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# Burma—The Way Forward

Dr. Sein Win, Prime Minister  
National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma

**T**hank you for inviting me to your National Consultation on Burma. To help you in your task of creating new policies and partnerships, let me give you a brief analysis of what we see happening in Burma today and what we think the military in Burma is trying to achieve.

## Inside Burma

The change of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in November last year, has raised a lot of questions. Some hoped that the change would lead to a change in the political situation in Burma. But your Foreign Minister, Mr. Lloyd Axworthy, made a correct analysis a few days ago when he said that the situation in Burma has not improved and that it has gotten worse. He is right.

Only a week ago, Amnesty International produced a major report detailing the atrocities being committed by the military against the Shan people. Hundreds of villagers have been tortured and executed, and hundreds of thousands have been driven from their homes and relocated to bleak locations. The Karen and other ethnic peoples have also suffered in the same way. Even the villagers who have sought refuge in Thailand are not safe. SPDC-backed troops have repeatedly violated Thai sovereignty and crossed over the border to attack refugee camps, even killing Thai officials. In the cities, the military continues to harass Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, other leaders of the National League for Democracy, and anybody remotely connected to politics. The recent sentencing of Daw San San who is over 60 years old, to 25 years in prison, is an example of the continuing repression of political activity in Burma. Universities in Burma have also been closed since December 1996 to prevent students from gathering and organizing protests against the regime. The military wants no opposition.

The military regime in Burma may have

changed its name but it is even more determined than ever to remain in power. When we see changes in Burma, we must always analyse the change in the context of how it affects the Burmese generals' objective of retaining political supremacy. There can be no real change until the generals give up this objective and are at the very least, able to accept the idea that other Burmese who are not military men or of Burman ethnic stock can also contribute to the task of nation-building.

The Burmese military created the myth that the Burma Army created modern Burma by overthrowing both the Japanese and British. They further claim that they saved the nation by destroying democracy in 1962. The fact that Burma has become one of the poorest nations in the world after four decades of repressive military rule, means nothing to the generals. They believe the myth that without the military, Burma will fall apart. They cannot see that Burma has already fallen apart because of their mismanagement and that the real need is to rebuild the country if we want to survive as a nation.

The SPDC is a crisis management team to ensure military supremacy. They will present a more acceptable face to the international community and be more flexible in certain areas if it will mean the survival of the regime.

For example, the military has said recently that they want to eradicate drug production in Burma. This sounds great because Burma is the largest producer of opium and heroin in the world. But in reality, many analysts agree that the regime is surviving today because of drug money.

So, why is the SPDC saying it wants to eradicate drugs? The answer is because the regime needs more hard cash to survive. It is hoping that the international community will be enticed by the chance to eradicate drugs. Once drug aid flows, the generals hope to also get humanitarian and development aid. The inflow of funds will ensure