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1 AUNG SAN SUU KYI VISITS EUROPE

Aung San Suu Kyi made a three-week tour of Europe in June, visiting Switzerland, Norway, Ireland, UK and France. It was the first time she has been able to travel to Europe in 24 years. She was greeted by cheering crowds throughout her trip and held meetings with government leaders and politicians.

Speaking at the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Geneva, Aung San Suu Kyi called for “*democracy-friendly human rights development growth*” and warned potential investors against investing in the state-owned energy company MOGE while it lacks standards. She said, “*MOGE, the state-owned company under the Ministry of Energy with which all foreign participation in the energy sector takes place through joint-venture arrangements, lacks both transparency and accountability at present. The Government needs to apply internationally recognized standards, such as the IMF’s Code of Good Practices on Fiscal Transparency. Other countries could help by not allowing their own companies to partner MOGE, unless it was signed up to such codes.*”

In Oslo, she was finally able to deliver her speech for the Nobel Peace Prize, which was awarded in 1991. In her speech, she called on the international community not to forget Burma’s political prisoners. “*One prisoner of conscience is one too many. Those who have not yet been freed, those who have not yet been given access to the benefits of justice in my country number much more than one. Please remember them and do whatever is possible to affect their earliest, unconditional release,*” she said.

In the UK, Aung San Suu Kyi’s 8-day visit included meetings with Prime Minister David Cameron, Foreign Secretary William Hague and leader of the opposition Ed Milliband, a speech in Westminster Hall to both Houses of Parliament, and collecting an honorary degree from Oxford University. In her speech to Parliament, she welcomed Thein Sein’s reforms so far but stressed the need to build strong democratic institutions and the importance of constitutional reform. She said, “*the current constitution, drawn up by*



the military government in 2008, must be amended to incorporate the basic rights and aspirations of Burma's ethnic nationalities."

2 VIOLENCE IN ARAKAN STATE

In June horrific violence erupted in Rakhine (Arakan) State in Western Burma, leaving thousands of homes and businesses destroyed and many people dead.

On 3 June an estimated 300 Rakhine Buddhists attacked a bus carrying Muslim pilgrims. Ten people were beaten to death. The angry mob was allegedly reacting to news that a young 27 years-old Rakhine woman had been raped and murdered in late May by three Rohingya suspects. At the time of the attack, the suspects were reportedly in police custody. The violence then escalated into rioting that spread to the state capital, Sittwe, and other townships. On 10 June President Thein Sein issued a state of emergency and sent Burmese Army troops to the area.

According to official government figures, 78 people have been killed, 87 injured and around 3,158 residential buildings damaged or destroyed. However, the true figure of dead and injured is likely to be much higher. For instance, the Burmese Rohingya Organization UK (BROUK) said that at least 650 Rohingya had been killed and over 1,200 were missing as a result of the violence. Information has been difficult to obtain as the government has denied or limited access to international journalists, aid workers, and diplomats.

The World Food Programme estimates about 90,000 people have been displaced and are in need of assistance as a result of the violence. Also, in addition to that Bangladesh has been condemned for closing its border and refusing to allow in hundreds of Rohingya who are fleeing the violence. Boatloads of men, women and children have been forced back out to sea by Bangladesh border guards.

Rohingya minority

The Rohingya are a persecuted Muslim minority in North Rakhine (Arakan) State in Burma, denied citizenship and subject to severe human rights abuses, including restrictions of movement and on permission to marry, arbitrary arrest and forced labour. They are widely viewed in Burma as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, despite the fact that Rohingya people have lived in Burma for generations.



The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Burma, Tomás Ojea Quintana, warned that the violence in Rakhine state represents a serious threat to the country's future. *"The underlying tensions that stem from discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities pose a threat to Myanmar's democratic transition and stability. I urge all sides to exercise restraint, respect the law and refrain from violence,"* he said.

3 BURMA IS THE SIXTH LARGEST SOURCE OF REFUGEES WORLDWIDE

On 18 June, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) released its annual report *"Global Trends 2011"* (UNHCR Global Trends 2011). The report identified Burma as the sixth largest source of refugees worldwide. As of December 2011, 414,626 refugees had originated from Burma. Burma was also the sixth largest source of asylum claims, with 29,800 claims filed in 2011.

4 BURMESE ARMY CONTINUES ATTACKS ONE YEAR AFTER BREAKING KACHIN CEASEFIRE

19 June marked the one-year anniversary since fighting broke out in Kachin State following the Burmese Army's breaking of a 17-year ceasefire agreement with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). This past year has been marked by continuous and systematic human rights abuses committed by the Burmese Army against Kachin civilians which has resulted in over 75 000 people becoming internally displaced.

Despite several rounds of informal and formal talks between the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) and government representatives, there has been no tangible progress towards a renewed ceasefire. Fighting continues on a near-daily basis and allegations of sexual violence committed by the Burmese Army against Kachin women, including the use of rape as weapon of war, continue to be reported.

At the occasion of this one-year anniversary, Kachin Women's Association in Thailand (KWAT) released a report that detailed various human rights abuses committed by the Tatmadaw over the past year.

For more information, please see:

http://www.kachinwomen.com/images/stories/publication/ongoing_iimpunity%20.pdf



5 U.S. SENATE APPOINTED DEREK MITCHELL AS A NEW AMBASSADOR TO BURMA

After 22 years, the United States will have an ambassador serving in Burma. The U.S. Senate confirmed Derek Mitchell, the former special envoy to Burma, as America continues to engage the former pariah state and seeks to consolidate the country's diplomatic pivot to Asia.

Before being officially appointed, Mitchell testified in front of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 27 June. *"We have no illusions about the challenges that lie ahead. As Secretary Clinton has observed, reform is not irreversible, and continued democratic change is not inevitable,"* said Mitchell during his congressional testimony. (source: www.dvb.no)

6 BURMA SIGNS AGREEMENT TO STOP CHILD SOLDIER RECRUITMENT

On 27 June Burma's military-backed government signed a Joint Action plan to stop the recruitment of child soldiers and release existing child soldiers from the military. The agreement was signed by senior military officials and UN representatives in the capital Naypyidaw. The agreement also grants access to international monitors to ensure the commitments are carried out.

The use of child soldiers in Burma is already illegal but the Burmese Army has continued to recruit and use children as soldiers. The UN Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict to the UN Security Council stated that during 2011, *"children continued to be recruited by the Tatmadaw (Burmese Army). Reports continued to indicate that, in addition to children who were formally recruited into the Tatmadaw, children were also used by the Tatmadaw for forced labour, including as porters. In Kachin State, there were verified reports in late 2011 of children being used by the Tatmadaw alongside adults as porters on the front line."*