

## European Burma Network

15th February 2011

### **Statement on the current situation in Burma, and recommendations to European governments**

Members of the European Burma Network (EBN) met in Prague, Czech Republic, on 12th and 13th February, 2011. The European Burma Network brings together organisations promoting human rights and democracy in Burma, and works in solidarity with Burma's democracy movement.

Members of the EBN remain deeply concerned about the lack of any improvement in the situation of human rights in Burma, and the lack of any progress towards genuine democratisation.

Elections held in Burma in November 2010 had no credibility. They did not meet any internationally accepted standards of being free and fair. Vote rigging on behalf of the main political party established by the military dictatorship, the Union Solidarity and Development Party, was widespread. Furthermore, the election has brought in the 2008 Constitution that is designed to maintain dictatorship.

As such, the results of the election are not credible and do not represent the genuine will of the people of Burma. The Parliaments have no legitimacy and no mandate to speak on behalf of the people of Burma. The chosen President and the Vice-Presidents and the government members, mostly coming from the military, confirm the regime strategy to maintain their grip on power.

In summary, Burma continues to be ruled by a brutal dictatorship which is committing serious human rights abuses, and there is no sign of any willingness to begin the process of change demanded by both the people of Burma and the international community.

#### 1. Political prisoners and human rights abuses

EBN members welcome the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. However, the release should not be interpreted as a sign of any political progress in Burma. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi should not have been in detention in the first place. The United Nations ruled that her detention was in violation of international law. When Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was released in 2002, it was as part of a political dialogue process brokered by the United Nations. No such process is taking place at the moment, and the dictatorship continues to defy calls by the international community, including the European Union, to enter into dialogue.

Since 2007, the number of political prisoners has doubled. Today, they are over 2100 and the dictatorship denies their very existence. The dictatorship also continues its military attacks against ethnic groups in Burma. Abuses that have continued since the election include extrajudicial executions, rape, mass use of forced labour, use of human minesweepers, recruitment of child soldiers, land confiscation, forced displacement and military attacks against civilians. All of these types of abuses constitute possible war crimes and crimes against humanity.

## 2. Sanctions

Given the current situation in Burma, there is no justification for relaxing any of the existing European Union sanctions imposed on Burma's dictatorship, and those associated with it.

All government ministers, past and present, should continue to be automatically placed on the EU visa ban list. To do otherwise would be to send the wrong signal to the dictatorship, and be interpreted as a sign that there has been some kind of change in the political system in Burma, which there has not. All that has changed is the structures which the dictatorship uses to perpetuate its rule.

Given this lack of any genuine change, there is also no justification for lifting the ban on ministerial visits to Burma. This would not only send the wrong signal, but also risks adding to the confused and contradictory messaging which the dictatorship receives from the European Union.

We welcome the recent statement on sanctions by the National League for Democracy, which has called for dialogue with the European Union to discuss how and under what circumstances sanctions might be modified. This includes the setting of clear benchmarks such as the release of all political prisoners. We call on European Union governments to fully abide by the Council Decision on Burma, including not publicly contradicting the agreed Decision, and to start monitoring and enforcing those sanctions which have already been agreed.

## 3. Assistance to Burmese communities and civil society groups

EBN members also remain deeply concerned that the European Commission and other European donors are cutting assistance to refugees from Burma in refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border, and still refusing to fund cross-border aid, which is the only way to reach many of the vulnerable people in ethnic areas where the dictatorship does not allow aid to be delivered. All humanitarian aid to Burma should be increased, including aid to refugees, and cross-border aid. Also human rights and democracy projects should be financed on a larger scale via genuine Burmese independent civil society groups based both inside Burma and along the borders with Thailand, India, Bangladesh and China.

## 4. United Nations Commission of Inquiry

At the recent session of the Universal Periodic Review on Burma at the Human Rights Council, Burma's dictatorship rejected sixteen separate proposals to respect international law, and investigate abuses. No action has been taken in response to the request made in the Council Conclusions in April 2010 that the dictatorship respect international law and investigate abuses.

The European Union must now endorse the recommendations of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Myanmar, and must express public support for a United Nations Commission of Inquiry into possible war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burma. 14 countries have already supported this call, including 10 European countries.

Burma's democracy movement, and the European Union and international community, have repeatedly stated that the solution to the problems in Burma lies in dialogue. It is

the dictatorship which continues to refuse to enter into such dialogue. The European Union must commit itself to doing all in its power to facilitate such dialogue, prioritising the release of all political prisoners, and a nationwide ceasefire, as key benchmarks as part of the dialogue process.

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