

## Aung Din Testimony

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom Public Hearing

"After the Saffron Revolution: Religion, Repression, and the U.S. Policy Options for Burma"

Rayburn House Office Building 2200

December 3, 2007, 2:30-4:30 PM

Testimony of Aung Din, Executive Director, U.S. Campaign for Burma

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Mr. Chairman, Commissioners,

Thank

you very much for holding this public hearing to discuss the situation in my country, Burma and the U.S. policy options. From the previous witnesses and the video footage, you have learned more about the Saffron Revolution in September, led by Buddhist Monks, which have waken up the international community to pay attention to the suffering of the people of Burma under the brutal military junta.

Please

note that the Saffron Revolution is not an isolated event of Burma. Actually, it is a part of the ongoing struggle of the people of Burma to restore democracy and human rights, including religious freedom, which has started in 1988 and which will end only when we reach our destination.

The military junta persists in crushing all opposition to its rule and prohibiting any freedom of assembly, association, expression, and movement as well as religious freedom. Currently, about two thousand political detainees remain behind bars, including the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. The use of torture and other cruel, inhumane and degrading punishments, exploitation of prisoners as forced laborers and death in custody remains widespread.

Moreover, the military junta continues to target ethnic minorities through its "Four Cuts" policy, aimed at cutting off all supplies of food, funds, recruits and intelligence to ethnic resistance groups. Forced relocations, forced labor and all forms of abuses against the ethnic population are an essential part of the junta's systematic campaign to control ethnic areas in the country. One of these abuses is forcing ethnic populations; many of them are mostly devotees of Christianity and other religions, to convert to Buddhism and destroying Churches and other places of worship.

To date, over 3,200 villages in ethnic areas have been destroyed, resulting in the displacement of over 500,000 ethnic populations inside Burma, as well as the exodus of more than a million refugees to neighboring countries. In areas of armed conflict in eastern Burma, anti-personnel landmines are deliberately used to target civilian communities, sexual violence is rampantly used as an instrument of control, including systematic rape of ethnic women and girls and taking of sex slaves as porters for the military, and children are forcibly recruited into the armed forces. Burma's armed forces, known as the Tatmadaw, maintain the largest number of child soldiers in the world, amounting to over 70,000. The junta also continues to use detainees as porters for the armed forces and commit abuses with impunity, including large-scale destruction of food supplies and means of production, murder, enforced disappearance, and arbitrary arrest and detention.

According to the Thailand Burma Border Consortium, the military junta stations 273 battalions, with over 150,000 soldiers which is 30% of its total strength, in Eastern Burma alone, which is the home of Karen, Shan, Karenni, Mon and other ethnic groups. In 2007 alone, TBBC reported that about 76,000 ethnic populations were forced to leave their homes and at least 167 villages were destroyed by the military junta. These reports have been corroborated by high resolution commercial satellite imagery taken before and after the villages were destroyed. These images have been taken by the American Association for the Advancement of Science since late 2006. AAAS has obtained and analyzed high-resolution commercial satellite imagery covering about 2,000 square kilometers of Papun, Toungoo, and Dooطلا Districts in Karen State, a small area in Shan State, and a refugee camp on Thailand-Burma border. You can find some of the satellite imageries in this room.

Mr. Chairman, Commissioners,

As I mentioned earlier, the Saffron Revolution is just a part of an ongoing campaign of the people of Burma to restore democracy and human rights and they will continue their non-violent struggle until they

achieve the freedoms they want, freedoms they deserve and freedoms they want to enjoy and exercise without fear. I believe the United States has a unique position to help the people of Burma by increasing pressure against the military junta and doubling its diplomatic effort to organize international community to stand together for the people of Burma.

My particular recommendation for the United States Congress is to approve two legislations, Senate Resolution S. 2257, known as Burmese Democracy Promotion Act of 2007, introduced by Senator Biden and McConnell and House Resolution H. 3890, Block Burmese JADE (Junta's Anti-Democratic Efforts) Act of 2007, introduced by Congressmen Tom Lantos, as soon as possible. These resolutions will help strengthen the current US economic sanctions against the Burmese military junta effectively.

My recommendations to the US Administration are as follows.

(1)  
To implement sanctions, economic sanctions and targeted financial sanctions, effectively and to coordinate with Governments of the EU, Canada and Australia, which also impose sanctions on the Burmese military junta. I would like to suggest the US Government appoint a full-time sanctions coordinator for Burma, as the US did in late 1990s against Milosevic's regime.

(2) I also would like to suggest the U.S. Government target more businessmen in Burma, who are providing finances to Generals and their families. So far, the U.S. named seven Burmese businessmen, including Te Za and five entities of them under financial sanctions. The Australian Government also imposed targeted financial sanctions against 418 Burmese, in which 40 businessmen are included. I would suggest the U.S. Government cooperate with Governments of the EU and Australia to impose financial and banking sanctions against more crony businessmen in Burma.

(3)  
We are seeing the policy shift among Governments of China, India and ASEAN on Burma, as the U.S. has increased its diplomatic effort to organize these countries to take more responsible stance. We want the U.S. Government to maintain the UN Security Council as the venue to discuss the situation in Burma and double its diplomatic effort in organizing these countries to be able to have a collective voice and take effective action on Burma, beginning with a binding resolution from the UN Security Council, which will effectively impose an arms embargo.

Thank you,

Aung Din

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