

End of Mission Report
UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, UNDP Resident Representative for Myanmar
2003-2007¹

“If you want to really understand us, listen closely to what we are not allowed to say.”²

Executive Summary

The “silent humanitarian emergency” and the acute human rights crisis in Myanmar - and with it much of the suffering of the people today - is a direct result of politics. It is a combination of a military authority (i) denying the involvement of all elements of society in the implementation of a gradual political transition, (ii) having little understanding of economic policies, or the management and provision of social services, (iii) creating an environment where human rights are violated, which in turn has led to (iv) international sanctions being applied. Economic mismanagement, massive long-term under-investment in the social sectors and a lack of legal protection and means of redress for victims of injustice and abuse have left a mark throughout the country. In ethnic areas, these problems are compounded by the uncompromising attitude of the military authority towards the ceasefire groups and a few ethnic armed groups which remain in conflict with the current government military.

Even if over the last four years, the international community has made efforts to dramatically scale up its response to the suffering in Myanmar, the overall amount of overseas development assistance remains very low in comparison to other countries in the region and particularly compared with other least developed countries. While the few assistance organizations operating in the country are achieving relatively a lot with the limited aid available, the current response is insufficient to counter the worsening trends. The likelihood that the situation in Myanmar will further deteriorate is very high. Given the to date limited levels of aid, the ability of the humanitarian assistance community to prepare for, or respond to, any further deterioration is far from evident.

The situation in Myanmar is undeniably complex. However, it could be argued that it is no more complicated than many other crises to which the international community is responding around the world. What defines the particular complexity in Myanmar is the fact that it is an embargoed context. It is a situation where most of the bilateral and much of the multilateral political and economic engagement is severely constrained, if not even prohibited. In such an environment of non-engagement the UN finds itself the lead international actor on a range of issues to tackle the political deadlock, as well as to address poverty and humanitarian concerns, and human rights violations.

The ultimate challenge in Myanmar is how to engage effectively and in a principled manner with an authority, considered as “pariah” by much of the international community, on behalf and in the best interest of an oppressed and neglected people. While such a principled engagement approach faces obvious internal challenges, to some extent less evident –and arguably completely unjustified – is the unrelenting hostile external scrutiny of aid efforts to Myanmar. The related politically influenced and externally imposed operational constraints (as a result of lobbying efforts by international lobby groups who lack confidence in the ability and determination of those working inside the country to be accountable and principled) make Myanmar one of the most challenging operating environments today.

This paper attempts to provide a brief analysis of the main stakeholders, share lessons from some of the principled engagement approaches and highlight issues that will require continued attention and further concerted international engagement on behalf of the people of Myanmar.

¹ **The views presented in this paper are those of the author of this report, and thus do not represent official UN positions.**

² Advice contained in a note from a civil society leader to the departing UN RC/HC.

Summary of Key Events during the Period 2003-2007

2003

- 30 May Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's convoy attacked near Depayin. She is subsequently incarcerated, the US and EU introduce further sanctions, including a US "import/financial services" ban
- 30 August Prime Minister and head of Military Intelligence General Khin Nyunt presents the Seven Step Roadmap for political transition, which includes the resumption of the National Convention to agree on the elements of a constitution.
- November Preliminary ceasefire discussions begin with the Karen National Union, the last of the major insurgency movements.

2004

- March UN authorized to open offices in the east of Myanmar in Townships adjacent to the conflict areas.
- End March Final in a series of missions by the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy, Ambassador Ismail Razali. He comes close to finding an understanding between the senior leadership and the head of the opposition Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.
- Early May NLD announces its withdrawal from participation in the National Convention, given the government's refusal to accommodate a number of demands.
- 17 May Resumption of the National Convention suspended since 1996.
- Mid-October Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt arrested.
- Late-October Between one to two thousand military intelligence officers either dismissed or arrested.
- December Following a successful completion of a high level regional consultation on trafficking (COMMIT), the remaining senior officials who were instrumental in promoting the former Prime Minister's policy of greater openness towards the international community, and greater engagement with the ethnic nationalities are either arrested or dismissed.

2005

- 7 May Three bombs go off in crowded shopping areas in Yangon killing a number of people. As of yet no one has claimed responsibility. Possible perpetrators include renegade military intelligence officers or extremist elements based along the Thai-Myanmar border.
- July Government cedes its turn as the chair of ASEAN
- August Under strong political pressure the Global Fund withdraws its funding from Myanmar.
- 20 October Significant increase in the price of fuel announced (900 per cent increase in the case of diesel). There is no public reaction to these price rises.
- November The government starts to move to what will become the new capital, NayPyiTaw.

2006

- January Having been unable to return to Myanmar since March of 2004 Ambassador Ismail Razali, the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy, resigns.
- February Presentation to the assistance community of a new set of Operational Guidelines. Presented by the Ministers of Planning, Foreign Affairs, and Home Affairs as a document for discussion, a number of the clauses compromise the integrity of humanitarian operations.

March	Presentation to the government of a set of “Guiding principles for the provision of humanitarian assistance”. The document is sent by the UN Resident Coordinator on behalf of UN agencies, international and national NGOs.
April	Government increases civil servants salaries ten-fold.
May	Commencement of significant offensive against KNU. Pressure placed on the UN to react.
Mid May	First mission of Under Secretary General Professor Ibrahim Gambari. In the course of the visit the Professor is able to hold substantive discussions with the Senior General, and to see Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.
November	Second mission of USG Gambari. Discussions with the senior leadership are more difficult, including their refusal to acknowledge the gravity of the humanitarian situation.
December	Designation of UN Resident Coordinator also as UN Humanitarian Coordinator.
<u>2007</u>	
January	Historic double veto by China and Russia of a Security Council resolution on Myanmar sponsored by the US.
April	Mission of the Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Margareta Wahlstrom. The purpose of the mission was to explain the significance of the designation of a UN Humanitarian Coordinator, and to discuss the nature of a humanitarian response.
15 August	Government introduces overnight dramatic price increases (of 100 to 500 per cent) for diesel, petrol and compressed natural gas. As a result many people are unable to absorb the sudden increase in the price of transportation.
Aug/Sept	Initial protests led by the 88 Generation Students put down. Following the security forces crackdown in the monastic centre of Pakokku, the monks in the main urban centres start to peacefully march demanding an apology from the regime for the attack and asking that they acknowledge the need to address the poverty of the people.
End September	Announcement of the conclusion of the National Convention. Despite a final attempt to introduce a number of points of concern by the ethnic nationalities, none are accommodated by the committee managing the deliberations of the National Convention.
Sept/Oct	Violent crackdown on the protestors, many killed and wounded. Thousands are arrested, some for nothing more than having given water to the monks or being seen to have clapped too enthusiastically.
September	Mission of Professor Gambari to encourage the authorities to cease in the violent repression of the peaceful demonstrations.
24 October	On UN Day the UN Country Team issues a statement drawing attention to the validity of the monks’ statement concerning the vulnerability of the people of Myanmar, and repeating the UN’s commitment to working with all parties to address this suffering.
4 November	UN Resident & Humanitarian Coordinator informed that he is to leave the country by the 4 th of December.
Early November	Professor Gambari conducts a mission to encourage the authorities to make the political transition process more open and participatory.
11 November	The UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Myanmar arrived in Yangon for a five days visit following Human Rights Council resolution S-5/1.
<u>2008</u>	
February	Announcement of the completion of the drafting of the constitution. The timing of the referendum is set for May, and the elections in 2010.
March	Professor Gambari undertakes a mission but returns with limited results

