



NATIONAL LEAGUR FOR DEMOCRACY

(Liberated Area – UK)

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NLD-LA-UK Press Release on 19th Anniversary of 8888 Uprising

On 8 August 1988 students prepared to start a general strike together with monks, workers; and hundreds of thousands of people in Rangoon marched to Rangoon city hall. Around midnight that fateful day, the military began firing at the demonstrators. Scores of unnamed, defenceless people were killed, amounting to a large scale massacre.

About one year before that 8.8.88 uprising, the United Nations listed Burma among the Least Developed Nations in the world, along with Ethiopia. A year later, Burmese people toppled the socialist regime in a nationwide uprising. The country hit the world news when thousands of demonstrators were shot to death in the streets.

But demonstration spread quickly to many cities and towns through out the country. During the six-week long nationwide uprising from August 1988, the civil administrations at local level broke down. Democracy activists took over the role of administrators in some areas. All that was brought to an end in September 1988 when the military staged another coup.

As the Burmese army began seek-and-destroy operations against all dissidents in urban areas, thousands of democracy activists, mainly students, fled to Thai-Burma border areas where ethnic separatist groups were based. Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of national hero Aung San, who during the 1988 uprising had become the most popular opposition leader, and other senior dissidents, formed the National League for Democracy (NLD) to take part in the elections. The junta put Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest a year before May 1990 elections. Many other capable dissidents were also imprisoned. Despite this, the NLD won a landslide victory in the elections. Since it was the NLD which won the elections, the junta refused to honour the opposition's victory.

Nineteen years after the historic 8888 uprising, Aung San Suu Kyi is still under house-arrest and the NLD is still finding means to engage with the junta in a dialogue. On their part, the military has never shown a political will to dialogue. Instead, they have consolidated their power and created Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), an ultra-nationalist mass party which will protect the military interest in the future. Military junta is now carrying out the final stages of their National Convention, or rather the Sham Convention as is known worldwide, without the participation of NLD or any major ethnic groups, to draft a pro-military constitution which will enshrine the influence of military in Burma' politics.

Inside the country, there are a myriad of socioeconomic problems. Myanmar ranks 155 out of 158 countries in the 2005 Corruption Perception Index by the Berlin-based Transparency International. The education system in Burma is in shambles. The SPDC only encourages military academies. The SPDC in fear of student uprisings has been operating universities and schools only intermittently since 1988. In health sector, the number of AIDS and tuberculosis victims are rising due to the lack of health education and health care infrastructures. Extrajudicial executions, forced labour, forced relocations and using rape as a weapon of persecution on ethnic minorities remain pervasive in Burma. Hardship inside the country has caused a Diaspora of Burmese populace into other countries. A 2002 report by Refugee International and Open Society Institute estimates that there may be up to many millions of documented and undocumented Burmese immigrants around the world. Hundreds of thousands of Internally Displaced People fleeing junta's attempted genocide are living in hellish conditions in make-shift refugee camps along Thai-Burma border. Only one glimpse of hope seen recently, the British Department for International Development has promised to provide increase cross-border aides for such IDPs.

So, the National League for Democracy (Liberated Area, UK) call here for an urgent but meaningful tri-partite dialogues between military junta, the legitimate election winner National League for Democracy, and ethnic groups for a genuine national reconciliation and a long-lasting peace in Burma.