

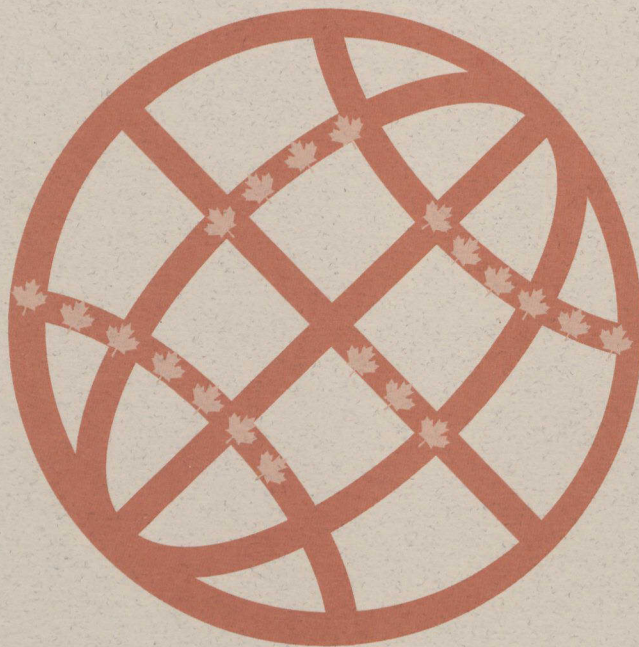
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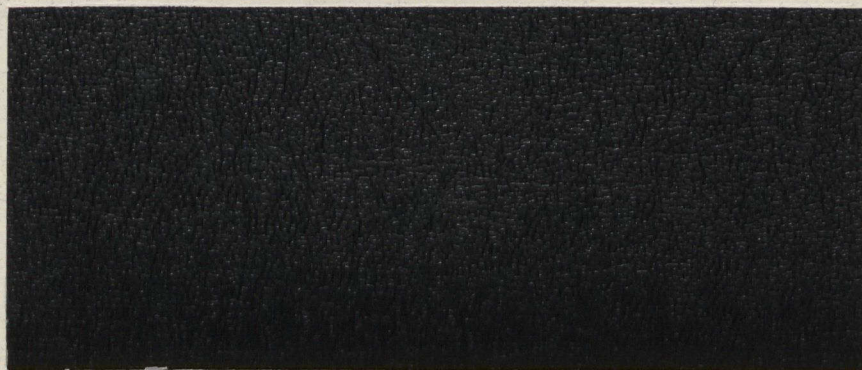
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BURMA:
CREATING NEW POLICIES
AND PARTNERSHIPS
International Conference
Ottawa, 25-26 April, 1998





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BURMA: Creating New Policies and Partnerships

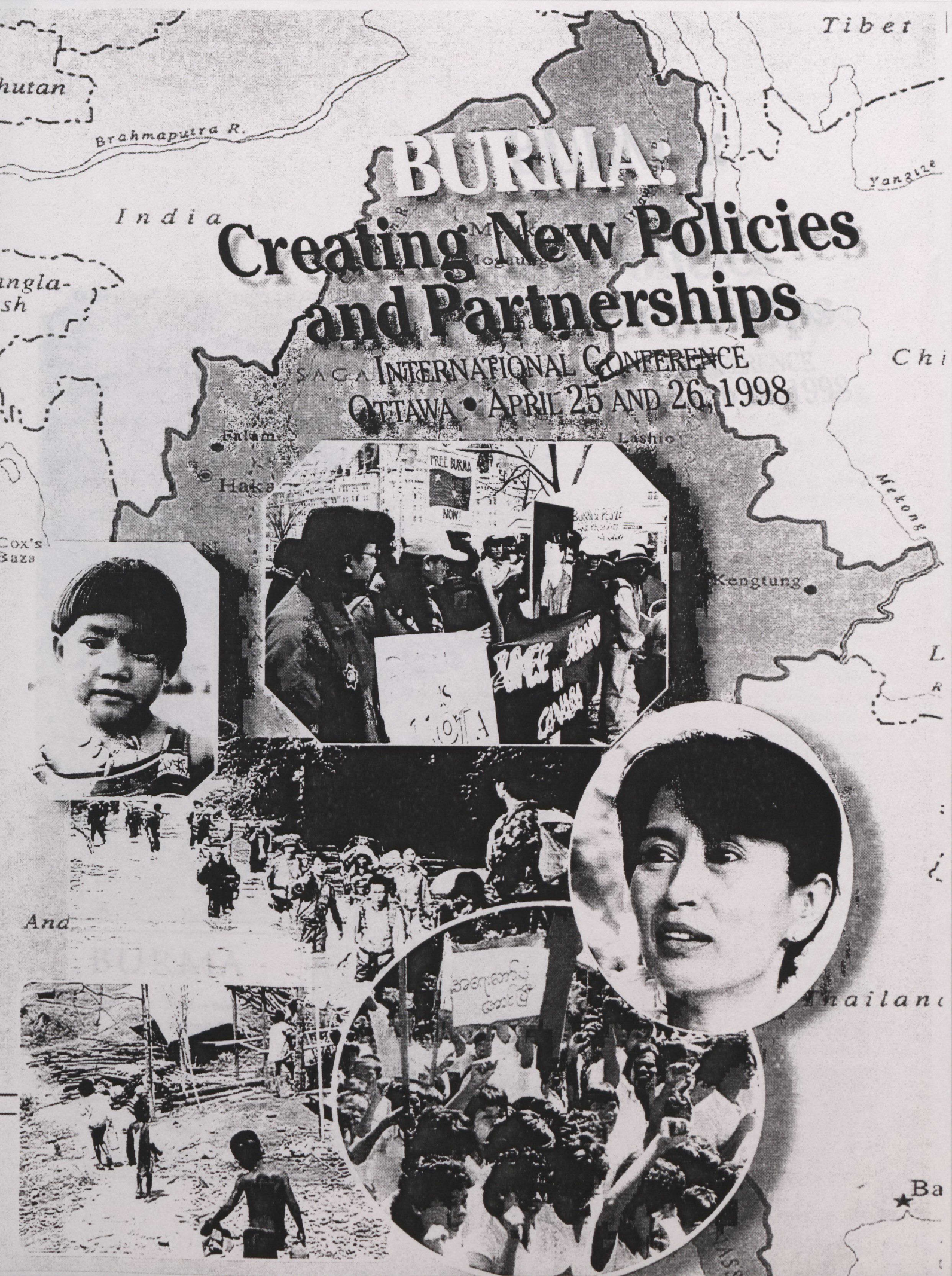
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BURMA: Creating New Policies and Partnerships

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
OTTAWA • APRIL 25 AND 26, 1998



This report was produced by the staff of Canadian Friends of Burma. Design and layout by Walters & Greene Associates. Publication of this report is made possible by support from the John Holmes Fund, Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development, Government of Canada.

CFOB is a non-governmental organization which operates in partnership with organizations along Burma's borders and other Canadian and international NGOs. It is affiliated with Peacefund Canada. CFOB works in a non-partisan manner for the cause of peace, human rights and democracy in Burma. Its primary objectives are to raise awareness about political and economic conditions in Burma, through special issue campaigns, fund-raising for humanitarian relief and cross-border assistance, and by tracking Canadian investment in SLORC-occupied Burma. CFOB has an on-going policy dialogue with the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade on the policy implications of Canada's commitment to international human rights and democracy, and to international trade and investment. In addition to its national office in Ottawa, CFOB maintains a network of Burma support groups across the country.

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Photo credits

Cover:

top left: Karen refugee in Huay Kaloke camp, Thai Burma border; Karen Connolly
top middle: demonstration against Burmese embassy, Ottawa; CFOB
centre: forced porters in SLORC army; Karen Human Rights Group
centre right: Daw Aung San Suu Kyi; CFOB
bottom left: new arrivals in Mae La camp, Thai-Burma border; Joie Warnock
bottom right: students in nation-wide demonstrations, Rangoon 1988; unknown.

Cover and page 1 map: John Isom

p.12 Karen Human Rights Group
p.23 background: Piers Cavendish; SLORC soldier: Alain Evrard/Impact Photos
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Foreword

In response to the growing levels of interest and activism on Burma brewing across the country, a national consultative conference entitled **“Burma: Creating New Policies and Partnerships”** was held on April 25 & 26 1998, in Ottawa, to harness the energy and expertise of a variety of people from a cross-section of Canadian society and internationally. The conference was hosted by Canadian Friends of Burma and funded by the International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Development, the John Holmes Fund, the Open Society Institute and the European Office for the Development of a Democratic Burma.

The goals of the conference were:

- To consolidate the existing Canadian network of people and organizations who are working for a free and democratic Burma.
- To formulate recommendations for Canadian government action
- To formulate strategies for Canadian citizen action

In order to meet these goals, the conference was set up over two days.

Day 1 consisted of a half day of updates to give conference participants the opportunity to hear

from the Burmese pro-democracy leadership, and from human rights/ refugee relief workers on the most current aspects of the democracy movement and human rights crisis.

Day 2 consisted of a full day of action-planning and focused exclusively on the question “What can we do further to work for a democratic Burma?”. Three concurrent workshops were held in order to be able to brainstorm and discuss strategies and action plans.

1. Pressuring the Burmese Regime
2. Supporting the Democracy Movement
3. Canadian Campaigns - what are the next steps?

This report will allow the reader to have access to the dynamic discussions and developments which occurred throughout the conference and learn of the policy recommendations which were created as a result.

May the energy and creativity which prevailed at the conference carry on in all of our work and each recommendation be given life in order to further support the struggle for democracy and human rights in Burma. Canadian Friends of Burma wishes to thank all those who took part in the conference and the volunteers who helped make the event possible.

“When spiders unite they can tie down a lion”

—Ethiopian proverb

Conference Agenda

Saturday, April 25.

Location: Room 253-D, Center Block, Parliament Hill.

1:15pm - Registration

2:00pm - Welcome by Christine Harmston,
Coordinator of Canadian Friends of Burma

Introduction of participants

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

2:30pm - Political Panel

Zing Cung - Vice-Chairman of Chin National
Front. Overview of developments on border
and political initiatives in western Burma.

David Tharckabaw: Karen Information Center.
Overview of developments on border and
political initiatives in eastern Burma.

May Pyone Aung - New York representative of
Burmese Women's Union. Overview of women's
involvement in movement.

Harn Yawngwe - Director of Euro-Burma Office.
Overview of international Burmese campaign.

Questions and Answers

3:45pm - Coffee Break

4:00pm - Issues Panel

Eugene Yawngwe. Overview of drug trade,
links to SLORC and Canadian connections.

Kevin Heppner - Director, Karen Human Rights
Group. Overview of human rights situation in
rural Burma.

Jack Dunford - Director of Burmese Border
Consortium. Overview of refugee situation on
Thai-Burma border.

Questions and Answers.

5:15pm - Wrap up.

Sunday, April 26.

Location: Citadel Hotel.

8:45am - Registration/coffee

9:00am - Opening remarks by Christine Peringer,
Conference facilitator

Panel presentation "Working for a Democratic
Burma"

Daisy Francis, Canada-Asia Working Group.
Overview of Canadian government initiatives
on Burma and what potential exists for further
federal government action at bilateral and
multilateral levels.

Ruth Jensen (Canadian Lutheran World Relief)
and Joie Warnock (Communication, Energy and
Paperworkers Union) - participants on CFOB
exposure tour to Thai-Burma border. Overview
of their experiences on trip and follow-up work
in Canada.

Craig Forcese, Canadian Lawyers Association
for International Human Rights. Briefing on
strategies for national economic disincentives
initiatives and federal and municipal selective
purchasing ordinances.

Toe Kyi - Burmese Students Democratic
Organization. Overview of BSDO and its
activities across Canada.

Christine Harmston. Canadian Friends of
Burma. Overview of on-going campaigns.

Questions and Answers.

10:45am - Coffee break

11:00am - Break-outs

Workshops on following themes:

- 1) Pressuring the Burmese regime
- 2) Supporting the Democracy Movement;
- 3) Canadian campaigns - what are the next
steps?

12:30- 1:30pm - Lunch

1:45 - 3:15pm - Repeat of workshops

3:15pm - Coffee break

3:30- 5:00pm - Plenary - "Creating Canadian Action
Plan".

Workshop presentations, formulation of strategies
and discussion

5:00pm - Closing remarks by Murray Thomson,
Peacefund Canada and co-founder of CFOB

Burma—The Way Forward

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

Thank 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

the survival of the regime at a time when they are facing severe economic hardships.

The generals know very well that the international community will lift the aid embargo if they engage in a political dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the ethnic peoples of Burma. But they do not want to do this because a dialogue will mean a political compromise and the military will lose its supremacy. They want money from the international community but only on their own terms.

If anyone thinks the generals are serious about drug eradication, they should remember that in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the US government gave about US\$80 million to the Burmese military to eradicate drugs. The helicopters given for drug eradication were used against the people of the Shan State and opium production during that period doubled. In addition, the major drug lords in Burma are today living in Rangoon and are protected by the regime.

The political strategy of the Burmese generals is to:

- keep the people of Burma under tight control
- wipe out any remaining ethnic resistance by force
- try various means to get international aid without giving up power
- isolate strong political opponents and co-opt weak ones
- finish drafting the new constitution that will legitimize military rule and hold elections to legitimize the regime
- use its new-found legitimacy and aid to consolidate military rule

International Arena

For the time being, most governments are standing firm. They are aware that the military in Burma has not changed substantively since the name change. This can be seen in the latest unanimous resolution of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva this month. Incidentally, the Canadian Mission in Geneva was very helpful to us in getting the resolution passed.

Japan has tried to use the resumption of some old

Official Development Aid to bring about change but nothing has resulted. The US has not changed its position but might be persuaded by the drug eradication plan. The European Union and other friendly nations like Canada are also standing firm. Even the ASEAN countries are beginning to try and persuade the generals to change. The president of the Philippines and the Prime Ministers of Singapore and Malaysia have visited Rangoon in quick succession.

We would like to see change in Burma. But as I said before, in order to see real change, the military must first accept that they must compromise. They will not compromise if they keep getting what they want. That is why we say that it is important to keep up the pressure on the

Burmese military. Now is not yet the time to start giving aid to Burma. It will only harden the military's stance. We have seen this repeated in the past. Every time the international community has relaxed its position, the military stepped up its repression of the people of Burma.