Key Observations and Lessons

The following reflections are based on the UN's work in Myanmar over the period July 2003-December 2007. The most glaring observation is that Myanmar is a complex challenge. It is a complexity as much defined by the known protagonists and obvious issues, as by the less evident stakeholders and underrepresented concerns in this multi-faceted context.

1. The Context – a brief overview

Myanmar represents the paradox of a country blessed with an extraordinarily rich natural resource base, but where decades of conflict, mismanagement, national seclusion and international isolation have led to deteriorating economic growth and increasing poverty. For the most part, Myanmar is a silent and slow onset emergency with a number of geographic pockets of acute humanitarian needs and human rights and protection concerns for particularly vulnerable populations. The political realities inside and outside the country have resulted in rising poverty levels and a steady deterioration of the socio-economic situation for the majority of the population. If left unchecked the increasing levels of household insecurity will not only contribute to further human suffering, but could eventually escalate into a major humanitarian crisis.

Diversity and Conflict

Myanmar is made up of an intricate mosaic of different ethnic, cultural and geographic entities. It is a nation of great geographic and ethnological diversity with more than one hundred and thirty ethnic groupings having different languages, religions, customs and histories. The topography of the country – mountain, hills, delta and dry zone – further contributes to the diversity with different groups having developed histories and forged identities that are not necessarily defined by administrative boundaries.

Myanmar has had a troubled history of almost sixty years of continuous conflict for the most part pitting the ethnic minorities against the (Bamar) majority-dominated military. At the time of independence, the very notion of the Union was not accepted by many ethnic groups within the country, and still remains contested by some. Decades of insurgencies have also reinforced the mutual suspicions between the majority ethnic group and the ethnic minority populations.

Poverty and Household Vulnerability

The humanitarian situation in Myanmar is characterized by rapidly deteriorating socio-economic circumstances across the country. High (and further increasing) levels of poverty coupled with a continuous decline in the capacity of social-service provision structures to provide essential services places the majority of the population in a situation of extreme vulnerability. The underlying causes of this situation include massive long-term underinvestment in the social sectors, ill-informed and out-dated socio-economic policies, along with a lack of legal protection and means of redress for victims of injustice and abuse. In ethnic areas, these problems are compounded by the uncompromising attitude of the regime towards ceasefire and ethnic groups.

There are a number of geographic pockets of acute need in the country as well as a number of population groups subjected to particular hardships throughout the country. These include (i) **civilian populations in areas of ongoing conflict** - predominantly in the south-east of Myanmar. As part of the army's counterinsurgency strategy, civilians in these areas are deliberately targeted with movement restrictions, destruction of food stocks, relocation, and abuses such as forced labour; (ii) **returnees from Bangladesh** - along with the Muslim population of northern Rakhine State as a whole. This group continues to confront lack of citizenship, restrictions on movement, land confiscation, forced labour and compulsory contributions; (iii) **former poppy farmers** - more than 700,000 of whom have lost, or stand to lose, their primary livelihood as a result of drug-eradication programs; (iv) **migrant workers** - who move around

the country and the world seeking work to send money back to families in both urban and rural areas. Those who work at sites inside Burma often do not have permission to be there or lack National Registration Cards; many (probably most) who work outside the country are not there legally, and thus face all the dangers that statelessness carries. Migrants are at higher than average risk of life threatening health conditions as well as trafficking and slavery; and (v) **women and children** - who are especially vulnerable to survival threats and abuse. Mortality rates for infants, children under five and mothers are alarmingly high. Trafficking and sexual exploitation are the most serious protection issues.

A household survey conducted in Myanmar in 2004-05 in collaboration with the Central Statistical Organization identified that more than 30 per cent of people were living below the poverty line (that is, their expenditures are insufficient to cover their basic food and non-food needs), with significant regional variations. For example, Chin State has the highest levels of poverty, at more than 70 per cent. Shan State (North) and Shan State (East) have poverty levels over 50 per cent. These figures are likely to be conservative as based on data collected before the significant increases in fuel prices in October 2005 and August 2007 and the (inflationary) public-sector salary hike in April 2006.

Today, Myanmar's estimated per capita GDP is a little more than half of that of Cambodia or Bangladesh, and less than half of that of Laos and Vietnam. Inflation is the highest in ASEAN, at almost 40% per annum. Average consumption expenditure of food of Myanmar households is as high as 73 percent of total expenditure, which is reflective of a very low-income level of the population. Myanmar's neighbours are considerably less poor as food accounts for 32 percent of consumption expenditure of households in Thailand, 37 percent in Malaysia, 52 percent in Bangladesh, 57 percent in Cambodia, and 59 percent in Indonesia. To place this last statistic in a more global context, a recent survey of the humanitarian situation in Gaza concluded that the comparable figure there was 68%.

Increasing poverty is resulting in correspondingly high malnutrition rates. More than 30 per cent of children under five are malnourished. Worryingly, Myanmar is the only country in the world where Beri Beri, a vitamin deficiency, is a major cause of infant mortality—indicative, in part, of an inability of poor families to diversify their food intake. Poverty is also having an impact on school attendance and the ability of families to meet health costs. More than 40 per cent of children who enroll in primary school fail to complete the cycle. Close to 80% of the cost of health treatment is borne by the patient.

The ability of the social service provision structures to address the essential needs of the population is deteriorating rapidly and most alarmingly in the health and education sectors. The weakening of the ability of the Ministry of Education to provide quality education has resulted in a generation coming of age that is less well educated than the generation of their parents, which they are replacing, a historical aberration. The decline of a previously stronger education system not only deprives generations of children of a good start in life, but moreover seriously impedes the capacity of the people of Myanmar to overcome chronic poverty in the immediate term as well as the ability of the country to develop and sustain democratic practices in the future. Deteriorating capacity of health structures means that these structures are increasingly unable to confront growing rates of HIV/AIDS, multi-drug resistant TB and malaria. Current visible signs of deteriorating health-sector capacity include very high rates of multi-drug resistance in new TB patients, and recent high rates of dengue mortality. It is expected that in the future such visible signs of health-system decline will increase.

