

**International Conference on Burma/Myanmar**

**The Role of ASEAN Civil Society in Supporting  
Human Rights and Democracy in Burma**



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**Current Conditions and Ongoing Issues  
In Burma**

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# Introduction

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- After brutally cracking down on last year's demonstrations, the Burmese military govt. appears to believe that they can go back to the situation before the demonstrations.
- The military regime seems to believe that it can maintain power by continuing to use force to eliminate the pro-democracy movement – no dialogue.
- The junta also appears to believe that it can continue to ignore the ethnic groups' demands for greater autonomy - by using (or threatening to use) force against them.
- The government has continued to commit human rights abuses.
- Tension between the two top generals has been growing.
- Will there be demonstrations again?



# Dialogue: Unlikely



- UN Secretary-General's Envoy, Ibrahim Gambari, hasn't been allowed back since last Nov.
- The junta skipped its road map step two where compromise was possible.
- Although Mr. Gambari was told last November that the liaison minister, Aung Kyi, would meet Aung San Suu Kyi every week, it didn't happen.
- Gen. Than Shwe hasn't replied to Aung San Suu Kyi's specific offers on compromises yet; instead he decided to speed up plans for holding a referendum (in May) on the constitution.
- As usual, Gen. Than Shwe's recent speeches on Independence Day, Union Day and Farmers' Day didn't include the issue of dialogue or national reconciliation.
- The Junta uses different ways to try to make Aung San Suu Kyi's party members resign, most of their offices have been forced to close. Aung San Suu Kyi remains under house arrest.
- The referendum law announced last week warns the people not to lobby for boycotting the referendum or criticizing the referendum – 3 years imprisonment.
- According to Foreign Minister, Nyan Win, the new constitution will bar Aung San Suu Kyi from running in the elections scheduled for 2010.



# Greater Autonomy for Ethnic Groups?



- Since 1989, many armed ethnic groups made ceasefires with the Burmese government, but they haven't achieved any political solution yet.
- 2004: the demand of 13 ethnic ceasefire groups for greater autonomy within a unitary state was rejected at the National Convention.
- 2005: A senior ceasefire leader (Gen. Hso Ten) was arrested and two smaller ceasefire groups (Shan State National Army and Palaung State Liberation Party) were forced to disarm.
- Mid-2007: The Kachin Independence Organization's proposal for some autonomy within a unitary state was also not even discussed at the convention.
- Mid-2007: One more divided/small ceasefire group (Shan State Nationalities People's Liberation Organization) was also forced to disarm.
- Recently, various commanders have approached the ceasefire groups telling them to disarm.
- Is there hope for greater autonomy, if there is a change to democracy?



# Human Rights Abuses

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- The junta has continued arresting political activists and journalists. Over 2000 political prisoners are now in prison. Dozens have already died in prison.
- Many monks are still under detention. Many monks at the teaching temples in cities were forced to go back to their native towns and sit exams there.
- Last month, the regime charged the 88 generation student leaders who started the 2007 demonstrations under Law no. 5/96.
- Last month, the house arrest of U Tin Oo, Vice-Chairman of Aung San Suu Kyi's party was extended for another year.
- Last month, a senior Karen leader, Mahn Sha, was assassinated in a Thai border town.
- Since last Sept, there have been more restrictions on UN agencies and international NGOs.
- In rural areas, villagers frequently have to do forced labor on roads, railroads and dams. Soldiers and other officials often extort money and confiscate land from villagers.
- In the civil war zones, the Burma Army burns ethnic minority villagers' houses, destroys their food/farms, rapes women, and tortures and sometimes kills them

# Top two generals agree on everything?



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- Vice Sr. Gen. Maung Aye is less corrupt than Sr. Gen. Than Shwe. Gen. Maung Aye has investigated the corruption of officers close to Gen. Than Shwe.
- Gen. Maung Aye is a more professional soldier than Gen Than Shwe. Maung Aye doesn't like Than Shwe's initiative of the pro-military mass organizations (Union Solidarity and Development Association and *Swan Arr Shin*).
- During the demonstrations: Army's standing order- to use as little fire power as possible. Gen. Than Shwe: Encouraged regional commanders to use firepower decisively. Gen. Maung Aye: Reminded the regional commanders of the standing order. Regional Commands also appeared to respond differently to the order. Family members of Than Shwe and his hardliners were sent abroad. Why?
- Than Shwe has tried to reduce the power of Maung Aye. He removed Maung Aye from the chairman position of the trade council during the demonstrations.
- Than Shwe and the hardliners have so far refused to listen to an intelligence report on the survival problems of the people, while some generals may be aware of the problem.
- Than Shwe surprised Maung Aye and many generals by announcing the referendum.

# More Demonstrations



- Can't rule it out. Why?
- Both the 1988 demonstrations and 2007 demonstrations started and grew unexpectedly to many people including some civil servants.
- Now, the underlying economic problem is unresolved and likely to get worse. The 1988 and 2007 demonstrations were caused by economic hardships.
- But, now people are very fearful, as they were after the crackdown in 1988.
- Unlike after 1988, the fear factor seems to be the only factor preventing the people from taking non-violent action again since there seems to be no alternative outlet for a political change or economic improvement.  
(1988 outlets: possible transfer of power after elections, armed struggle and a better economy after the military announced an open-market economic policy)
- There is also great anger against the government for its crackdown, likely to be to a greater degree and more persistent than in 1988. Why?