



BCN

Burma Centrum Nederland

ANNUAL REPORT 2011
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Travelers on the circular line in Yangon

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

Since March 2011 significant changes have occurred in Burma: political prisoners have been released, contact between the government and the NLD has been restored, censorship has decreased and negotiations with ethnic groups have been set up again. Though these are all promising steps, democratization is still in its initial stage. The human rights situation continues to be dire, censorship, though lessened, is still widespread, fighting is still going on in some of the ethnic areas, and no sustainable solution has as yet been found for the conflict between ethnic groups and the Burman majority in the country. Nevertheless, the spirit of change is very much alive in Burma and inspires all of us at BCN.

BCN earlier shifted its focus towards cooperation and dialogue with those in Burma working towards all inclusive democracy, responsible development and civil education. 2011 also marks a period of organizational changes within BCN, started on a few years ago: the shift from a campaign oriented organization to a more action and program oriented organization, facilitating processes of change in the field, and developing and organizing trainings of, among others, political actors in the country. BCN's ethnic conflict program (executed together with TNI) is a well developed example of the new focus on activity based programming through seminars, trainings, advocacy and lobby, combined with information dissemination in the form of well received briefings and papers.

BCN continued its programs on strengthening democratic development in 2011, and will continue to do so in the coming years by training political actors in various democratic skills. Supporting political actors, civil society and the media, and building up the capacity to perform roles as watchdogs and instigators of change in a progressively democratic Burma, will be an all important focus for BCN and its partners in the coming years. The outcome of talks between the government and ethnic groups will be crucial to attaining sustainable peace and requires serious international attention. Finding ways to address the roots of the grievances of the ethnic peoples and finds inclusive solutions to the conflicts, will be a task of great magnitude that needs to be addressed nation-wide and over a long period of time. BCN intends to support the democratization and the peace process in Burma through its programs and in close cooperation with its partners.

Maike van der Werf, chair of the board

SHORT BRIEF OF EVENTS IN 2011

INTRODUCTION

2011 could very well be the year that enters the annals of Burmese history as the year Burma started to transform from a country under military rule to a more democratic society with restored connections to the outside world.

In November 2010 the first general elections in twenty years were held. Hardly anyone regarded the elections as free and fair or up to international standards. The National League for Democracy did not participate. The NLD considered the elections unlawful as they were based on an undemocratically conceived constitution which the people were forced to adopt in a referendum pushed through in the middle of the devastation Cyclone Nargis had caused in 2008. The election laws were regarded as unfair, as they barred Aung San Suu Kyi and other members of the democratic opposition from running in the election.

Some democratic and ethnic parties however, did take part in the election. They managed to secure some seats in the central and regional parliaments, which enabled them to explore and expand the small democratic space that thus had become available to them.

Nevertheless, the general feeling after the election was one of disappointment, especially after the votes that were cast in advance of the election were counted and all went to the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), the main party related to the military.

Just after the election, Aung San Suu Kyi was freed from house arrest.

A NEW GOVERNMENT

In January 2011 the parliaments convened, and people were appointed or chosen for posts and committees. U Thein Sein, a senior member of the previous military government, best known for his loyalty to senior general Than Shwe, who had changed his uniform for civilian dress in the run up to the elections, was elected president. Thiha Thura Tin Aung Myint Oo was elected vice president, as was Sai Mauk Kham, an ethnic Shan and also a member of the USDP.

At March 30, Thein Sein made his maiden speech in Parliament, in which he spoke about the task ahead and the problem to be faced:

“ ... It is still necessary to show our genuine goodwill towards those who have not accepted the constitution because of being skeptical about the seven-step Road Map in order that they can discard their suspicions and play a part in the nation building tasks. ... Democracy will promote only hand in hand with good governance. This is why our government responsible for Myanmar’s democracy transition will try hard to shape good administrative machinery... The representatives have entrusted me and the Union Government with this responsibility to take charge of the executive sector. So, we need to cooperate with all to accomplish the tremendous duty ”



U Thein Sein

His speech was well received, though many people remained skeptical about the sincerity of the new president. It was unclear how much influence the officially retired dictator Than Shwe was still yielding behind the scenes. Especially after the announcement of the convening of a Supreme State Council, not mentioned in the constitution, which is headed by the supposedly retired senior general, and in addition of the National Defense and Security Council, which is in the constitution, and is headed by Thein Sein.