Patterns of Abuse and Violation

While existing legal systems do not promote violence, they are not set up to protect the population. The origin of many of the violations can be linked to the 'self-reliance' policy of the army (whereby troops rely on the local population for supplies and logistical support) and a value system which justifies violent means to reaching the ends of state security and integrity. Thus throughout the country communities are

subjected to varying levels of abuse by military forces who, in order to assert greater central government control and often to implement national development projects, resort to forced labour, the seizure of property and assets, and the forced relocation of populations. The situation in the conflict portions of the border areas is even worse with reports of the frequent and systematic recourse to such grave human rights violations as torture, extra-judicial execution, rape, and extremely abusive forms of forced labour. The cessation of many conflicts following a series of ceasefires has somewhat improved the situation, and in recent years both central government and local authorities have shown some willingness to crack down on activities such as illicit drugs and the trafficking of women and children, as well as to address the issue of forced labour.

Operating Environment

The operating environment is a very cautious one with accessibility constrained by both security and geographic considerations, as well as lengthy government approval procedures, strong customs rules, and frequent administrative, political and bureaucratic changes. The authorities are deeply suspicious of the presence of UN agencies, as well as even of the ICRC. More recently, the authorities have sought to further regulate the provision of assistance through special guidelines – a move the humanitarian community has resisted given that the guidelines were violating humanitarian independence.

Since the mid-1990s, Myanmar has been placed under strong international sanctions. As a result the IFIs, such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, have no presence in country, nor even programmes of any significance. UN Agencies operate under a variety of mandates, ranging from limited technical assistance, for the most part in the health sector, to severely restricted mandates, as in the case of UNDP. The current isolation follows almost forty years of self-imposed seclusion. The cost of the lengthy absence of engagement with the wider international community is felt in the limited technical knowledge of government counter-parts. Unlike in other humanitarian contexts, given the combination of the constrained environment and limited availability of aid funding, to date the number of international and national NGOs operating in country is still quite limited, though having grown significantly over recent years.

2. The Protagonist – a brief analysis of positions and interests of the main stakeholders

There are many different actors involved in Myanmar - each one strongly believing their cause just and their treatment unfair (resulting in discourses on Myanmar that are not always particularly rational). In terms of contributing to the complexity of the landscape the principal protagonists could be grouped into six categories, even if each sub-grouping does not necessarily present internal cohesion and common purpose. The categorization includes the ruling authority, the political opposition, the ethnic nationalities, the Burma lobby, the foreign governments, and the assistance community.

The Ruling Authority

- Military

Since 1962, with the end of the “parliamentary period”, Myanmar has been governed by varying iterations of military rule. The primary preoccupation of most of the past regimes as well as the current ruling authority is security and reclaiming the physical integrity of the State – the Union of Myanmar. The regime has been isolated through decades of self-imposed seclusion (under the regime of General Ne Win from 1962 to 1988) followed by almost twenty years of ostracization (since the violent repression of the 1988 uprising) by the international community. Today, the regime is no longer defined by any specific political ideology beyond maintaining the integrity of the union, but rather by military mentality and reasoning.

The senior leadership of the SPDC believes that it is the military that has kept the country together and saved it repeatedly from external and internal threats. Also it views its primary mission as forging Myanmar's modern history and that it will be remembered as one of the great builders of the nation. Political power in Myanmar is highly centralized and located within the military hierarchy rather than the government administration. Though nominally the "State Peace and Development Council" (SPDC) is placed at the apex of the pyramid of power, all crucial decisions that affect the entire State – and the populace – are made by the two top leaders, Senior General Than Shwe and Vice-Senior General Maung Aye. The administration of the State is thoroughly militarized in the sense that most ministers and deputy ministers are military officers, both retired and active duty. Within the military culture to be transferred to a ministerial position is not necessarily considered a promotion. The few civilians in the government owe their appointment to their loyalty to the top leaders, and thus generally suffer from an acute sense of vulnerability in such a military-dominated system.

The formal functioning of the government is regulated by meetings of a number of committees and the cabinet. For the most part concerned with decisions of an essentially routine or administrative nature, these committees are usually headed by one of the top leaders, or a cabinet minister, and exist within most significant policy areas. These committees are charged with implementing decisions passed down from the top two state leaders, whose tendency to give vague and often emotionally reactionary instructions renders these committee hesitant to make any significant reform.

At the sub-national level, the country is divided into thirteen regional military commands, each under the command of a Major-General. Following the dismantlement of former General Khin Nyunt's Military Intelligence, the Regional Commander has ultimate authority over political, economic and social affairs in his area, and easily overrides ministerial directives from Naypyitaw. Receiving limited budgetary support from the central authority, the Regional Commander is responsible for the maintenance of his troops on the ground, and also carries out many administrative functions.

The relationship between the regime and the population is feudal at all levels. The interactions between the state and its people are more defined by the aspirations of the military governing the state than by any sense of responsibility towards addressing the physical needs and political rights of the population. The authority believes that prioritizing security and physical infrastructure is an acceptable form of governance, a vital element of sovereignty and nation-building. The fact that the latter frequently entails forced relocations, forced labour and hostile military action victimizing the civilian population is considered a necessary sacrifice to achieve the political goal of maintaining the Union. In their view, the military has sacrificed 'sweet and blood' for the country, and therefore it is only fair that citizens are put to work, under these harsh and involuntary conditions for what they consider the common good of the country. There is no apparent attempt among the senior leadership to understand what the people really need, or indeed to imagine that this is a relevant question.

Consequently, it is a ruling authority with little understanding of and/or concern for the conditions in which the people live, even less so since the dismantling of General Khin Nyunt's military intelligence apparatus. Combined with an apparent lack of technical macro and micro-economic and social policy expertise, the results are ill-guided economic and social policies. The allocation of government budgetary resources to the social sectors is the lowest in the region. As a result social development policies and legal frameworks are extremely weak, or even nonexistent. There is no transparency and accountability within the government system, and even less towards the people or vis-à-vis the outside world.

Exacerbating the regime's limited understanding of socio-economic realities, in particular the senior leadership's limited experience of non-military matters, is the reluctance of civil servants and junior military personnel to report bad news up the chain of command, and the resulting unwillingness to allow any information to be collected that could be politicized and used against it. As a result many of the statistics and performance indicators reported to the senior leadership by relevant Government Ministries

(for example GDP growth rates ranging from 12.2% to 13.6% during the period 2002-2007, literacy rates of more than 96% in the same period) do not reflect the realities encountered on the ground in many parts of the country.

