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Burma

The Burmese crisis, its roots and the urgency of solidarity

- IV Online magazine - 2007 - IV393 - October 2007 -

Publication date: Sunday 28 October 2007

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Demonstrations are rare things in Burma. Under the yoke of a military junta which is among the most repressive in the world, the population has not forgotten the violence of the repression of the demonstrations for democracy in 1988 which ended in the death of at least 3,000 demonstrators and thousands of arrests.

A shorter version of the article was published on 8 October 2007

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/Burmanew.jpg>]

Yet, despite a tight lockdown of the country by paramilitary militias, the Burmese people, who live in extreme poverty in medieval economic conditions, the absence of democracy and everyday injustice, have again defied the junta. The demonstrations have been the most significant in twenty years. Street marches began following an increase in the price of fuel by two thirds, the doubling of the price of diesel and a fivefold rise in the price of compressed natural gas in mid-August in Rangoon. Burmese people were shocked by this brutal and sudden increase, condemning a number of them to spend nearly half their wages to pay the costs of public transport (which increased owing to the increased fuel prices) or to go to work on foot (when possible).

The military junta had anticipated these protest movements and had alerted its militias to intimidate the demonstrators. Despite this, peaceful street marches, initiated in general by students, took place daily in numerous Burmese towns. Until recently the army and riot police did not appear in public. The first demonstrations were repressed by thugs from the Association of the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) and by the paramilitary group “Swan Arr Shin” (“the all powerful”), organisations supported by the government. There were also reports that the regime had used hooligans and criminals released from prison for this purpose [1]. In the early weeks, hundreds of peaceful demonstrators mobilising against the harsh economic conditions were arrested by the police and heavy jail sentences were pronounced [2]. Journalists were forbidden to cover the events and members of the National League for Democracy (NLD), one of whose main leaders is Aung San Suu Kyi, were closely monitored, tracked down and arrested [3]. The country’s main political activists, many of whom belong to the NLD, were arrested from the end of August, like Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi [4]. Others took flight like Su Su Nway, an activist for workers’ rights [5] and Phyu Phyu Thin, a member of an association which assists people with AIDS. .

The monks with the people

At the beginning of September, the demonstrations took a new course with the participation of Buddhist monks in the town of Pakokku in the district of Magwe. Around 500 monks carrying placards “the monks with the people” participated in a march demanding the abrogation of the price increases and the liberation of the imprisoned demonstrators. The death of one of them in the violent repression which followed led to fury among monks who seized several official representatives who had come to excuse the repression they had suffered [6]. That was a turning point in the mobilisation, the demands moving to the political terrain. Following this confrontation, massive demonstrations developed everywhere in the main towns of the country, the monks demonstrating first alone to protect the people, then with their support. The monks, generally very young, and organised in an “alliance of all Burmese monks” advanced three main demands: apologies from the government for the violence they had suffered in Pakokku, economic reforms and the liberation of all political prisoners including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. The pro-democracy activists and the people relied greatly on the commitment of the Buddhist monks and on their support because they were very respected and had on numerous occasions played a significant progressive role in politics. They mobilised very early against the British colonists and their key role among students during the uprising of 1988 remains in all memories. For the military junta, the intervention against the monks in Pakokku was particularly risky and perhaps represented a “slip-up” on the part of some local thugs. Having neither political nor moral legitimacy in

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the eyes of the population that they have enslaved and oppressed for 45 years, the ruling military have tried to create this legitimacy through the promotion and protection of the Buddhist tradition [7].

In 1979, a Supreme Council of Monks (Sangha Maha Nayaka) and councils at every level (villages, boroughs, districts) were created with the goal of controlling the monks and the monasteries. Every traditional ceremony, construction of monastery or temple has to be approved by the local representative of the Sangha Maha Nayaka. Monks who refuse to join the council are strictly controlled. Meanwhile, the military offer a host of offerings to the monks and monasteries who accept their authority. In a country profoundly marked by the Buddhist faith, the military are also preoccupied by the necessity of acquiring “merits” to avoid the consequences in a future life of their current brutality [8]. It’s easy to understand the impact of the boycott of offerings from the military and their families organised by the monks on the junta, which dares to call itself the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) [9] and why it multiplied its warnings to the monks to remain outside of political events.