The actual division of power remains unclear even now, as is the influence Than Shwe still has over the transformation process. It is said that as long as the senior general and his family are not threatened and their assets are safe, he will remain quiet. It is also said that Than Shwe became increasingly worried by the growing power and influence of China in Burma, and wanted to balance the power of the great neighbour by rapprochement to the West. Also rumoured is, that he wants to end his life in benefactor mode, balancing his karma in preparation for future lives. Whatever the motivation of the senior general, he seems to have stepped back and pushed a fairly nondescript man to center stage and presidency. Though Thein Sein is regarded as a loyal follower of Than Shwe, he has a relatively clean slate when it comes to corruption. He is also regarded as a gentle and soft spoken person.

REFORMS

However doubtful many both inside and outside Burma were, the new president meant business. After a rather slow start, the process of reform gathered momentum after Thein Sein met with Aung San Suu Kyi on Martyr's day (July 19) to commemorate the murder of Bogyoke Aung San. After that first meeting they spoke together several times behind closed doors, after which Aung San Suu Kyi expressed her confidence in the president and declared his desire to transform the system of governance in Burma to be sincere.

Meanwhile the parliaments started addressing the problems which with the country is confronted: poverty, human rights abuses, political prisoners, ethnic conflict, the desolate state of the economy, the increasing influence of China in Burma - all issues that could not be debated openly under the generals' regime.

Reforms to liberalize the economy were implemented, such as de-monopolization of the trade in cooking oil, which lowered the price considerably to the benefit of the poor population, and the changing of the rules governing the export of rice, so as to open the market for small scale traders. State pensions were increased. These kind of measures are of direct benefit to the average people in the country and as such a sign that the new government was willing to address their needs and take measures to improve their lot.



Strand Road, Yangon



Behind the Aung San Market, Yangon

Some of the harsh laws were reviewed: censorship was eased, access to internet widened, workers- and farmers unions are allowed to form and peaceful demonstrations are no longer forbidden.

After a widely supported protest movement against the damming of the Irrawaddy river in Myitsone, president Thein Sein announced at September 30 that the building of the Chinese funded dam would be halted, at least for as long as he would be president. This unprecedented action was for many people more prove that this new president had been serious when he said he would listen to the wishes of the people. It was also a clear signal to China that the new government wanted more influence in the running of the country's economy.

An amnesty in October freed more than 6000 prisoners, among which were dissident comedian Zarganar, and labour activist Su Su Nwe. Though all rejoiced in theirs' and others' newfound freedom, there was general disappointment that the most prominent leaders of the democracy movement were still kept incarcerated.

Still, the general mood of expectation and hope for genuine change was further advanced by the re-registration of the NLD and the announcement that the party would participate in the by-elections, which are going to be held at the first of April 2012. Aung San Suu Kyi announced that she would be contesting a seat in parliament. At the end of the year, the NLD was allowed to organize a public fundraiser in the stadium in Yangon, where party banners waved openly and empowering speeches were made. Aung san Suu Kyi and Zarganar also hosted the first free filmfestival to be held in Yangon on the brink of the new year.

On 13 January 2012 there was another amnesty, and this time most, but not all, of the political prisoners were released, including the leaders of the 88 generation students. They were welcomed by cheering crowds of supporters, adding to the general feeling of hope that Burma was truly on the road to reform.

But people are still cautious as well. The route to recovery from all those decades of dictatorship will be long and hard. As it is still unclear who is in control behind the scenes, and there is still strive between the reform minded and the hardliners in government and society, there still is a chance that the clock will be turned back.

The economy of the country is in shambles, the social fabric torn, the level of health care, education and services is low and there is a general lack of capacity to perform the tasks at hand to satisfaction.

Therefore it is important that Burma receives constructive support, not only political, but also practical.

ETHNIC CRISIS

Ever since the then military government announced its intention to implement Border Guard Forces (BGF) in the ethnic areas, which would incorporate the ethnic armies under Burmese army (Tatmadaw) command, there has been unrest in the ethnic states that reached cease fire agreements with the government in the 1990s. Some groups accepted the government's proposal and formed BGF, but some resisted. In Shan and Kachin states fighting again broke out in the run-up to the elections of November 2010 between armed groups and the Tatmadaw. Especially in Kachin State the situation deteriorated during 2011.

Initially, fighting restarted in the northern Shan State when the Tatmadaw attacked positions of the SSA-North, ending a truce dating back to 1989. The KIO is also based among the Kachin population in the northern Shan State and subsequently, after 17 years of cease-fire, fighting spread to the Kachin State when clashes broke out between Tatmadaw and KIO troops near a strategic hydroelectric dam on 9 June 2011, with serious humanitarian consequences: following the outbreak of hostilities, some 60,000 civilians have become displaced in Kachin State and northern Shan State.

