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Burmese in Europe - Promoting Partnership for Transition in Burma

Conference in Prague, September 15-16, 2009

Conclusive Statement

The conference was conducted in awareness of the fact that the Burmese pro-democracy movement in exile is a complex forum with different approaches that in the past have often missed opportunities to consult each other on points of disagreement. Participants, however, agree that constructive communication within the movement is crucial for maintaining an important role in the future of Burma and in order to be perceived by the international community as a key partner for further development.

Participants also agreed that the role of ethnic nationalities and the role of women deserve particular attention as pivotal factors for achieving reconciliation, stability, and justice in Burma.

Although the upcoming elections, scheduled for 2010, are unanimously identified as lacking democratic legitimacy, participants took different positions on whether people should be encouraged to take part in the election, since the participation of democratic forces would open the chance for a gradual change or, on the contrary, the democratic forces' participation might merely strengthen and legitimize the regime.

Many participants suggested that an arms embargo would be an effective means to curtail the regime's suppression of the Burmese population. Several speakers argued that change in Burma could be promoted by directing support to civil society activities inside Burma, even if they pursue not openly political objectives.

While all participants agreed that a dialog with the regime is necessary and must be benchmarked by credible reciprocal steps, no agreement could be reached on the question of the conditions of involvement. Also, different positions about sanctions versus engagement were maintained. Participants, however, agreed with the observation that past activities for democracy lack tangible results not least because the regime enjoys strong international economic and political support.

Burmese participants welcomed the interest and involvement of European and Western players and recommend that they keep consulting the expertise of the Burmese pro-democracy movement in exile as a primary force making use of its capacity to act as a bridge between Burma and the international community. Participants in the conference articulated their wish to repeat similar conferences that facilitate a meaningful dialog between representatives of different ethnic groups and different approaches for the common goal of democracy, freedom, and justice in Burma and to invite the participation of European/Western players. They particularly appreciated the contribution of participants who joined them from inside Burma.

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