

# MYANMAR

## 1988 TO 1998

### HAPPY 10TH ANNIVERSARY?

### A CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

**In 1998 Amnesty International is looking back at the 10 years since the popular pro-democracy movement was violently suppressed by the security forces in Myanmar. Sadly, the hopes of thousands of demonstrators killed in 1988 and those who continued their protests have not been fulfilled. People in Myanmar have continued to be imprisoned because of their political beliefs; political prisoners have been tortured and ill-treated; ethnic nationalities have been unlawfully killed and ill-treated, forced to act as porters for the military or been forcibly relocated from their homes, causing hundreds of thousands to seek refuge in neighbouring countries; people all around the country have been ill-treated while being made to carry out forced labour on building projects. The following chronology of major events in Myanmar since 1988 provides a background and context to this litany of human rights violations during the past 10 years.**

## 1988

- ◆ On 13 March Yangon Institute of Technology student Maung Phone Maw was the first person to be killed by the army during mass student demonstrations against 26 years of one-party military rule which began in Yangon (Rangoon, the capital).
- ◆ In July General Ne Win resigned as head of the government as demonstrations spread to other parts of the country.
- ◆ In August huge demonstrations of hundreds of thousands of people throughout the country called for democracy and formed strike committees. Thousands of peaceful demonstrators were shot dead by the police and army in the streets.
- ◆ In September the military reasserted power over the country and formed the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). At least 1,000 people were killed by the authorities in the aftermath of the coup. Hundreds of others were arrested.

- ◆ The National League for Democracy (NLD) was also formed in September by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, U Tin U, and others.
- ◆ The SLORC abolished the 1974 Constitution and issued martial law decrees which forbid any public criticism of the military and public gatherings of more than five people.
- ◆ At the same time the SLORC began to permit the registration of political parties in preparation for promised multi-party elections and dissolved the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). Dozens of new political parties were formed, including the student-led Democratic Party for a New Society (DPNS).
- ◆ Thousands of students fled to border areas controlled by ethnic minority armed opposition groups; some formed the armed All Burma Student Democratic Front (ABSDF).

## **1989**

- ◆ In March Paw U Tun, better known as Min Ko Naing, Chairman of the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU) was arrested and later sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment. He was badly tortured and remains in frail health at Insein Prison.
- ◆ In June the SLORC changed the name of the country to Myanmar; many other place names were also changed.
- ◆ In July the SLORC began a massive crackdown on the NLD; Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, U Tin U, and hundreds of others were arrested.
- ◆ Also in July the SLORC instituted martial law decrees establishing military tribunals using summary trial procedures; subsequently hundreds of people were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment in grossly unfair trials.
- ◆ The SLORC established a policy of agreeing cease-fires with the many ethnic minority armed opposition groups.
- ◆ In December U Nu, former Prime Minister, and 13 of his supporters were arrested for establishing a symbolic parallel government.

## **1990**

- ◆ The NLD won almost 82% of the parliamentary seats in the general elections held in May but the SLORC refused to honour the result.
- ◆ In July the NLD Gandhi Hall Declarations called for the convening of the People's Assembly and the SLORC issued Declaration NO. 1/90, which asserted continued SLORC rule.

- ◆ Monks in Mandalay began a boycott of all military and their families in protest at the killing of two monks in connection with a demonstration held there to commemorate the anniversary of the 8 August 1988.
- ◆ In October the SLORC issued decrees prohibiting any independent monks' associations and arrested hundreds of monks in Mandalay and Yangon.
- ◆ In September and October the authorities began rounding up scores of MP's-elect, including U Kyi Maung, a former army colonel who led the NLD to victory.
- ◆ In December a group of NLD MP's-elect fled the country and set up the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), an alternative government on the Thai border.

## 1991

- ◆ The SLORC sentenced at least 32 MP's-elect to long terms of imprisonment on treason or related charges.
- ◆ Almost 600 people were arrested for opposition to the SLORC in the first seven months alone.
- ◆ In October the SLORC launched a large offensive against the Karen National Union (KNU, an armed ethnic minority opposition group) in the Ayeyarwady Delta, killing many Karen civilians and arresting thousands of others.
- ◆ At the end of the year tens of thousands of Burmese Muslims from the Rakhine State, known as Rohingyas, began to flee from a campaign of terror by the army into Bangladesh, where camps were established to accommodate them.
- ◆ In December Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, still under house arrest, won the Nobel Peace Prize. 900 students in Yangon were arrested after demonstrations calling for her release.
- ◆ Initial reports of mass civilian forced labour on military projects, especially in the Rakhine, Shan, and Kayah states, began to filter out as refugees fled from harsh conditions to Bangladesh and Thailand.