To explain the depth of the current crisis, KIO leaders say that, during 17 years of cease-fire, they were promised a political dialogue, but this never materialized. Instead, the SPDC demanded that the KIO convert into BGFs (a demand that was only withdrawn after the fighting had started) and the national Election Committee refused to accept the registration of the KIO-backed Kachin State Progressive Party (KSPP) to participate in the 2010 elections, excluding them from the political process. The exclusion of the KIO, they believe, was quite deliberate on the government side – even though the KIO had attended the National Convention and cooperated with the SPDC's "roadmap to democracy". In addition, the KIO points out that it already had a cease-fire agreement, which was broken by the Thein Sein government when the Tatmadaw attacked KIO positions on June 9, 2011. Therefore, the KIO wants any new agreement to include a political settlement.

The fall-out from the Kachin crisis is serious. The fighting in Kachin State and northern Shan State has antagonised and potentially radicalized a new generation of Kachin youth, who had not seen fighting in their areas during their lives. It has created strong anti-Burman sentiments that were not there in the past. Public support for the KIO in Kachin State increased dramatically following the KIO's refusal to concede to the government's demand to convert into BGFs, and further grew after the outbreak of hostilities.

President Thein Sein has announced his willingness to come to a negotiated solution to the continuing problems within the ethnic states and between the ethnic groups and the central (Burman dominated) government. He did succeed in sealing provisional



Jacob Baynham / Special to The Chronicle



Talks between KNU and Government were held.

cease fires with some groups, including the KNU, in order to start a genuine process of negotiation towards an inclusive future.

It is clear that one of the biggest challenges Burma faces is to find a solution to the decades old ethnic conflict.

The peace initiatives of the government are gaining momentum, negotiations have started, which bode hopeful for the future. It is generally accepted that there can be no lasting peace and constructive development in Burma as long as the country is torn apart by strife among the different peoples within its boundaries.

Aung Min, minister of railways appointed by president Thein Sein as government representative for talks with armed groups, promised a national conference in the style of Panglong. This is a reference to the 1947 Conference at the town of Panglong, resulting in the historic Panglong Agreement between representatives from some ethnic groups (Shan, Kachin and Chin) and the Burma national liberation movement led by Aung San about the principles for a future Union of Burma. Though such a conference has not been formally announced by the government, it would be a welcome initiative.

It is vital that the current peace process is both inclusive and participatory. Aung Min announced that there will be national level talks on socioeconomic recovery/development plans. Burma is a poor country by any international standards, and health, humanitarian and other socioeconomic indicators are consistently worst in the ethnic states and borderlands. Ethnic territories are rich in natural resources and the government has done very little to reinvest revenues back into the local communities. Large-scale unsustainable logging and mining caused great damage to the livelihoods of local communities, as well as to the environment. Socioeconomic development is important as a peace dividend, and is key to rebuilding war-torn and neglected ethnic areas. However, economic development in itself will not solve ethnic conflict and, if carried out in inappropriate and inequitable ways, is even likely to bring about new conflicts. Economic development, especially large scale infrastructure and agricultural projects, should therefore benefit local communities, who should also have a say in how these projects are developed and managed. Failure to do so will not only have a negative impact on conflict resolution and national reconciliation, but also create new grievances among ethnic communities, thus contributing to Burma's cycle of conflict.

The role of civil society in the peace process is a new element. In the talks between Aung Min and armed groups, representatives from Myanmar Egress, a civil society organization based in Yangon, were present. They have also played an advisory role to

Aung Min as well as the President. In the talks between the government and the KNU in mid-January, representatives of Karen civil society, the electoral Karen People's Party that won seats in the 2010 elections, local media and an international observer were invited to attend the public signing of the initial agreement (although not the negotiations itself). This is another welcome break with the past, when all negotiations and their outcomes were shrouded in secrecy.

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

After decades of being regarded as a pariah, Burma's new government wants the country again to be accepted as a full and respected member of the international community. Therefore it needs to convince the USA and Europe that reforms are genuine and preconditions for reviewing of the sanctions against Burma are going to be met. So far they have succeeded remarkably well in a short period of time. From halfway 2011, a steady stream of visitors came to the country, including high level delegations from Europe, Japan and the US, notably the visit of US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at the end of the year, announcing the posting of an ambassador to the American Embassy in Yangon. The Obama administration appointed a special envoy to Burma, Mr. Derek Mitchell, and announced its intention to support the reform process, though still expecting more efforts to ensure genuine and inclusive democracy in the country.