NCGUB's vision and plan for the future

For our part, we have always maintained that the root cause of the problems in Burma is political and they must be resolved by political means. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi herself has said that she is willing to discuss any options with the military. There are no preconditions. How much more flexible can you be?

But since the military has very stubbornly refused to begin a real dialogue either with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi or the ethnic peoples, we can no longer wait. If the military will not talk to us, we will talk amongst ourselves without the military.

The National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma is committed to the establishment of a democracy and a federal union. As expressed in the 1947 Panglong Agreement, we see all the ethnic races of Burma as equals having the same rights and responsibilities. Everyone must participate in the building of the new Burma. No special class or elite has the monopoly to shape the country's future.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi herself has said that she is willing to discuss any options with the military. There are no preconditions.

How much more flexible can you be?

Unlike the military's model of a centralized top-down system of government, we believe the people of Burma must decide what system of government they want. In the 1990 general elections, the people very clearly decided that they want a multi-party democracy. In the same way, the ethnic people of Burma must decide for themselves what they want in a future Burma. Some have said they want independence, others want a federal system. The NCGUB believes in a federal system but the ethnic people must decide for themselves.

That is why the NCGUB is promoting programmes through the Euro-Burma Office to enable the ethnic people of Burma to hold conferences and seminars to discuss amongst themselves what they want. After that, we hope the different ethnic people in each state can get together to determine their common future. At a still later stage, the various groups can get together to determine what kind of a nation they want. Only a genuine National Convention based on the participation of all the peoples of Burma can resolve Burma's problems. The Convention currently being held by the military which restricts participation and imposes the military's will on the people is not acceptable.

The NCGUB is also embarking on programmes to prepare for the future. We already have obtained funding from Sweden and the US for an independent Burmese economic research project for the development of Burma. We are in the process of locating and encouraging Burmese scholars to begin looking at various issues we will have to face in a future democratic Burma. We are also trying to set up scholarship programmes for Burmese students who have had their studies interrupted.

The participation of women of all ethnic backgrounds in the political process is also a key component of the NCGUB. Last year, a Karenni and Burman woman were able to attend the APEC meeting in Vancouver. This year, a Burman and Karen woman were included in the NCGUB delegation to Geneva. We plan to increase such participation by the women of Burma. We are beginning the process of re-building Burma.

I would, therefore, like to invite you to join us, the people of Burma, in looking for ways to strengthen and develop the democracy movement both inside and outside the country so that we can sustain the democratic system once change comes to Burma.

Overview of developments on border and political initiatives in western Burma

Zing Cung

Vice-Chairman of Chin National Front

First of all, I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude to all of you for coming to this conference today. We are also grateful for having the opportunity to participate. It is so encouraging for us who are fighting for democracy, equality and justice in Burma. I would also like to express our gratitude especially to members of the Canadian Parliament who strongly support our democratic movement in Burma.

We know that your voice in the Canadian Parliament will make a big impact on the international community. So, through your parliament, please make a voice for the voiceless people of Burma who have been suffering for so long under the dictatorship rule. And I would like to express my gratitude and thanks to the Canadian Friends of Burma who organized this conference and made it possible.

Today, I am going to speak to you as a representative of the Chin delegates who attend this conference. My name is Zing Cung and I am vice-president of the Chin National Front (CNF). We, the Chin National Front are fighting on behalf of the Chin people for democracy, national equality and self-determination. I would like to mention the background history of the Chin people very briefly. Chinland is located in the adjoining area of Burma, India and Bangladesh. The whole population of the Chin people is 2.5 million. Until the British colonial period, Chinland was an independent country, ruled by our own tribal Chief. In 1896, after ten years of rule under King Thibaw, the British dethroned him and began occupying Chinland. It was the first time in our history that Chinland was occupied by outside forces.

Since we were an independent people before the colonial period, we had the right to gain back our independence from Britain. But instead of

demanding our independence on our own, we agreed to join the Union of Burma according to the Panglong Agreement. As you all know, the Panglong Agreement was signed on the principle of national equality. In other words, the people of various nationalities in Burma agreed to form the federal union which they believed would guarantee freedom, equality and self-determination.

But unfortunately, after Aung San, the father of the Union of Burma was assassinated, the leaders of Burma did not honour the Panglong Agreement and the right to self-determination for the ethnic nationalities and as a result, civil war broke out soon after Burma gained its independence in 1948. In 1961, all the non-Burman nationalities held a very important conference in Taungyi and agreed to amend the Union Constitution based on a federal system. Before it was able to happen in Parliament, Ne Win took over state power and suspended the Union Constitution in 1962. As you all know, the main reason for the military coup in 1962 was to prevent the formation of a federal union of Burma. In 1974, General Ne Win promulgated a new constitution based on a Unitary System in a society that was multiracial and plural. This Unitary Constitution was nothing but racist and chauvinistic.

Indeed, we the Chin people and other nationalities in Burma have been suffering from many kinds of suppression, exploitation and persecution under the racist, chauvinist regime of General Ne Win and the successive military governments.

Apart from the civil war that we have been fighting now for five decades, General Ne Win and his military government have been launching ethnic cleansing in many ways. I use the word "ethnic cleansing" not because the term has been made

***I use the word
"ethnic cleansing"
not because the term
has been made popular
by the Balkan War but
because we have been
suffering already for
almost five
decades.***

popular by the Balkan War but because we have been suffering already for almost five decades. Among many, I would like to mention one method of ethnic cleansing in Chinland. For instance, the Government has re-drawn state boundaries since independence and as a result, they have excluded Klay-Kabaw and Naga hill and Asho areas which used to be homelands of the Chin people from Chin state. Moreover, they expelled the Chin people from their homes and replaced them with the Burman people and established Burman towns such as Saya San, Bandhula and Aung Za Ya. As you all know these names are the names of the Burman military forces.

The Chin people also suffer religious persecution. You might be aware that more than 80 percent of the Chin population is Christian. The military government is now saying that since Christianity comes from the West, it is imperialist and the person who is Christian is unpatriotic to Burma. So they do not allow us to establish new churches and even prohibit the Bible to be printed. Another military strategy to oppress the Chin people has been to send Chin orphans to Buddhist monasteries and force them to wear the yellow robe, which means they are forced to convert to become Buddhist monks.

I would also like to mention the refugee problem among the Chins. There are 40,000 Chin refugees both in Bangladesh and India. In February 1995, the Indian Government and Burmese military regime signed an agreement that included the forced repatriation of refugees. This agreement badly effected the Chin people in two different ways. The first effect is that the Indian government agreed to deport refugees from the India border, especially those seeking refuge in Mizoram state. Most of the refugees who were sent back to Burma have been imprisoned, tortured and killed. As well, the military junta is using many Chin people as forced labour to build highways and roads.

Unfortunately, neither the international community or organizations including UNHCR have provided assistance to our refugees. UNHCR can help only those refugees who are able to reach New Delhi.

Finally, I would like to mention the ceasefires between the ethnic forces and the military junta. We, the CNF, are always looking for a peaceful solutions to stop the civil war in Burma. Currently, the military junta has been approaching many ethnic nationalities have accepted their offer while others have not. We, the CNF have not accepted this offer because this type of ceasefire is in fact, a surrender which does not provide for any political dialogue or a solution to the civil war. However, the CNF is open to the idea of ceasefire negotiations without pre-conditions that allows real political dialogue in order to achieve a genuine federal Union. We believe that the best way to achieve this Federal Union is with tripartite dialogue with the Burman democratic forces, the ethnic nationalities and the military regime as agreed to by the Chin National Front with all other ethnic nationalities in the Mae Htao Raw Hta agreement in 1997.

We strongly believe that the voice from the Chin struggle cannot be silenced. We shall achieve our goals together with all the democratic forces of Burma who have been fighting on the Burma-Thai border as well as those who are based overseas. Although there has been more and more repression and persecution by the junta in the western region of Burma, we, CNF, have been able to stand firm and move forward along with our aims and objectives.

We therefore hope that in this conference, the Canadian government and other Canadians will come to better understand our movement and support us with all available means. So, my dear friends, let us work hard for our movement which is not only for the freedom of our generation but also for the future generations of Burma.

Overview of Developments on Border and Political Initiatives in Eastern Burma

David Tharckabaw
Karen Information Center

Burma is a country with a complex society. There are 8 major ethnic nationalities with the Burman forming the largest majority. The non-Burman are referred to as minorities, or ethnic nationalities. The ethnic Chinese and Indian minorities are generally regarded as foreigners.

After independence in 1948, all of the ethnic nationalities, one after another, rose in resistance against the central government, after their peaceful attempts to redress their grievances failed.

Five of the 7 ethnic nationalities live in the eastern part of the country, bordering on China, Laos and Thailand. The Karen, under the leadership of the Karen National Union (KNU), had managed to maintain a sizable liberated area, on the Thai-Burma border. In 1976, a number ethnic organizations formed a loose alliance known as the National Democratic Front (NDF), in the liberated area of the KNU. By 1986, the alliance came to include all of the 7 major ethnic groups and 4 smaller ones. In 1988, as an aftermath of the pro-democracy uprising, the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB), comprising of the ethnic and pro-democracy forces, came into being, in the liberated area.

The country-wide pro-democracy uprising in 1988, against the BSPP government, the then military dictatorship, was peaceful and orderly. The dictatorship used its undercover agents to create violence and disorder. Then the military forces swooped in and brutally crushed the movement. State power was changed over from the BSPP to another military group, which assumed the name of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC).

The NDF did not make any armed intervention, at the time of the uprising, so as not to give the BSPP dictatorship an excuse for crushing the movement. On the other hand, it had hoped that the dictatorship would give in to such an overwhelmingly popular demand and resolve the politi-

cal problems of the country, peacefully.

When it was soundly repudiated in the 1990 general election, the SLORC quickly reneged on its promise to hand over power to the winning party. About the same time, it laid down a plan to increase the strength of its armed forces by 5 folds.

Cease-fire Talks

In May 1993, the SLORC made an overture for cease-fire talks with the armed resistance groups. The NDF and the DAB made an offer for talks, so as to obtain a comprehensive solution to problems besetting the country, instead of the SLORC's attempt to get a deal separately with each individual organization. The SLORC rejected the offers of both the NDF and the DAB.

In early 1994, the Kachin Independence Organization, reportedly under Chinese pressure, reached a cease-fire agreement with the SLORC, in spite of strong protests by other NDF member organizations.

In March 1995, the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) reached a cease-fire agreement, which broke down barely after 3 months, when the SLORC started to violate the cease-fire terms. In May 1995, the New Mon State Party (NMSP), under the pressure of some Thai business groups, had to accept a cease-fire agreement.

In Shan State, where there is a melange of smaller ethnic groups, armies of drug lords and groups based on different political ideologies, it is hard to make out where each group stood, but, generally speaking, the groups in drug business reached cease-fire agreement with the SLORC, well before 1990, and continued their drug business unhindered.

The Karen National Union (KNU) was in the last stages of preparation for talks, when the SLORC launched attacks on its headquarters in early 1995. As a result, talks between the KNU and the SLORC

could not begin until late 1996. Early on, the KNU asked for suspension of military activities, cessation of human rights violations and meeting with the media during the talks. The SLORC turned the KNU's requests down and instead demanded that the KNU enter the legal fold, renounce armed resistance line and promise to lay down arms one day, before any talks on cease-fire began. In a one-year period, 4 formal rounds of talks took place. The talks were essentially exploratory in nature. The KNU found out that after a cease-fire agreement, it would not be allowed any political activity, administrative activity or freedom of movement. To enter the 'Legal fold' meant to accept the SLORC as a legal entity and submit to its repressive rule.

At the 4th round of talks in November 1996, the KNU rejected the pre-conditions, but expressed its willingness to continue the talks with a view to resolving problems by peaceful means and establishing lasting peace. The KNU repeated its willingness to continue talks, through the mediators who came to the KNU headquarters at the end of January 1997. However, the SLORC launched a major offensive against all the KNU areas, beginning from the middle of February 1997. In the face of overwhelming superior number, the KNU had to abandon all permanent positions. As a result of massive human rights violations and extreme atrocities coming together with the offensive, more than 30,000 Karen had to flee into Thailand for refuge, increasing the number of Karen refugees in Thailand to nearly 100,000. More than 2,000 villages were destroyed. An estimated 50,000 were trapped or remained in hiding, inside. About 20,000 were forcibly relocated.

Present Situation & Initiative

The SLORC's name change to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), in November 1997, was an attempt by the military junta to enhance its image internationally, after becoming an ASEAN member. The dismissal of most of the previous junta members came as a result of the intensification of power struggle between the side, that wanted to appear sophisticated, and the other which was interested only in increasing personal power and wealth.

The SPDC remains to be the same hard-lined military dictatorship, with its policies and pro-

grams based on fascist and militarist ideologies. Force, aggression and war are its main tools for achieving its objectives and maintaining itself in power. It continues to practice forced buying of the staple rice, uses forced labor for its development projects, for feeding its troops and in its military operations. Its troops continue to perpetrate human rights violations of forced relocation, arbitrary arrests, torture, extra-judicial executions, intimidation, rape of women, extortion of money, looting, destruction of homes, villages and means of livelihood, and desecration of places of worship, on ethnic and sometimes on religious grounds. These violations of human rights are a daily occurrence in the rural areas of the ethnic Shan, Karenni, Karen and Mon States. The populations living even in the cease-fire areas are not spared.

Every year since 1992, Special Rapporteurs of the UN Human Rights Commission on Burma deplore these massive violations of human rights. However, the military junta, either makes a blanket denial or just says that it is an internal affair, in which the UN Human Rights Commission has no business to interfere. The SPDC has always been insufficient in budget to properly maintain its monster army reportedly to be over 400,000 strong now, and it is allowing its army to live off the population, as a matter of policy. It does not care about the destruction of villages and means of livelihood, and uprooting the population as a result of its callous policy of denying the ethnic rebels, at all cost and by all available means, sources of information, income, food supply and communication. The wholesale destruction was done also on purpose, in line with the SPDC's undeclared policy of ethnic cleansing.