Militarisation of society

The control of the military is not limited to religious congregations. Since the coup by General Ne Win in 1962, the Tatmadaw (the Burmese army) has dominated nearly every aspect of the political, economic and social life of the country. Since then, no social mobility or opportunity takes place outside of the army. The military control, at local or national level, the redistribution of wealth and land. On the economic level, the army controls two of the most powerful Burmese companies, the Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings (UMEH) and the Myanmar Economic Cooperation (MEC). The declared objectives of the UMEH are to “meet the needs of the military personnel and of their family” and to “become the main logistical support of the army”. The goal of the MEC is to “transfer the funds allocated to the defence of the public sector towards the private”. It is authorised to do business in virtually every area it wishes. All foreign investment in Burma has to be approved by the Myanmar Investment Commission (MIC), controlled directly by the junta, which allows them to channel the profits from investment towards companies dominated by the military [10]. Total and other companies which invest or have invested massively in Burma have some nerve to say that they are not practicing politics. The Burmese do not see a penny of the money, which on the contrary enriches the junta and perpetuates its power.

In September 1993, to consolidate its power over society, the military regime created the USDA, presented as an organisation of civil society but having direct links with the chief general Than Shwe, who became head of the junta in 1992 and is the most powerful man in the country. This association now claims 22.8 million members, or nearly half the population of the country. In fact, membership of the association is presented as compulsory for students and citizens, many of whom have been enrolled as members without knowing it. On the other hand, in refusing to join the association, one is exposed to harassment and opportunities in the educational or professional field are closed. Inside the association, student members are encouraged to monitor the activities of their classmates. To be a member of the USDA gives access to English and computing courses as well as extra curricular and sporting activities. In 1996, the regime transformed the association into a force against the student members of the NLD. Since then USDA members have often been in the vanguard of repression. It was notably them who attacked Aung San Suu Kyi in 2003 and tried to kill her [11].

Financial stakes versus human rights

Unlike in 1988, the current crisis in Burma has a high profile in the international media. That has allowed knowledge of the conditions in which Burmese live and the extremely oppressive nature of the ruling regime to be widely circulated. The courage of the demonstrators faced with the threats that they incur (beating, torture, prison, death and so on) no longer has to be demonstrated. That is why one would expect firmer condemnation from the international community, a support based more firmly on the democratic forces of the country and above all actions which really put pressure on the junta.

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The reaction has unhappily not been at that level, human rights and democracy having little weight faced with the financial stakes. Outside of the United States, no country or organisation announced strict provisions liable to make the junta rethink its position.

On September 6, the European Parliament condemned the violations of human rights and accused the Burmese junta of being a threat to Southeast Asia... but added at the same time, through the voice of its commissioner Vivian Reding, "Isolation will only make the population pay a greater price... We do not believe that additional restrictive measures will push the government in the desired direction or will alleviate the suffering of the people." [12]. Although having a common position on Burma, establishing "a legitimate civilian government, which respects human rights" [13], the members of the EU agreed on the lowest common denominator. If some states like Britain, the Czech Republic, Holland, Ireland and Denmark are favourable to a firmer policy towards Burma, France, Germany, Austria, Spain and Poland have until now opposed it. Their position is explained in particular by the economic interests that they have developed in the country. Despite the regular appeals for the liberation of Aung San Suu Kyi, French diplomacy, for example, is still attached to the defence of French financial investment in the country. It has supported the Total company, one of the most important investors in Burma, accused of using forced labour [14]. The enterprise directs the operation of gas fields in Yadana, which bring the Burmese government between 200 and 450 million US dollars annually, or around 7% of the estimated budget of the Burmese state [15].

The current measures from the European commission include an embargo on the sale of arms and defence equipment, a ban on any non-humanitarian aid and a ban on investment in certain public enterprises. The strategic sectors which bring in money for the junta and the help it stay in power, like lumber, precious stones, minerals, gas and oil are not affected by the various banning measures [16] which are to say the least ineffective, indeed hypocritical. One cannot envisage an effective sanctions policy without a total ban on investment in the country, or at least a ban on investment in the areas vital for the junta.