This “mutually strategic ignorance” – that is, the arrangement whereby both the average civil servant and the decision-makers choose not to seek to report or discuss anything unpleasant about the country’s socio-economic and institutional conditions - can account to some extent for a number of disastrous economic and social policies. However, it by no means excuses the neglect of the most basic needs of the population. While it could be argued that the Myanmar context suffers from an element of the “Emperor has no clothes”, it could equally be said that such ignorance is convenient for the senior leadership while “strategic un-reporting” of unpleasant realities is a necessary survival tactic for rank and file members of the military government at all levels.

The aforementioned dynamics are further complicated by the fact that the regime is in the midst of a structural transformation made even more difficult by the failing health of the senior leadership. This has triggered an urgent need among the senior leaders to identify a new generation who will protect their legacy. The question of identifying a succession has to some extent paralysed the government, as senior officials try to protect their current power bases and future prospects. There is an even greater unwillingness or inability of even senior government officials to raise problematic issues with the top leadership. These dynamics have further reinforced the harder-line isolationist attitudes in the government’s dealings with the international community - no one individual can afford to be seen adopting more moderate positions of the kind taken by the former Prime Minister Khin Nyunt, even if so inclined.

While viewed by some international observers as nothing more than an exercise to give appearance of movement towards political change, the introduction of the constitution will by definition redistribute power at the central level - through, for example, the possible designation of a President and two Vice-Presidents of equal rank, one civilian and one military. At the sub-national level the establishment of some form of state and regional level authority may strengthen the ability of ethnic nationality leaders, and specifically those who have ceasefires, to renegotiate the terms of existing economic arrangements more or less imposed on them by the regional commanders.

The next generation of military leaders seem to be more pragmatic, possibly as a result of the realization that they have yet to make their mark. This more nuanced approach was demonstrated last year in the government’s change of attitude towards the ILO. There are further initial indications that the events of August to October 2007 introduced into the minds of some of the emerging senior leadership an element of doubt regarding the state of the economy as officially presented by the regime.

In such a closed environment with a withdrawn leadership, the recent announcement by the senior leader of a timetable for a referendum, sometime in May, and future national elections in 2010, would suggest that the country has entered a period of greater reclusiveness. As a result approaches to promote change will need to be more sophisticated, exploiting internal contradictions, and identifying and supporting those within the regime who understand the need for such changes.

- *Civil Servants*

It would be an oversimplification to view the government in power as a homogenous entity. Aware of the deficiencies and injustices of the system to which they belong, there are civil servants who are open to finding entry points to improve governance. Many of these are senior government technocrats who are responsible for the provision of social services. While most of these technocrats lack authority to affect wide-ranging changes, they are confronted with the daily realities of the civilian population, and have in the past tried to find ways to continue to support humanitarian operations. These dedicated civil servants

are typically from an older generation – one that had benefited from a much higher quality education than domestically-educated, recent recruits to the civil service.

Also to be noted is the commendable service of civil servants working, for example, as midwives, nurses, university staff, foresters, agricultural extension staff, or schoolteachers in communities throughout the country (under trying circumstances), often without basic inputs (medical and schools supplies) and for minimal pay. Many of these civil servants will be expected to function during and even after a political transition.

However, as these senior civil servants with solid technocratic backgrounds retire the issue of the quality of the next generation civil servants arise, in part because of the progressively malfunctioning education system and in part because of the accelerating brain drain as ‘the best and the brightest’ leave the country under military rule for greener pastures abroad. This is something that is going to impact the quality of the civil service negatively even with a capable political leadership operating in a favorable domestic and international contexts.

The Political Opposition

- The National League for Democracy

While the political legitimacy of the main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), is derived from its victory in the 1990 elections, its relevance, and moral authority, is defined by the courage of its incarcerated leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Most of the current NLD leadership is made up of former senior officials, many of whom are retired military of the earlier regime led by General Ne Win. Also known as the “Uncles”, in reference to their age, their experience is of strong central government structures with ethnocentric rigorously applied, centrally controlled development models.

Beyond having a political mandate and carrying the moral authority embodied by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the NLD has not been able to clearly articulate an alternative political, social and economic vision for the country – other than claiming their right to run the country based on their election victory. Because Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has spent 12 of the last 18 years under house arrest and thus has been prevented from engaging NLD members and representatives of other groups in debates about social, economic and political problems in Myanmar, the NLD has not been able to take positions on a number of key issues affecting the day to day lives of the population.

- The 88 Generation Student Movement

Contrasting sharply with the NLD have been the positions taken by an emerging political force known as the 88 Generation Students. This group is made up of former student leaders incarcerated in 1988 and then released from long prison sentences end of 2004. Careful not to eclipse the historical position of the NLD, the 88 Generation Student Movement has built part of its political platform on the need to address the socio-economic hardships of the population. Vocal in their protest of the sudden fuel price increases of August 2007, the leaders were all rearrested. Possibly being perceived as a greater threat by the regime, the 88 Generation Students may have evolved as the most potent source of principled and effective resistance to the Government today.

Ethnic Nationalities

- Ceasefire Groups

Confronting the threats of at times more than thirty armed groups, the regime has been able since 1989 to reach separate ceasefire agreements with seventeen ethnic nationality groups. These arrangements came about as a result of the economically-motivated policy reversal of the foreign governmental backers such

as China and Thailand which left the Burmese insurgent groups dry financially and in terms of weaponry and other types of support and cooperation. The ceasefire groups (as they are now called), though united in their opposition to the Bamar dominated government and army, have never been able to create a common front. The current authorities have, of course, encouraged such fragmentation as it facilitates the strategy to maintain control over the minority ethnic groups through domination rather than accommodation.

This approach also seems to have defined the attitude of the authorities towards those ceasefire groups participating in the National Convention. Agreeing to attend the process on the basis of earlier commitments made to them by the former Prime Minister and head of Military Intelligence General Khin Nyunt, the ceasefire leaders were unable to get any of their concerns accepted by the more hard-line group currently dominating the agenda. As a result, there are considerable tensions within many ceasefire groups, with younger members questioning the wisdom of their leaders to have engaged in such a process with no apparent benefit. The forcible disarming of three minor ceasefire groups in the summer of 2005 has further heightened tensions between the leadership and their constituencies. There are reports that some of the major groups have started to recruit and rearm.

Adding greater complexity to an already complicated reality is the fact that none of the ceasefire groups offered more than passive, almost token, support to the monks during their peaceful demonstrations against the price hikes of August-October 2007. The event was seen as a Bamar affair, and the ethnic groups are said to have maintained their distance based on prior experience where ultimately they have found themselves being held accountable for tensions, principally among the Bamar majority and in the main urban centres, that were not of their making. The dilemma that many ethnic groups have faced throughout history is that if they support one Bamar-majority group then the others become their opponents. Thus it is to be feared that there are strong simmering inter-ethnic tensions that are currently being papered over by the general frustration and anger that is being focused on the military authority.