## 1992

- ◆ Government troops launched a major offensive against the KNU's headquarters when hundreds were seized as porters for the operation and dozens of civilians were shot dead between January and April, when the offensive was called off.
- ◆ In March the army began a forcible relocation program in Pruso township, Kayah State, when more than 8,000 Karenni civilians were moved and confined to camps in poor conditions. Many did not survive.
- ◆ In March the UN Commission for Human Rights adopted a resolution appointing for the first time a Special Rapporteur for Myanmar.
- ◆ In April the SLORC announced that political prisoners not posing a "threat to security" would be released. Some 1300 political prisoners, including U Nu, were subsequently released. General Than Shwe replaced General Saw Maung as head of the SLORC.
- ◆ At the same time the government announced that they would convene a National Convention, whose purpose was to establish principles for a new constitution.
- ◆ By July some 260,000 Rohingyas had fled from widespread human rights violations in the Rakhine State into Bangladesh. The military destroyed villages, seized Muslims as porters, some of whom were tortured and killed, and raped Muslim women.
- ◆ In August the SLORC acceded to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 which establish minimum humane standards of conduct to be observed in internal or external armed conflict. However it continued to flout Common Article 3, which provides for the protection of civilians in internal conflict situations.
- ◆ In September the SLORC abolished military tribunals and curfew restrictions. However political prisoners continued to be sentenced by civilian courts where trials fell far short of international fair trial procedures.

## **1993**

- ◆ On 1 January the SLORC commuted all death sentences to life imprisonment, benefiting at least 31 prisoners under sentence of death. All sentences of more than 10 years would be reduced to 10 years.
- ◆ In January the SLORC convened the National Convention with almost 700 delegates hand-picked by the government. 120 of these were elected MP's, including some 90 from the NLD.
- ◆ Over 700 political prisoners were released during the year. However many of them were subject to surveillance and other restrictions on their freedom.
- ◆ In September the SLORC formed the Union Solidarity Development Association (USDA), a pro-government "social" organization. Membership was not entirely voluntary.

- ◆ Some 50,000 Rohingya refugees were repatriated to Myanmar between September and November. In November the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the SLORC signed a Memorandum of Understanding which gave UNHCR access to refugees who had returned to the Rakhine State.

## 1994

- ◆ In January the National Convention was reconvened and agreed basic principles for administering the state, including a leading role for the military in politics.
- ◆ In February for the first time in almost five years, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who remained under house arrest, was allowed visitors other than her family.
- ◆ In February the Kachin Independent Organization, an armed ethnic minority opposition group, agreed a cease-fire with the SLORC.
- ◆ Hundreds of thousands of civilians were forced to work on infrastructure projects, including on the Ye - Dawei railway which ran from the Mon State to the Tanintharyi Division.
- ◆ In December a Buddhist Karen group, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Organization (DKBA) split from the KNU and allied itself to the SLORC.

## 1995

- ◆ In January Manerplaw, KNU headquarters, fell to SLORC and DKBO troops, causing some 10,000 Karen civilians to flee into Thailand. During the offensive thousands of porters were forced to carry loads and hundreds were killed in the process.
- ◆ In February the DKBA began to attack refugee camps in Thailand in an attempt to force refugees to return to Myanmar. Over a dozen Karen refugees were killed, dozens injured, and thousands made homeless.
- ◆ In March the SLORC and the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) agreed a cease-fire; however, it broke down three months later and fighting resumed.
- ◆ In February dozens of students were arrested for peacefully demonstrating at the funeral of U Nu, Myanmar's first Prime Minister. Nine were sentenced in April to seven years' imprisonment.
- ◆ In March U Tin U and U Kyi Maung, senior NLD leaders and prisoners of conscience, were released.
- ◆ In June the SLORC and the New Mon State Party (NMSP) agreed a cease-fire.

- ◆ In July Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest after almost six years. She was reappointed as NLD General Secretary as the party became more active throughout the country.
- ◆ In November the NLD withdrew from the National Convention and were then expelled from the group by the SLORC.
- ◆ Also in November at Insein Prison 29 political prisoners, including prisoner of conscience U Win Tin, were placed in cells meant to house military dogs as a punishment for writing a letter about prison conditions to the UN Special Rapporteur.
- ◆ By the end of the year some 200,000 Rohingya refugees had been repatriated amid concerns that human rights violations, particularly forced labour and relocations, continued in the Rakhine State.

