

BURMA: *A Human Rights Disaster and Threat to Regional Security*

"When tyrannical governments like Burma abuse their citizens and deny their rights, it is the responsibility of all free nations to condemn these actions."

—Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice

Over five decades, Burma's military regime has sustained itself through brutalization and unconscionable human rights abuses, resulting in over one million internally displaced people and many more international refugees. The regime further threatens regional stability by ignoring Burma's HIV/AIDS epidemic, and rampant human and narcotics trafficking. Due to this regime's total disregard for its own people, the UN Security Council added Burma to its formal agenda on September 15, 2006. On September 19, 2006, the First Lady of the United States, Mrs. Laura Bush, will host a roundtable discussion in New York to further raise awareness of the crisis in Burma.

Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons

Hundreds of thousands of Burmese refugees have fled conflict and persecution over the last two decades. While some have returned, approximately 200,000 now live in Thailand, Malaysia, India, and Bangladesh. Conditions in Burma continue to deteriorate, reducing hopes for refugees' safe return. As many as 3,000 Karen refugees entered Thailand this year as a result of Burmese military offensives against opposition forces in Karen State. The Burmese government has no programs to assist the nearly one million Burmese who are internally displaced.

The United States provides humanitarian assistance to Burmese refugees (estimated at nearly \$10 million in FY 2006), and is offering resettlement consideration to 2,300 Karen living in Thailand. The United States also plans to resettle many more Burmese refugees in coming years.

HIV/AIDS

According to the UN, at the end of 2005, about 360,000 Burmese were infected with HIV/AIDS – one of the most serious HIV/AIDS epidemics in Asia. In 2002, the United States began supporting international NGOs working on HIV/AIDS in Burma. Our goals include increased access to preventive products and services; increased access to care for people living with HIV/AIDS; and education to foster safer behaviors among priority groups.

An estimated 18 percent of people with HIV require immediate antiretroviral (ARV) treatment, but health services are poor, and access to ARVs is extremely limited. The regime's response to HIV/AIDS remains ambivalent at best, and it has impeded humanitarian operations. In August 2005, the AIDS Global Fund terminated its operations in Burma, as it could no longer ensure that its funds would go to those in need rather than be diverted into regime coffers.

Narcotics Trafficking

The United States determined this year that the Burmese regime has again "failed demonstrably" to meet international counter narcotics obligations. Burma remains a source of deep concern because it is the second largest producer of illicit opium, and it produces and trafficks amphetamine type substances. A 2005 U.S. Government survey found 40,000 hectares producing 380 metric tons of potential heroin. Within the Burmese regime and military, there are serious problems of official corruption, complicity, and lack of control over high-level

drug traffickers, and amphetamine production and consumption. U.S. counter narcotics assistance was suspended in 1988, when the military regime began suppressing the pro-democracy movement.

Trafficking in Persons

The United States has designated Burma a Tier 3 country under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act because the regime does not fully comply with the minimum standards to eliminate trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so. Burma trafficks women, children, and men for forced labor and sexual exploitation, both internally and to several Asian countries. The regime's economic mismanagement, human rights abuses, and forced labor policy contribute to Burma's large human trafficking problem. After the regime began arresting opponents of forced labor, the International Labor Organization (ILO) stopped accepting new cases documenting these abuses in Burma. In 2005, the regime imposed new restrictions on all NGOs and international organizations, undermining their ability to care for trafficking victims. The Burmese

government uses internal forced labor, with reports of the Burmese Army forcibly enlisting thousands of children.

For More Information:

HIV/AIDS

The Joint UN Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS):

www.unaids.org

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria:

www.theglobalfund.org

The Global Business Coalition: www.businessfightsaids.org

Refugees

U.S. Refugee Programs: www.state.gov/g/prm/

Narcotics

International Narcotics Control Strategy Report:

www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/nrcrpt/

On Human Trafficking

U.S. Trafficking in Persons Annual Report:

www.state.gov/g/tip/

BURMA TIMELINE

September 1988: The military regime, now known as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), took power.

May 1990: The National League for Democracy, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won an overwhelming majority of seats in a national election. The regime ignored the election results, arrested political activists and unleashed a campaign to crush the pro-democracy movement. There are over 1,100 political prisoners in Burma. Suu Kyi spent the next several years in and out of detention or house arrest.

May 2003: The regime orchestrated a violent attack on Suu Kyi and her colleagues. Many of her supporters were killed or injured and the regime again placed her under house arrest, where she remains.

December 2005: UN Under Secretary-General for Political Affairs Ibrahim Gambari briefed the UN Security Council (UNSC) on the situation in Burma for the first time.

May 2006: Gambari visited Burma where he met Senior General Than Shwe and Suu Kyi. Immediately after his visit, the SPDC renewed Suu Kyi's house arrest for another year.

September 2006: The US formally requested the UNSC add Burma to its permanent agenda.

September 2006: The SPDC announced plans to resume the National Convention on a new constitution in mid-October. The regime prohibits delegates to the National Convention from debating or meaningfully participating in the process of drafting a new constitution.

September 2006: Burma is added to the UNSC's permanent agenda.

September 2006: First Lady Laura Bush hosts a dialogue on Burma to raise awareness of the crisis and generate support for UNSC action.