Burma was granted chairmanship of ASEAN for 2014, which could also be seen as a reward for its reform efforts. The EU lifted part of the sanctions, such as the ban on diplomatic visits. The IMF and World Bank are making reconnaissance visits to the country and many International NGO's are setting up offices in Yangon. All visitors had talks with both the government in Nay Pyi Taw and with the democratic opposition and Aung San Suu Kyi in Yangon.

It is expected that the current wave of reforms will result in the lifting of at least part of the sanctions that the US and Europe have against Burma. They were implemented as reaction to the grave human rights violations following the failed elections in 1990, and tightened at several instances of renewed heavy repression, such as the Saffron Revolution in 2007. Preconditions to easing or lifting the sanctions have always been the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all other political prisoners, the reinstatement of the NLD, substantial improvement in the country's human rights record and, increasingly important, reconciliation with the ethnic nationalities and de cessation of fighting between armed groups and government forces.

As the US are rethinking their Burma policy, it is also expected that the EU will adjust its sanctions policy next April (2012) at the occasion of the annual revision of the Common Position on Burma.



Media coverage Clinton visit

BCN is greatly encouraged by the developments taking place in Burma and the international reaction to the changes. BCN has been in favour of reducing or lifting of EU sanctions even before the current wave of reforms, as it became increasingly clear that it was the common people in Burma who suffered from the sanctions, whereas the military and the business community related to the military did not. Because of the economic influence of China, India and other neighboring countries, the riches of Burma were exploited to the benefit of only a few.

More evenly spread investment, as well as investments in labour intensive industries producing for the internal and export markets could be initiated by investors (from outside the region). In order to ensure inclusive development, investments in the neglected ethnic areas deserves special attention.

BCN wants to draw attention to the need to reconsider Burma's removal from the Generalized Systems of Preferences, a system that gives developing countries benefits from special import and export tariffs to stimulate their economic development and enable them to enter the global market. Burma has been removed from that system in 1997 due to widespread practices of forced labour, though forced labour did not occur in the sectors that could benefit from GSP.

BCN welcomes initiatives to increase the aid and development budgets for Burma from the US and the EU. However, the economic situation of the country is quite instable, as it has been dominated for a long time by the military and its cronies, and caution is needed to make sure that investments and development are for the benefit of the Burmese people and within a recognized framework of sustainability.

Aid and support efforts should be geared towards rebuilding the power structures in the country to a more democratic setup, increasing capacity of civil society and political actors so as to give the Burmese people the tools with which they can rebuild their own society.

Prior to elections, those participating in the political process envisaged most space for political reform would be at the regional level. In some states democratic and ethnic parties had managed to secure a fair number of seats in the regional parliaments. However, as the regional parliaments have no budget and little facilities, in comparison with the 'getting on with it' attitude of the central government, little has happened so far in the regions.

Nevertheless, the regional parliaments could play a significant role in stimulating regional development and local good governance. Efforts should be made to capacitate and empower the regional representatives, as well as support for the construction of local democratic structures.



Listening to Aung San Suu Kyi - Yangon, February 2012

ABOUT BCN AND ITS WORK

MISSION STATEMENT

BCN works towards all inclusive democracy with respect for human rights and the environment in Burma. BCN does this through strengthening of Burmese civil society organizations and democratic forces, information dissemination, lobby and campaign work.

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

Burma Center Netherlands was created in 1993 as a result of the perceived need of a group of Dutch NGO's to establish a center that would specifically focus on Burma. For several years BCN invested in building strong networks with a wide variety of ethnic and non-ethnic civil society groups and political actors in Burma. From the late 1990s BCN has been realizing a civil society program that includes facilitating initiatives that foster independent thinking, strengthening of democratic structures and confidence building to provide participants with the tools to independently deal with their issues. Capacity building activities are vital ingredients in this process of empowerment. From 2008 onwards, BCN moved towards more actively engaging political actors and citizens in the political process, in response to requests from key organizations in its civil society program. In 2010, BCN chose to support the democratic political actors and parties that decided to participate in the elections, through trainings and capacity building, and in 2011 continued its program to support democratic forces in the changing political landscape of Burma.

