

UNION OF BURMA

ETHNIC NATIONALITIES COUNCIL

Statement No. 4/2004

"The European Union, ASEM and Burma"

1. The Ethnic Nationalities Council calls on the European Union not to accept Burma as a member in the upcoming ASEM (Asia Europe) meeting in Hanoi in October 2004.

To do so without any political reforms by the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), or meeting any minimum human rights standards, would be tantamount to promoting a culture of impunity and a total disregard for the rule of law. Democracy and human rights are the two basic values dear to the heart of every citizen of the European Union, especially eight of the ten new member nations. They themselves have only recently freed themselves from tyranny.

2. The Ethnic Nationalities Council also calls on the Asian partners of ASEM to urgently work with the European Union to bring about concrete political change in Burma.

In 1997, ASEAN welcomed Burma as a member with open arms. The reasoning was that as a member, the SPDC will moderate its worse tendencies. This did not happen. The SPDC interpreted membership as a license to strengthen its hold on power. Once again, ASEAN is hoping that as a member of ASEM, the SPDC will change. This will not happen. The SPDC will not change because the Burmese military believes that it has a right to rule; because it believes that the international community is impotent; and because Burma under the SPDC is fast becoming a failed state. Even the military's chain of command is beginning to fail. ASEAN, China, Japan and South Korea cannot afford to have a failed state in its ranks. ASEM must help the people of Burma to prevent the country from disintegrating.

3. The Ethnic Nationalities Council still believes that a tripartite dialogue amongst ethnic nationalities representatives, democracy advocates led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and the military junta is the best way to resolve Burma's problems.

The 25 plus million peoples of the Arakan, Chin, Kachin, Karen, Kayah (Karenni), Mon, and Shan States of the Republic of the Union of Burma founded in 1948, live in fear for their lives daily. They can be forced by the army to move from their homes at anytime. The penalty for disobeying is death. They can be forced to work for the military without any compensation at anytime. Their wives and daughters can be raped by army personnel with impunity at anytime. They cannot teach their own languages in schools. They cannot travel freely in their own homelands. They have no access to adequate health care. The list is endless. But in spite of these conditions, the Ethnic Nationalities Council believes that a political solution must be found.

Our compatriots from the cease-fire groups who attended the National Convention in May 2004 have made positive recommendations to the SPDC but they have been ignored. We also proposed a detailed road map in September 2003 as a recommendation to enable the SPDC to bring about a transition to democracy but this too was ignored. Even the 'peace talks' with the Karen National Union started in January 2004 have stalled. The SPDC will not implement real reforms without a compelling reason to change the status quo. ASEM now has the opportunity to provide the reason.

**Central Executive Committee
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