From a political viewpoint, the European Union has not shown very much more determination. In recent years, the European commission has reduced its subsidies to projects aimed at the development of human rights and democracy. According to the association Info-Birmanie, the EU has only supported "softening" the draft resolution on Burma at the UN Security Council in early 2007 [17].

Regional support

In Asia, the Burmese democrats have little chance of obtaining better support. The neighbouring countries, notably India and China, being big consumers of the raw materials that Burma possesses in abundance, have decided to close their eyes to the systematic violations of human and children's' rights. It is true that in India and in China workers and child workers are also fiercely exploited. The geographic situation of Burma is of great interest to India which seeks to implement its "eastward" policy and to China which sees the possibility of obtaining an opening to the Indian Ocean and thus avoid the strait of Malacca for routing its supply of Middle East oil.

China and Burma have always been good neighbours. The first country outside of the "Communist" bloc to recognise the People's Republic of China in 1949, Burma was also the first to sign a treaty of friendship and non-aggression in 1961 with its neighbour, while its leaders were the first to express their sympathy to the Beijing government following the repression at Tiananmen Square in 1989. In 1991, the Chinese leaders were the first to sell arms, planes, frigates and other military equipment to the Burmese junta [18]. China has also invested a lot in Burmese infrastructure (ports on the Indian Ocean, roads and so on). It is a big importer of wood and minerals from Burma. Since early 2007, support from China for Burma has considerably deepened with a view to strengthening economic and financial links, intended to ensure the development of Yunnan, the Chinese province bordering Burma. At the political level, the Chinese see in Burma a Trojan horse inside ASEAN, which they consider too influenced by the United States.

Beijing, with much caution, has recently added its voice to the international pressure against the repression, but it maintains its policy of “non-interference in the domestic affairs” of Burma. China has quickly wished that Burma “begins a democratic process appropriate for the country” and restores “internal stability as quickly as possible”. The well being of the Burmese people has little place therein. Beijing is very nervous because the current instability could threaten China’s considerable investments in Burma and destabilise the border regions between the two countries, leading to significant population movements – more than a million Chinese have moved to Burma recently [19].

India waited until September 26, the first days where the Burmese junta sent the troops and killed several monks and civilians, to “express its concern” on the repression of the mobilisations. Questioned on the close relations between the Burmese junta and India by the US and British ambassadors during a visit to Thailand, the Indian foreign minister replied that “The cardinal principle of our foreign policy is non-interference in the domestic affairs of any country,.. It is essentially the job of the people in the country to decide what government they want.” [20]. The Burmese people, bloodily repressed when they demand democracy and a change of government will appreciate it. The policy of support between Jawaharlal Nehru and Aung San, heroes of Burmese national independence is a long way off. In a context of great tension and with risks of ferocious repression, on September 23 India sent its oil minister, Murli Deora, to Burma [21]. India wanted to see to what extent it could exploit energy deposits discovered in Burma and to try to change Burma’s decision to sell to China and not India the gas that two Indian companies exploit jointly with Burmese enterprises in the off shore deposits A1 and A3 in the Indian Ocean. India is determined at all costs to reinforce its relations with Burma to limit China. New Delhi plans a number of projects going from the construction of a pipe line between the Burmese coast and India to the development of a port in the bay of Bengal allowing its Northern States (only 2% of whose land is attached to the subcontinent) to have an access to trade routes and to develop Indian policy (“Look East Policy”) in the direction of the ASEAN countries [22]. That Burma is considered as a pariah state by the international community has not stopped India from seeking agreements on military cooperation with the junta. Thus, according to Human Rights Watch, India has offered light combat helicopters, state of the art equipment for fighter planes and naval surveillance planes in exchange for a policy against the Indian rebels who use Burma as a rear base for their independence movement.

Japan, Thailand and South Korea have not stayed still. Since the 1950s, Japan has been the first source of “development aid” for Burma. From February 17, 1989, Tokyo recognised the SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council) [23], and resumed aid, suspended before the coup d’Etat for reasons of political instability [24]. In the current crisis, although calling for “restraint” from the junta, Japan has indicated that it would not join any possible trade sanctions against Burma and this despite images showing a Japanese reporter being killed by a Burmese soldier during a demonstration. Japan describes its commercial investments as a “official development aid” (ODA) that it will not reconsider. ODA is indeed the means used by Japan to exert influence in the region while respecting the constitutional ban on sending military forces abroad [25].