The ethnic forces and pro-democracy groups on the Thai-Burma border are united and committed to struggle on for human rights, peaceful resolution of conflicts, the establishment of just and lasting peace, freedom and democracy. The divide-and-crush policy of the SPDC has temporarily weakened the strength of the ethnic resistance forces to a certain extent, but it will have no lasting effect. After the surrender of Khun Sa, who is believed to have been working as an undercover agent for the military dictatorship, the divided Shans are now re-grouping to unitedly carry on the struggle. The Karenni people vow not to be duped into signing a sham cease-fire agreement again.

The Karen resistance has been purged of its unruly and opportunist elements and, as result, its morale has been boosted higher than ever.

The Mae Tha Raw Hta Agreement, signed by all the major ethnic nationalities, except one, was a blow to the military junta. In this Agreement, the signatories pledged unity of purpose and action, total support and acceptance of the struggle for human rights and democracy. The participants condemned the atrocities and human rights violations, and urged the military dictatorship to resolve the political problems of the country by political means.

Casual mention by the SPDC chairman, Gen. Than Shwe, in his speech on the SPDC commemorated Armed Forces Day, that the door to peace for the armed ethnic groups was kept open, while its forces were making an all-out attack on the KNLA 7th Brigade headquarters, was nothing but a show of arrogance.

In spite of the continuing hard-lined stance of

the military junta, the NDF and the DAB continue to call for the resolution of problems and conflicts by peaceful means.

*The international pressure that affects the income of SPDC, such as trade sanctions by the US, the withdrawal of GSP by the EU, is effective, but more is needed for persuading the SPDC towards the negotiation table and for positive change.

*Continued support for the refugees in terms of material assistance and protection is essential to keep up the hope and morale of the ethnic nationalities in their struggle for freedom, human rights and democracy.

*Unity is a problem that needs proper attention and maintenance. In our situation where there is quite a diversity in all the spheres of activities, we need more effort than usual to maintain it. All concerned should be aware of this, and also the fact that the SPDC is always trying to look for the tiniest cracks for driving a wedge in.



Making a lone trek to the Thai border after escaping a SLORC military offensive against her village.

Overview of women's involvement in democracy struggle

May Pyone Aung
New York representative
Burmese Women's Union

I would like to thank the Canadian Friends of Burma for inviting me to speak on behalf of the Burmese Women's Union. I am very happy to attend this conference because I am meeting people from different parts of Burma. I am also very happy at this moment because Prime Minister Sein Win for the first time mentioned women's issue as being a crucial matter. Thank you very much, Prime Minister.

Despite popular belief, we have had a very strong traditional role of women's involvement in politics such as in the independence and post-independence movements. There was even a woman cabinet minister in U Nu's government. Now, the role of women has been suppressed by the military regime. But even within our democracy movement, women's issues are not often discussed or adequately addressed. Women's issues are generally not considered a priority issue. Some suggest that we have to wait for democracy before women's issues can be addressed.

In fact, SLORC, or the so-called SPDC, is giving some attention to the issue of women but we know it is only superficial. They are using women's issues as a propaganda tool to undermine the opposition. They started to deal with women's issues at the time of the Beijing Conference in 1995. SPDC has founded a National Women's Committee to supervise the activities of women's issues. Moreover, it has formed a number of women's NGOs to receive the humanitarian assistance. In 1996, it became a signatory to CEDAW (the UN Commission on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women). These "activities" are how the regime is trying to promote a nicer image at the international community level in order to gain more legitimacy and respect.

SPDC has also expended these activities by forming branches of the National Women's Committee. They force women, especially the wives of army officers and civil servants, to participate in that process. Throughout it all, the regime tries to give the message that women's issues are social affairs and have no place in the political arena. Obviously,

this propaganda is trying to underestimate the role of our leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

Despite this propaganda, the real status of women in Burma is exactly the opposite. As many of you know, women politicians and activists have been arrested and given very harsh punishments. We have received the news about the imprisonment of Daw San San only a few days ago, and in fact, there are about a hundred female political prisoners currently in jail. Women in rural areas have to deal with forced relocations and forced labour on a daily basis. It is only in the area of human rights abuses where women are being treated equally as they are suffering just as much as the men, if not more. Since the economy is also bad, there has been a steady rise in the number of women engaging in prostitution. Many women have crossed the border to work in terrible conditions in Thailand. Inside Burma, foreign investment and 'Visit Myanmar Year' have also led to the increase in prostitution.

To date, we have been effective in highlighting the issue of trafficking of women and the lives of female sex workers in Thailand. The US Congress introduced the bill that will pressure the Thai government to take action against the trafficking of Burmese women. But in our opinion, we still need to do more to counter the propaganda of the Burmese military regime. We also believe that the process of education and empowerment is needed to promote the issues of women in Burma. This is exactly what our organization is doing in our small own ways. BWU had its first seminar this past January which comprised of Burman and ethnic women and we plan to work very closely with the other ethnic women's groups in the name of a brighter and more promising future. All women face the same problems and need each other to overcome the enormous challenges. We are thinking of launching a campaign to acquire a higher level of international attention and any support and expertise would be greatly welcome.

Overview of international Burmese campaign

Harn Yawnghwe
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

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.

1990 elections was the Montreal-based International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Development - the first in 1991 to come forward and give financial support to the government in exile- something of which Canadians should be very proud. Following this example, the Norwegians came on board and gave support. Norwegian support has been very important to the democracy movement as it has provided the opportunity to have a radio broadcasting station, one which has been broadcasting daily programs to Burma since 1992. In the beginning it was very difficult to run, as the taped broadcasts had to be mailed to the transmission stations on the Thai-Burma border. Now there is a professional studio in Oslo broadcasting 1 1/2 hours a day, and it being is transmitted by at least two stations in Oslo and Germany. There are now seven ethnic language programs, done by the different ethnic groups themselves. Through the radio, there is a democracy-building process taking place and the creation of a new society where different ethnic groups can present their views and work with one another.

Another achievement of the National Coalition Government was the creation of the Burma Donors Secretariat, an agency independent from the government. Most of the democracy groups on the border don't know where to go for funds, something the Burma Donors Secretariat can help with by channeling funds from various donors to projects in need of assistance..

The National Coalition Government also secured funds from the Swedish government, which led to the creation of an independent council of Burmese

economists focused on the Burmese economy.

Last year the European Union funded the European Office for the Development of Democracy in Burma. When things change in totalitarian governments, the people tend to do the same things they did under the dictatorship. The goal of E.O.D.D.B. is to prepare the people of Burma to be exposed to new ideas, democratic systems and democratic institutions, and to also conduct training sessions for those involved in the democracy movement. One of the programs is to build the national goals by enabling the various ethnic groups the opportunity to meet and discuss what they want- such as the upcoming Chin conference in Ottawa. The next step would be inter-ethnic conferences, so that the different ethnic groups within each state could meet together to decide how they want to handle affairs in their own state. Then the next step would be to have all the ethnic states meet for consultations, eventually leading to the creation of a national convention in which all the ethnic states and Burman people could work together to decide on the Burma that they want in the future. The European Union has now agreed in principal to support Burmese scholars, professionals, etc. to form various groups, such as the economic research project, AIDS in Burma, redesigning the education system and the creation of a new health system.

We are moving forward - not only in the negative areas of being able to deny the regime legitimacy and resources but also positively in that we are now able to start to rebuild the Burma that we want. There is every reason to be encouraged and to continue on with the struggle.

Burma, the Heroin Trade, and Canada

Dr. Chao-Tzang Yawnghwe

Shan academic and member of the Burma Vancouver Roundtable

Introduction: The Problem of Narcotics and the Opium-Heroin Trade

The problem of heroin outflow from Burma is a serious global problem in one respect, but it is also, at the bottom, a global agro-business based on the opium crop, in which are involved a host of entrepreneurs, financiers, wholesalers, retailers, producers, and finally, consumers around the world.[1] The opium-based, multi-billion agro-business is however radically different from others of the kind since opium and its processed (or value-added) product, heroin, is illegal. Therefore, besides the host of actors involved in the commercial-business side of this multibillion dollars, agro-business, there are also involved host of other actors. These include, on the one hand, criminal elements—gangsters and narcotics syndicates—that regulate, in a manner of speaking, the illegal, trans-border, transnational opium-heroin trade [2], seeing to it that agreements are observed, debts paid, goods delivered as promised, and so on.

On the other hand, or in tandem, actors in this opium-heroin agro-business and trade include those who have taken on the task of suppressing what is termed narcotics trafficking. They are: international organizations such as the United Nations, in particular its agencies responsible for drug suppression and eradication (and crop replacement), the Interpol, national governments (or states), national police forces, national narcotics suppression bodies with extra-national interests and jurisdiction. Also involved in various ways in the opium-heroin problem (or alternatively, business) are politicians (national leaders or otherwise), community leaders (mayors, local politicians, town council members, etc.), and organizations that deal with the “collateral damages” of heroin on societies and its members. Both the business of “fighting” the opium-heroin problem and dealing with its negative effects on communities,

have become multibillion dollars, transnational ventures, based primarily on revenues of national states, i.e., in the final analysis, tax raised by governments, i.e., paid up by members of society.

The Opium-Heroin Trade: A Short History

The history of the opium-heroin problem-cum-business is a very long one. It has its root in the 19th century, and began as a British attempt—very successful—to open up the self-sufficient, even self-contained, Chinese “economy”. Because China did not need or want goods offered by British and other traders from the West, opium was exported from India to China, and sold for silver coins which, in turn, was used to buy tea and silk, and sold in India, Britain, the United States, etc. Part of the proceeds was then reinvested by, in particular, the British East India Company in the opium industry in India.[3] It can even be said that opium was instrumental in commercializing the Chinese economy and bringing it into the world economy.

The opium-heroin business was given a big second boost in the cold-war years (roughly, from the mid 1940s to the late 1980s). This time, the motive was not commerce or economics. It was purely political. It began in Burma, a country that neighbors China, Laos, and Thailand—countries that were variously involved in the “hot” (and “warm”) aspect of the global cold war between Communism and the “Free World”, led by the United States. As Alfred McCoy, among a few perceptive observers, notes throughout the cold war, the CIA used gangsters and warlords, many of them drug dealers, to fight communism. These included Marseilles Corsicans, Lao generals, Thai police, Nationalist Chinese irregulars, Burmese military-socialists, Afghan rebels, Pakistani intelligence, Haitian colonels, Mexican police, Guatemalan military, and so on. During the forty years of the cold war, government intelligence services—including American—forged

covert action alliances with some of Asia's key opium traffickers, inadvertently contributing to an initial expansion of opium production.[4]

In time, the opium-heroin business, being very lucrative and as well more or less "sanctioned" by the American cold war establishment, have come to possess an autonomous economic life and dynamics of its own. The impoverishment of Burma resulting from "socialism" — imposed by the military after Ne Win's 1962 coup — contributed to the entrenchment of opium and its value-added product, heroin, as a commodity that played an important role in the "development" or semi-industrialization of the United State's foremost ally in the region, Thailand. The trade in, and demand for opium and heroin — together with the demand in Burma for contraband goods (ranging from daily necessities, to luxuries), and demand elsewhere (Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong, Australia, the United States, Europe, and so on) for Burmese gems, jade, teak, mineral ores, art/cultural artifacts (and antiques)[5] — thus created a narcotics- contraband business that was truly global.

It was a business that yielded high profit and enriched those in position to exploit opportunities of the borderless and the "free-est" of free market, one free of legal constraints and regulations (except those "enforced" by local business culture and godfathers, warlords, and corrupt generals, ministers, politicians and so on). It might be added that the "underground" opium-heroin market, with trans-border "underworld" elements figuring largely in it as financiers and enforcers constituted one of the main engines of growth in Southeast Asia. It also contributed to the development and the consolidation of free-market economies in the region.

Of note is the fact that with the growth of the opium-heroin business and the expansion of the market from Burma and Southeast Asia to distant shores, there also grew in tandem, an "industry" to fight the billion dollars, transnational heroin business. This is a multibillion dollars "industry" fueled by tax dollars of individual and corporate citizens in what one might call "end-user" countries, mainly in the affluent West (or as the case may be, the wealthy North). The war against narcotics was institutionalized as a global undertaking in the 1970s, following President Nixon's call for a national and global "war" on drugs. Since then, there has come about concerted efforts by governments,

international bodies, and law-enforcement agencies of almost all countries to combat trafficking and trade in narcotics — heroin, cocaine, marijuana, and other addictive substances considered harmful or damaging to society (with the exception of certain addictive substance like cigarettes and alcohol).[6]

The Global War on Drugs Since the Early 1970s

The "war against drugs" may be analyzed as having two main components: One, "war" waged in the "upstream" end of the opium-heroin industry — in the countries that produce the raw material and where it is refined or processed into narcotic substance. Two, "war" waged in countries "downstream" — in the heroin market place. Other dimensions of the "war against drugs" are those that focused on the transit aspect of the business and the business of laundering "black" money, which is also global in scope.

The upstream "war against drugs" involves financial and other aid to, and cooperation with, host governments to eradicate poppy and coca fields; wean cultivators away from growing opium (etc.) via crop substitution program and other development projects; seizures of the raw material (opium) and chemicals used for processing the raw material; the search for and destruction of refineries or processing "plants", and the punishment of those involved, i.e., mainly, cultivators of the raw material, addicts (for possession of drugs), petty (street) pushers and, theoretically, drug "kingpins", money launderers, narcotics tycoons- financiers, corrupt government officers, politicians, and power-holders involved in narcotics.

