

Australia extends sanctions against Myanmar junta

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CANBERRA, Australia: Australia extended financial sanctions against another 45 of Myanmar's military leaders Wednesday as a protest against the junta's lack of progress toward democracy.

Foreign Minister Stephen Smith said the new list of 463 individuals singled out for sanctions included members of the ruling State Peace and Development Council, government ministers and military officers as well as the regime's business associates and relatives.

It replaces a list of 418 people announced a year ago after the junta brutally crushed pro-democracy protests led by Buddhist monks in Myanmar, which is also known as Burma.

"This was, unfortunately, only the most recent very public instance of the brutal treatment meted out to civil society in that country and to those seeking to make Burma a better society and a nation based on democratic norms and ideals," Smith told Parliament.

"Australia will continue to press Burma's regime for meaningful political progress toward democracy," he added.

Smith said the detention of 2,000 political prisoners, including pro-democracy leader and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, is "a major impediment to political progress."

The junta's initial response to the devastation caused by Cyclone Nargis in May was "very disappointing" and the referendum days later that approved Myanmar's new military-backed constitution was "a sham," Smith said.

The cyclone killed more than 78,000 people and left another 56,000 missing, according to the government — the worst natural disaster in the nation's modern history.

Australia has long banned defense exports to Myanmar and denies travel visas to members of the regime.

Ministerial Statement: Burma

22 October 2008

Stephen Smith, Foreign Minister

Mr Speaker, Australia is deeply concerned at the situation in Burma.

For many years, Burma's regime, the State Peace and Development Council, has shown a profound disregard for the human rights and democratic aspirations of the Burmese people.

Australians were rightly appalled in September last year when the regime used violence to suppress peaceful protests, led by Buddhist monks, in Rangoon and other centres.

This was, unfortunately, only the most recent very public instance of the brutal treatment meted out to civil society in that country and to those seeking to make Burma a better society and a nation based on democratic norms and ideals.

The ongoing detention of Aung San Suu Kyi, the General Secretary of the National League for Democracy, along with that of an estimated 2000 political prisoners, is a major impediment to political progress.

Aung San Suu Kyi has been under house arrest continuously for the past five years, and for 13 of the past 19 years.

The Burmese regime has also presided over the stark deterioration of the Burmese economy. Burma has become a poor and isolated country.

Australia has consistently urged the Burmese regime to engage in a transparent political dialogue with opposition parties in Burma, including Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy.

The Prime Minister and I have raised Burma in discussions with our counterparts from many countries. I expressed Australia's concerns directly to the Burmese Minister for Foreign Affairs in the margins of the ASEAN related meetings in Singapore in July.

I have recently expressed Australia's deep concerns about the further extension of Aung San Suu Kyi's detention.

Australia's Ambassador to Burma has also made these representations, at the most senior levels of the Burmese regime, and will continue to do so.

Australia strongly supports efforts by the United Nations to promote a genuine dialogue between Burma's regime, opposition groups, and ethnic minorities.

Australia welcomed very much the fact that UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon invited Australia to participate in the Secretary-General's Group of Friends on Burma.

The Group of Friends consults regularly with the Secretary-General, and with his special envoy for Burma, Mr Gambari.

I met Mr Gambari in New York in September, in the margins of the UN General Assembly.

Together with the international community, Australia will continue to work for progress in Burma.

In 1991 Australia introduced a ban on defence exports to Burma.

For many years now Australia has had in place visa restrictions against senior members of the Burmese regime and their associates and supporters.

Financial sanctions were introduced in October 2007. The current financial sanctions have been in place now for 12 months.

It is the Australian Government's strong view that sanctions need to be kept current and focused for maximum impact.

To ensure this, the Australian Government has renewed the list of individuals subject to Australian financial sanctions.

The updated sanctions list, which comes into effect and which I announce today, reflects personnel movements in the regime during the last year, as well as information obtained since October 2007.

The revised list names 463 individuals, including members of the ruling State Peace and Development Council, ministers, senior military officers, prominent business associates of the regime, and immediate family members of these individuals.

The list previously named 418 individuals.

These sanctions will maintain pressure on the Burmese regime, but are not aimed at the Burmese people themselves.

Australia remains committed to providing humanitarian assistance for the Burmese people.

Australia has provided \$55 million in humanitarian aid to assist relief and recovery efforts following the devastation of Cyclone Nargis.

Through UN agencies and Non-Government Organisations on the ground, Australia is also supporting health, basic education and the protection of vulnerable groups.

Australia is contributing approximately \$16 million in such assistance during 2008-09.

The initial response of Burma's regime to Cyclone Nargis was very disappointing.

While there remains scope for improved cooperation, I am pleased that the Burmese regime is now working with the United Nations and ASEAN relief efforts.

Australia particularly welcomes ASEAN's collaboration in assessment work and emergency assistance after Cyclone Nargis. Australia responded to ASEAN's involvement by adding, last July, \$30 million in humanitarian assistance to the \$25 million Australia had already provided.

It was a matter of great regret that, amid the disaster of Cyclone Nargis, the Burmese regime pushed ahead with a constitutional referendum. This was the fourth step in the regime's so-called "Roadmap to Democracy".

Neither the referendum process nor its ultimate outcome signaled any intention by the Burmese regime to actually listen to the will of the Burmese people on their future. The referendum process itself was a sham.

Australia will continue to press Burma's regime for meaningful political progress towards democracy.

My announcement today on further financial sanctions is a demonstration of the Australian Government's firm resolve and commitment to this.