- *Groups in Conflict*

Having chosen not to pursue the ceasefire discussions initiated by the former General Khin Nyunt with the last major insurgency movement (the Karen National Union), the military is currently engaged in an offensive against a number of the KNU brigades. In addition, confrontations are also being waged against two other much smaller groups, namely the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) and the Shan State Army South (SSA-S). The estimates of the size of these movements vary from 1000 for the smallest (KNPP) to 4000 for the KNU, but it is doubtful whether these organizations, with their increasingly limited funds, could actually arm and deploy this many soldiers at any one time. None of these groups control significant territory and their strongholds are scattered across the SPDC controlled territories.

In many ways the political influence of these groups is far greater than their numbers and the estimated military threat they pose to the government. Seen as the last active resistance to the regime, the KNU especially draws significant support from international advocacy groups as well as in some cases from assistance organizations operating from Thailand.

Burma Lobby

Another group whose political influence in foreign capitals seems to be disproportionate to its relevance on the ground is the Burma lobby, specifically the US and UK based groups, both Burmese and non-Burmese. They attain their influence by claiming to speak on behalf of ASSK, and have been facilitated in this by her lengthy periods incommunicado. Without updated public leadership from ASSK, the lobby continues to promote an approach established in the mid-1990s. They reflect their strategy of isolation and sanctions back into the country, and seek to encourage the opposition inside to believe that this will

bring about regime change and lead to peace and justice. Some original supporters of this strategy have subsequently re-evaluated its effectiveness and pursued alternatives. But a hard-core remains drawing support from understandable political and popular indignation in the West about the situation and continuing abuses, and a belief that 'something must be done'.

In the first half of this decade, significant lobbying energy was expended to attack the humanitarian assistance community for arguing the humanitarian imperative and for appealing for more donor support to assist the suffering people in Myanmar. These attacks were driven by several imperatives (i) fear of aid mismanagement and diversion to government coffers through exchange rate distortions (the former mostly unsubstantiated, the latter a genuine concern which was addressed); (ii) lack of knowledge of the situation on the ground (both as concerns humanitarian data, and the activities of NGOs and civil society, particular as many in the lobby are blacklisted or refused to visit 'on principle'); (iii) concern that the SPDC would manipulate assistance to bolster its control; (iv) a fear of diversion of aid from the relatively well-served border to 'inside'; and (v) a belief that by alleviating people's suffering, regime change would be delayed. But the centre of debate on humanitarian and other assistance has shifted in the last two years, thanks in part to credible Burmese voices speaking out from inside' and even the hardcore of the lobby now accept that assistance must be provided to the population inside, albeit highly conditioned. Unfortunately, this awakening has come at a time when operating conditions have become much more difficult.

Foreign Governments/Diplomatic/International Community

The international community can be subdivided into three categories: governments committed to forcing political change via sanctions; the regional players viewing Myanmar in broader economic, geo-political and geo-strategic terms, and other regional players. The first sub-category is made up of governments whose policies seem to be as much influenced by the need to respond to their own domestic political pressures as by the felt-moral responsibility to address the suffering in Myanmar. As a result, possibly effective and far reaching approaches are frequently diluted as politicians and governments attempt to avoid antagonizing internal constituencies whose understanding of the realities in Myanmar is frequently incomplete.

A number of regional governments have strong economic and geo-political interests in maintaining a working relationship/co-operation with the Myanmar authorities. The realities of having common borders and needing to maintain stability with similar ethnic groups, combined with an increasing dependency on the natural and human resource wealth of Myanmar, has meant that there is only limited willingness of these governments to support strong isolationist strategies. Other regional players though concerned about the possible impact of events in Myanmar on the region, find themselves able to do little, but nevertheless find themselves incurring political costs in their broader regional engagement with the US and Europe.

Assistance Community

The assistance community is comprised of the UN and international NGOs, and those operating inside and outside the country. As concerns the UN, Agencies operate under different mandates. While a number of UN Agencies are able to function as they would in any other country, others (such as UNDP) operate under severely restricted mandates. Even if over the last years an increasing number of international NGOs have started to operate in Myanmar, the overall presence remains limited. With around US\$3 per capita, Myanmar receives a fraction in comparison to the international aid provided to other countries in

the region such as Vietnam (US\$33 per capita), Cambodia (US\$38 per capita) and Laos (US\$49 per capita).³

As already mentioned, some humanitarian partners have been facing increasing pressure from the authorities to the point of having to suspend operations. MSF France, for example, closed its programmes in Myanmar in December 2006. Similarly, the ICRC had its independent protection work compromised as they have not been allowed to conduct prison visits without being accompanied by national officials. As this is inconsistent with their global standards, ICRC had to suspend the programme. On the other hand, a number of international NGOs have been able to reach understandings with local commanders allowing access to areas previously categorized as black, or inaccessible. The environment demands the skills of knowing how to function within an unpredictable setting, learning how to seize opportunities and consolidate gains.

A number of groups, mostly based in Thailand, have for many years been delivering assistance to populations in the Myanmar borderlands. However, international organizations for the most part cannot work directly cross-border, and therefore provide assistance via proxy organizations associated with the conflict actors. These include exiled groups, groups linked to armed ethnic organizations still operating in Myanmar, non-governmental organizations and international religious aid organizations. As the political, military and financial fortunes of the ethnic opposition groups within Myanmar have declined, and as funding from governmental and institutional donors has increasingly focused on humanitarian rather than political efforts, increasing numbers of the elite from these organizations have gravitated towards aid delivery to the populations in their areas. Although the cross-border assistance groups are based in Thailand, they have sometimes extensive networks in ethnic areas (often identical with the networks of the armed ethnic organizations) and deliver services (health, education and food/cash) to populations with assistance and security provided by the armed groups.

3. The Issues

Myanmar represents the ultimate challenge to the international community in terms of the urgent need to address a political problem and a worsening human rights situation in order to **prevent the currently silent emergency from deteriorating further into a major humanitarian crisis**. While all the warning signals are there, there have not been sufficient efforts on the part of the international community to view, analyze and respond to the complex situation in its totality. The following is an attempt to highlight some of the key issues that will require continued attention and further concerted international engagement on behalf of the people of Myanmar:

i) Representing those who are not heard

Clearly, urging progress on the political front needs to be at the center of the international community's principled engagement approach in Myanmar. To date, what limited international attention there has been on Myanmar has focused more on the dynamics between the military regime and the main opposition movement led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, than on the tensions between the military and the ethnic groups as well as other emerging stakeholders. While the former is key to exploring future reforms to the national political system more attention to the latter is essential to developing solutions leading to sustainable peace and security not only for the center, but throughout the country.

