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International Federation
for Human Rights

Federación Internacional
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الفدرالية الدولية لحقوق الإنسان

Information note

The situation in Burma poses a threat to international peace and security

Released on 19th June 2006 - The fact that thousands of people are currently fleeing the country mostly into Thailand is a cause of instability in the region. Indeed, Thai border controls have been struggling to cope with a growing exodus of refugees. There are currently more than 140,000 refugees living at the border in fenced camps, where Burmese civilians are denied the permission to work and can only survive with humanitarian aid. In view of the widespread and growing nature of the junta's attacks, the whole region is threatened by insecurity and a larger humanitarian crisis.

Recent academic studies have demonstrated that the humanitarian crisis caused by the junta is *not* restricted to within Burma, but has ever-increasing spillover effects reaching the entire region. One consequence of this is that deadly and new diseases are rapidly spreading amongst neighboring populations of at least 6 countries. In a report issued in March 2006 by the John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, researchers concluded that "for both malaria and TB, multi-drug resistance generated by Burma's weak programs for drug control are increasing drug resistance in Thailand and India and threatening to undermine the only effective regimens for drug resistant *Plasmodium falciparum* in South and Southeast Asia. (...) Resurgent drug resistant malaria and TB have the potential to threaten enormous populations. HIV spread related to Burmese heroin exports has already done so and affects India, China, Thailand, Vietnam, and, most recently Bangladesh."¹

Burma is also one of the world's leading producers of heroin and amphetamine-type stimulants. To claim that this drug production and trafficking does not pose an international threat is simply false. Among the wide range of violations in Burma, this element is only one more reason to justify Security Council action.

Finally, the Burmese regime's assaults on ethnic minorities and its intensification of political repression in Rangoon and elsewhere represent a growing risk of an outburst of civil war which would undeniably cause even greater instability in the region, and further human exodus to neighboring countries.

Security Council's thematic resolutions have placed a clearer and stronger duty on its members

On April 28, 2006, when voting **Resolution 1674 on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflicts**, the members of the Security Council agreed on "the importance of taking measures aimed at conflict prevention and resolution," without limiting this objective to international conflicts alone. Most importantly, this resolution highlighted the fact "that the deliberate targeting of civilians and other protected persons, and the commission of systematic, flagrant and widespread violations of international humanitarian and human rights law in situations of armed conflict, may constitute a threat to international peace and security, and, *reaffirm[ed] in this regard [the Security Council's] readiness to consider such situations and, where necessary, to adopt appropriate steps.*" (Emphasis added)

The situation in Burma, which falls directly under the categories mentioned in Resolution 1674, should be

¹ "Responding to AIDS, TB, Malaria and Emerging Infectious Diseases in Burma: Dilemmas of Policy and Practice March 2006", a report by the Center for Public Health and Human Rights, Department of Epidemiology, John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, March 2006, available at http://www.jhsph.edu/humanrights/burma_report.pdf, (Page 8).

analyzed in the light of the Security Council members' commitment to "consider such situations" and "adopt appropriate steps."

Furthermore, the adoption in October 2000 of **Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security** specifically addresses the role and experience of women in the context of armed conflicts and calls for an end to impunity for gender-based abuses during and after conflicts. It calls for action to be taken by a wide range of actors, including governments, the UN Secretary-General, and parties to armed conflict. It also called upon the UN Security Council itself to take measures to implement this resolution. Provisions of Resolution 1325 have since been implemented in diverse conflict or post-conflict situations, including in Afghanistan, Colombia, Timor-Leste or Democratic Republic of Congo.

Because women and the girl child suffer the most from the military junta, who use rape as a weapon of war against ethnic women, and from the forced displacement, this resolution gives further justification to the Security Council to take action on Burma. And here again, Aung San Suu Kyi is the living example of how women, even Nobel Peace Prize winners, are treated and oppressed by the Burma regime.

Finally, numerous **Resolutions on Children and Armed Conflict** have been adopted by the Council (1612, 1539, 1460, 1379, 1314, 1261), calling upon all members to move from expressions of concern to action in specific situations. Resolution 1539 from April 2004 states that the Security Council "stress[es] its determination to ensure respect for its resolutions and other international norms and standards for the protection of children affected by armed conflict."

The fact that the Burma military junta forces more children to become soldiers than any other country in the world, should in itself be sufficient for the Security Council to address the issue, and to take all necessary steps to save Burmese children's lives.

The Security Council has in the past issued resolutions on countries posing non-traditional threats

Some country-oriented resolutions adopted by the Security Council have been justified not because the situation in a country posed a traditional threat to international peace and security, but because it posed other serious threats, of equal concern, for example: the overthrow of democratic governments, refugee outflows, humanitarian and human rights violations or drug trafficking. Resolutions on countries such as Afghanistan, Colombia, Yemen and Haiti were adopted on these grounds, despite the fact that they pose what may traditionally be considered to be internal rather than international threats.

The Security Council has increasingly recognized that internal conflicts do affect the stability and security in a given region. Furthermore, the only sustainable way to obtain and maintain international peace and security is to ensure that regimes do not systematically violate human and civil fundamental rights against their own populations.

For all these reasons, it is vital that the Security Council takes urgent action to address the situation of an eighteen-year-old intensifying military dictatorship.

On the occasion of Aung San Suu Kyi's 61st birthday, FIDH calls on all Security Council members to publicly condemn her arbitrary detention, request her immediate release and raise public awareness to her tragic situation. Putting the issue of Burma on the Security Council's agenda must be a priority, with the objective of issuing a binding resolution in order to call on the military junta to engage in peaceful national reconciliation and to put an end to the widespread and growing human rights violations.