Thailand is the third biggest investor in Burma and the first destination for Burmese natural gas which has brought the junta 1 billion US dollars for the year 2005-06 alone, an amount which doubled the following year in great part thanks to the price increase. Thailand does not hesitate to pillage Burmese resources with the complicity of the ruling junta. In 2005, the Thai state electricity company Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) signed a memorandum of understanding with the junta opening the way to the construction of several dams on the river Salween, which borders Thailand and Burma, so as to supply Thai industry with electricity and water. If they are built, these dams, beyond enriching the members of the junta, would create an ecological and human disaster. The first dam, Hatgyi Dam, is envisaged in a zone of Karen State where the military have violently expelled villagers and destroyed their households. In 2006, the Burmese military attacked Karen villagers with mortars to expel them from the region. They only spared adults and children to work on the dam construction sites. Many women and girls have been raped by the soldiery. A great part of the territory controlled by Karen rebels will be flooded by the dam. A good business for the Burmese military. Another dam envisaged in Shan State will, after construction, be the highest dam in Asia. It is planned in a zone where Shan civilians have also been brutally displaced in the hundreds of thousands since 1996. Whereas the cutting of teak is now banned in Thailand, the latter country imports quantities of this rare wood from Burma. Teak represents the second biggest official resource of the junta with 427 million dollars in

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2004-2005. Its exploitation, legal and illegal, leads to the disappearance of primary forests at such a rhythm that these ecosystems could be definitively destroyed by 2020 [26].

Finally, South Korea is a perfect illustration of the hypocrisy and double talk that numerous countries employ in relation to Burma.

Korea, whose population is very sensitive to the question of human rights, has forbidden the sale of arms to Burma. Despite the threat of sanctions that it incurs, the firm Daewoo International has exported military equipment and technology and built an arms factory on Burmese territory. Its president at the time, Lee Tae-Yong has just been prosecuted for this. On the other hand, Daewoo International, which holds 60% of three natural gas fields in Burma, has just discovered a new deposit of 219.2 billion cubic metres of exploitable gas, the biggest deposit ever discovered by a Korean enterprise and the equivalent of 7 years gas consumption for the whole of South Korea. The Korean government quickly let it be known that it wished to see the gas arrive in its country [27]

Finally, numerous states don't trade directly with Burma, but sell arms and all sorts of equipment that the junta uses for military ends, through countries like Switzerland, Singapore or Pakistan, which then resell them to the Burmese military junta. [28]

Policy of "constructive engagement"

The Burmese dictatorship essentially owes its survival to the huge financial investments that states like India, China, and France make in the country. Attempts to bring pressure at the political level are hanging fire. The policy of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) [29] towards Burma is a brilliant illustration of this. Burma became a member of ASEAN in 1997. The members of the association, and particularly Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore, will defend their position faced with international criticisms explaining that a state which violates human rights should not remain isolated and in a position to continue its abuses. According to the Malaysian prime minister of the time, Mahatir Mohammed "if Burma is outside of it, she is free to behave as a hooligan or a pariah, whereas if she is in, she will be subject to certain norms" [30] It is what ASEAN has called the "policy of constructive engagement" supposed to lead the junta on the path of democratic reforms. In 10 years of belonging to ASEAN, the junta has shown no will for democratic reform. Its policy of repression against political opponents and ethnic minorities has even deepened since the year 2000 as if its membership had the value of a moral guarantee. The continual flood of Burmese refugees to India and Thailand in particular, the drugs traffic, the development of the AIDS virus and more recently the lack of control of bird flu threaten the safety of the whole region. Despite that, several member states of ASEAN continue to develop trade relations with the Burmese government as if nothing was wrong and are not ready to sacrifice them.

A cumulation of sad records

The ruling military junta in Burma has never had any other objectives than its personal enrichment and its maintenance in power. No policy favourable to the economic development of the country and the improvement of the living standards of the people has ever been implemented since the overthrow of the democratically elected government of U Nu in March 1962 [31]. The different military juntas have on the contrary systematically developed rackets of every kind and the pillage of the country's natural resources.