The problem however with the upstream "war" on drugs is that, as often as not, powerful figures in host governments, and in the military, police and other law-enforcement agencies, prominent politicians, and respectable businessmen, even pillars of the community, are corrupt. Moreover these elements are involved (directly or indirectly) in the drug business. Most host elements are interested only in manipulating the "war on drugs" (and aid, financial or otherwise, thus obtained) to achieve goals unrelated to narcotics suppression. The manipulation of the "war on drugs" by host elements (especially in the state or government, or in

politics) include waging war against ethnic rebels (directed more at the ethnic populace than rebels); using aid provided for the “war on drugs” to build personal power-bases either in the government, the armed forces and other coercive agencies of the state; distorting the goals of development projects and crop replacement programs so that they are transformed into patronage “fiefdoms”; using the “war on drugs” as a pretext to repress the people, suppress their rights, consolidate authoritarian control, strengthen the coercive and surveillance arms of the state, and so on — with no appreciable effects on drug production and outflow.[7] The upstream war on drugs often became, as one DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency) agent puts it, a war between “our crooks” and other crooks.[8]

Burma: The “War on Drugs” Gone Wrong

The best example of the distortion of the upstream “war on drug” — a war gone wrong — and its unintended consequences, is illustrated by the “war on drugs” in Burma. In the mid-1970’s, the U.S. government under President Carter embarked on a policy of cooperating with Ne Win’s socialist-military regime to wage a “war against drugs” in Burma’s “Golden Triangle”, i.e., in the Shan State. The U.S. supplied the regime with US\$18 million annually. Additionally, the UNFDAC (United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control) also provided the regime with about US\$19.5 million (allocated in three phases, from 1976-1988).[9] However, despite the inflow of monetary and other assistance to the socialist-military regime, the production of opium in Burma increased from 360 tons to 800 tons (production more than doubled).[10] In an assessment of U.S. cooperation with the Ne Win military-socialist regime (which collapsed in 1988, as a result of a country-wide “people’s power” uprising), the American General Accounting Office was compelled to conclude that the anti-narcotics program in Burma was not effective, adding that corruption pervading the government and the military (and the ruling BSPP/Burmese Socialist Program Party) facilitated illicit trafficking, making effective action against narcotics difficult to sustain.[11]

What is particularly ironic about the “war on drugs” in Burma is that after 1988, those who the regime had fought against — with the help of U.S.

and other anti-narcotics aid and assistance — and who the regime had blamed for the opium-heroin problem, were transformed into “democratic” armies, their commanders became “leaders of the national races”.[12] Their “business” partners and patrons — major players in the trans-border opium-heroin and contraband trade — became “entrepreneurs” on the cutting edge of economic development, via the Burmese path to capitalism. What transpired, in a nutshell, was that after the collapse of the military-socialist regime, brought about by 1988 people’s power uprising, the military staged a bloody “come-back” coup, with the help of neighboring governments — in particular, Singapore, China and Thailand. the new regime — State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) — declared that it was embarked upon a development-oriented free market path. It “opened” the hitherto closed “socialist” economy to investors from neighboring countries, i.e., China and ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) states, in particular. At the same time, Chinese and Thai leaders persuaded former communist forces (previously supported by China), and later, Shan and other ethnic-based resistance forces, to sign cease-fire agreements with the illegitimate regime. This was a timely move for the regime: the Burman majority had become disaffected with the military and had found a new champion in Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who embodied the aspiration of Burman majority in particular (and the whole country generally) for civilian, democratic rule (and better governance).

The new, post-1988 alignment of power in Burma, and “partnership” between Burman and non-Burman armed elites (and their respective cronies, sons, daughters, and close relatives),[13] has resulted in — in the words of Richard Gelbard, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for international narcotics and law-enforcement affairs — “the corruption and criminalization of the state and the entrenchment of the drug trade in Burma’s political and economic life”.[14] Burma continues to provide the bulk of the world’s opium supply and is the source of over 60 percent of the heroin seized on streets in the United States. The French Observatoire Geopolitique de la Drogue estimated that drug revenue from 2,800 tons of opium (producing 200 tons heroin) would yield an illegal income between US\$2 to 8 billion (compared to official for-

eign exchange reserves of \$200-300 million and a GDP of \$1.460 million at the unofficial exchange rate, and \$26.953 billion at the official rate — 6 kyats to one US dollar).[15] According to the latest U.S. State Department, opium production has risen from 800 tons (in 1988) to 2,340 metric tons (nearly tripled) — enough opium to produce 230 tons of heroin and satisfy the U.S. heroin market many times over. There are few signs, the report observes, of improvement in the government's counter narcotics performance. Groups known to be involved in the heroin trade, such as the United Wa State Army and the Kokang militia, remain heavily armed and enjoy complete autonomy in their base areas. Moreover, Khun Sa, once labeled by the regime itself as the heroin lynchpin (who however "surrendered" in 1995) has not been prosecuted (nor extradited to the U.S., as the Americans hoped, perhaps even expected).[16] There is evidence of a reluctance, according to the U.S. State Department, on the regime's part to take effective action to suppress the heroin trade. The drug trade continues virtually unchecked. For example, in 1995, the regime managed to seize less than 100 kilograms of heroin and less than 1.1 metric tons of opium.[17]

Money laundering in Burma is also a growing problem and the laundering of drug profits have had widespread impact on the Burmese economy. The lack of enforcement against money laundering have created a business and investment environment conducive to the use of drug-related proceeds in legitimate commerce. The regime's business relationships with some of Burma's top narco-trafficking groups indicates that senior Burmese officials may be profiting from narcotics revenues. There are also persistent reports that lower level officials, particularly in the border regions, are involved in taking bribes in return for ignoring drug smuggling. The lack of a vigorous enforcement effort against money laundering leaves Burma vulnerable to the growing influence of traffickers who will use drug proceeds in legitimate business ventures, thereby gaining influence over investment and commercial activities, and perhaps even a stranglehold on the whole economy.[18] It is likely that these elements will come to gain inordinate influence over officials and power-holders, and thus, over the government or the state itself.[19]

The Down-Stream "War on Drugs": Vancouver and British Columbia

As seen from the case in Burma, the U.S. or U.S-led upstream "war against drug", has not produced the intended or hoped for result. The "war against drugs" down-stream too has not been successful. To illuminate the lack of success, and the complexity of the "war on drugs", an analysis of the "war" in Vancouver is presented below: Police officers involved in the drug war admit that efforts to stem the tide of heroin inflow is not working.[20] This is due, in their views, to a number of reasons. One reason is that there is not enough manpower to search even containers from suspected countries and cities. As such, only small quantities of heroin have been seized, and most of these are those seized from addicts and street pushers (most of whom are themselves addicts).

Officers in the RCMP and the City police admit that the "war on drugs" is complicated by the fact that they are able to take more or less effective action only against street pushers and small-time suppliers, and do not have the resource or manpower to investigate, arrest, and prosecute the big suppliers and financiers. In the words of a much decorated police officer, Gil Puder, wealthy traffickers are rarely caught; those arrested are street pushers-addicts and addicts (for possession of illegal drugs).[21] As a result, the war on drug has become distorted: the goal is no longer to eradicate drug trafficking, but to gain recommendation, bonuses, and promotion by arresting a high number of addicts and petty pushers, i.e., "arrest-maximizing" has become an end in itself.[22] The most problematic aspect of the "war on drugs" is, according to police officers engaged in the day-to-day war on drugs in Vancouver and adjacent municipalities, the involvement of seemingly "straight and respectable, law-abiding" elements as financiers of the drug (heroin) trade. Many drug-financiers are legitimate businessmen, live in the "high end" parts of town, and do not deal directly with drugs. According to these police officers, there has been an increase, in the past ten years, in the number of financiers-businessmen, especially within the Asian community. Some of those involved in the financial-business end of the drug trade are those who were already linked to Southeast Asian-Chinese heroin syndicates; while some

enter the drug-financing business through connections made in Vancouver, or are tempted into it by a relatively safe investment that yield a relatively quick return.

Financing the heroin market is safe because it is difficult to convict those involved in the financial side of heroin trafficking, even after their arrest and detention on narcotics charges. They have the money to hire good, high-priced lawyers. The police are moreover hampered in their task by the fact that they, by law, have to disclose everything connected with the case to the defense team. The views of police officers is that because it has become very resource- and time-consuming to prosecute middle and high level traffickers and financiers, it has become almost impossible to do so. As a result, the justice system is, the police fear, not sending the most important element in the narcotics trade — the financiers — the message that it does not pay to get involved in illicit drugs. What is also worrying is the fact that with the expansion of the illicit drug market, there has sprung up a wide area of commerce that is regulated by criminal gangs. As put by a critic of the US-led “war on drugs” approach — one adopted by Canada and most countries — the nature of illegal markets (in illicit drugs) is such that violence and credible threats becomes a “factor of production” from which criminals (and corrupt governments and officials) earn economic rent.[23] As well, the vast amount of money generated in the drug marketplace, carries with it the danger that law-enforcement officers and other officials might be contaminated. In this respect, the “war on drugs” is not without high cost. It includes wear and tear on institutions, undermines the authority of the rule of law and ultimately threatens political institutions. In other words, it results in the contamination of the state (and governments and associated agencies), politics, economy, and society by money and criminal elements who have, and make big money.[24]

Monetary and Other Cost of the Drugs Business on Society and Communities

Furthermore, according to a study undertaken not very long ago (in 1996), society does incur monetary cost related to crime, law enforcement, court procedures and process, the correction system, the health system, addiction-related (and treatment)

programs, and loss in productivity, etc.[25] This study shows that the estimate cost to Canada with regard to illicit drugs is Can.\$1.37 billion (for 1992). These include: (1) Direct health-care cost \$88 million; (2) Direct losses associated with workplace, \$5.5 million; (3) Direct administrative costs associated with transfer payments, \$1.5 million; (4) Direct cost for prevention and research \$41.9 million; (5) Direct law enforcement cost \$400.3 million; (6) Other direct cost \$10.7 million; (7) Productivity losses \$823.1 million. By province, the estimate of cost due to illicit drugs (in 1992), is as follows: Ontario, \$507.5 million; Quebec,\$334.3 million; British Columbia, \$207.5 million; Alberta, \$135.2 million; Manitoba, \$45.1 million; Saskatchewan, \$36.1 million; Nova Scotia, \$36.1 million; New Brunswick, \$25.2 million; Newfoundland,\$18.2 million; Prince Edward Island, \$4.6 million.[26]

Again, in monetary terms, wastage in term of money diverted to illicit drugs is quite high: An addict needs \$100 - 300 a day to support his/her addiction.[27] This adds up to \$3000- 9000 a month, or \$36,000 - 108,000 a year, for one addict. In downtown Vancouver, with an estimated addict population of 6000, the wastage, or diversion, of money to illicit drugs, would amount to \$216 million to \$648 million, a year. For British Columbia as a whole, with the addict population estimated at 15,000, the figure would be \$540 million to \$1,620 million (\$.54 billion to \$1.62 billion), annually. Most of the money for drug purchase, according to the police, come from crime against property, social assistance payments (from the government, i.e., taxpayers), and a large portion from the proceeds of crime or prostitution, and they can, as such, be counted as monetary cost to society.[28] In addition, there are health risk or cost, that arise from the illicit drug (including heroin) marketplace. Prevalence of HIV is quite high among drug users (of heroin and cocaine especially). In the Vancouver area, the prevalence rose from 25% in 1995 to 50% in 1997. The overdose (OD) death rate in Vancouver is 13 deaths a week, or about 600 a year (in 1997). Death from overdose in the rest of British Columbia is 7 deaths a week (or 360 a year).[29] Other cost, or the “collateral damage”, of illicit drug use (including heroin) are young children, 9-11 years old, being used by their parents to carry drugs (mostly heroin and cocaine); 12 years old

children smoking heroin; prostitution among the young, 13-14 years (which is on the increase); damage to family cohesion and anguish caused as a result of addiction of a family member, and the loss of human capital when the young abuse drugs or become addicted to heroin or cocaine. These costs, like the erosion of integrity of police officers; the undermining of the authority of the rule of law; the erosion of values, morals, and ethics; and the wear and tear on institutions, etc., are incalculable.

The War on Drugs: Ensuring Good Governance in Host Countries

The cost and damage, current and potential, to Canadian society and communities across the country, stemming from the inflow of illicit drugs, especially heroin — mainly from Burma — is, as shown above, very high. What then should and can be done to combat the danger that threatens the quality of life and security of Canadians? As discussed, the “war on drugs”, both upstream and down-stream, has not produced the desired result. With regard to the war upstream, in host countries,[30] the war on drugs in Burma has in fact resulted in civil strife, internal wars, military atrocities, repression of the people by successive military-authoritarian regimes, etc. It has also brought about, as noted, an alliance between elements that are involved, directly and/or indirectly, in the transnational opium-heroin trade, or have benefited from it. There is no denying the observation made by Robert Gelbard that anti-drug assistance to the Burmese government has failed in the past. It is also wise to heed his assessment — made from a “hard-headed, drug-control point of view” — that the Burmese military and its ruling generals are part of the problem, not the solution.[31]

As such, it does not make the slightest sense for the government of Canada to follow the lead of self-interested elements within the American government — the DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency), for example — or go along with the suggestion that the “war on drugs”, in cooperation with the military regime, should be resumed. In view of the danger, in the short- and long-term, posed to Canadian security (broadly defined), there is only one option open: that option is — as well put by Gelbard — “encouraging a swift resolution to Burma’s political crises, one that can make its military more

accountable to civilian and judicial authority, one that denies legitimacy to narco-traffickers, one that leads to a real fight against corruption and crime”.[32] This option, given the failure of the “war on drugs” approach, is the only way the government of Canada will be able to protect and ensure the safety of Canadians.

END NOTES

1. Perhaps one of the earliest re-definition of the so-called heroin problem as a transnational, multibillion dollars agro-business, rather than as a problem of law enforcement, is found in Chao-Tzang Yawnghwe, “The Political Economy of the Opium Trade: Implications for Shan State”, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol.23, No.3, 1993, pp. 306-326.

2. This point is recently stressed by Professor Richard Stevenson, an economist from Liverpool University (England, U.K.). See Richard Stevenson, “Costs of the ‘Drug War’”, Seminar: Sensible Solutions to the Urban Drug Problem, The Fraser Institute, Vancouver, B.C., April 21, 1998. The seminar was hosted by the Fraser Institute, a very conservative, highly respected think-tank based in Vancouver — regarded in some quarters as the bastion of hard right-wing, very conservative think-tanks.

3. For an illuminating study of the history of the beginnings of the opium trade, see Hao Yen P’ing, *The Commercial Revolution in 19th Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), esp. pp.55-64, 67-70, 112-137.

4. See Alfred McCoy, “CIA Covert Action and Drug Trafficking”. Transcript obtained from Alternative Radio, 2129 Mapleton, Boulder, CO 80304.

