



Burma Day
September 26-27, 2000 - Oslo, Norway

Remarks of Dr. Sein Win
Prime Minister
National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma
Tuesday, September 26, 2000

I want to thank the Norwegian Burma Council and Norwegian Church Aid for the opportunity for me to join you in this important and timely conference: “The Cost of Military Rule in Burma.” I am very glad to be in Norway again, and I like to use this opportunity in expressing our deepest appreciation to all Norwegian people for supporting our cause in Burma. Indeed, we are very privileged to have this conference in Norway, a great country with a foresighted vision in helping the developing countries around the world to heal their internal wounds of poverty, repression and violence. I believe that in the next two days we all learn from great experiences of this country in helping other countries in crisis. I also expect to learn from the discussants and share each other’s perspectives to advance the struggle for a democratic transition in Burma.

The first theme you have proposed for this panel is about ‘encouraging change’ in Burma. As you all know, we had a crisis situation in Burma a month ago as our leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was barred from making trips outside the capital and subsequently put under house arrest for two weeks. We have alerted and requested all democratic governments to send a clear signal to the regime about their highest concerns to the situation in my country. In fact, we are very pleased that the world leaders promptly took actions and strongly condemned the military junta. Again, I must express my appreciation to your government, especially H.E. Mr. Thorbjorn Jagland and Mr. Raymond Johanssen for taking a very prompt action in sending their strong protests to the junta. I must also say that these actions count in Burma. As world leaders such as President Clinton, Secretary General Kofi Anan, Vice President Al Gore, Secretary Madame Albright, and Mr. Robin Cook poured their support for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the junta lifted the temporary house arrest order and Daw Suu was allowed to meet her colleagues in Rangoon on September 14. As she has declared her intention to exercise her right to travel, we all must be vigilant about the developments inside Burma.

Should we be complacent about the influence of international pressure on the junta? Of course, the answer is no. The NCGUB will continue to carry out our Strategic Plan in shaping the international environment conducive to a dialogue process in Burma. The basic thrust of our strategy is to mobilize effective international pressures while facilitating opportunities for a dialogue process in Burma. We will work very closely

with Norwegian government and others from the Nordic countries to mobilize international pressures at all levels. We will pursue a stronger resolution to be passed at the United Nations General Assembly in coming November. We want to make sure that the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General will get stronger mandate to effectively facilitate dialogue process in Burma. We are also going to organize an international summit of parliamentarians who have involved in our solidarity drive to support the NLD's right to convene the parliament. We have already received signatures of fifteen hundred MPs from 85 countries including 76 from Norway. I must express my deep gratitude to PD-Burma, the international network of parliamentarian promoting democracy in Burma and particularly, its chairman H.E. Mr. Kjnell Bondivik for his relentless efforts in achieving this impressive outcome.

Now, let me address the second part of the theme—"repairing the damage." In our plan, we are not only emphasizing political actions that will influence the current political developments, we also emphasize transitional planning as a critical area to undertake necessary preparations. Why are we engaging in this transition planning activity? Are we putting the cart before the horse? What we are doing for the future is very relevant for the present struggle. In essence, we are presenting a viable alternative to the military regime in Burma. Creating a viable alternative will be one of the most effective tools to bring sufficient international actions on the SPDC, which is now bankrupt, repressive and failing as a viable regime in Burma. In fact, the two themes—encouraging for change and repairing the damage—go hand in hand as we cannot afford to ignore the immediate challenges and serious obstacles of 'repairing job' once the military junta is gone.

As an active participant of the democratic movement in the last twelve years, I have come to realize the importance of information and knowledge as essential tools for our movement. If it is often said that knowledge is power. And that is why this conference is so important. We are deeply grateful that so many distinguished thinkers, researches, analysts, scholars and leaders have been willing to join us to share the power of their knowledge and experiences. Your knowledge and your commitment to our cause are enormous assets. It is my conviction, and it is the fundamental premise of this conference, that these assets, the power of your knowledge and insight, are sources of power that can help to end the nightmare of the people of Burma. We are committed to doing everything possible to put the power of that knowledge to work in the most effective ways possible.

To prevail, the powerful idea of free and democratic Burma needs powerful and committed allies. That is why it is so important that you are here. You all bring strengths to this struggle. The power of your knowledge, insight and commitment can give life to the idea of a true democracy in Burma. What we need is to focus the power of this knowledge in a way that gives maximum strength to our movement and therefore, maximum support to the people of Burma. That is the purpose of this conference.

It is also one of the primary reasons that we were eager to help create the strategic units like the Euro-Burma Office and the Burma Fund. The Euro-Burma Office, for example, has organized one of most innovative approach to repair the internal wounds of Burma.

It has launched the National Reconciliation Program (NRP) that will build capacity within and promote mutual understanding among various ethnic groups involved in their dual struggle for democracy and equality in Burma. The NRP has already reached out to a dozen of ethnic groups in both Thai-Burma and Indo-Burma borders and some groups have even come up with their own vision for local governance. The NRP program will help each ethnic group, in a bottom up approach, to define their role in the future political landscape in Burma and to empower themselves in realizing a historic opportunity to participate in the tri-partite dialogue process advocated by all parties in Burma.

In terms of specific steps in repairing the damage, we have also facilitated one of the most comprehensive researches done on Burma, which culminated in a report on the Burmese economy. The report titled, “Economic Development of Burma: A Vision and A Strategy,” has recently come out from Singapore University Press. I am pleased to appreciate the work of the authors including Dr. Myo Nyunt, who is also a participant to this meeting. The NCGUB has taken several recommendations made by the group in our vision for economic transition in Burma. The Burma Fund, based in Washington D.C. will follow up on a more ambitious plan to organize the scholars and experts who are working on Burma-related issues into a network to assist the leadership of the democratic movement. The initiatives for facilitating Technical Advisory Network for Burma have been taken early this year and a working group is now being formed to formalize the mechanisms. It has also facilitated a number of research projects, which are looking into issues that are critical to the transition in Burma. The NCGUB will use these mechanisms to promote knowledge sharing and capacity building that can make a solid foundation for a democratic transition in Burma. These organizations will also serve as a resource to organize the follow-up activities this conference will generate. It is my hope, therefore, that the Technical Advisory Network will become a resource for everyone here as we move forward together.

Last not least, the NCGUB is in fact ‘encouraging changes’ within ourselves. We are repairing the damage caused by our capacity gaps and resource constraints in leading the movement. We are presently reviewing various aspects of NCGUB governance structure and process in order to renew ourselves to become more accountable, efficient and responsive in providing critical leadership to the movement outside Burma. With all your support and understanding, I am very confident that we can do the ‘repair job.’

Once again, on behalf of the people of Burma who dream of the day when they are free, thank you for your support and for your willingness to participate in this important conference. Let us dedicate ourselves to converting the enormous power of knowledge and commitment that is here today into a force that no totalitarian regime – regardless of how many guns in their arsenal – can withstand.

Thank you.