Dozens of years of reforms under the banner of "the Burmese road to Socialism" [32] have led to the quasi-ruin of the economy and the collapse of institutions like education and health. The economy is so backward that Burma appears among the poorest countries and the "least developed in the world". (source United Nations).

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The only institutions still existing in the country are the army and the clergy. Burma holds some sad records:

* It holds the absolute record for forced enrolment of children in the army. According to the association Coalition to Stop The Use of Child Soldiers, there would be as many as 20% of child soldiers, including some as young as 11 (figures for 2004) for an army estimated at 380,000 to 400,000 members.

* Tens of thousands of civilians are forcibly enrolled for projects like roads, bridges, airports. The work is free and compulsory. If a person cannot do it, they pay a fine or must send somebody (man, woman or child) to do the work in their place. This “form of modern slavery” as the International Labour Organisation has characterised it has served companies like Total and Unocal (since bought by Chevron) on the site of Yadana, despite the denials of Bernard Kouchner paid 25,000 euros in 2003 by an office of consultants to whitewash Total of any accusations [33]

* The Burmese army is champion in human rights violations. In its struggle against insurgent minorities (Karen and Shan in particular), it uses summary executions, the rape of women and children, torture, forced removals, and pillage. It torches villages, burns livestock and food resources of villagers, kills health workers who try to help them [34].

* In 2006, Burma was classed 164 out of 169 nations in terms of freedom of the press (source Reporters sans frontières).

* Burma is the second biggest world producer of opium and the first of amphetamines apparently thanks to the complicity of its police and army. Drugs are channelled abroad via India, China, Thailand and Bangladesh, creating appalling situations. Because of widespread use of injected drugs, the border region between China and Burma has one of the highest HIV infection rates in Asia. On the Indian side, the absence of adequate responses on the part of India and Burma [35] as well as the absence of cooperation between the two countries have led to a catastrophic humanitarian situation. Nearly 730 villages from the state of Mizoram are affected by the use of drugs. 60% of the Singpho tribe in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh are dependent and there are no less than 50,000 addicts in the Indian state of Manipur [36]. The situation is hardly any more inspiring along the Burmese-Thai frontier. The United Wa State Army (UWSA) has obtained, in exchange for a ceasefire agreement in 1989, a guarantee that the junta closes its eyes to the production and trafficking in drugs that it carries out. Originally settled in Shan state along the Chinese frontier, the Wa have been authorised to establish themselves in the states bordering the Thai frontier where they have extended their “trade”. From 2001, Thaksin Shinawatra, then prime minister of Thailand, led a political turn in the tumultuous historic relations between the two countries, undertaking a policy of “economic agreements beneficial to the two parties”. Although having launched a “war on drugs” which has led to more than 2,000 extra-judicial murders in Thailand, Thaksin limited the activities of the Thai air force to the frontier so as not to hinder the activities of the Wa drug traffickers [37].

Education and health sacrificed

One of the most dramatic aspects of the balance sheet of the dictatorship concerns education and health. Officially primary schooling is free but the sector does not dispose of sufficient financial means to function. Books, exercise books, pencils and costs of maintenance of the school are charged to the parents. In a country where the majority lives on 1 dollar per day, the absolute poverty threshold according to the world Bank, the consequence is that the level of education of the population is extremely low. “For the years 1998 and 1999, the state devoted less than 7% of its expenses to education against 49% to its army” [38]. According to the statistics of UNICEF- whose data concerning Burma are subject to caution because the sources come essentially from the Burmese government- 79% of children complete an entire cycle of primary teaching. This rate includes re-enrolments, it should be understood that less than half of the pupils reach the last year of primary teaching, which a Unicef report confirms. Still according to these sources, only a little more than a third of pupils have access to secondary teaching. From the uprising of

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1988 until 2000, the universities were closed more than they were open. It is one of the means employed by the military junta to try to contain the opposition in student circles [39].

According to a joint report of university researchers from Berkeley and Johns Hopkins [40], the policy of “public health” of the Burmese junta poses a problem for health at the national, regional and world level. Health expenditure is among the lowest in the world. Only 3% of the state budget is allocated to health expenditure. The annual budget for the prevention and treatment of HIV is 22,000 dollars per year for a population of around 50 million. As a consequence, life expectancy is no higher than 61 and the infant mortality rate is 76‰ (sources Unesco 2004). In comparison, Indonesia in 2004 had a life expectancy of 67 and an infant mortality rate of 30%.