## 1996

- ◆ At least 1,000 political prisoners remained imprisoned, in spite of the releases of over 2,000 prisoners since April 1992.
- ◆ In January Khun Sa, leader of the Muang Tai Army, agreed a cease-fire with the SLORC. However thousands of Shan troops continued to fight with SLORC troops and the SLORC began a massive forcible relocation program of Shan civilians in March.
- ◆ The National Convention adjourned at the end of March after approving guidelines for the composition of the executive, judicial, and legislative branches of the government, including a legislature in which the military would hold at least 25% of the seats.
- ◆ Beginning in April 1996 the SLORC forcibly relocated 20,000 to 30,000 members of ethnic minorities in Kayah State under threat of death. As a result some 5,000 people fled to Thailand.
- ◆ In a pre-emptive move the SLORC arrested hundreds of NLD members when plans emerged for a meeting in May to celebrate the NLD sixth anniversary of its election victory.
- ◆ Forcible return from Thailand to Myanmar of 10,000 Mon civilians, without international monitoring, was concluded in June. At the same time human rights violations, including forced labour on the Ye-Dawei Railway, continued as civilians fled into NMSP-controlled areas.
- ◆ In August 31 NLD members and supporters were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment for their peaceful political opposition activities.
- ◆ In September during the NLD meeting to commemorate its founding date hundreds of members were briefly detained.

- ◆ At the same time the Government began to prohibit the NLD from holding weekend mass gatherings and blocked off Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's compound.
- ◆ In December students led massive mostly peaceful demonstrations in Rangoon and other towns, where they called for the establishment of a student union and a better quality of education. Dozens were arrested and later sentenced.

## 1997

- ◆ NLD members continued to be subject to intimidation and harassment in the form of short-term arrests, pressure to resign from the party, and orders for local NLD groups to remove their signboards or close their offices.
- ◆ In January SLORC troops crossed into Thailand and attacked two Karenni refugee camps, killing three Karenni refugees.
- ◆ Also in January the DKBO destroyed two refugee camps in Thailand, leaving 7,000 Karen civilians homeless.
- ◆ In February the SLORC launched a major offensive against remaining KNU bases; as a result, some 20,000 fled into Thailand. Hundreds of civilians were taken as porters in the offensive.
- ◆ Beginning in February the SLORC began to destroy villages in Papun District, northern Kayin State, forcing thousands of Karen villagers to flee.
- ◆ A second wave of forcible relocations of civilians in the central Shan State began in March; by the end of the year almost 300,000 people had been forcibly relocated. Anyone who returned to their village risked being shot dead by the army.
- ◆ Over 300 NLD members were threatened with arrest or actually detained before the NLD meeting to celebrate the seventh anniversary of their election victory.
- ◆ Some 20,500 Rohingyas remained in refugee camps in Bangladesh after Bangladeshi authorities forcibly returned almost 400 of them in July. Thousands of other Rohingyas fled poverty, forced labour and relocation in the Rakhine State into Bangladesh.
- ◆ In July Myanmar was granted full membership into Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).
- ◆ The International Labour Organization (ILO) took the rare step of appointing a Commission of Inquiry into Myanmar's failure to implement the provisions of Convention No 29 on forced labour.
- ◆ In June and July 300 Shan civilians were killed by the Burmese army in retaliation for the killing of 25 ethnic Burman civilians by an unknown Shan armed opposition group.

- ◆ In November the SLORC changed its name to the State Peace and Development Association (SPDC) and purged its ranks of corrupt ministers. However repressive policies remained in place.

**Amnesty International hopes the next 10 years will bring greater respect for the welfare, dignity and human rights of all people of Myanmar. Please add your voice to the many all around the world who have been campaigning for human rights in Myanmar over the last 10 years.**

**You can add your voice to the many others who have been campaigning for the rights of ethnic minority peoples in Myanmar during the last 10 years.**



**Write to:**

**Senior General Than Shwe  
Chairman  
State Peace and Development Council**



**c/o Ministry of Defence  
Signal Pagoda Road  
Yangon  
Union of Myanmar**

**or**

**Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt  
Secretary 1  
State Peace and Development Council  
c/o Ministry of Defence  
Signal Pagoda Road  
Yangon  
Union of Myanmar**

**or**

**write to the Myanmar Embassy in your country.**

**You could also ask your own government what it is doing to promote human rights protection in Myanmar by writing to your elected representative.**

***"All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination".***

(Article 7, Universal Declaration of Human Rights)