5. For a detailed and excellent study of Ne Win’s Burmese Way to Socialism economy, and the “illegal” economy and associated trade, see Mya Maung, *The Burma Road to Poverty* (New York: Praeger, 1991).

6. In terms of negative social side effects, such as family violence, property crime, violent crime, etc., alcohol is viewed by most researchers, scholars, and even policemen, as more damaging to society than narcotics (except, crack cocaine). See Robin Room, “Psychoactive Substances in Canada: Levels of Harm and Means of Reduction”, Seminar: Sensible Solutions to the Urban Drug Problem, The Fraser Institute, April 21, 1988. Also, Patricia G. Erickson, “Drugs, Violence and Public Health: What Does the Harm Reduction Approach Have to Offer?”, Seminar: Sensible Solutions to the Urban Drug Problem, The Fraser Institute, April 21, 1988.

7. For a critical analysis of the upstream “war on

drugs", see Mathea Falco, "Foreign Drugs, Foreign Wars", *Daedalus*, Vol.121, No.3, (Summer 1992), pp.1-14. Falco's analysis is particularly important because she was a member of President Carter's "war on drug" team, and was instrumental in providing anti-narcotics aid to the Ne Win regime (in the mid-1970s). Helicopters provided for narcotics suppression were instead used by the military to transport troops to fight Karen, Shan, Kachin, and communist rebels, and herbicide provided was used against the civilian population, especially in Shan State. Also see, Jerome H.Skolnick, "Rethinking the Drug Problem", in *Daedalus*, op cit., pp.133-159.

8. Conversation with a DEA agent at an Anti-narcotics Briefing in Washington D.C., September 17, 1993, hosted by the U.S. State Department.

9. See UNFDAC: Review of the UNFDAC/Burma Program for Drug Abuse Control, October-November 1983. Also see Drug Control: Enforcement Efforts in Burma are Not Effective, U.S. General Accounting Office, September 1989.

10. Bertil Lintner, "War and Drugs in Burma's Sector of the Golden Triangle", Anti-narcotics Briefing, U.S. State Department, Washington D.C., September 17, 1993. Ronald D.Renard, *The Burmese Connection: Illegal Drugs and the Making of the Golden Triangle* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996), pp. 89-96.

11. Drug Control: Enforcement Efforts in Burma are Not Effective, U.S. General Accounting Office, September 1989.

12. Top leaders who signed ceasefire agreements with the regime are: U Sai Lin aka Lin Ming-shing of the Eastern Shan State Army (ESSA); Yang Mao-liang, Peng Chia-sheng, and Liu Go-shi of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDA-Kokang Chinese); Pao Yu-chiang, Li Tzu-ju, and Wei Hsueh-kang of the United Wa State Army (UWSA); and U Mahtu Naw of the Kachin Defense Army (KDA). See International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, 1998 (Section on Burma), U.S.State Department, Washington D.C.

13. For example, Sanda Win (Ne Win's daughter), Aye Zaw Win and Tun Oo (Ne Win's sons-in-law); Ngwe Soe (Ne Win's "black sheep" son); the son of General Than Shwe (currently head of the junta); the widow and sons of General San Yu (the second last President of Ne Win's military-socialist regime); the sons and daughters, nephews, nieces of Generals Khin Nyunt (Secretary 1 of the current junta), Saw Lwin (currently head of the National Convention and Minister for Hotels and Tourism), Maung Maung Khin (Minister, ex-Navy commander), and so on, are Rangoon's "new rich". Source:

communication with businessmen friends from Burma.

14. Richard S.Gelbard, "Slorc's Drug Link", *The 5th Column*, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, November 21, 1996.

15. See Stefan Collignon, "Burmese Economy and the Withdrawal of European Trade Preferences" posted on Internet by News and Information Bureau, All Burma Students League (ABSL), New Delhi, India.

16. It must however be said that the perception (or argument) which holds that opium-heroin businesses are "empires" run by a drug "kingpin", is quite Hollywoodish. In the 1970s, Lo Hsinghan was fingered (and "hollywoodized") as the world's heroin "kingpin". However his "capture" by Thai authorities in 1973 and extradition to Burma (where he received a death sentence, but was pardoned in 1980), did not affect the opium-heroin trade in any significant way. It will suffice to say that the heroin trade is too big, too complex, too transnational for it to be amenable to control by any one man or a single syndicate.

17. International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, 1998 (Section on Burma), U.S.State Department, Washington D.C.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.* For details of the legitimate business deals of "drug kingpins" like Lo Hsinhan (his son, Steven Low), Khun Sa, and Kokang and Wa "leaders of the national races", see Anthony Davis and Bruce Hawke, "Burma, the Country that Won't Kick the Habit", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Vol. 10; No. 3 (March 1, 1998).

20. References made to the views or words of police officers are based on interviews with, and communications from, those involved in the "war on drugs" in the RCMP and the city police force. They have requested anonymity. (The interviews were conducted in April 1988. Some were conducted 2 years ago, as part of a research in preparation for an Anti-narcotics Conference in Lisbon, hosted by the North-South Center, Council of Europe, in March 1996).

21. Gil Puder, "Recovering Our Honor: Why Policing Must Reject the 'War on Drugs' ", Seminar: Sensible Solutions to the Urban Drug Problem, The Fraser Institute, Vancouver, April 21, 1998.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Richard Stevenson, "Costs of the 'War on Drugs'", Seminar: Sensible Solutions to the Urban Drug Problem, The Fraser Institute, Vancouver, April 21, 1988.

24. Stevenson, op cit.

25. Eric Single, et al, *The Cost of Substance Abuse in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Center on Substance Abuse, n.d., 1996?), p.8.

26. Single, op cit., p.15.

27. The figure, money needed by an addict to support his/her drug habit, is obtained from interviews with police officers, both the RCMP and the city police.

28. Depending on how one looks at the figures, the figures given — \$.54 billion to \$1.62 billion — can be looked upon, alternatively, as the value of the trade in illicit drugs in British Columbia.

29. The total OD deaths in British Columbia is almost a thousand annually. The OD death rate would have been very much higher were it not for the administration of “narcans” by ambulance units (“narcans” is an injection that neutralizes the effects of OD, and revives those who could be considered as dead from drug overdose). Interview with a senior police officer, the Vancouver City Police (April 19, 1998).

30. Regarding the downstream “war on drugs” in “market (or “consuming”) countries”, one suggestion

that has been gaining some grounds, at least among academics interested in the narcotics problem, is the “decriminalization” of narcotics. This is aimed at taking away the huge profit accruing to criminal elements, transnational drug cartels or syndicates and drug-financiers that is inherent in the prohibition approach. One other alternative approach favored is the “Harm Reduction” or the public health approach. It is one where addicts are not targeted as criminals (for possessing illicit drugs) — which has been the case in the current law-enforcement or “criminal justice” approach. See, Patricia G. Erickson, “Drugs, Violence and Public Health: What does the Harm Reduction Approach have to Offer?”, Seminar: “Sensible Solutions to the Urban Drug Problem”, The Fraser Institute, April 21, 1998, Vancouver.

31. Gelbard, op cit.

32. Ibid.



Human Rights in Rural Burma

Kevin Heppner
Karen Human Rights Group

In November 1997 the State Law & Order Restoration Council (SLORC) military junta ruling Burma changed its name to the State Peace & Development Council (SPDC). However, there was no change in the four key leaders of the junta, and judging by the testimonies of villagers throughout Burma and the continuation of all of the regime's military operations, there has been no change in policy; in fact, the forced relocations and related abuses occurring in many rural parts of the country have only intensified, making it appear that the SPDC regime is even more ruthless and repressive than the SLORC ever was. Like many dictatorships, the SLORC/ SPDC is an extremely paranoid regime, believing that it must control every inch of territory and the daily lives of every citizen in Burma; that if it relaxes its repression for one moment, the people will rise and destroy it. This mentality explains the junta's refusal to negotiate or compromise with its opponents, even in situations where there would be nothing to lose by doing so. SPDC leaders regularly state that "only the Army can hold the country together", and they feel that to do this the Army must control absolutely everything which happens in the country.

In order to gain this control, the military continues to expand at a rate far beyond the means of the junta or the country. In many regions, particularly the central and urban areas, the military has already established near-complete control, but in remoter areas, such as the non-Burman ethnic areas towards all the borders, it has only partial or no control, and in some of these regions there is still armed resistance. The policy of the SPDC, and before it the SLORC, in the case of any form of armed resistance is to "drain the ocean so the fish cannot swim"; in other words, undermine the oppo-

sition by attacking the civilian population until they can no longer support any opposition. This is the fundamental idea of the Four Cuts policy (cutting supplies of food, funds, recruits and intelligence to the resistance) which Ne Win initiated in the 1970's. The current SPDC plan for consolidating control over areas where there is resistance appears to consist of the following steps: 1) mount a military offensive against the area; 2) forcibly relocate all villagers to sites under direct Army control and destroy those villages; 3) use the relocated villagers and others as forced labour, portering and building military access roads into their home areas; 4) move more Army units in and use the villagers as

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forced labour to build bases along the access roads; 5) allow the villagers back to their villages, where they are now under complete military control and can be used as a rotating source of extortion money and forced labour, further consolidating control through "development" projects, forced labour farming for the Army, etc.. If resistance attacks still persist at this last stage, retaliation is carried out against villages by executing village elders, burning houses and other means.

Throughout Burma we can see examples where this process is at various stages; in eastern Tenasserim Division the SPDC is still on a military offensive, while in parts of Chin State they are conducting initial forced relocations, and in central Shan State they are combining the two. In parts of central Karen State which they have now occupied for 1-3 years, they are constructing access roads and new Army bases with forced labour. In areas which the junta has controlled for longer periods and those where there has never been active resistance, the process is well into its last stage of sys-

tematic forced labour and economic exploitation of the local population

Many villages now being burned by SPDC troops were first burned in 1975 when the Four Cuts were first implemented, and some villagers speak of having been on the run from Burmese troops since 1975; but even these villagers say that in the last 2 to 3 years things have grown much worse. The direct attacks on the civilian population, characterized by mass forced relocations, destruction of villages and the village economy, and completely unsustainable levels of forced labour, have now become the central pillar of SPDC policy in non-Burman rural areas of Burma. In the past, the regime would strategically destroy 2 or 3 villages at a time when there was resistance. Now when they perceive a possibility of armed resistance, they delineate the entire geographic region and forcibly relocate and destroy every village there is, as many as hundreds of villages at a time. In many cases, these villages have had little or no contact with resistance forces and do not even understand why they are being targeted.

The worst example of this example is in central Shan State, where SLORC/ SPDC has destroyed over 1, 400 villages since 1996, making over 300, 000 people homeless. The campaign began by relocating and destroying about 400 villages in an attempt to undermine the Shan Untied Revolutionary Army (SURA). Villagers were given 3 to 7 days to move to Army-controlled sites, after which many of their homes were burned and anyone seen in their villages was shot in sight. When this operation failed to have any effect on the SURA, SLORC/ SPDC expanded the relocation area and also forced many of those already relocated to move again, to even more crowded and tightly controlled sites. By early 1998 this forced relocation campaign had expanded to cover all the villages in an area of 7, 000 square miles, totaling over 1, 400 villages, and the area is still being expanded despite the fact that many of these villages have never had any contact whatsoever with Shan opposition groups. The SURA has now joined with other groups to form the Shan State Army (SSA) and is seeking negotiations with the SPDC, but the junta has refused negotiations and vows to crush them. The villagers are starving in the relocation sites, where the SPDC gives them nothing and uses them as forced labour building Army camp and an air base

and maintaining and guarding roads into the area. Many villagers can be seen begging for food along these roads, while many others have been shot on sight or massacred by SLORC/ SPDC troops because they try to return to their villages to find food. An estimated 80, 000-100, 000 refugees from the region have already fled to Thailand so they have no option but to enter the illegal workforce, ending up as cheap labour on plantations, constructions sights, in sweatshops and as bonded labour in Thai brothels. The SPDC freely allows the ethnic Shans to flee to Thailand, and has now begun a practice of stripping them of their Burmese identity papers as they leave, probably in order to assure that they can never return.

In Karenni (Kayah State), over 200 villages have been forcibly relocated and destroyed since 1996, after the SLORC broke a cease-fire agreement to attack the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP). Almost every hill village in the entire state has been destroyed. First the Army issued orders that all villagers move to military-controlled camps within 7 days or be "considered as an enemy". Patrols then went from village to village, burning and destroying everything and capturing or killing any villagers found. Some villagers are still struggling to survive in hiding in the forests, but most have fled to the towns or gone to the relocation sites, where they live in starvation conditions and are used by SPDC troops as forced labour maintaining Army camps and as servants for soldiers. Since the beginning of 1998, SPDC troops have swept and destroyed villages in the south of the State where the relocation orders had not previously been strongly enforced, and have now begun expanding the relocation to include villages in northern Karenni along the Shan border, which had previously not been relocated because they are in an area partly controlled by the Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front (KNPLF), a group which has a cease-fire deal with the SPDC.

In northern Karen State, SLORC and SPDC have destroyed at least 200 Karen villages since March 1997 as part of their campaign to consolidate control over this rugged region adjacent to the Thai border. Villages close to Army garrisons in Papun, Nyaunglebin and Toungoo districts were ordered to move to Army sights by mid-1997, and some were used to build military access roads while others were taken as porters by troops setting out to

destroy all villages in the region. However, most of the villages are small and remote in the forested hills and troops can never catch villagers there, so Army columns have never even given them relocation orders; the columns simply approach each village, shell it with mortars, then enter and burn down every house. As stated in a typed and signed SLORC order issued to 64 villages in 1997, *"The above mentioned villages must move and consolidate...Small villages, even those not included in the above list, must move and consolidate to nearby consolidation villages before May 6th. Villages which fail to move will be destroyed."*

Food supplies are systematically hunted out and burned and villagers are shot on sight. Most villagers have fled into the forest where they hide in groups of 2 or 3 families, trying to stay near their ancestral fields so they can grow some food. However, SPDC patrols the area at least once a month to hunt out and destroy their shelters, destroy any crops or food supplies, and shoot villagers and livestock on sight. An estimated 30,000 villagers are still living in hiding in the forest, and the area of village destruction continues to expand. About 2,000 people have escaped to refugee camps in Thailand, but this is difficult and dangerous because of landmines and SPDC patrols. In March, Thai authorities moved these refugee camps further south and barred non-governmental organizations from this part of the border, so it is likely that any new arrivals will be forced back across the border at gunpoint by Thai troops.

