

Akbayan Representative Mayong Aguja's Speech on Burma

Wednesday 1 March 2006, by [AGUJA Mario "Mayong"](#) (Date first published: 7 November 2005).

Mr. Speaker, esteemed colleagues, I rise today on the matter concerning the worsening situation of Myanmar. Even if our country is likewise experiencing political crisis and repression, this should not prevent us from fighting for the rights and welfare of our Asian brothers and sisters.

The case of Myanmar is not new. As you may remember Myanmar, formerly called Burma, has been ruled by a military junta beginning 1962. Several attempts have been made to restore democracy in Myanmar both within and outside the country. The closest was the holding of a free elections in 1990. Despite having won 406 out 489 seats, the National League for Democracy (NLD) however was not allowed by the ruling military regime, to form a government. Moreover, members of the NLD has, since then been harassed, jailed and even murdered. NLD's leader Aung San Suu Kyi who is a Nobel Peace Prize winner for her "non-violent struggle for democracy and human rights" ironically remains under house arrest. Moreover, several ethnic groups have also figured in clashes with the military government led by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

The situation in Burma continues to worsen with no degree of measurable improvement. Members of the international community have been reporting of grave human rights violations and sustained conflict between the government of Burma and its people despite its hollow promises to move towards national reconciliation. Most recent is a report commissioned by The Honorable Vacláv Havel, Former President of the Czech Republic and Bishop Desmond M. Tutu, Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town. The report calls for the UN Security Council to act on Burma after finding these factors present in Myanmar: 1) the ouster of a democratically elected government, 2) the conflict between governmental bodies and armed ethnic groups, 3) humanitarian and human rights violations, 4) substantial outflow of refugees, and 5) drug trafficking. Such factors have been considered by the UN Security Councils interventions in Cambodia in 1990, Liberia in 1992, Rwanda and Haiti in 1993, Yemen in 1994, Afghanistan in 1996 and Sierra Leone in 1997. Burma's case is extremely unique because never have ALL the mentioned factors existed in UNSC's previous interventions. Burma's situation is even more severe than in previous cases. In addition to those factors previously considered by the UNSC, Burma's contribution to the spread of HIV/AIDS further aggravates the situation. The case of Burma is not just a human rights problem, it even goes farther than that. It is a continuously growing threat to international peace and security such that ASEAN's concern with Burma is not only with the latter's damage to ASEAN's reputation, but moreover with its harm to regional security and stability as manifested in the spread of HIV/AIDS and trafficking of drugs beyond its borders into Thailand, India, China, and throughout the region.

The ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC) has endorsed the Havel-Tutu report in its 23 September 2005 meeting and likewise calls for the UN Security Council to intervene. It affirms Bishop Tutu's statements that "quiet closed-door meetings are no longer enough". It is already past due for the Security Council to intervene after all previous attempts have failed. The United Nations has spent a considerable amount of effort and resources to promote political, economic, and social change in Burma. The Secretary General's office, the UN General Assembly, UN Commission on Human Rights, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Committee on Torture, Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Working Group on Arbitrary Detention,

and Economic and Social Council have all worked in their various capacities to effect change in Burma generally by facilitating national reconciliation. All these efforts, due to unenforceable mandate have not been able to produce any substantial reform. Most recently, a request by the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, Paolo Serghio Pinheiro to visit Myanmar was again turned down by the government. Pinheiro has been denied entry to Burma since November 2003. As Burma's failure to cooperate continues to plunge itself further isolation while continuing to pose harm to its neighboring countries, it is time for the UN Security Council to take immediate action.

The UN Security Council has, under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, the authority to intervene within the domestic jurisdiction of a State when it poses a threat to international peace and security. For the Security Council to discuss a country situation, nine members must agree to put it on the agenda. The Philippines as elected member of the Security Council and looked up to as champion in upholding democratic principles, in defending the human rights of her people and in supporting electoral democracies should be at the forefront in promoting the call for the UNSC's action on Burma.

We from the Akbayan Citizen's Action Party urge this House to call for the Philippine government to strongly urge the ASEAN to support the growing demand of the international community for the inclusion of Myanmar in the agenda of the United Nations Security Council and for the government to exercise its membership in the UN Security Council to endorse these calls and agree to put Burma in the agenda of the UNSC. Despite recent political differences, we should unite once again as we have in February when this House adopted House Resolution 593 overwhelming filed by 131 representatives calling the Philippine government to urge the ASEAN to reconsider Myanmar's chairmanship of the 2006 ASEAN meeting for its failure to institute democratic reforms.

Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch expressed, "Democracies like the Philippines should be ashamed if they try to block discussion of Burma at the Security Council". And we from Akbayan say, the Filipino people, who have once overpoweringly toppled a military regime should even be more ashamed if we turn blind and deaf to Burma's worsening situation. Our two-year term in the UN Security Council will end in December 2005. Let us leave this position with a great mark in history and be at the forefront in fighting for Burma's causes. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's appeal should continue to inspire us: "Please your liberty to promote ours."