A combination of domestic and international efforts will have to change the situation. There are over a thousand political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi and 14 elected MPs. Therefore, while the people of Burma are struggling under tremendous oppression, we want concrete and effective action by UN and international players so that a political

dialogue process will be opened among the military rulers, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi led democrats and ethnic political parties. It is also important to note that our call aims for peaceful change to avert utter devastation.

It is alleged that in the last few years China has been selling arms to the military government, which is using these against different ethnic minority groups. How do you perceive this?

It is not only China but also India which have become major arms suppliers of the regime which has been killing its own people. The growing exodus of ethnic minority people from the eastern border is because of the offensive by the junta using foreign military supplies. The army, which faces no external threat, is spending huge amounts of the country's scarce wealth for militarization.

Those arms supplier countries are like the regime because they ignore increasing poverty, degradation of education, spread of communicable diseases, opium growing, and illicit drug trafficking.

You may know that thousands of Burmese Rohingya refugees are living in different camps in Bangladesh. What is your interpretation of this issue?

We are equally concerned about refugees of all sorts in all countries. We are grateful to all governments and NGOs which take serious note of Burmese refugees. At this point, we would like to point out that outpouring of over a million refugees is the direct result of political repression, and an indirect consequence of economic mismanagement by the military regime. It is necessary not only to help the refugees, but also to remove the cause.

Many say that in a multi-ethnic country like Burma a monolithic totalitarian government is needed to rule the country effectively. How do you see the future of democracy in your country?

I completely disagree. A rigid regime can hold back some differences only for sometime. It does not mean long-term solution, and that will definitely bring about a worse scenario when rigidity is lessened. Totalitarianism will have to go. I know problems are ever-present, whoever rules a country. But morality should not be compromised at the expense of the people.

More importantly the ethnic peoples of Burma are not what they are portrayed to be by the military. During the years of struggle the question of building a genuine federal union has been agreed upon by those, inside and outside anti-dictatorial forces, who are stakeholders of the country.

It is a pity that outsiders are being deceived as per propaganda of the military elite of Burma. A wiser regime with a vision for the future can be worthwhile. But this regime has destroyed the country and future. The ceasefire agreements with various ethnic groups are only to be used for show, and are not allowed to be spoken about at the constitution writing.

All major ethnic political parties are branded illegal. The alliance of all ethnic parties, United Nationalities League for Democracy (UNLD), has been disqualified. The leading ethnic party leaders are sentenced to over 100 years. Instead of education of the people about genuine union concepts, federalism has been illustrated as the cause of disintegration of the country.

Those actions would not be carried out by a democratic government. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is the binding force. Once we restore democracy, I am confident that a peaceful union could be established after damage control measures.



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