report at UNGA which included some of the allegations of serious human rights abuses tabled at UNCHR. The Special Rapporteur has since visited Burma but was unable to visit political detainees.

Burma is a country with a dozen distinct ethnic groups and hundreds of languages spoken. Some of the ethnic groups have their own armies and have been fighting the central government for greater autonomy or independence.

Burma's problems are not confined to its own borders: over 260,000 Rohingya refugees remain in camps in Bangladesh claiming persecution by Burmese military in Arakan province. The problem is being compounded by report of forced repatriation to Burma of small groups of refugees. Opium production has escalated since the SLORC has been in

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