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Burma Fact Sheet

Florida Center for Survivors of Torture

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FLORIDA CENTER FOR SURVIVORS OF TORTURE

A program of Gulf Coast Jewish Family and Community Services

Inspiring Hope and Understanding

TIMELINE

Burma

1057 - Burma is founded and Buddhism is adopted.
1885 - Burma is annexed to British India.
1937-48 - Burma is an official colony of the British crown.
1942 - Japan invades and occupies Burma using the Japanese-trained Burma Independence Army, which later becomes the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) and rebels against Japanese occupation.
1945 - General Aung San leads the AFPFL and frees Burma from Japan with help from the British.
1947 - General Aung San and members of his government are assassinated by nationalist rival U Saw.
1958-60 - AFPFL party splits resulting in the formation of a caretaker government.
1960 - U Nu wins elections. His endorsement of Buddhism and acceptance of separatism antagonizes the military.
1962 - Military coup led by General Ne Win abolishes the federal system and implements the "Burmese Way to Socialism", which nationalizes the economy, forms a one-state party, and bans independent news organizations.
1974 - The new constitution transfers power to the People's Assembly led by Ne Win and other military leaders.
1975 - The Opposition National Democratic front is formed with minority groups from diverse regions.
1982-87 - New laws passed restricting the rights of non-indigenous people, and devaluation of currency leads to civil unrest.
1988 - Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of General Aung San speaks to hundreds of thousands and calling for non-violence. By mid September the protests become more violent, thousands are killed, and the State Law and Order Restoration Council is formed (SLORC).
1989 - Thousands of human rights and democracy advocates are arrested. Aung San Suu Kyi, is put under house arrest. Burma is renamed Myanmar.
1990 - Opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) and Suu Kyi win general election, but the results are ignored.
1991 - Aung San Suu Kyi receives Nobel Peace Prize.
1995 - After six years, Suu Kyi is released from house arrest.
1996 - SLORC arrests over 200 attempted attendees of the NLD congress. Aung San Suu Kyi attends the congress and is not arrested.
1997 - SLORC renamed State Peace and Development Council.
1998 - 300 NLD members are freed from prison.
2000 - Aung San Suu Kyi and other NLD members are given more freedom of movement from the ruling junta and begin secret talks with them.
2001 - About 200 activists are released from prison.
2003 - Clashes between the government and Suu Kyi's supporters result in her placement in house arrest. Khin Nyunt becomes prime minister and vows to draft a new constitution.



2004 - The government and the Karen National Union, agree to cease violent conflict. The constitutional convention excludes the main opposition and ethnic parties. Prime Minister Nyunt is replaced and put under house arrest.
2005 - The administrative capital of the government is moved to Naypyidaw by the military junta.
2006 - Constitutional convention talks end without outcome.
2007 - The junta adds a year to Suu Kyi's house arrest. In reaction to the unexpected rise in fuel prices, Buddhist monks lead anti-government protests. The government kills 13 protestors and arrests thousands of monks in the Saffron Revolution.
2008 - The proposed constitution ensures a quarter of parliament seats to the military and bans Aung San Suu Kyi from running for office. Cyclone Nargis kills as many as 134,000. The government claims 92% voted in favor of a referendum on the constitution despite the humanitarian crisis of the cyclone. Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest is renewed. Activists receive sentences up to 65 years in closed trials.
2009 - Burma denies the existence of the Muslim Rohingya minority. Talks between the military junta and Suu Kyi begin again.
2010 - Election laws pass allowing electoral commission to be picked by junta. NLD plans to boycott polls, but National Democratic Front (NDF) gains legal status and plans to run in elections. The junta changes the country's flag and anthem and the name from the Union of Myanmar to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

* For research purposes please contact FCST for references



Burma

TORTURE METHODS

FORCED LABOR is usually reserved for long prison terms, but in 2007, monks with short prison terms were also sent to labor camps. The conditions in these camps are reportedly worse than in typical prisons. The food is often rice mixed with stones or rat feces. Proper medical care is almost nonexistent. The feet of prisoners are chained and they typically have to work long hours doing hard manual labor.

