

“Burma Day 2005 - Challenges and Opportunities of Providing Assistance to People in Burma/Myanmar”.
Brussels 5 April 2005

Info Flash

- In order to provide input for the discussion at the Burma Day 2005 a report was commissioned last autumn through a tender procedure under the Framework contract. Two high quality CVs were presented by the framework company: Professor Robert Taylor and Mr. Morten Pedersen, former project director for the International Crisis Group in Burma, and the two suggested consultants were approved by Commission services. **None of the two authors are “pro-military junta” as alleged by some individuals in the Burma advocacy groups.**
- The Final Report by the two consultants was forwarded and approved by the Commission by early February and sent out as a discussion paper for the Burma Day – clearly stating that “the views expressed in this report are based on an analysis of the situation in Myanmar by the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Commission.
- Although the “Independent report” also covers EU policy on Burma/Myanmar, **the aim of the Burma Day 2005 was to focus on possibilities for assistance provided inside Burma/Myanmar** (in accordance with the revised Art 5 of the Common Position as agreed unanimously by all EU Member States in October 2004).
- The Burma Day in 2003 had a stronger political focus as well as a focus mainly on the situation for groups outside the border (Thailand but also Bangladesh). On that occasion mainly advocacy groups and NGO’s operating outside the borders were invited in addition to EU stakeholders.
- **The “Independent report” and the Burma Day 2005 were never intended to provide input to the on-going discussions on the yearly revision of the Common Position, discussions which are undertaken in the Council, but as an input to the current reflections on humanitarian assistance to Burma/Myanmar in the European Union and how EU policy can be made more effective in reaching its aims.**
- Due to a variety of factors (budget, venue etc) there were limitations to the number of invitations for the Burma Day. The Commission took the decision to **focus invitations on International Organisations and NGO’s involved in direct assistance inside the country, to the relevant stakeholders on the EU side (EU Member States representatives and MEPs) and to the “Government in exile” – the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB).**
- Some representatives of organisations advocating for increased sanctions and a tougher EU stance against the junta were invited to the meeting and took the floor

on several occasions. **However, as not one single participant in the meeting advocated an end to sanctions against the regime, sanctions did not become a topic for discussion on this occasion.**

- The Burma Day started with a discussion on the Independent report, where it was clarified that the paper was to be seen as an input to an on-going debate on assistance and on policy towards Burma/Myanmar. There was never an intention to have a general endorsement of the report from the Burma Day conference.
- At the outset of the meeting, the authors of the report repeated that the report does not recommend an end to sanctions (as stated in the IHT and the Irrawaddy News.)
- The main topic of the speakers commenting on the report was the need for continued assistance to the Burmese population. Mr Harn Yawngwe, director of the Euro-Burma Office, expressed some criticism on the process for the preparation of the report, the “choice” of authors and on the analysis made by the authors.
- All participants were invited to make comments on the analysis and recommendations in the report. Additional recommendations from participants were also discussed.
- **Many of the recommendations in the Independent Report were not seen as controversial, and there was an agreement among participants on:**
 - 1. the need to continue to provide assistance to the Burmese population**
 - 2. The need for all assistance providers in Burma/Myanmar to coordinate closely**
 - 3. The need to continue to discuss policy on Burma/Myanmar**
- The entire afternoon session of the Burma Day was devoted solely to the main topic of the conference - assistance matters, with presentations by International Organisations (UN system), a previous World Bank official, a former Australian Ambassador responsible for Australia’s human rights initiative in Burma/Myanmar and NGOs active in Burma/Myanmar. **None of the panellists can be described as “regime sympathisers”.**

Q and A

Has there been a change in EU policy?

NO.

The EU maintains a balanced policy, which includes political sanctions targeted at the regime as well as a commitment to provide assistance to the Burmese population. The EU continues to voice its concerns, directly with the regime in ASEM and EU-ASEAN meetings or on Troika missions, as well as in international fora (UN, ILO etc).

The Commission and EU Member States have clearly indicated that the current political situation does not justify the abandoning of the EU's critical views vis-à-vis the military regime. On the contrary, the sanctions part of the EU Common Position was further strengthened in October 2004.

At the same time, while the EU was strengthening its sanctions against the military regime it also recognised that it did not mean to hurt the ordinary people of Burma/Myanmar. **This is why Article 5 of the Common Position, as revised in October 2004, not only confirms the EU's commitment to continue providing humanitarian assistance but also open assistance for longer term development in sectors such as democracy and human rights, health, education, environmental protection and livelihoods.**

The EU Common Position – in its Article 5 – also stipulates, “the EU will continue to engage with the government of Burma over its responsibility to make greater efforts to attain the UN Millennium Development Goals”.

Political Dialogue.

The EU agreed to discuss with high-level Myanmar government representatives already in 2000 when the EU-ASEAN Ministerial was held in Vientiane. This has since been followed by an EU-ASEAN Ministerial in Brussels in 2003, ASEM V and the EU-ASEAN Ministerial in Jakarta recently. **The EU agreed in 2000 that we would seize occasions like these to raise our concerns with the Burmese "face-to-face".** The EU has also undertaken troika missions to B/M on the level of geographical directors' level (last one was in 2002) in order to get the EU message across to high-level representatives. These contacts are thus **part of a continuing dialogue with the Burmese government. There are no intentions to send a EU Ministerial level troika to Burma/Myanmar.**

As regards the recent EU-ASEAN meeting in Jakarta, Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner's views on Burma/Myanmar, as mentioned in several articles in the press (FT, Reuters..) strictly respects the EU agreed position on the subject. The EU had offered to organise a Ministerial Troika meeting with the Burmese Minister of Foreign Affairs in the margins of the EU-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Jakarta in March 2005. If the meeting had taken place it would have been the first bilateral Ministerial Troika with the Burma/Myanmar. As in all meetings of this sort (bilateral Ministerial meetings), the Commission is always pressing for the EU being represented by the Troika. The Commissioner has no intention to meet Myanmar ministers on her own.

The Ministerial Troika meeting with Burma/Myanmar could in the end not take place due to the insufficient level of the Burmese delegation. The Myanmar representative in the ASEAN-EU Ministerial meeting, Political Director Thaung Htun, did however meet his Presidency (Lux) equivalent in the margins of the ASEAN-EU Ministerial meeting. The Commission did not take part in this meeting. References to the Burmese Deputy Foreign Minister meeting Mrs. Ferrero-Waldner are erroneous.

During the ASEAN-EU Ministerial meeting in Jakarta, ministers had a frank exchange of views on the situation in Burma/Myanmar. **The well know position of the EU, in particular as regards the unconditional release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her followers and on the way the National Convention should be conducted remains the basis for engaging the Burmese government.**

