

REPORT OF THE 1997 ROUNDTABLE ON BURMA

Vancouver

“Consider Burma as a frozen lake. On the surface, because of repression, everything seems frozen. But when the sun comes out and the ice melts, you find out there was a lot of life underneath all along...” (Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, 1997)

The Roundtable was held at Simon Fraser University on 28 April 1997. **Steven Lee**, Director of the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development welcomed the Roundtable participants to this opportunity to “think together” about Burma. Burma has been identified as a critical issue in Canada’s foreign policy as well as of great personal interest to Minister Lloyd Axworthy. His advisor on Asia-Pacific issues, **Denis Stevens**, welcomed the participants on behalf of the Minister, and directed their attention to two themes, among others: finding the means through multilateral contact to break the political log-jam around Burma, and controlling the expansion of Burma’s drug trade (which has a considerable impact in Canada).

The Roundtable’s local host, **Robert Anderson** of Simon Fraser University opened his observations with the quotation [above] from Norman Webster’s interview with Suu Kyi, “consider Burma as a frozen lake”. This vibrant metaphor surfaced a number of times through the Roundtable discussion. Anderson gave a personal account of one Canadian’s 35 year intermittant relationship with Burma, all of it under a military government; he described his continued frustration that none of the efforts of the Burmese people have resulted in the achievement of a freer, more democratic society.

Ingrid Hall, the Director General for South and Southeast Asia of DFAIT, explained the measures which Canada had gradually put in place around Burma since 1988 (see