

European People's Party (Christian Democrat) Meeting on  
**TOWARDS PEACE AND DEMOCRACY IN BURMA**

- Welcome Address by Joseph Daul, MEP, Chair of EPP Group
- Welcome Address by Ioannis Kasoulides, MEP, Vice-Chairman of EPP Group, Chairman of EPP Working Group on Foreign Affairs
- Introductory Remarks by Maria da Graca Carvalho, MEP, Member of EP's Committee on Industry, Research and Energy

Keynote Speech:

**Jose Ramos-Horta, President of East Timor, Nobel Peace Laureate**

**Roundtable – Views on Developments in Burma:**

Chair: Jose Ignacio Salafranca-Neyra, MEP, EPP Group co-Coordinator, Committee on Foreign Affairs

Panelists:

- Gunnar Stalsett, Bishop Emeritus, Church of Norway (Special Envoy of Norway to Timor-Leste)
- Leon de Riedmatten, Director, Association Fairness International (former informal representative in Yangon of the UN Special Envoy to Burma, Ambassador Razali Ismail)
- Thierry Falise, Field Officer, Association Fairness International (Belgian photo-journalist based in Bangkok)
- Ma Nila, International NGO staff in Yangon
- Harn Yawngwe, Executive Director, Euro-Burma Office
- Laima Andrikiene, MEP, Vice-Chairman, Sub-Committee on Human Rights

**Debate with the audience**

- Conclusions: Elmar Brok, MEP, EPP Group co-Coordinator, Committee on Foreign Affairs
- Concluding Remarks: Paulo Rangel, MEP, Vice-Chairman, EPP Group and Head of EPP Portuguese delegation

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**Harn Yawngwe**

President Ramos-Horta, Mr Chair, Ms Carvalho, Honourable Members of the European Parliament, and distinguished guests – Thank you of this opportunity to speak.

In answer to the two questions by the Chair –

1. Sanctions – I have to confess that I was one of the people who lobbied the European Parliament for sanctions. We wanted to pressure the military regime to enter into a tripartite dialogue that was mentioned earlier by Thierry (Falise). Unfortunately, it did not work out the way we wanted and the SPDC has not changed in the last 20 years. The unintended results of the sanctions have been to push the regime into the arms of

China. It has also served to isolate the people of Burma. This has served the purpose of the regime to keep the people ignorant and easily controllable.

2. Boycotting the elections – As mentioned by Bishop Gunnar, no one expects that the elections will lead to democracy in Burma. But it could be the first step in a long process towards democracy. I personally believe that boycotting the elections is a strategic mistake. By boycotting the elections, the NLD is out of the picture. The international community can no longer support the NLD because it no longer legally exists. In the future, the international community will not be able to insist on meeting Daw Aung San Suu Kyi because she can no longer represent the party. Any support for her will have to be on a personal basis. According to the SPDC's laws, if no one contests the USDP in the elections, it wins by default. There is also no minimum voting requirement. If democrats boycott the elections and do not vote or spoil their ballots, the SPDC needs only one person to vote for the USDP and it will win. By boycotting, we are handing over victory to the SPDC.

In the context of the elections, I would like to add that half the parties registered to contest the elections are ethnic parties. They have decided to do so for two main reasons:

- Representation – they do not want the USDP to represent their people and their state. They want their own ethnic party to represent them
- Political solution – they would like to try and use the elections to seek a political solution to their problem. The alternate for most of them is a return to armed struggle.

However, as mentioned earlier by Thierry (Falise), the SPDC does not seem to want a political solution. It did not allow the Kachin State Progress Party to register and it is not holding elections in some ethnic areas. It has in fact stated that as of 1 September 2010, there are no more ceasefires. The only way left open is for the ethnic armies to surrender their arms.

This will not happen. The ethnic armies with ceasefires have formed an alliance with the ethnic armies that are still fighting the military regime. They will assist each other if the Burma Army attacks. They are expecting this to happen after the elections. If fighting breaks out, it will affect the stability of Bangladesh, India, China, Laos and Thailand. They are very concerned. It is imperative that the European Union work with Burma's neighbours to prevent an armed conflict. That is one reason to engage the government now or after the elections.

Another reason to engage the government in a dialogue is that if we want democracy in Burma, the ethnic issue must be resolved in a just and equitable manner. The Burma Army seized power in 1962 because it disagreed with the democratic government on how the ethnic issue should be resolved. The government wanted to amend the constitution to give the ethnic states more power in a federal arrangement. The Army said this will lead to the disintegration of the nation and seized power. Therefore, unless the ethnic issue is resolved, the Burma Army will never return to the barracks.

Finally, I would like to plead for the European Union to engage the government of Myanmar in a dialogue irrespective of how the elections work out. Do not wait for good behavior on the part of the general before you engage. That will not happen. We need to engage them in a dialogue to bring about change in Burma. That is the only way. Thank you.

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Question on monks not being allowed to vote – Buddhist monks have never been allowed by any Burmese constitution since independence in 1948. Monks did not wish to vote in the past. In their view, voting is political and temporal. They are concerned with the spiritual.

Comment on not accepting the elections as being credible – Ultimately, the people in Burma will decide if they want to participate in the elections or not and whether it is credible or not. In 1990, we called for a boycott because the process was not fair – Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was under house arrest; she was not allowed to contest the elections; political prisoners were not freed; campaigning was very restricted – much like it is today. But Daw Aung San Suu Kyi decided to contest the elections and the NLD won. Overnight, we said the elections were credible. Why? Because she won? Are we now saying the process is not credible because she cannot win? We need to evaluate our position.

Comment on supporting an International Inquiry on Crimes Against Humanity – We cannot say we want to prosecute the current regime only. The crimes against humanity against the ethnic people in Burma did not start in 1988. It started in 1948 when we gained independence. In fact, it started getting worse after 1962 under the Ne Win regime. The most debilitating strategy against the ethnic people is the *Four Cuts Strategy* of the Burma Army. This was instituted when the current Chairman of the NLD U Tin Oo was the Commander-in-Chief. How far do we want to go with this inquiry into crimes against humanity? We need to be very careful.