Similar forced relocations and village destruction campaigns have been occurring in other parts of the country as well, such as southern Tenasserim Division, where at least 100 villages have been relocated and destroyed and are now being used as forced labour building a road network and Army camps throughout their home area, and Chin State,

where some strategic forced relocations are now occurring. In Pa'an and Dooplaya districts of central Karen State, the SPDC is in the next stage of consolidating its control and is currently using villagers as forced labour building road networks and new Army camps, while continuing to conduct localised forced relocation and destruction of villages wherever villagers are to be more tightly controlled or punished for opposition activity in their area.

Another tool now being used by the SPDC to consolidate its control over ethnic rural populations is the creation and support of "proxy armies" in order to divide the ethnic-based resistance. In Karenni State, the Karenni National Democratic Army was created in 1996 at the instigation of SLORC and used to attack Karenni refugee camps in Thailand. In 1994 the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) formed of its own in Karen State but was promptly made dependent on SLORC for material support, and since that time it has primarily been used as a form of SLORC/ SPDC militia and to attack Karen refugee camps in Thailand. The most recent such attacks occurred in March 1998, when Huay Kaloke (Wan Kha) refugee camp was

burned, leaving four refugees

dead and 9,000 homeless, and Maw Ker and Beh Klaw (Mae La) camps were also attacked. In late 1997 in central Karen State, the SLORC helped to form the Karen Peace Army (KPA) under the command of a Karen Army officer who was known for corruption.

The SPDC has now given this new proxy army control over a large territory in central Karen State, ejecting the DKBA from the area in the process. The KPA still has only 200 or 300 soldiers, but they are actively recruiting by promising that the families of all recruits will be exempt from forced labour for the SPDC. It appears likely that the SPDC



Faces of the internally displaced

may pit the KPA against the DKBA in the future, and if the KNU (Karen National Union) continues to fight both groups, then the SPDC will likely take a step back, simply supplying and encouraging the war in Karen State until all of the resistance movements are so weak that they can be crushed and controlled one by one.

In areas where there is full SPDC control and no resistance, the villagers become completely at the disposal of the Army. They must continually do rotating shifts of forced labour as servants at each of the Army camps near their village, and new Army camps are always being established. They must also go for up to two weeks per month of forced labour on infrastructure projects, such as roads, railways and hydro dams, which the Army implements to consolidate control and attract foreign investment. Villagers must also pay the costs of these projects; the SPDC controlled media often describes "self-reliance basis" projects, meaning those which are constructed entirely with the forced labour and money of villagers; the money forced out of villagers for these infrastructure projects is listed as "people's contributions" and usually amounts to one-third to half of the total budget. However, in reality any money provided by Rangoon is simply pocketed by local and high-level authorities, while villagers are forced to pay anywhere from 100% to 300% of the actual cost of the project to these same authorities. In addition, many Army camps confiscate their farmland without compensation and then force them to do labour growing rations and cash crops for the Army or for export. They must also do forced labour gathering building materials for Army camps and participating in moneymaking activities for the local Army officers, such as logging and brickbaking. An average family must send one person for each 3 or 4 types of forced labour every month; women must often do this labour because men are more likely to be beaten by soldiers at the worksite, and children must often go because their parents need to work the fields for the survival of the family. If the village fails to comply with requests for forced labourers, materials or money, the village elders are arrested and often tortured, houses are burned down, or the army simply storms the village and takes two or three times as many people for labour as were originally requested.

In urban areas the SPDC has decreased its demands for forced labour, because it fears the possibility of uprisings in the cities and because forced labour in the cities is more visible to foreign visitors. Instead the regime uses convicts for forced labour in the cities or brings in villagers from rural areas, while those who live in the cities simply pay cash in lieu of doing forced labour. In some forced labour projects on tourist routes the SPDC has even taken to paying forced labourers, though the amount paid is usually 20 or 40 Kyats per day, which is no more than 25% of the money needed for daily food. This allows them to show foreigners that forced labourers are "paid", even though the rest of the country forced labourers are never paid.

In some rural areas thousands of acres are confiscated and the villagers must do forced labour establishing fishpond projects and rubber plantations. These projects are often promoted in the media as "local income generation", but all proceeds go to the Army. Officers also steal the wages and rations of rank-and-file soldiers and then order their soldiers to survive by looting the villages. All farmers who still have land must hand over 25-50% of their crops as a quota to the Army and are paid only 10-20% of market price. The quotas increase every year, even when there are bad crops and natural disasters, and farmers often have to sell their belongings to buy rice at market price just so they will have enough to pay the quota and avoid arrest. Many of the crops grown by forced labour and those handed over as quota are used to support the Army, but local officers take and sell a great deal of it, and it is likely that much of it is also sold to foreign companies for "countertrade" export; "countertrade" is a practice whereby foreign companies convert profits earned in Kyat, the local currency which cannot be exported, into exportable goods by buying agricultural products from SPDC agencies. Cash crops and rubber are often used for this.

Every army camp demands money from every village in its area, and usually this is calculated to amount to all the money a village can raise each month. With the arrival of new Army camps, the amount increases proportionately. In 1995 the Karen Human Rights Group studied a group of 28 villages averaging 50 families in size and found that each village was paying an average of approximate-

ly 100, 000 Kyat per month to local Army battalions just in established cash fees, not including extra fees to avoid forced labour, *ad hoc* extortion demands or forced contribution of food and other material goods. 100, 000 Kyat is US\$15, 000 at official exchange rate or US\$350 at market rate, but for a subsistence farming village it is a very large amount of money. This amount continues to increase because of the constant expansion of the number of Army camps near every village. Just looking at this amount and considering the number of villages in Burma, it appears that at least one to two billion Kyat per month is being robbed from rural villagers by SPDC field military officers, and this does not even include other money which these officers make by selling rations and village goods, or by stealing the wages of their soldiers. These officers have no expenses while in the field. They remit a portion of their profits to higher-level officers and send the remainder to their families, most of whom live in Rangoon, Mandalay or other large towns. Their families can then use these billions of Kyat flowing into the towns as seed money to start businesses, and it is these businesses which lead to the false impression of "economic growth" in the cities. In fact, all of the "growth" in the cities is financed by this steady flow of money and goods robbed from rural villagers, combined with the laundered profits of the narcotics trade.

The SPDC is systematically stripping rural Burma of all it can produce in order to finance a

facade of economic improvement in the cities, while at the same time destroying the food production capabilities of most non-Burman ethnic areas. Even rural villages which have never been burned or forcibly relocated cannot sustain this system. Having to do so much forced labour that they no longer have enough time to farm, to hand over crop quotas which are often more than they can grow and cash which is more than they could ever obtain, and always facing the additional looting by SPDC soldiers, many villagers can only survive by selling off their livestock and valuables. When those are gone or when another Army camp comes to their area, they have no choice but to flee or face arrest. Many end up as beggars in the towns, internally displaced people living in the forests, or "economic migrants" and refugees in neighboring countries. Over 80% of Burma's population live in rural villages, but the SPDC is looting the countryside until the village is no longer viable as a social unit. This is the key factor causing Burma's current economic crisis. The SPDC apparently hopes to keep operating this unsustainable system, propping it up with money from foreign investment and aid. This explains their current attempts to attract investment and aid money. However, without political or policy changes, any outside support will only prop up an unsustainable system and ensure a greater disaster in the future.

Overview of refugee situation on Thai-Burma border

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Until recently, the entire Thai-Burma border (250 km) was under ethnic control and the Burmese army only had access to Thailand through three trading gates. In 1984, the Burmese army broke through the Karen frontline attacking bases north of Mae Sot and the first refugees came into Thailand (10000 people). It was then when the BBC was formed and began working with the Thai government. The Thai government decided not to bring in UNHCR but rather asked NGOs to take care of the humanitarian needs.

The story of the last 14 years has been one of the Burmese army continuing to make more and more inroads into the ethnic territory. The beginning of the end came in 1995 when SLORC was able to take the Karen headquarters of Manerplaw and take sections of the border for the very first time. The number of refugees increased to about 100 000 people. Most of remaining ethnic territory was Karen in the southern part of the border. Last year, a major Burmese army offensive took place and all remaining Karen areas were taken by SPDC. The situation today is one where the Burmese army is now more or less in control of the entire border from north to south for the first time in history and the amount of territory controlled by ethnic groups is quite minuscule. Behind the frontline, the Burmese army is attempting to consolidate its control through massive forced relocations of villages. The army has tenuous control of the border and is trying to make sure it is maintained in the future. The result of this is that the number of refugees has grown to 115 000 in official numbers in camps and has brought many crucial problems such as the never-ending potential flow of refugees coming into Thailand from areas of forced labour and forced village relocations. With SPDC right along the border, the camps are no longer safe. Camp attacks have occurred since 1995. This has brought some significant changes to Thai policy relating to refugees. The Thais have tried to handle security

problems by trying to consolidate camps into bigger camps. Ten major centers for refugees along the border now exist. The theory is that by having larger camps, they are easier to defend but that theory is in question. Thailand is faced with an unenviable problem in that there is an endless potential of more refugees fleeing over and with more SPDC control of their homelands, there exists very little desire among these people to return home. During the last year, we've seen close collaboration between Thai and Burmese armies to stop flow of refugees across border and get them to go back. The Thai army policy of trying to get rid of this problem is by having the Burmese take control of the border so what happens inside Burma has nothing to do with them, it is an internal problem. Refugees have been forced back and many denied to cross over. In the last 12 months, there has been no new refugee policy.

The conditions of the camps have deteriorated considerably with consolidation. The Thai army has imposed strict conditions in the camps to make life difficult in the hope that the refugees will want to return. In other words, a humane deterrence policy has been applied to the camps.

In this very difficult situation, we can summarize our present concerns as these four:

- asylum is being denied to new refugees
- camps are no longer safe
- with the clampdown on conditions of camps, the concern is for the living conditions of the camps/quality for asylum
- concern that there may be involuntary and early repatriation

This has been heightened by recent attacks on the camps in March. One camp was completely destroyed by fire. The incident was a great embarrassment for the Thai army. Now there have been knee jerk responses to this problem. Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai has opened up possibility of UNHCR to have a presence on the border to have

transparency and to handle refugees in a way that is acceptable to the international community but BBC concerned this could backfire and be used as alternative purposes by the Thai army. The Thai army would like to move all refugees way away from the border, about 100km inside. They want UNHCR to build a camp and look after refugees in that place. But the dangers are obvious. At the moment, there is access to the border and a chance of getting into Thailand for the refugees. If these camps were located far inside Thailand, the chances would not be there and the Thai army could completely close off the border and asylum would become a real problem. At the moment, camps are relatively small and run by refugees themselves and they have a degree of ordinary life. They are living close to their homes and living in areas that are refugee-friendly. If the camps are moved and shoved far inside, they will lose all of that. The people will become “sitting refugees” and thoughts of what the international com-

munity can give them will predominate rather than thoughts of going home again. There are concerns about the strong pressure of involving UNHCR. The UNHCR should be involved but in the right way and for the right reasons. UNHCR should see that camps which are really at risk be moved further inside (Wangka and Maw Ker camps).

The roles of UNHCR should be to

- Provide protection and this is what international community should be pushing for and what UNHCR should be defining.
- Monitor new arrivals and have access to the border and preventing the army from pushing refugees back.
- Ensure that all returnees are voluntary and not forced and to work towards durable solutions for the future.

The Thai authorities want this as well. They know that they need to involve UNHCR for political purposes and are looking at providing them access but to restrict that as carefully as possible.



Refugees on Thai-Burma border

“Working for a Democratic Burma”

Panel Presentation

DAISY FRANCIS - Canada Asia Working Group

Now is a good time to overview Canadian involvement in Burma's democracy movement, especially as 1998 marks the tenth year after the people's uprising in Burma.

Thanks to the efforts of Canadian NGOs, we've see a sharp increase of Canadian engagement over the past years starting with the withdrawal of Petro Canada in 1992. The past few ambassadors accredited to Burma have been much more interested and active in demanding access to Burma as compared to their predecessors. In 1997, we saw the culmination of our collective work with the imposition of trade sanctions. Minister Axworthy has shown his interest in Burma and desire to be active on this issue.

Jan Bauer of Article 19 and I started the Burma Advisory Group to bring together government, aid agencies and NGOs to discuss Burma. The first meeting was launched in December 1994. Over the years, these meetings have built a strong level of trust and confidence between government and NGOs and strengthened important relations.

What is next?

Get SPDC out/Get Democracy in. We must pursue a series of strategies: "Drain the ocean so the fish can't swim" (the fish being the SPDC). We need to continue to drain the SPDC's ocean. .

Getting SPDC out - Internationally, we should look at the opportunities being presented amidst the ASEAN financial crisis. The strength of the Burmese military regime lies with the ASEAN nations. ASEAN is not going to risk its own financial needs by continuing to help Burma. We must ensure that UN resolutions on Burma keep going. There has been talk of trying to get SLORC to vacate their seat at the UN but there is a very slim chance of that happening

Burma is coming up for review of debt forgiveness. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are objects of the campaign to forgive highly

indebted nations. Do we want Burma on this list?

We must look more closely at the UN children such as UNDP, UNEP, UNDCP and evaluate their effectiveness and see whether the benefits are really going to the people its supposed to or not. Are there better ways to allocate resources? Is there any effective crop substitution program that we can look at in the case of the heroin issue?

We should look at the issue of unions, how they are linked globally and how to work with them to help keep shipments from Burma away from our respective countries' ports.

In Canada, our goal is to keep Burma squarely on Axworthy's agenda. We must ensure that the ban against giving bilateral assistance is maintained. We should look at codes of conduct and the questions around this. Canadian investments in Burma are primarily through branch plant operations such as Nortel which require much more complex legislation and through junior mining companies which often aren't on the stock exchange and therefore, are much harder to regulate.