STRESS POSITIONS force prisoners to sit, squat, and stand in the same position for prolonged periods of time. The **SEMIGWA DANCE**, based on a traditional Burmese performance, forces prisoners to crawl over gravel on their knees and elbows with feet and hands in the air. The **MOTORCYCLE POSITION** requires prisoners to balance on the balls of their feet, imitating riding a motorcycle, while making engine noises. The **AIRPLANE POSITION** forces prisoners to balance on one foot while holding their arms and other leg out while making airplane noises.

BEATINGS with batons, truncheons, rubber cords, bamboo sticks and broomsticks are used during interrogations if the prisoner cannot or does not answer questions to the satisfaction of the interrogator. Some report being tied head down to a seesaw and beaten for hours until the pressure in the head became unbearable. Prisoner report witnessing some being beaten to death.

BURNING with lighters and lit cigarettes has been reportedly used against political prisoners.

SEXUAL ASSAULT, RAPE, and the threat of which has been used against both female and male political prisoners. Male prisoners report attempts to use dogs to rape them.

ELECTRIC SHOCK is administered to the feet and genitals of political prisoners.

SLEEP DEPRIVATION is often used during interrogations and beatings.

SOLITARY CONFINEMENT and the denial of books, paper, and pens occurs for months at a time. Political prisoners are held in dark cells and unable to tell night from day.

FALSE HOPE OF RELEASE: Individuals and family members given conflicting incorrect information about detainee's release

BLAMING THE VICTIM: During interrogation, other prisoners are tortured if detainee does not provide information.

RECENT CONFLICT

ETHNIC CLEANSING: The current violence between the Burmese Army and minority ethnic groups has been ongoing since 1948. The military campaign targets minority groups such as the Karen, Chin, Shan, Rakhine, Arakanese, Mon and Kachin. There are an estimated 135 minority groups in Burma today. Ethnic minority insurgent groups and civilians accuse the military of attacking villagers to assimilate them into mainstream Burman language, culture, and religion. The military junta attempts to suppress all dissent and holds absolute power despite international denunciation and sanctions. In 2007, internally displaced people were estimated to be over 500,000.

AUNG SAN SUU KYI is an opposition leader and General Secretary of the National League for Democracy. In the 1990 election she was elected Prime Minister and awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991. She has remained under house arrest for 14 out of the past 20 years. She was released from house arrest in late 2010.

ELECTIONS were held in November 2010. While the ruling junta's Union Solidarity and Development Party won over 70% of the seats in Parliament, the international community widely condemned the elections as flawed and fraudulent.

MYANMAR/BURMA NAME DEBATE: Pro-democracy leaders insist on "Burma" due to claims that the current government was illegitimate in 1989 when it changed the name from "Burma" to "Myanmar". To some, the use of "Myanmar" equates to sympathizing with the military junta. To the SLORC, the use of the word "Burma" might indicate subversion. Additionally, many ethnic minorities do not identify with Burma or Burmese, and simply refer to themselves by their ethnic minority.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING of men, women, and children occurs at staggering rates within Burma and from Burma to East and Southeast Asia. Women are trafficked to work in the sex trade, as forced domestic servants, and in other labor areas. Children are also forced into labor as beggars, in shops, in agriculture, and in other industries. Within Burma, civilians are trafficked to work in industrial areas, agriculture, and in the commercial sex industry. Military and civilian officials as well as ethnic insurgent groups use forced labor of adults and children. While the Government of Burma is reportedly making significant efforts to curb trafficking and forced labor and increased the budget for anti-trafficking, the problems still exist. Many military and civilian officials remain involved in human trafficking.

ILLCIT DRUGS: Burma is the second largest producer of opium in the world and a major source of methamphetamine and heroin for regional consumption.