The health system has been rendered incapable of responding to the country’s serious health problems. Malaria, HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis are widespread. In 2005, 34% of the cases of tuberculosis in the country were resistant to all forms of treatment, a figure twice as high as in the neighbouring countries like Thailand. Nearly 90% of the population lives in zones infected by malaria (half of the deaths due to malaria in Asia are localised in Burma). The report reveals that nearly 70% of anti-malaria medicaments sold in Burma are counterfeits or wrongly dosed, which increases the risks of resistance to the disease, a problem which also exists for tuberculosis. Since the putsch of 1988, hundreds of thousands of Burmese citizens have been displaced or have become refugees in the bordering countries, notably Thailand, Bangladesh and India. In these countries, most Burmese have not obtained the status of refugees. More than 2 million Burmese live clandestinely in Thailand, against only 140,000 having official refugee status. This situation contributes to the emergence or re-emergence of diseases like tuberculosis, dengue or syphilis in the bordering countries. The absence of recognition of refugee status obliges millions of Burmese immigrant workers to live in clandestinity, prostitute themselves or accept dangerous and underpaid work. Access to care is denied to them and their great mobility, due to clandestinity, limits the capacity of NGOs to bring them help. That contributes to the spreading of infections like the AIDS virus. This has taken such proportions that the Thai minister of health has had to admit that it threatens the Thai public health system [41]. This situation has worsened since 2005 with the hardening of the junta’s policy towards NGOs and charity associations, limiting their capacity to work in the country and leading to the withdrawal of certain associations like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Médecins Sans Frontière (MSF).

Help the Burmese people, now!

Since it has been in power, the Burmese junta has only trampled down the most elementary rights of the Burmese people. One cannot credit it with any will to make reforms or re-establish a civilian government. The recent national convention convoked with the goal of drawing up a new constitution is only another political farce which will allow the junta to strengthen its power still further behind a semblance of a participatory process. The military have very carefully controlled the whole of the process, chosen 99% of the delegates, ruled out opponents, banned questions, suggestions, remarks from delegates. The latter were forbidden to communicate with the press. The result is a written “constitution” by the generals for the generals [42] without any hope of change or improvement of the situation.

The suffering of the Burmese people has only worsened and the UN and governmental appeals to “moderation” are another scandal. Undoubtedly several hundred civilians and monks have been killed in the violent repression of past weeks and thousands of people have been arrested. But on the contrary in 1988, millions of people around the world have witnessed massacres of civilians demonstrating peacefully for the most basic demands: the right to live decently, liberty... The governments which support the Burmese junta are this time clearly morally condemned. China, India, Russia but also the members of ASEAN, South Korea, Japan can no longer hide their hypocrisy.

ASEAN, for example, has expressed its “revulsion” at the violence of the junta, but gives no concrete sign showing that it will take the least measure. At least, all these countries can no longer continue their lucrative trade with the junta and the pillage of the natural resources of the country behind the scenes.

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The United Nations, the European Union and the United States have also promptly reacted to the repression of demonstrators. Appeals to “restraint” and the “use of peaceful means to restore stability” are nonetheless hypocritical. Who can believe that one of the most ferocious dictatorships in the world, whose head Than Shwe is a paranoid maniac, will be intimidated by such timorous words?

Big European and US companies like Total and Chevron have been established in Burma for many years, too many years. Their trade and activities directly enrich the junta. The people are condemned to forced labour, fear and misery.

This situation is intolerable.

China can play a key role in forcing the Burmese soldiers to change. But is not alone in being able to unblock the situation as many have a tendency to say, allowing them to avoid their own responsibilities.

* In all countries, pressures should be exerted to ban trade and financial investment with the junta. Of course, if one company withdraws, another is ready to take its place... Perhaps, but the withdrawal of a company like Total can have a real impact for some months for the junta without affecting the situation of the people who do not benefit from these cash flows. Moreover, what moral justification can be made for doing business with this dictatorship?