Getting democracy in - At the national level, we should be researching lessons learned from countries which have experienced recent transitions to democracy. We should look at Chile, South Africa, El Salvador, Nicaragua. They are all very different cases with varying dictatorships who now have either few generals in power or none at all. We should start the study now.

We must address the issue of educating the next generation, organizing placements at universities and governmental levels - to train a future administration. Would Canada be a good place to do this or countries in Africa or Asia?

Internationally, we need to start getting people inside Burma ready for democracy. We should all have parallel and effective strategies that draws in all of our constituencies and different skills to help support this movement and help it prepare for a new Burma.

RUTH JENSEN - Executive Director of the Canadian Lutheran World Relief and participant on CFOB 'exposure tour' to Thai Burma border.

Refugee camps are not easy places to visit. The fact that we have over 22 million refugees in the world today is a sad reality. CLWR is investigating what kind of a role it can carve out for itself to assist the Burma movement and more specifically, the refugees. Colleagues in India and Geneva have been contacted and together with the movement, CLWR will search for an appropriate role to assist.

There is a Japanese proverb which states "Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare." CLWR does not want to get taken into a nightmare and therefore, it will require some time to research what kind of a role CLWR can play in this movement but it looks forward to working with all the actors involved.

JOIE WARNOCK - National representative of the Communication, Energy and Paperworkers Union and participant on CFOB 'exposure tour' to Thai-Burma border.

Canadians are often not aware why labour unions are involved in international issues and international solidarity campaigns. The CEP has a big membership nation-wide and has a humanity fund in international solidarity. Funding has gone to help with the creation of the CFOB "Dirty Clothes-Dirty System" report. The work CEP feels it can do in this movement is one of a political nature and can network with the Canadian Labour Congress and the International Labour Organization to pursue greater involvement. Some of my local efforts have involved the issue of the Vancouver ports and seeking ways to get dock workers to not handle goods derived from Burma. On the issue of downstream effects of heroin in Vancouver, I have approached key activists to see if there is an interest to hook up with CFOB on the issue of educating people about the democracy movement and the effects of the military regime on the drug trade. The response has been more than favourable. She hopes to be able to add more voices to the movement.

CRAIG FORCESE - Board member of the Canadian Lawyers Association on International Human Rights.

Canada has taken some steps to curb Canadian money going to support SPDC by putting Burma on the Area Control List and revoking Burma from the General Preferential Treatment List. But so far, Canada has done nothing on investment. A large number of Canadian junior mining companies are operating in Burma and have paid lots of money to the regime to have exploration permits. The real problem is that we don't have a strong legal instrument to regulate overseas investment by Canadian companies. A law exists called the Special Economic Measures Act which states Canada cannot unilaterally impose sanctions on another country unless there is an international mandate to do so (such as by the UN) or the country in question poses a grave peace and security threat to Canada. It will take a while to look into this act and find ways to use it to our advantage but the heroin link should be used.

But immediate research can be done to find other policy disincentives. For example, Canadian companies operating overseas and who pay taxes to a foreign government are able to deduct a certain proportion of those taxes from their Canadian taxes. There is a good possibility that Canadian companies in Burma are deducting their Burmese taxes from Canadian taxes - a tax subsidy for investing in Burma. This issue needs immediate research.

The Canadian government has been emphatic that it does not offer any assistance to companies wanting to invest in Burma yet on the DFAIT website, there is a link to a Burma investment page. This link should be severed.

The success of selective purchasing in the US has yet to occur in Canada. The federal government has a type of selective purchasing in place. When it procures goods and services, it will only buy from those which meet certain ethical criteria such as those that maintain pay equity programs. Why don't we have municipal selective purchasing? Canada must deal with a recent supreme court rul-

There is a good possibility that Canadian companies in Burma are deducting their Burmese taxes from Canadian taxes—a tax subsidy for investing in Burma.

ing which decided that in the case of municipalities, the decisions of municipalities must be based on local concerns that its citizens have and that international issues don't count. A strong argument can be made with the heroin link and that Burmese heroin is a local concern for municipalities. A paper on this issue will be coming out in a month in the University of Toronto Law Review.

There are grassroots alternatives such as consumer pressure tactics but which are only effective against products that are consumer-based and for example, against mining companies. There was a recent case in Ontario where Friends of Lubicon was being sued by a subsidiary of a Japanese company for launching a boycott against it. The courts ruled that there is nothing illegal about consumer boycotts and this ruling is a victory for all consumer activists across the country.

Lawsuits. California-based Unocal is being sued in that state for its business involvement in Burma. Could this be a success in Canada? We don't know yet but cases are being filed, particularly one in Montreal and if it is successful, then we can think about suing Canadian companies that are in Burma.

Shareholder activism. This is a very important issue though it is being de-emphasized in the Canadian environment. There is difficulty in getting Burma issues in front of shareholders meetings due to the legal environment. Canada has a far less liberal position than that of the US and the law is being considered for amendment. There are suggestions that the law should be liberalized but business lobby groups want to further restrict it. It would be good to see more human rights groups getting involved in this issue to counterbalance these lobby groups.

Codes of conduct are generally used to condition or moderate business behaviour overseas such as workplace labour standards (child labour). Few codes exist to condition when a company will be in a country and when it will decide to pull out. If companies don't have country guidelines which dictate that if a certain country has such bad human rights problems that the company will pull out, I feel then that codes of conduct are useless. In the case of Nortel, for example, Nortel explained that it doesn't have country guidelines because it doesn't want to offend the country it is in.

There are a couple of reports on these issues,

published by the International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Development if people would like to do further reading.

TOE KYI - Secretary General

Burmese Students Democratic Organization

I work as the Secretary General for the Burmese Students Democratic Organization (Canada). Our student organization was formed in December, 1997 at the First Conference of Burmese students in Canada. Our student organization consists of Burmese students who left Burma after the bloody military crackdown on the democracy movement and Burmese nationals who were committed to work on the restoration of democracy and human rights in Burma. The objective of our student organization is to restore democracy and human rights in Burma. As a student organization, we will put our priority on working to get freedom in the formation of student institutions in Burma.

I am glad to be here in Ottawa for the conference, and to have the chance to meet you all in one group, a rare opportunity. I believe this conference will be productive for our struggle for democracy and will certainly produce much closer relationships among our democratic forces, and other individuals and organizations working for democracy and human rights in Burma. So I want to give my special thanks to Canadian Friends of Burma for this opportunity and its generous help in supporting our struggle for freedom.

On behalf of Burmese Students' Democratic Organization (Canada), let me briefly express our opinion of the on-going political dilemma in Burma. You will see some different opinions relating to this political situation. Some people think the current political dilemma can be solved if another election is held, but it's totally unpractical. Recently, I heard Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations, making a comment about holding new elections in Burma, in the hopes that this will solve the current political dilemma. If the news of Mr. Annan's comments are true, it would not be good news for the people of Burma. We (BSDO) are greatly concerned with this comment, as we can prove another election will not work. I want to suggest that the UN resolution on SLORC to recognize the results of the May 1990 elections, and transfer power to the elected people be implemented. Can

we forget the peoples' sentiments and whom they elected as their leaders? Will elections under the military be fair? I want to make it clear that another election will not solve the current political situation, as we already had one in 1990. You ask what is needed to solve the situation in Burma. We (BSDO) strongly believe that the current political problem in Burma can only be solved through an equally-based tripartite dialogue that includes democratic forces under the leadership of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, ethnic minorities and the military regime. The tripartite dialogue must be based on mutual respect. The tripartite dialogue must not have any preconditions. Each related party should have the right to choose its own delegations who will participate in the proposed dialogue. To have successful tripartite dialogue, as a first step, the Burmese military regime must lift all the restrictions put on the democratic forces, unconditionally release all political prisoners including student leader Ko Min Ko Naing and initiate a dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Having a dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi will pave the way to solving the current dilemma in Burma. Without Daw Aung San Suu Kyi present, no dialogue will be meaningful.

Since the military came to power through its bloody crack down on the democracy movement, it has never listened to our voice, to the voice of Burmese people. Everything they have done clearly indicates their intention to hold onto power as long as they can. So we have to think about what we can do to force the military to listen to the people of Burma. In that case, what I see as the most effective action that we should take against the military regime is international economic sanctions. We need to work towards international economic sanctions. They are the only language that will make the military understand the concerns of the international community concerns vis a vis the deteriorating situation in Burma. When we talk about economic sanctions, everyone frequently voices concerns that sanctions will hurt the people of Burma even more. In that case, I can assure that the sanctions will not affect the ordinary people of Burma. Don't forget student leader Ko Min Ko Naing is still in prison. Don't forget that there are millions of Burmese people being conscripted into forced labour, forced to work in the beautification projects of tourism, rail roads, and dams which are

directly or indirectly related to international investments. The people of Burma are suffering. Burma is like a prison. With or without sanctions, the people of Burma will still be suffering until the common goals of democracy and human rights are restored in Burma. So the sanctions will not effect the ordinary people. The sanctions will only affect the military and privileged people who have close connections with military. Now those military relatives and privileged people are getting worried about their future and survival because of investment sanctions from the US, because of selective purchasing and trade sanctions from Canada, because of a possible international economic sanction which we demand now. There is no choice. Only sanctions will make military regime in Burma respect the will of the people of Burma. Only sanctions will work in forcing the military regime to open a dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. So let us work on the international community to impose economic sanctions against Burma for the sake of the people of Burma. The sanctions will certainly work on Burma. We already witnessed how the sanctions worked in ending apartheid in South Africa. So why not Burma? To make sanctions more effective in accordance with our goal, I also want to express our strong support to Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy's proposal of having an international monitoring group watch over the developments in Burma. This proposal is similar to the five-member contact group of former Yugoslavia, and I have no doubt that will certainly be useful for Burma. So I want to urge Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy to try and implement his proposed idea.

While I am talking about the action that we should take to achieve the people's desire for democracy, I am also aware that those actions will only take place if we, the democratic forces, work together in perseverance and mutual cooperation. Failure to have the strong cooperation among us will result in a long road to achieving democracy. Therefore I want to tell all of you that it's time we are more united than we are now. It's time we have much stronger cooperation than we have now. With our strong cooperation, with our strong unity and with our strong perseverance, let us work together until our common goal of democracy and human rights are restored. As I talk about the unity, I notice a motto written on the invitation let-

ter of Canadian Friends of Burma that "When the spiders unite, they can tie down lion". So let us be united and let us work together in perseverance. Democracy will prevail in Burma.

CHRISTINE HARMSTON

- Coordinator, Canadian Friends of Burma

CFOB's current activities:

The "dirty clothes" campaign. Canada is importing million dollars worth of clothes from Burma and one sixth of the profits goes directly to help SLORC. There needs to be a complete ban on imports of clothing but the World Trade Organization hinders this as both Canada and Burma are signatories and have agreed to a certain import quota. However, immediate action can still be taken through consumer pressure, for example, telling store owners to stop sourcing clothes "Made in Myanmar" and launching grassroots campaigns to raise public awareness and put pressure on the retailing industry. It goes without saying that CFOB maintains a strong campaign against all investments in Burma, which is predominantly in the mining sector, and has begun research into Canadian laws to find ways to push for investment sanctions on Burma.

Heroin creates another link between Canada and Burma. Our message to those concerned about the effects of heroin in Canada is to get involved in the pro-democracy movement and help bring about political change in that country.

CFOB has been funding small relief projects on the Thai-Burma border such as programs coordinated by Dr. Cynthia. We should be pleased that the Canadian government immediately came through with \$25,000 for emergency relief after the cross-border attack on Huay Kaloke refugee camp by the Burmese army.

A lot of good fund-raising efforts derive from students and their activities. CFOB tries to connect student fund-raising activities with humanitarian relief work on the border as a means to facilitate strong connections with the movement. CFOB now has a website (www.web.net/~cfob).

Please give comments and constructive criticism to improve it. CFOB also greatly welcomes articles for our quarterly newsletter Burma Links.

CFOB continues to maintain good dialogue with the Department of Foreign Affairs. The Canada-Burma network has Minister Axworthy's interest and he wants creative ideas and opportunities to carve out a unique role for Canada in supporting the movement- a value added effort and not one that is repetitive of many other countries. We should push for Canada to become a leader at the multilateral level and coordinate efforts to support the struggle.

Where are we going? This conference is all about finding new strategies and action plans for the coming months.

Here are some suggestions:

Urge for a parliamentary envoy to visit the region. Visit the Thai-Burma border and New Delhi. Do we want the envoy to also go to Rangoon and try and see Aung San Suu Kyi?

Create an Urgent Response Mechanism. A fast and effective communication mechanism is needed to have our network respond to crises such as when a company is about to invest in Burma. We would be able to use the mechanism to call for a flurry of letters to be sent to the company and demand that they not go in. At the same time, if a company has withdrawn, the mechanism can be used to congratulate the company.

Organize a national/international day of action on Burma. Suggested date of Sept. 18th as it marks to the 10th year of the current regime coming to power. Have Burma activists across the country and/or around the world do an action on that day and make a specific demand on our respective governments.

The level of activism and commitment across Canada has grown immensely over the years and our concerted efforts have resulted in a good deal of progressive outcomes from government and civil society. Let us maintain that momentum and continue to challenge whatever blocks our path to achieving freedom in Burma.

Workshop #1

Pressuring the Burmese Regime:

What are the pressure points in government and within our economy which we can use to increase the pressure on the Burmese military regime?

Recommendations:

1) Implement UN Resolutions

- Urge Canada to host UN informal consultative mechanism and seek other ways for Canada to continue and expand its leadership role at the UN and facilitate access and support for the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma office in New York.
- Improve communication between grassroots and policy levels (between NCGUB and supportive NGOs based worldwide).



Child soldier who defected from SLORC army

2) Find pressure points at various levels such as ASEAN (regional), bilateral (India border), multilateral (Commonwealth, UN and its agencies). These pressure points should be exploited by the Canadian government.

Western border issues to focus on:

- Canadian pressure on India/ Bangladeshi border focusing on effects of 1995 trade agreement vis a vis drugs/ HIV/ refugees (forced repatriation)
- International operations with military forces/ land mines issue
- Grassroots need more documentation/ information, also in Commonwealth

3) Urge Canadian government to help promote ethnic policies and political relations with the NCGUB and other democratic forces

- Point out critical nature of ethnic unity in Burma & opportunities available to build this unity

4) Seek support for consultation between the vari-

ous players in the democratic movement.

