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BURMA AS A THREAT TO SECURITY IN SOUTH EAST ASIA

The Burma Action Group in South Australia call upon the United Nations and international community to intervene the political, human rights and humanitarian crises that have been developing in Burma. Without decisive action and intervention by international community, the crises in Burma will develop into major security threat in Southeast Asia. In the following, Burma Action Group (SA) has identified the developing crises in Burma.

In advocating the intervention by the international community, the Burma Action Group (SA) believes that when dealing with an identifiable crisis, the better option is an early and pre-emptive imposition of the solution to that crisis. Early intervention is also desirable in a sense that it costs less. In the case of Burma, an early intervention will lay a better foundation for the emerging democratic state. The Burma Action Group in South Australia, therefore, urges the United Nations Security Council to put Burma in its agenda.

Under current military government, the people of Burma have been facing an unacceptable level of poverty and consequent corruptions. The military junta through its rank and file have been involved in narcotic trade and in international drug money laundering. Burmese military junta also launched a nuclear program, about which the proliferation of nuclear arsenals into the hands of terrorist groups has become major concern. Within the country, a continuing political stalemate and sporadic armed conflict with ethnic rebel groups are causing further outflows of refugees and displaced people into neighbouring countries. The movement of displaced people can become a major destabilising factor in neighbouring countries.

1. ILLICIT DRUG TRADE AND CRIMINAL MONEY LAUNDERING.

The United States Department of State reports Burma produces a total of 484 metric tons of raw opium in year 2003, down 23 percent from previous years.¹ Despite this, Burma is still the second largest producer of illicit opium and heroin in the world. Burma also remains as the largest producer of Amphetamine-Type Stimulant (ATS) tablets within Southeast Asia. Due to increased pressure by the international community, the military government of Burma has made some form of cooperation regarding with illicit drug suppression and anti-money laundering efforts. However, the natures of the cooperation given by the junta in these regards are primarily of a token gesture. Regarding with criminal drug money laundering, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in November 2003 stated that Burma has failed to establish a framework to engage in effective international cooperation in the fight against money laundering. The FATF has urged its 31 member states to take appropriate action against military government in Burma.

² The United States Treasury department also noted in its Federal Register (pp — 19100):

The United States continues to recognize that Burma is a haven for international drug trafficking. On January 31, 2003, the President also signed Presidential Determination No. 2003-14, identifying Burma as a major illicit drug producing and/or drug transiting country and as a country that has failed demonstrably during the previous twelve months to adhere to its obligations under international counter narcotics agreements and take the measures In addition,

¹ U.S. Department of State, International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, March 2004.

² FATF Decides to impose Counter-measures on Myanmar, Financial Action Task Force, 3 November 2003.

this past year Burma continued to be named as a major money laundering country. A major money laundering country is defined by statute as one “whose financial institutions engage in currency transactions including significant amounts of proceeds from international narcotics trafficking.”

Due to the military junta's lack of substantive cooperation in regards to drug money laundering, the United States Treasury Department has classified the two largest private banks in Burma, May Flower Bank and Asia Wealth Bank, as a primary money laundering concern.

The United Nations Security Council should request the international community, especially Burma's neighbouring country, to cooperate with FATF and US Treasury Department in taking measures against money laundering in Burma. As a first step, the United Nations Security Council should authorise UN member states and related institutions to put strictest measures to curb the drug money laundering in Burma.

2. NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION

After 1998 Pakistani government had tested its first nuclear bomb, Burmese military junta began to show interest in nuclear technology. In late 2001, the Far Eastern Economics Review reported 300 Burmese nuclear technicians were trained in Russia to maintain nuclear reactor.³ In April 2003, the Democratic Voice of Burma reported the shipment of equipment to an island in southern coastal regions.

With Burma existing military infrastructure, the possibility for developing a viable nuclear weapon on its own is still a remote possibility. However, early February this year, the United States Department of States expresses concerns that Burmese military junta may be acquiring nuclear weapon technology as well as missiles. There is also the possibility of cash strapped and corrupt military dictatorship may seeks to spread nuclear equipments to other rogue states as well as terrorist organizations.

The United Nations Security Council should place measures to prevent proliferation of nuclear weapons, as well as conventional arms sales to Burma. The Security Council should also appeal Burma's neighbouring country, especially to the member countries of ASEAN, to keep Southeast Asia a Nuclear Free Zone.

3. REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PEOPLE

The persistent violation of human rights, which is the consequences of protracted political strife as well as sporadic armed conflict in Burma, has been major cause for several Burmese nationals displaced within and outside of that country. In India's Mizoram state, estimated 30,000 Chin ethnic minorities of Burma had fled forced labour and religious suppression. In Thailand, more than 110,000 ethnic Karen refugees continue to live in border refugee camps since 1996.⁴ In addition, the estimated 600,000 Burmese illegally entered to Thailand in search for work. Human Rights groups also reported 150,000 Shan refugees who have been living in the informal camps within Thailand.

In early 2004, the Royal Thai Government has withdrawn the mandate of UNHCR to assess new refugee claims.⁵ Continue harassment of refugee by Thai authorities in the border camps were also been reported.

