
Overview of international Burmese campaign

Harn Yawngwe
Director, European Office for the
Development of Democracy in Burma

People are becoming increasingly frustrated and disheartened at the lack of any apparent change in Burma, as though nothing has been achieved. If one considers what has been accomplished in the democracy movement over the last few years, one realizes that this is simply not true. Take for example Dr. Sein Win, who on his first trip found it very difficult to interest any politicians in meeting him, and those who did wanted to do it discreetly. Now, he has the opportunity to meet prime ministers, foreign ministers, and members of parliament, many of whom are now interested and want to take action on the matter.

From the beginning the strategy/ tactics of the international Burmese campaign have been two-fold, one negative and one positive. The negative aspect is denying the dictatorship the legitimacy and the resources they need to maintain their rule. NGOs and grassroots movements have been most effective in denying the regime the resources, as governments, in the early days, did not want to take action any further than withdrawing development aid. Burmese support groups can be found through out the world, some in the most unlikely places, such as Iceland, South Africa, the Philippines, Malaysia, and the democracy movement even gets financial support from Korea.

When it comes to denying the dictatorship legitimacy, this has been more the role of governments and especially of the United Nations. However, many feel frustrated that the United Nations doesn't seem to do anything but pass resolutions. Resolutions have been unanimously passed every year for the last seven years, and at the Human Rights Commission for eight years. Resolutions are important, however, as many countries do not want to act alone, and when there is a United

Nations resolution, it helps them to come forward with different policies. Resolutions and pressure have been very effective; one only needs to look at the US investment sanctions introduced last year. The effectiveness of these sanctions is demonstrated by the recent backlash of American companies involved in Burma. This includes USA Engage, a group which is battling the US government in order to remove trade sanctions. Clearly the magnitude of this reaction, and the amount of money these companies are pouring into this campaign demonstrate that the sanctions are having an effect.

We have talked about the positive and negative aspects of denying the dictatorship legitimacy. On the positive side, again we have tried to work in two areas, the political and the financial.

There are many countries which give support politically to the democracy movement, even in those countries where there have not traditionally been any ties, such as the Scandinavian countries. The ethnic peoples of Burma have also benefitted from the increased international political support.

In the past, when an ethnic problem was discussed or ethnic leaders were brought forth, people tended to look on them as rebels and their cause unworthy of attention. People weren't interested in the same way that no one was interested in seeing Dr. Sein Win. It was very difficult for ethnic leaders to get travel visas for most countries. Today, no one questions the fact that the ethnic peoples of Burma have a legitimate cause and that they are fighting for their own human rights, like everyone else, and that is a big achievement and a very positive development.

In terms of financial aid, we have also achieved a great deal. One of the first groups to support the democracy movement based on the

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