³ Official Development Assistance Received (net disbursements) Per Capita, in 2005 –From UNDP, *Human Development Report 2007/8*, <https://hdrstats.undp.org/indicators/171.htm>.

Thus not only should the views of all political stakeholders in the diverse Myanmar landscape be sought (as they are), but the UN could also help promote some of the political options proposed by the more reflective groups such as the Ethnic Nationalities Council⁴. While accepting that the current senior military leadership will in all probability refuse to consider such proposals, the UN giving voice to the more realistic and credible options may trigger some discussion within a regime currently in transition.

The media should also be used more creatively to talk through political options. UN officials should participate in debates on BBC, VOA, RFA and DVB. Although the audience of DVB TV and some of the other radio stations inside the country is limited, the internet allows it to become the source of news for the Burmese diaspora. It is thus very important in both influencing them, and providing material for their discussions with audiences in the country and building capacity and knowledge outside and in.

However frustrating and futile the effort may seem, it is essential that the SG's Good Offices mandate be maintained. It has to be understood that the regime is in the midst of a generational transition as well as some form of structural transformation. At such a time of internal change it would be premature to attempt to assess the value of the SG's Good Offices mandate. It is crucial that attempts continue to convince the authorities of the necessity to be more inclusive and transparent in the implementation of their political transition. The people of Myanmar have a right to expect that the UN remains determined to find ways of engaging with a leadership that refuses to hear them.

ii) *Providing assistance in an environment of oppression*

XXXXXX TEXT OMITTED.

iii) *Engaging with a "pariah" authority on behalf of its people*

XXXXXX OMITTED

iv) *Applying humanitarian principles in a rapidly deteriorating development situation*

XXXXXX OMITTED

Preventing, monitoring and reporting on human rights abuses⁵

The abuses being committed in Myanmar are widely reported. The application of the human rights principles of universality and inalienability, indivisibility, inter-dependence and inter-relatedness, equality and non-discrimination, participation and inclusion and accountability and the rule of law remain therefore a crucial challenge.

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⁴ Created in 2001, the ENC presents itself as a task force, representing non-ceasefire as well as ceasefire groups, preparing for eventual tripartite dialogue.

⁵ Myanmar is party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It has however not signed, among others, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and the United Nations Convention against Corruption.

Finding the right balance between political and humanitarian objectives

The UN has at different times been invited by the authorities to engage at the political level, but the quality of the discussions has never been consistent or sustained. Concerns regarding sovereignty and national pride are frequently brought up by the authorities to counter efforts to discuss options on how the political transition process could be made more inclusive and transparent. Further complicating the efforts of the Secretary General's Special Envoy has been the need to accommodate differing, even at times mutually exclusive, expectations from different parts of the international community. At one end are governments who encourage greater understanding of, and patience for, the regime's efforts and difficulties. While on the other side are governments insisting that no support be provided until tangible progress is demonstrated. As a result, the Special Envoy has had limited maneuverability in terms of offering support or incentives to encourage adoption of a particular course of political action. Thus over time different Special Envoys have regularly looked at instrumentalizing humanitarian aid to provide an inducement for political progress. This in turn has created tensions between the political and humanitarian components of the UN efforts.

During the brief period of attempted political reconciliation (brought to an abrupt end with the attack on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's convoy in Depayin in May 2003), the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy, Ambassador Ismail Razali, had hoped that the promise of increased humanitarian aid could be used as an incentive, and that political reconciliation could be promoted through the establishment of a joint mechanism to administer the assistance. This strategy was also accepted by the opposition, and even today there is a sense at the highest levels of the NLD that the provision of increased aid should be conditioned on progress on the political side. At the time, the attempt to subject the provision of essential assistance to political progress was resisted by the humanitarian community.

Later, when the UN was able to reengage politically in country in 2006, the case of the humanitarian imperative had been made. As a result, Professor Gambari saw his role as advocating for greater humanitarian access. It was a position fully supported by the humanitarian community. Over the course of his various missions Professor Gambari has been very successful in explaining to the senior leadership the realities they are facing on the international scene. More importantly, and to the displeasure of the leadership, Professor Gambari has been able to bring Daw Aung San Suu Kyi out of total isolation.

While supporting humanitarian efforts has become one of the tangibles by which the utility of the UN facilitator's role is demonstrated, the provision of increased assistance has also been presented to the authorities as a predictable benefit of greater openness and transparency. What has not been fully debated within the UN is the extent to which humanitarian aid, or even poverty reduction support, serve as real inducements to an authority that has recently denied the gravity of the socio-economic situation. Their interest is in infrastructural assistance. Also no understanding has been reached within the UN on the extent to which the political component of the UN should actually lead in facilitating the humanitarian response.

Both these issues take on greater significance today in light of the hardening of the government's attitude towards the humanitarian community and apparent complications on the political level. In such a context, is it practical to ask the Special Envoy to pursue both humanitarian and political agendas?

v) Coordinating the UN's humanitarian, human rights and political response

The embargoed context in Myanmar has meant that the assistance component of the UN has found itself in the lead of an effort to address a situation with a combination of political, human rights and humanitarian challenges. As a result the role of the UN Resident Coordinator is very multi-dimensional in

Myanmar. The stove-pipe nature of the interactions with different UN headquarters offices represents a combination of challenges as well as, to a lesser extent, opportunities. Many times it seems as if the broader coherence or coordination of the various elements of UN efforts is only materialized in the fact that “by chance” one individual is being asked to respond to multiple masters.

Contexts with a strong political dimension such as Myanmar represent particular challenges to the RC system in a situation where there is no UN mission or UN political presence. Though the RC reports to the UNDP Administrator, in his capacity as chair of the UN Development Group, humanitarian and political contexts such as Myanmar are only of marginal significance to a structure preoccupied with UN corporate development priorities. As a result, mechanisms have yet to be created to facilitate sustained and meaningful interactions between this regular development oriented system and exceptional outliers such as Myanmar.

Further complicating the ability to carry out the role of UN Resident Coordinator in Myanmar has been managing, as Resident Representative, the pressures placed on UNDP by certain member states. The understandably conservative attitude of UNDP senior management in light of the threat of extreme punitive financial measures by a major contributing member of UNDP’s Executive Board, in the event that the declared sanctions regime would not be adhered to, potentially constrains the UN Resident Coordinator’s ability to push difficult issues on behalf of the UN system.