Burma Action Group (SA) believes that providing United Nations protection to the refugees is a vital first step towards implementing a lasting solution for the problem of refugees. Thailand has been generous to those displaced from Burma for several years. However, recent restrictive measures are impeding UNHCR's search for solution and such restrictive measures will only exacerbate the serious situation of Burmese refugees. The lack of effective protection in their first country of asylum may force desperate Burmese to flee to further destinations.

³ Far Eastern Economic Review, December 2001–January 2002.

⁴ Refugee International, Country report 24 January 2003.

⁵ Thai Government Policy puts thousands of Burmese at risk, 25 February 2004.

For many years, the UN High Commission for Refugees has been requesting substantive cooperation of Burmese military government in solving root causes of refugee problem. The United Nations Security Council should put in its agenda that the Security Council would see through the measures that may be taken by UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

4. CHILD SOLDIERS

Institutionalisation of military in Burma is one of the main causes of poverty and ongoing political crisis. Recruitment of child soldiers into the army — or Tatmadaw — was denied the junta. The ruling junta, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), in 2002 claimed that the army comprises entirely of volunteers of aged eighteen and older. However, the investigation by Human Rights Watch in 2002 found that as many as 70,000 children under the age of eighteen may have been serving in Burma's national armed forces. The Human Rights Watch has also estimated that children may account for 35 to 45 percent of new recruits into the national army of the estimated 350,000 troops. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), based on the eyewitness accounts by the refugees in Northern Thailand, also reported the Burmese army recruiting children as young as eleven or twelve. This worrying allegation claimed that the child soldiers were trained and used in purpose built programs such as ethnic cleansing activities in border areas and, at times, as internal political oppressions against the students or the local population. The child soldiers class itself became one of the major building blocks of the militarisation in Burma. When such purpose built military organizations disintegrate, they inevitably threaten and destroy the local and regional security. Another six to seven thousand child soldiers serve in Burma's myriad-armed ethnic opposition groups.

5. HIV/AIDS EPIDEMIC

Lack of effective control in HIV infection in Burma and its border areas become both regional and global health and security concern. According to Burma's military government's web site report, during the period of 1988 to December 2000, junta's tightly controlled National AIDS program has recorded a cumulative total of 31453 HIV positive cases and 4472 AIDS patients. On the other hand, an independent study in 1999 ⁶ estimated that there were 687,000 Burmese adults living with HIV infections. This translates to about one person in every 29 adult citizens being infected with HIV. The UNAIDS estimated in that same year 530,000 adults and children living with AIDS, or a population prevalence of about one in 50 adults. The illegal drug trade, money laundering and trafficking of sex slaves are ripe in Burma's Border areas. The junta's border protection forces, Na Sa Ka, has been responsible for manipulating such trades. To effectively control the epidemic of HIV infection in Burma, the junta must first change its perception of the roots of HIV problem.

6. POLITICAL CONFLICT

After 14 years since general elections were held in Burma, which resulted a landslide victory for National League for Democracy Party, the military junta continued refusing to hand over power. One of the stated reasons to which the military refusing hand over power is because of the lack of state constitution. The military government had never allowed the parliament to be convened by the representatives elected in the general election in 1990.

The United Nations General Assembly since 1991 has called upon the junta to respect the result of the general election held in 1990. In particular, the UN General Assembly encourages the military junta and the National League for Democracy, the election winning party, to promote national reconciliation in Burma and to start all-inclusive dialogue so as to

⁶ Report by C Beyer, M Razak, Brookmeyer.

solve political conflict. The UN Secretary General has also appointed an envoy to broker dialogue between the two parties.

The National League for Democracy for its part expresses on numerous occasions to participate in an open and transparent dialogue with the junta, and also to work together towards genuine national reconciliation. However, the military junta has made only token cooperation with special envoy of the UN in initiating dialogue.

The major setback to the process of finding dialogue took place on 30 May 2003, when the government-affiliated groups attacked the members of National League for Democracy. Witnesses reports indicate that this attack on the members of National League for Democracy was orchestrated by the military authorities at the high level [the translated witness reports by Burma Action Group(SA) is enclosed here with.]. This has been yet another evidence of military junta refusing to enter dialogue with the opposition.

It is conceivable that the process for reconciliation and dialogue cannot begin unless justice is done for the killing of NLD members on 30 May 2003. The United Nations Security Council should give a clear mandate to UN Secretary General and UN Human Rights Special Rapporteur on Burma to seek justice for the 30 May 2003 killing and the initiative for genuine dialogue between the military junta and the opposition party.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Burma Action Group in South Australia appeal to the United Nations Security Council that the case of Burma be considered. The UN Security Council should take action regarding with Burma to:

- 1. prevent drug-money laundering by the Burmese junta;*
- 2. prevent the Burmese military building up and proliferating of Nuclear Weapons; urge the ASEAN countries to keep their region a nuclear free zone;*
- 3. ensure that the Burmese military government fully cooperate with UN High Commission for Human Rights and UNHCR;*
- 4. . ensure that the Burmese military government stop recruiting child soldiers; halt Burma's military arms built up and placed international armed embargo;*
- 5. . expand the mandates of Human Rights Special Rapporteur and Secretary General in seeking justice for 30 May 2003 killing of NLD members;*
- 6. . actively promote all inclusive dialogue in Burma; and that the Security Council be remained seize of the matters.*