

Resolution on Burma

2007/2619(RSP) - 06/09/2007 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

Following the debate which took place during the sitting of 6 September 2007, the European Parliament adopted a joint resolution by 66 votes to 0 on Burma, deploring the SPDC's crackdown on peaceful protestors against the fuel price increase of 15 August 2007, the arrest of over 100 people and the violent attacks on civilians with particular brutality against women. On that date, the Burmese government had withdrawn fuel subsidies without warning, leading to an increase in fuel prices estimated at 500 %, doubling transport costs and inflating the cost of essential goods and services. Parliament demanded the immediate and unconditional release of all those who had been arrested since the protests began on 19 August 2007, including the leaders of the 88 Generation Students. It also demanded the immediate and unconditional release of Aung San Suu Kyi, who has spent 11 of the last 17 years under house arrest.

Parliament pointed out that about 90 % of the Burmese population are living below or near the poverty line of USD 1 a day, more than 30 % of children under five suffer from malnutrition, mortality rates for malaria and tuberculosis remain very high, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has spread across the general population and nearly half of school-age children never enrol. It expressed its grave concern about the adverse effect which the extraordinary price increase for basic commodities was having on the Burmese population and the fact that the Burmese junta was clearly incapable of utilising the country's extraordinary natural resources for the benefit of the people of Burma.

Members went on to express deep concern about the military build-up in Rangoon and the violent attacks by security forces and proxy civilian organisations. They strongly condemned the SPDC's use of civilian mobs such as the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) and the Swan Ahr Shin (SAS) to arrest, attack, intimidate and threaten protestors and activists. These and similar groups must be disbanded immediately. Parliament condemned the SPDC's unrelenting oppression of the Burmese people and its persistent persecution and imprisonment of pro-democracy activists, drawing particular attention to the case of U Win Tin, a 77-year old journalist detained as a political prisoner for almost two decades now for writing a letter to the UN on the ill-treatment of political prisoners.

Parliament referred to the fact that the so-called National Convention of Burma had concluded the drafting of the basic principles for a new constitution, which lacked credibility due to the absence of democratically elected representatives. It urged cessation of the current illegitimate constitutional process, and its replacement by a fully representative National Convention including the NLD and other political parties and groups, taking account of the recommendations made by the UN Secretary-General to transform it into an inclusive constitution-formulating process.

Parliament regretted that the Burmese Foreign Minister, Nyan Win, banned from travelling to the EU, was permitted to attend the eighth ASEM Foreign Ministers' meeting in Germany, only days after the military junta in Burma had extended the illegal house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi for another year. Whilst it welcomed the renewal of EU targeted sanctions, Parliament recognised that they have failed to achieve the desired impact on those directly responsible for the suffering of the Burmese people, and it called on the Council to analyse the weaknesses in the present sanctions system and to introduce further measures as may be necessary in order to guarantee a greater degree of effectiveness. The governments of the UK, France, Belgium, Italy and Slovakia, all members of the UN Security Council, were urged to make a concerted effort to introduce a binding resolution in regard to Burma, including the release of Aung San Suu Kyi. Parliament noted that a similar resolution was passed in January 2007 but vetoed by China and Russia and opposed by South Africa. It called for an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council to address the current situation in Burma. All Member States that are members of the United Nations Human Rights Council must make a concerted effort to introduce and obtain support for a resolution on Burma at the next session of the Council in September 2007.

Parliament also urged China and India, as well as Russia, to use their considerable economic and political leverage over the Burmese regime in order to bring about substantial improvements in the country and, in any case, to cease the supply of weaponry and other strategic resources. It called again on businesses which invest in Burma to ensure that, in carrying out their projects, human rights are genuinely respected and, if human rights abuses do occur, to suspend their activities in Burma. It expressed disappointment that some countries have seen fit substantially to increase their investments in Burma, regardless of the dire human rights situation there.

Lastly, Parliament urged leaders at the APEC Summit in Sydney on 8 and 9 September 2007 to address the recent human rights abuses in Burma and to agree on action to induce change in that country.