

ROUNDTABLE ON BURMA

May 27, 1999

Ottawa

On May 27, 1999, the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development organised a roundtable on Burma in Ottawa. The main objective of the roundtable was to examine the evolution and thinking about Canadian foreign policy in relation to Burma, including a continued discussion from the 1997 Vancouver roundtable. The roundtable was held in the presence of the diverse participants, including representatives of the private sector, academia and labour representatives, as well as the presence of the media. The roundtable discussed various approaches. The following is a summary of the roundtable.

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The Political and Socio-Economic Background in Burma - Some Canadian Assessments

The current situation in Burma and the general direction of Canadian foreign policy was described by the Honourable Raymond Chan, M.P., Secretary of State, Asia-Pacific, who pointed out that besides North Korea, Burma is one of the most difficult countries to work with and to influence. While one may see movement towards democracy even in Communist China, it has become increasingly difficult to "crack the shell" in Burma. Minister Chan emphasized that the situation is getting worse. This development poses difficulties for policy makers in Canada. Despite the fact that Minister Axworthy toughened up Canada's stand toward Burma two years ago, there has been no positive development there.

Minister Chan then invited the roundtable to generate thoughts and new ideas to help make headway in Burma.

The Canada's Ambassador to Bangkok, Anthony Green, shared his experience from working in Burma. After a prolonged period of a year and a half of travel around the country to establish contacts and to assess the situation, he said that there has been no significant progress. The measures implemented by the international community, such as sanctions and imprisonment increased. There is no hope for the future. Perhaps the only positive sign is that the International Red Cross Committee is returning and to help the people. Another troubling problem the Ambassador said was the situation of the economy and trade, which saw a very slight decrease in 1998.

Burma has been hit by the Asian crisis as much as any other country in the region. While

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