On a different but related note, it has always been peculiar to observe what seemingly little support UNDP obtained, or possibly asked for, from the wider UN system in its efforts to counter the pressures from some member states. Of course, a contributing factor is the desire by other Agencies not to be burdened with the same constraints. But as a result, much leverage is lost in arguing points of principle – especially the right of victims of an unfair regime to receive assistance.

The designation of the UN Resident Coordinator as Humanitarian Coordinator brought with it a number of advantages including access to Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) funding for UN agencies in Myanmar, and more direct support from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). It also allowed the head of the UN in Myanmar to engage the authorities on behalf of the wider humanitarian community as represented by the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC). This said OCHA’s support to date has not been systematic and more due to individual initiative. Even though it is able to do so in Zimbabwe, the organization seems to continue to have difficulties coming to terms with responding to the situation in Myanmar.

On the political level, prior to the government’s notification that he leave, Professor Gambari had always insisted that the UN RC/HC be an integral part of every one of his missions. This was not without complications as the authorities have continuously tried to separate the different parts of the UN. The fact that Professor Gambari has resisted government attempts to compartmentalize their engagement with the UN has contributed to ensuring a more coherent UN approach towards the authorities. While there is still a need to find clarity on the question of how far the political component of the UN should engage in the substance of the humanitarian effort, or even the extent of the humanitarian community’s support to the political efforts, there should be no misunderstanding of the importance of maintaining vis-a-vis the authorities a unified UN front. One of the ways of materializing this is through the participation of the RC/HC in all high level missions, and the continued involvement all headquarters policy discussions.

vi) Working under restricted mandates – the case of UNDP

UNDP has been operating in Myanmar with a restrictive mandate since 1993. The restrictions were initially introduced in US legislation, and later adopted by the UNDP Executive Board. Officially the restrictions on UNDP’s mandate were defined as (i) not providing financial, military and political benefit to the SPDC, (ii) consulting with the NLD and the NCGUB on its operations, and (iii) UNDP operations

should focus on grass roots community based initiatives. UNDP-Myanmar undergoes a yearly independent assessment of its operations to ensure compliance with these restrictions. In many ways the restrictions on UNDP's mandate as articulated by the Executive Board are in themselves nothing more than a list of what the organization should and should not be doing in such a complex political setting in any case.

What is more problematic is the fact that the UNDP operations in Myanmar are also the subject of a US certification process, and that the US legislation used to guide the process is ambiguous in terms of what constitutes a breach of the mandate. The current interpretation of what would constitute "benefit to the SPDC" includes such basic support as training of primary school teachers, community health care workers and auxiliary midwives. This inevitably prevents UNDP from delivering on its mandate of providing services "at the grassroots level in a sustainable manner", especially in education and health.

As a result UNDP in Myanmar has in the past hesitated in its engagement with the government. At first such hesitation was of limited importance as the scale of UNDP's operations was relatively small and the ability of communities to cope with the socio-economic conditions still relatively strong. Over time as communities were forced to revert to unsustainable and rapidly impoverishing coping strategies in order to confront the consequences of badly thought through or out dated economic and social policies, it became clear to UNDP-Myanmar that were it to serve the needs of the disenfranchised and the poor it had to engage the government in a substantive discussion on its responsibilities towards the most vulnerable. Equally, as the political situation on the ground became more complex and poorer communities more vulnerable, it became important to defend the interests of poorer communities from the arbitrary actions of local authorities, entailing face-to-face dialogue with them. However, the current interpretation of the mandate restrictions does not allow for any of this.

vii) Resisting the intimidation of the UN system

The events of the summer of 2007 thrust to the fore *poverty* as one of the core issues defining the suffering of large portions of the population of Myanmar. The inability of a growing number of people to meet their daily needs was one of the main concerns so courageously expressed by monks in their peaceful demonstrations. This reality was also one that the assistance community had been raising with the senior leadership for years. On the occasion of UN Day on 24 October 2007, the UN Country Team felt compelled to draw attention to the plight of the people of Myanmar, in a joint statement highlighting the urgent socio-economic needs facing large parts of the population.

The Government's response was harsh – an official denial of the problem and the forced departure of the UN Resident & Humanitarian Coordinator. The incident brought to the fore many of the complexities of the Myanmar situation. Rather than opting for an adversarial statement, the UNCT had put together a statement aimed at highlighting to the leadership – based on an analysis of the government's statistics – that the socio-economic situation in the country was of serious concern and that the assistance community was ready to support. While the measured language of the UNCT statement seems to have been mostly dismissed as not strong enough by the external advocacy community, the UNCT statement was characterized by some among the senior leadership as an "act of insurrection". Since then the authorities have attempted to dismiss the events of September 2007 as a minor distraction fermented by "destructive elements", and have denied the validity of the socio-economic concerns raised by the demonstrators. In a similar vein international advocacy groups are attempting to deemphasize the poverty dimension of the demonstrations in favour of their political agenda.

The forced departure of the head of the UN in Myanmar was seen both as a means of sending a message to the people that the regime is able to silence any voice that will rise up in their defense, but also as a way to intimidate the humanitarian community. Since departure of the RC/HC the authority's attitude towards the UN has been harder, refusing to accredit an incoming head of agency, making it known that

certain nationalities would not be acceptable as UN representatives, constraining operations, and harassing national staff.

The difficulties being encountered in country today have made some within the UN question the wisdom of issuing a statement on UN day. It is essential to understand that the UN system had no other option. Firstly, the UN Charter placed a strong moral responsibility on the UN system to come out strongly, especially on the day celebrating its existence, in support of those who had had the courage to peacefully express the suffering of the population. Secondly, the August/September repression and resulting arrests, including of UN staff, had created a pervasive climate of fear, mixed with anger. The celebration of UN day provided an opportunity for a public statement to reassure national staff, who risk confrontation with authorities in their day-to-day work advocating the values of the United Nations. Thirdly, in the hostile international political environment that represents Myanmar, remaining silent would have damaged the credibility of the agencies in country, especially when other humanitarian partners had already had the courage to take a stand.

More broadly, it should also be acknowledged that even before the events the interactions with the government were becoming increasingly more limited, and operations on the ground confronting greater difficulties in terms of obtaining government support or clearance. The lack of a response by the UN humanitarian system in country, while the issue of poverty had been so clearly expressed in the streets and the subsequent violent repression conducted in front of the very eyes of all UN officials would have irreversibly weakened the UN system's standing vis-à-vis the authorities as a moral and principled force. It would also have undermined the confidence that those within the regime had that the UN would support positive change.