- Network between civil society and government/ inter-government (NGO's/ Burmese community)

5) Seek support for consultation between the various players who have major influences (USA, European Commission, UN as well as bilateral pressure).

- Use Euro Burma office as a model for networking/ communication

6) Policy objectives to be encouraged

Internal pressures:

- Re establishing unity between NLD & ethnic parties (UNLD)
- Promotion of inter-ethnic unity
- Promotion of past demonstrations of unity
- Opening of universities, promoted by international pressure
- Ease constraints on political activities
- International pressure: Uniform, consistent pressure from international community

7) Funding suggestions

Multilateral Funding

- Support for independent radio
- Greater support for education/ student scholarships
- Support for translation of English reports into ethnic languages and production
- Be wary of UN drug control programs used to do end-run around prohibitions on support for SPDC.

8) Breaking diplomatic relations and unseating SPDC from UN

- not considered practical

9) Tax law

- Discuss with Foreign Affairs implications of partial tax credits for taxes paid to SLORC. Accounting firms: bare minimum steps taken by NLD to get assets held by businesses flagged (More promising approach. Concerns itself with the possibility of questioning the viability of title held for assets in Burma. If assets are questioned it will have an immediate impact on share value of corporations).

10) Bilateral sanctions

- GATT Article XX- Public morals/ prison labor (discussed as a possible legal response to GATT and WTO challenges to sanctions/ Massachusetts selective purchasing law).

11) Business engagement

- Inform banks/ accounting firms/ law firms
- Use testimonials from companies that have pulled out

12) Tourism

- Heighten "Don't visit Burma" campaign

Workshop #2

Supporting the Democracy Movement:

What creative opportunities exist for Canadian government and civil society to pursue in order to further support the democratic forces, humanitarian assistance efforts, students' education etc?

Recommendations:

1) Need to make democracy struggle a public issue in Canada

- Build constituency, use the media and community events
- Strengthen CFOB in terms of capacity and funding
- Use existing networks in Canada (Students, trade unions, churches, women's groups) Speaking tours of political actors and students across the country.

2) The needs to support the democracy movement/ political opposition movement

- Operational costs
- Promoting democracy inside Burma and supporting it with financial assistance Strengthening NCGUB & democracy movement (International lobbying)
- Financial assistance for communications and media strategies
- Adding contribution of Burmese and Burma-sympathetic intellectuals
- Policy research (i.e. economic policy, transitions, health)
- Building understanding amongst ethnic groups
- Education/ training/ internships/capacity-building among ethnic groups

Our role (in Canada) in resourcing the democracy movement

- Need for a common framework amongst the Canadian groups and in our relationships with the democracy forces, the need to have an understanding of what that framework is and what we are all working towards.
- Need to expand Canadian NGO involvement in the Burma struggle (repeat exposure tour to the Thai-Burma border).

- Expand humanitarian assistance which also supports the political movement as it is a politic expression of our role

Short Term: Possibility of channeling money into the movement as early as next month. Could channel funds through existing institutions

Long term: Framework that includes humanitarian assistance / support to the democracy movement/training/ etc.

- Approach government and get larger amounts of resources

3) Debt forgiveness

- dilemma for a country like Burma. Rule of thumb: country that spends excess of X amount of GDP on military are excluded from debt forgiveness.

4) Canadian Government

- Given new government in South Korea, Axworthy could explore what kind of a role that government could be playing in the region vis a vis Burma
- Informal consultative mechanism of which Canada is part - encourage Canada to play a heightened and continued role in that mechanism.

Workshop #3

Canadian campaigns - what are the next steps?:

How can we strengthen the Canadian network to become more effective in our campaigns and what should be our main campaigns for this year?

Recommendations:

1) National awareness-raising campaign

- Begin the campaign on August 8 to commemorate 8/8/88 in which thousands of people were massacred during peaceful pro-democracy demonstrations and end on September 18 which marks the tenth year of rule by the current regime. **Each participating group should remind the public that the killings and oppression have gone on for almost half a century and not just over the past ten years.**
- Due to the disadvantageous time of year to begin such a campaign, each participating group can do as many or as few actions throughout the forty days as they wished, depending on resources and availability of people.
- Activities can include demonstrations, information tables, letter-writing campaigns, cultural nights etc. and the themes of the actions will be left up to the discretion of each group - it does not have to be a one-slogan campaign. CFOB staff will be responsible for providing materials and videos to those who require it and coordinate the overall campaign, including media coverage.
- On September 18th, in order to make it a truly "national day of action", each participating group will do a public event in their respective areas. Broad approval was given that the demand on this day be for the Canadian government to take the lead in pushing for United Nations sanctions on Burma. (The issue of sanctions and its surrounding controversies were discussed. It was decided that each participating group should remind the public that Aung San Suu Kyi and the democratic forces have called for sanctions to be imposed on their own country and that since the military

regime opened up the economy in 1988, oppression and human rights abuses worsened). Groups could put this appeal in any materials that are published for public distribution.

Participants suggested that each group get other locally-based organizations involved throughout the time period, such as the Council of Canadians, Citizens for Public Justice, the anti-Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) groups, National Action Committee on the Status of Women and local refugee-sponsorship groups etc. Activists could ask to speak at local organizations' annual general meetings to highlight the campaign and gather support.

Groups could make giant "Boycott Made in Myanmar" labels and use it as their logo to make the campaign recognizable to passers-by.

Suggested themes to adopt over the forty days:

- Honour 1990 election results
- Call for tripartite dialogue
- Call for full investment sanctions by Canada - focus on Canadian mining companies in Burma
- Open Burma's universities and colleges
- Congratulating companies which have withdrawn from Burma
- De-seat SLORC from UN
- Release political prisoners Links between SLORC, drug trade and Canada
- Stop imports of "Made in Myanmar" clothing
- Highlight SLORC's use of forced labour and other human rights atrocities
- Highlight student prisoners in Thailand and forced repatriation of migrant workers
- Implement UN resolutions on Burma

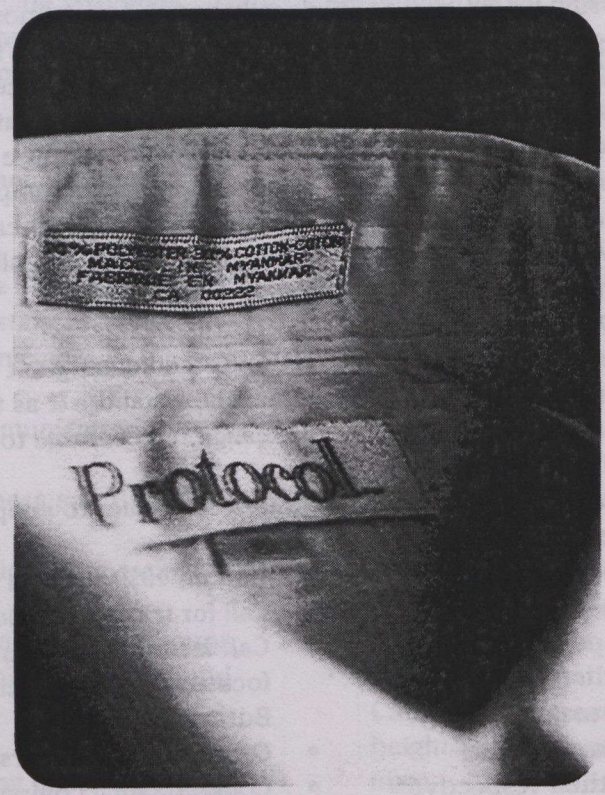
- “Pinch SLORC’s wallet” - raise awareness about ethical investment (pension plans, mutual funds, RRSPs, selective purchasing etc) to cut Canadian money from going to finance SLORC’s tyranny.

2) Concern was expressed about the poor outreach to Franco-Canadians due to lack of material in French and the need for a speaker’s list so that groups could call on people to talk at public events and functions.

3) Participants responded favourably to a proposal to contact the CBC television show “Street Cents” and lobby for a show to focus on consumer

activism with specific attention to Burma and “Made in Myanmar” clothes.

4) Strengthening the network: In response to the need to better facilitate dialogue between all Burma activists across the country, participants agreed that an efficient way to address this need was through the newly-established “Canada on-line chat listserve” and to use this service to consolidate the network and organize national campaigns. (To subscribe, send an email to canada@burma.net and in the body of the message write, “subscribe” (without quotation marks). Each subscriber will be able to post messages to all other subscribers).



Dirty clothes from Burma

Policy Recommendations to the Government of Canada

- 1) Provide increased financial support for the democratic movement and programmes designed to promote the peaceful transition to democracy in Burma.
- 2) Promote Canada as a player in inter-governmental consultations on migrant labour and refugee issues and encourage ASEAN to lead.
- 3) Facilitate the process of consultation and policy development of the major players in Burma's democracy movement; the facilitation should include financial support and the provision of travel documentation and visas for consultation participants.
- 4) Host future meetings of the UN informal consultative mechanism on Burma of which Canada is a part.
- 5) Continue to support the cost of providing for refugees from Burma and internally displaced persons in Burma. Monitor and promote the interests, security and well-being of Burmese refugees in Thailand, Bangladesh and India.
- 6) Ensure that Canada not include Burma in any debt-forgiveness campaigns and promote a rule of thumb that countries which spend a disproportionate amount of their budget on the military be exempt from any debt-relief efforts.
- 7) Impose investment sanctions on Burma, maintain the suspension of ODA funds and oppose any programmes by the United Nations (especially UNDP and UNDCP) in Burma, unless or until all resolutions pertaining to Burma by the UN General Assembly and the UN Commission on Human Rights have been implemented.
- 8) Continue to find pressure points at regional (ASEAN), bilateral (India and Thailand) and multi-lateral (UN, Commonwealth) levels. Give special focus to India/Bangladesh border and implications of 1995 India/Burma border trade agreement on HIV, drugs, forced repatriation of refugees etc.
- 9) Convene a parliamentary delegation to visit the region including Thailand, India, China and Burma. The parliamentary delegation should visit colleagues, fellow members of Parliament, who were elected in the 1990 elections and are now based on the borders; visit the refugee camps and the human rights groups documenting the abuses. An attempt should be made to make a solidarity visit to Rangoon and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.
- 10) Research what the new South Korean government's position is on Burma, its role in South East Asia and what role it could play to further the democracy movement.

Post-conference meetings

Below is a synopsis of the meetings which representatives of the NCGUB, Karen and Chin political offices, International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Development and CFOB had with various government officials and parliamentarians after the conference to convey the concerns of the democracy movement and gather political support for the policy recommendations forged at the conference.

April 27, 1998

Honourable Lloyd Axworthy, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Honorable David Kilgour, Secretary of State for Africa and Latin America

Parliamentary reception for Dr. Sein Win and all conference participants.

April 28, 1998

Breakfast meeting with members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade

Presentation by Dr. Sein Win (NCGUB), Harn Yawngwe (Euro-Burma Office), Dr. Sui Khar (CNF), David Tackarbaw (KNU), Dr. Thaug Htun (UN Burma Service Office), Kevin Heppner (Karen Human Rights Group), Mika

Levesque (International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Development) and Christine Harmston (Canadian Friends of Burma) to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade

M. Gilles Duceppe, Leader of the Bloc Quebecois.

Luncheon in honour of Dr. Sein Win, attended by selected parliamentarians and senators

Honourable Herb Gray, Deputy Prime Minister of Canada.

Honorable Raymond Chan, Secretary of State for Asia-Pacific

Meeting with selected group of senators, hosted by Senator Ron Ghitter

Bob Mills, Reform Party Critic for Foreign Affairs.

Excerpts from the testimony of Dr. Sein Win, Prime Minister of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma in front of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Parliament Hill, April 28, 1998. For a complete transcript of all the testimonies, please contact CFOB. Members of the Standing Committee who were present for the hearing were Bill Graham (Liberal MP); Colleen Beaumier (Liberal MP); Bob Mills (Reform MP); Daniel Turp (Bloc Quebecois MP); Raymonde Falco (Liberal MP); Gurmant Grewal (Reform MP); Jean Augustine (Liberal MP).

The National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma would like to urge the Canadian Government to:

- 1) Refrain from giving aid to the military regime, especially financial assistance to the UN Drug Control Program projects in Burma, as the aid will not lead to the effective reduction of drug production and helps strengthen the military effort to consolidate the control of ethnic areas. Premature resumption of aid would give a wrong signal to the regime that it is not necessary to enter into a political dialogue with the democracy forces. Debt forgiveness should be refrained as the military regime uses more than 50% of its budget on modernizing and expanding the army.
- 2) Increase unilateral sanctions if possible and continue to speak out in favour of multilateral sanctions.

- 3) Increase humanitarian aid to Burmese refugees and internally displaced persons, and provide financial support for the political activities of the Burmese democracy movement, in particular for the transitional planning, specialized skills training for ethnic civic groups, monks, students, journalistic enterprises and human rights groups. Canada is the first country that extended financial support to the NCGUB through the International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Development.

- 4) Facilitate meetings like the present one. Participation of the representatives of democratic and ethnic forces in the seminar on "Burma - Creating New Policies and Partnerships" and "Chin Conference" could not have happened without the good offices of the Honourable Colleen Beaumier who helped expedite the visa application process.

- 5) Host the informal meeting of the members of the UN Informal Consultative Mechanism for Burma.

- 6) Encourage the Government of Thailand to ensure the safety and free access of humanitarian aid to the Burmese refugees and allow the UNHCR to play its role of providing protection to the refugees.

- 7) Encourage ASEAN to have a consultative meeting on migrant workers and refugees.



*from left to right:
Harn Yawng hwe, Euro-Burma Office; David Tackarbaw, Karen Information Center; Prime Minister Sein Win, Dr. Sui Khar, Chin National Front; Dr. Thaug Htun, Burma UN Service Office on Parliament Hill.*

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To get involved in the Free Burma Coalition, to which students and Burma activists all over the world belong, subscribe to the FBC listserve. Send an email to:

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Their website addresses are:

<http://danenet.wicip.org/fbc/freeburma.html>

<http://sunsite.unc.edu/freeburma/freeburma.html>

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