

## Myanmar (Burma)

Issue: Human Rights Situation

Background:

Human rights abuses in Myanmar have been subjected to increased international attention and concern since the military government took power in September 1988, after a series of riots and mass demonstrations were violently suppressed.

The country had been ruled by General Ne Win since a Revolutionary Council of Army Officers, led by the General, overthrew the government, suspended Parliament and established a one-party regime under the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) in 1962. While Parliamentary elections were held in 1981, and Ne Win retired as President, he retained effective control of the government through his chairmanship of the BSPP. All those elected to the Parliament came from the BSPP and were loyal followers of General Ne Win.

In March 1988, there were a series of major riots in (Yangon) Rangoon and other southern cities. Although the initial cause was a dispute between students and the local police, it escalated into a manifestation of public dissatisfaction with the government. These protests were forcefully suppressed at the direction of Sein Lwin, a man closely identified with General Ne Win. The government later acknowledged over fifty deaths and 3000 arrests.

General Ne Win cited the riots as grounds for his resignation as Chairman of the BSPP in July 1988 and recommended multi-party elections be held. Instead, the BSPP chose Sein Lwin as the next President and Chairman of the Party. The demonstrations and casualties that followed led to the resignation of Sein Lwin after 17 days in power.

The protests grew through the summer of 1988. In some parts of the country ad hoc groupings of monks and students took over the administration of cities and towns, threatening the control of the BSPP. When Dr. Maung Maung, the civilian successor to Sein Lwin, failed to win back support for the administration with the promise of elections and the enactment of modest reforms, the military authorities re-established their direct control and established the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) in September 1988. Martial law regulations were instituted. The army's clashes with protesters led to approximately 3000 deaths.

Upon taking office in September 1988 the SLORC promised free and fair multi party elections by May 1990. (Elections were later announced for May 27). While election procedures were enacted, and political parties registered, martial law regulations remained in effect. The press is directly controlled by the government and