



BURMA'S DIRTY WAR

Use this sheet to:

- Find out why Burma engages the Responsibility to Protect
- Hold class/group discussions
- Find out how to take action

Burma's Human Misery

Burma's people have suffered nearly four decades of brutal military repression and civil conflict. Ever since General Ne Win overthrew Burma's last elected government in 1962, which plunged Burma into four decades of isolation, repression and economic stagnation, the Burman-dominated military has ruled by suppressing dissent and promoting division among Burma's minority ethnic groups.

Ironically, in 1997, the regime changed its name from the State Law and Order Restoration Council to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

In 1991, the US imposed economic sanctions and the US, Australia, Canada and the European Union called on the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) – one of Burma's main trading partners – to put pressure on the government. But China and the ASEAN nations, who were eager to take advantage of Burma's strategic position and vast economic potential, turned a blind eye and formed close economic and political links with Burma.

More recently, in its campaign to destroy links between the people and resistance groups, the army has targeted Karen, Karenni and Shan villages along the Thai/Burma border. First the villagers are forcibly relocated to Government-controlled areas and then, to prevent them returning, their fields and homes are burnt, and their animals and food stocks are taken to feed the army or destroyed.

Many are conscripted for forced labour, where they act as porters or slave labour for the military or to clear land mines in advance of the army. If they refuse to work or take part in the regime's campaigns against the opposition groups, they are beaten, raped or tortured, and often killed.

Despite US and EU sanctions, the suspension of Japanese aid,



O God, be not far from me: O my God, make haste for my help. Psalms 71:12.. In the burnt-out remains of her village, a Burmese child crouches among her family's last possessions. Photo: Christian World Service, National Council of Churches in Australia.

spiralling inflation, declining investment and near economic ruin, the Army's campaign escalated in scope and ferocity in 2006. It appears that the Army used an 18 month ceasefire period to reinforce military infrastructure along the Thai/Burma border, allowing them to wage increasingly severe attacks throughout the rainy season – traditionally a time of respite for rural villagers. This relentless onslaught prevented villagers from planting rice, and they now face the very real threat of starvation in 2007.

There are over a million internally displaced people in Burma and over 200,000 refugees and asylum seekers in neighbouring countries, including 140,000 who are confined to camps in Thailand (mostly ethnic minorities and some pro-democracy activists); 40,000 in India (mostly Chin and Naga); and 53,000 in Bangladesh (mostly Rohingya). Over 40,000 women have been sold into Thailand's sex industry.



The Responsibility to Protect in Burma

The conflict in Burma is one of the clearest engagements of the international Responsibility to Protect. Not only is the Military Regime “unable or unwilling” to protect its population from crimes against humanity; it relentlessly pursues their destruction. Refugees and displaced persons fleeing the violence report widespread torture, rape, forced labour, unlawful killings, the militarization of internment camps, and the recruitment of child soldiers; all of which are war crimes and collectively constitute crimes against humanity; thus engaging the international Responsibility to Protect.



raising human rights abuses while continuing trade talks.

While this may be the first of many non-intervention steps to be taken in accordance with R2P, the recent

escalation of violence and on-going nature of the conflict demonstrates the regimes' resistance to these efforts. ASEAN has recently voted to reconsider its traditional policy of non-intervention, and targeted sanctions against military leaders, that do not unduly affect civilians, may prove effective.

It is important to remember that even at the highest level, military intervention is only one of a number of reaction measures. Often, it takes only the real possibility of intervention to compel a military regime to comply with international mandates. It is thus crucial that a framework for Security Council action be developed, including a definitive timeline for the Burmese Military regime to cease committing war crimes and an agreement restricting the use of the veto power by China; lest political interests continue to prolong the inhumane suffering of Burma's displaced people.

Ultimately, Security Council action remains the crucial missing link in a definitive global stance on Burma. Without it, the Burmese Military Regime will continue to act with impunity.

Though the time for prevention has passed, members of the international community recognised their responsibility to react in a draft Security Council Resolution in 2007, which called on Burma to cease military attacks on civilians, end human rights violations and cooperate with international efforts to end the decades old conflict. However, both China and Russia used their veto power to block the resolution, on the grounds that the situation in Burma 'is not a threat to international security.' This excuse is groundless, because the responsibility to protect doctrine, which both countries voted to adopt, expressly makes these crimes a matter of international peace and security.

China has interests in Burma's natural gas reserves and is planning a trans-Burma pipeline to import oil from the Middle East. Russia is likely concerned that similar US led pressure may soon be directed towards Zimbabwe, on whom they also rely for natural resources.

What Action does R2P call for?

Both the Australian Government and ASEAN have traditionally favored a “constructive engagement” approach towards the Burmese Military Regime, which has largely meant ‘quietly’

TAKE ACTION ON Burma!

How to get involved:

Write a letter to the Minister for Foreign Affairs requesting the Australian Government:

- **Support Security Council action on Burma,**
- **Take a tougher stand on Burma, including imposing targeted sanctions, and engaging in regional dialogue with ASEAN,**
- **Adopt the principles of R2P as a normative framework for dealing with atrocities.**

Voice your concerns in the Federal Elections. Find out where candidates stand, and encourage discussion on Burma and our responsibility to protect the world's most vulnerable people.

Raise funds for Christmas Bowl and earmark gifts for the Thai-Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), which is run almostly entirely by Burmese refugees, and provides basic food and relief supplies for 165,900 refugees in the camps along the border. As a result of the army's interference with rice planting in 2006, TBBC, now more than ever, is often all that stands in the way of starvation for these refugees.

Call CWS toll free on 1800 025 101.

See the Burma Study and Action Guide in the 2006 RMS Kit for more ideas or read the education sheets on Burmese refugees from Thailand resettling in Australia: www.ncca.org.au/cws/refugees