* At the level of the European Union sanctions should be extended, notably through a ban on investment in the most lucrative sectors for the junta: rare woods, minerals, oil and gas. Also all trade with Burma should be banned.

* Without delay, a boycott should be organised of companies like Total which are present in Burma.

* At the international level, the United Nations can no longer simply request “a peaceful dialogue between the two parties”. They should explicitly condemn the exactions of the junta and do everything to ensure that a civilian government is rapidly set up. This government should take the emergency social measures the people need, and re-establish democratic liberties allowing the speedy election of a genuine constituent assembly bringing together all the components of Burmese society.

* The only aid authorised should be humanitarian aid which does not fall under the control of the junta or the associations it controls.

* China has a real influence on the Burmese junta. As the 2008 Beijing Olympics approach, it is very concerned about its reputation and does not really want to be associated with the most vicious dictatorships. It is possible to bring pressure on the Chinese government by organising a campaign stating clearly that the philosophy of the Olympic games is in no way compatible with the repression of democratic freedoms in China or in Burma [\[43\]](#).

[1] “Burma’s Democracy Challenge Flickers Out”, Aung Zaw, The Irrawaddy Online. September 3, 2007. It is a traditional technique of the Burmese junta to “release” petty criminals on street demonstrations”

[2] In the town of Taungkok in Arakan State a demonstrator, Soe Win, was sentenced to 4 years in prison for demonstrating alone with a placard calling for the liberation of political activists, including Aung San Suu Kyi, and for the excommunication from the Buddhist faith of junta leader general Than Shwe. “Burma Protests: the Situation on September 12. The Irrawaddy Online.

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[3] "Myanmar. The authorities should allow peaceful demonstrations". Amnesty International. August 31, 2007.

[4] Paw U Tun, alias Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi are two leaders of the group of students of the 88 generation. They had helped organise the big demonstrations of 1988. The military regime had then responded by killing at least 3,000 students and activists. Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi were released in 2004 and 2005 after having spent 15 years behind bars and endured years of torture and mistreatments. The list of 14 main leaders arrested was published on the site of the World Organisation Against Torture (WOAT)

[5] Hundreds of thousands of people in Burma/Myanmar are subject to forced labour and other human rights violations or live under the permanent threat of being subjected to it. The continuous use of forced labour is often accompanied by torture and other types of physical and psychological violence. See in this respect the World Organisation Against Torture which coordinates a network of more than 280 NGOs with as first objective preventing the use of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading punishments.

[6] "Burma Protests: the Situation on September 5 and the following days". The Irrawaddy Online.

[7] Burma is a multi-ethnic country of 52 million people. 2/3 are Burmese and the rest are made up of about a hundred nationalities including the Karen, Karenni, Mon, Shan, Kachin, Rakhine and Rohingya. Without doubt more than 80% of the population is Buddhist by religion

[8] "The Politic of Piety: Pageantry and the Struggle for Buddhism in Burma". Stephen MacCarthy. Working Paper Series n° 85. SEARC.

[9] In 1997, the junta announced that it had changed its name. The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) was renamed the "State Peace and Development Council" (SPDC)

[10] "The Gathering Storm. Infections, Diseases and Human Rights in Burma. Universities of Berkeley and Johns Hopkins July 2007.
<http://www.hrcberkeley.org/download/BurmaReport2007.pdf>

[11] See note 10

[12] <http://www.burmanet.org/news/2007/09/07/reuters-eu-calls-rights-violations-in-myanmar-a-scandal> Reuters: "EU calls rights violations in Myanmar a scandal" September 7, 2007

[13] The EU's relations with Burma/Myanmar. Overview. http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/myanmar/intro/index.htm

[14] Info Birmanie: France Culture est-elle la voix de la diplomatie française?
<http://www.info-birmanie.org/images/stories/birmanie%20france-inter.pdf>

[15] "Total pollue la démocratie. Lettre ouverte aux actionnaires". FIDH <http://www.birmanie.net/birma/pdf/AGLettreOuvertevODS.pdf>

[16] Info Birmanie: "L'UE doit renforcer sa position commune sur la Birmanie". August 27, 2007.
<http://www.info-birmanie.org/images/stories/depuis%20le%2015%20ao%FBtib.pdf>

[17] See note 16. <http://www.info-birmanie.org/images/stories/depuis%20le%2015%20ao%FBtib.pdf>

[18] "Many Firsts with China." Aung Zaw. www.burmanet.org/news/2007/09/14/irrawaddy-many-firsts-with-china-aung-zaw.

