

CURRENT SITUATION

The Burmese military junta, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), continues to exercise dictatorial control over the lives of the people of Burma as it has done with impunity for over forty years. The junta routinely employs torture, rape, slavery, murder, forced displacement, and mass imprisonment to consolidate its power and silence any dissent. These acts are criminal violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

Burma consistently tops major global indices on repression, lawlessness, corruption, instability, and human insecurity and is one of the most conflict-prone countries in the world.

Last June, the International Committee for the Red Cross issued a global alert for the second time in its history, condemning the SPDC and calling on the international community to respond to this breach of the Geneva Conventions. The only other time the ICRC issued a similar call was in response to the Rwandan genocide.

According to the Women's League of Chinland report "Unsafe State," "under the military regime, women and girls are at constant risk for being raped." The military exercises total impunity for those who commit rape. A 2002 Human Rights Watch report estimates that 20% of the soldiers in the Burmese army are children under the age of 18.

None of the ceasefire agreements between the SPDC and armed groups have affirmatively ensured the inclusion of women, despite provisions for women in conflict in Security Council Resolution 1325.

The recently ratified, army-drafted constitution presents two grave problems. First, the SPDC granted itself immunity from any criminal prosecution for its crimes against the Burmese people. Second, this constitution puts military requirements on the major government positions and maintains a block of military-only legislative seats, making gender inequality a permanent feature of government.

Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the pro-democracy opposition that won in a landslide in the 1990 elections, has been held under house arrest for more than 11 out of the past 18 years. A Nobel Peace Prize recipient, Aung San Suu Kyi has worked tirelessly to promote democracy in Burma, but the military has consistently thwarted her efforts.

On May 30, 2003, government-backed mobs attacked Aung San Suu Kyi and other National League for Democracy members and supporters as they toured Burma. Known as the Depayin Massacre, at least 70 people associated with the NLD were brutally killed, while others were taken into custody by the police.

In September 2007, Burmese monks staged peaceful protests and marches against the government. The peaceful protests were harshly suppressed as the military carried out a brutal crackdown on the protestors. The SPDC reported 10 protestor deaths, but NGOs and the U.N. Special Rapporteur claimed the death toll was around 30 deaths. Additionally, the military beat and arbitrarily detained thousands of protestors.

In May 2008, Cyclone Nargis hit southern Burma, quickly destroying homes, food, and water supplies. The military junta's refusal to allow nonpolitical international humanitarian aid to enter Burma until almost a month after the cyclone resulted in the unnecessary deaths of thousands of people.

The military regime has ignored over 30 U.N. resolutions, most of which include a call for an independent investigation of crimes by the junta. Eight U.N. envoys have tried to carry out fact-finding missions and to facilitate dialogue between the junta and the pro-democracy forces. All U.N. efforts have been met with silence.