The challenge for the UN remains to find a way to reclaim the initiative in addressing poverty with all its multiple dimensions, including participation in policy processes or voicing concerns about decisions that impact their lives, and pushing the authorities towards substantive discussions on humanitarian issues. Following the forced departure of the UN RC/HC, it would be too much to expect the UN in country to take on this challenge alone without the active backing of the UN system at the highest levels.

viii) Preparing for more suffering

The events of August to October 2007 have left a significant portion of the population with an even greater sense of anger, fear and despair. This has greatly increased the tensions between the people and the regime, at a time when the authorities have announced a series of public consultations (referendum and future elections). Even if many do not express their views in the referendum, the authorities will ultimately be forced to deal with the strong sentiments that they have unleashed. Many people in Myanmar have referred to the events of mid-2007 as being almost as significant a watershed as the 1988 crisis.

The anger that the people feel stems from the security forces ruthless and bloody crackdown on the monks. The monks play a central social and cultural role in Myanmar. The sight of them being beaten and arrested, after peacefully drawing attention to a fundamental social problem, has had a profound effect on Myanmar society as a whole. The fear comes from the force used to put down the peaceful demonstrations, and more specifically the fact that a broad segment of the general population was targeted. This time, people without political networks, to turn to or to depend on for assistance, were also tracked down for simply having provided water to the monks, or for having appeared on international television as by-standers clapping too enthusiastically. Finally, following the government's refusal to acknowledge the poverty induced suffering of the people, a sense of despair has started to appear linked to the anxiety that there will be no end to their suffering.

The situation in a number of the ethnic areas is becoming particularly worrying. There is a real potential for local conflict and violence, especially if the authorities move towards disarming these groups as part of the political transition as defined in the Seven Step Road Map. As discussed above certain ceasefire groups are reporting to be recruiting and rearming. As tensions mount the international community will need to be particularly alert to underlying inter-ethnic differences that could trigger secondary clashes.

Also underlying the risk of further instability throughout the country is the growing erosion of the authority of traditional leadership and the increasing dependence by larger segments of the population on unaccountable economic actors. The growing inability of families and individuals to survive shocks, whether political, socio-economic or natural, has increased their dependence on risky coping mechanisms (for example, increasing debt from unregulated moneylenders or migration to neighbouring countries) and on those who are able to provide minimal support and informal forms of protection. More and more livelihoods are found in unregulated and many times illegal centres of economic activity. For forty years, the dependence on "informal" economies was most evident in the border areas, but now this dependence is prevalent even in the heartland -- the Dry Zone and the Delta.

While planning any response to this potential crisis it is important that the cross-border component be appropriately supported. Current operations have been successful in a large part due to the low key and extremely cautious approach taken by the local implementing partners. The risks of a dramatic scaling-up operations need to be assessed. Doing so without adequate considerations of all relevant factors could actually lead to greater violence and targeting of beneficiaries of the assistance, who would risk being categorized as insurgent sympathizers by the military (see Annex II for a more detailed discussion).

Recommendations

The issues raised in this paper have also been the subject of many reports written over the years. For the most part these reports present a range of valid recommendations on how to ameliorate the effectiveness of responses and even the general situation. This paper, written from the perspective of a departing RC/HC/RR, wishes to focus on four specific recommendations:

Urgently develop an integrated approach that brings together on equal terms the political, humanitarian and human rights components of a response

This will demand that:

- Donor governments must be willing to operate under the terms of internationally endorsed principles, such as those covering Good Humanitarian Donorship, and Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations.
- Advocacy groups will need to acknowledge, appreciate and accept that the assistance community must engage with the government to get the latter to change key socio-economic policies, and that donors will need to support capacity-building of government social service provision structures.
- The UN will have to establish an internal policy structure that brings together at the highest levels officials from the political, humanitarian and human rights areas of the system. This could take the form of a Myanmar Steering Committee at the ASG level chaired by the Secretary-General's Special Envoy with representation from DPA, OCHA, OHCHR and UNDP (on behalf of the Development Group).

Increase and strengthen the engagement with all stakeholders.

- Specifically, as regards the authorities, identify approaches to further inform them of the deteriorating socio-economic situation as well as suggest initial policy steps that could be taken to address its worst abuses or distortions. Additionally, while explaining to the authorities that the humanitarian activities of the UN and its partners remain outside the realm of political processes and are based on the principals of neutrality, impartiality and humanity, underscore the fact that to further constrain humanitarian operations could provide certain governments with the excuse needed to raise Myanmar in the Security Council.
- As regards the lobby groups, establish some form of constructive dialogue based on an acceptance of what can be accomplished in country, and focused on the accountability and transparency mechanisms that need to be in place to insure a principled response.
- Reinvigorate efforts to engage with the ceasefire groups on humanitarian issues. Formalize the UN's engagement at the political level.
- Use of radio/TV services to raise awareness of possible approaches to the humanitarian and political situation drawing on (UN) experience from elsewhere, to try and widen the terms of the debate.

Dramatically scale-up the response to the suffering of the people of Myanmar

- Additional resources must be found and directed towards expanding the assistance community's presence throughout the country. A reinforced expanded presence should be accompanied by a more decentralized coordination structure (the establishment of operational areas similar to those that exist in Northern Rakhine State and the Special Region of Wa). It should also be acknowledged that while the needs in the border areas are well recognized, pockets of high vulnerability also exist in the dry zone.
- Resources should also be directed towards education, environmental protection, livelihoods and capacity building for technical social sector departments.
- Priority areas for increased funding in health should not just be HIV, malaria and TB, but also the less prominent diseases such as respiratory infections and diarrhea, the major causes of death among children.
- Support should also be provided for monitoring and evaluation as well as needs analysis.

Strengthen the coherence of the UN's response

- Through the establishment an inter-Agency Headquarters taskforce for Myanmar to support the role of the RC/HC. The taskforce would bring together representatives from UNDGO, UNDP, OCHA, DPA and OHCHR. The taskforce would talk at least monthly with the RC, and would report directly to the ASG Steering Committee. Members of the taskforce would be expected to have conducted one or two missions a year to Myanmar either as a group or individually.
- Review UNDP's mandate restriction. If poverty is to be addressed in Myanmar in a meaningful way, supporting the self-reliance of households and communities needs to go hand in hand with policy advocacy and dialogue to achieve a governance framework and policies that are supportive to community based poverty eradication efforts. In the case of Myanmar this means policy changes need to be affected. While the current UNDP mandate for Myanmar allows for the former, it prohibits the latter. It has been fifteen years since the mandate restriction was introduced, it may be time to assess whether the mandate is in fact achieving the objectives of the Executive Board.

Charles Petrie
1 April 2008

List of Available Annexes

Annex I	UN Strategic Framework
Annex II	Review of Humanitarian Assistance to Vulnerable Populations in South-East Myanmar
Annex III	On the Edge of 'No Man's Land' - <i>Chronic Emergency in Myanmar</i>
Annex IV	Statement