[19] Les nouvelles de Birmanie number 20. June 2007

[20] Deutsche Presse-Agentur: "Indian foreign minister grilled on Myanmar" Friday 14 September 2007.
<http://www.burmanet.org/news/2007/09/14/deutsche-presse-agentur-indian-foreign-minister-grilled-on-myanmar/>

[21] <http://www.mizzima.com/MizzimaNews/News/2007/Sep/67-Sep-2007.html>

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[22] "India and Burma: Such Good Friends. Nava Thakuria. February 26, 2007. Asia Sentinel http://www.asiasentinel.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=397&Itemid=31<0}

[23] Name the new junta gave itself after the coup of 1988

[24] "Japan's Aid Relations with Military Regimes in Burma 1962-1991. The Kokunaika Process". Donald M. Seekins

[25] See note 24

[26] HNS-Info. Teck de Birmanie: luxe au Nord, dictature au Sud. http://www.hns-info.net/article.php3?id_article=10002

[27] "South Korea Has a Burma Problem", Correspondent. August 24, 2007. "Asia Sentinel"

[28] "Burma's Generals on a Buying Spree". David Fullbrook. November 18, 2006. "Asia Sentinel".

[29] ASEAN was created in 1968 on the initiative of the United States to fight Communist influence in Asia

[30] "Engaging Burma: The ASEAN Experience". Mario Aguja. April 6, 2006.

[31] U Nu was elected prime minister of the Burmese 'Union from 1948 to 1962, with the 'exception of the period 1958-1960. He replaced Aung San, main architect of Burmese independence, assassinated in 1947. Aung San has become a legendary figure in the country. He was the father of Aung San Suu Kyi who is the main leader of the NLD and who gained 80% of the votes at the elections of 1990 that the military junta had to concede under popular pressure

[32] In 1962, following his coup d'Etat, general Ne Win promulgated a series of institutional and political reforms under the banner of the "Burmese road to socialism". The reforms were "socialist" only in name. From 1962 to 1988, Burma was more or less an autarky, at the rhythm of aberrant economic reforms leading this country, rich in natural resources, to a nameless poverty

[33] Forced labour is not done directly on the site but Burmese civilians are forcibly enrolled to clear the jungle around the site and along the pipelines at risk to their health. Many contract malaria in the forest. Maybe doctor Kouchner can care for them? See also Rapport Kouchner on the site http://birmanie.total.com/fr/publications/rapport_bkconseil.pdf

[34] There is a good deal of literature on this subject. See for example Interview with Brad Adams, outlining Burmese Ethnic Minority Communities' Ongoing Horrors. Human Rights Watch. <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2005/09/22/burma11774.htm>

[35] In 1994, 'India and Burma signed a trade agreement authorising unrestricted 'access to a zone of 40 kilometres on each side of the border, 1643 km long. This facilitated the passage of drugs on both sides of the border

[36] Burma Briefing. October-December 2005. A Campaign by Asian Center for Human Rights and Mizzima News

[37] "The Gathering Storm. Infections, Diseases and Human Rights in Burma. University of Berkeley and John Hopkins. July 2007. <http://www.hrcberkeley.org/download/BurmaReport2007.pdf>

[38] "Les enfants sacrifiés de la junte birmane". Hebdo Net N°52 <http://www.birmanie.org/Fichiers/File/NETHEBDO/hebdo52.html>.

[39] "UNICEF in Myanmar: Protecting Lives, Nurturing Dreams". Unicef Report 2004. See also "The Gathering Storm. Infections, Diseases and Human Rights in Burma". University of Berkeley and John Hopkins. July 2007. <http://www.hrcberkeley.org/download/BurmaReport2007.pdf>

[40] See note 37

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[41] See note 37

[42] For more details on the national convention charged with writing the new constitution, see the site of Human Rights Watch. <http://hrw.org/>

[43] A year before the Olympic Games, Reporters sans Frontières has launched a campaign to publicise the question of human rights in China. http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=23181