BCN links Burmese organizations with other knowledge based or campaign based organizations and international networks. BCN is also an active partner in developing an all-inclusive international advocacy agenda on Burma, including issues relevant to the different ethnic groups. Ethnic communities need to have equal partnership in order to create genuine democracy in Burma. Now that a reform agenda is initiated from the central government



Yangon, February 2012

and the opposition based in Yangon, it is of vital importance to include the ethnic communities in the transformation process and make sure hostilities are ended and genuine negotiations can bear results.

There is a huge demand in Burma for the activities and services of BCN, and for some years BCN was among only a few other organization offering these programs. Now that the country is opening up, a host of other (I)NGO's are entering the arena, building on the foundations BCN and other organizations have formed.

BCN considers strengthening civil society, political capacity building, stimulating local participation and development as well as facilitating a constructive ethnic dialogue crucial for the future of the country. It welcomes constructive engagement with the new government, but also feels there is a need for cautiousness, as the new structures in Burma are still very weak and could collapse under unbalanced support from too many players.

BCN continues to be involved in the development of democratic skills in Burma by building on the foundations created during the pre and post election period, strategizing coping mechanisms for this transformation period. BCN programs center on democratic capacity building and participants exposure to experiences from other nascent democracies in the region and further afield.

As fostering political participation and stimulating both theoretical and practical democratic development is a slow process, BCN and its Burmese and Asian partners are developing a program for the period up to the next elections (scheduled in 2015). The coming years will be used to strengthen civil society organizations with special attention to the role of civil society in a developing democracy and its relation with the political structures that are being formed. The new political parties and the elected democratic politicians in the regional parliaments will be supported in developing policies, strategic thinking and ways to translate wishes and needs of their constituencies into political programs and into laws and regulations.

BCN also continues its ethnic conflict program, which is a joint program with TNI, focusing on a solution to the long lasting conflict in the ethnic areas and stimulating inclusive development on an equal basis for all peoples in Burma. The project will publish its highly valued briefings and papers in the coming years as well.

BCN acts as a partner and coordinator, bringing together people from different backgrounds and facilitating the sharing of ideas and development of a common agenda. BCN works demand driven and cooperates closely with Burmese partner organizations. Field visits and exposure trips to democracies in the region, as well as bringing democratic practitioners to Burma, are an integral part of BCN's program.

IN MEMORIAM NAY WIN MAUNG

BCN staff and board are very sad about the sudden death of Nay Win Maung, on January 1, 2012. BCN has closely cooperated with Nay Win Maung and the local organisation Myanmar Egress of which he was a co-founder. Working out of a modest hotel in central Yangon, Egress teaches classes on democracy, economics and entrepreneurship, often to young students who have had poor exposure to those subjects in Burma's under-developed education system. In the run-up to the elections BCN cooperated with Egress in some of its trainings for upcoming members of parliament and civilians.

Egress earned widespread praise from international aid groups,

when it helped coordinate relief efforts after the 2008 Cyclone Nargis, which killed more than 130,000 people. Nay Win Maung, who also headed a local newspaper, envisioned Egress as the equivalent of a think tank, helping to formulate new economic policies while creating a critical mass of young pragmatists willing to work within the system in order to bring change to Burma. Nay Win Maung was seen by his opponents as being too close to the military in power, but his supporters said his contacts on both sides of Myanmar's political divide made him an effective interlocutor between the government and the opposition. In the final months of his life, he was linked to many of President Thein Sein's reforms and was helping negotiate cease-fires between the government and the country's ethnic minority groups. As current reforms show, Nay Win Maung has been right in his assessment of the new government. It is a real pity he didn't live longer to see the changes materialize.



ACTIVITIES 2011

DECENTRALISATION WORKSHOP

'Scope of Decentralization in Myanmar—Options for Local Participatory Governance and Local Development'
25 February 2011.

After being postponed several times, the workshop, held in Yangon, brought together 30 people, representing donors, NGOs and political parties (opposition only) to share the insights on ways of stimulating local governance and its role in development on a local level.

Though the elections of 2010 were restricted and unfair and ensured the military a grip on power, they also opened up space for civilian and non traditional political actors to enter politics, especially at the local and regional level. Ethnic parties did relatively well at the regional level (compared to the national level at least). Though during the year the process of changes gained unforeseeable speed, at the beginning of the year it was expected that change would be initiated from the region, not so much from the centre. Therefore the focus of the workshop was to look at democratization experiences of countries in the region, especially with regard to decentralization, local governance and local development.

The workshop was meant as a starting point to investigate models from the region and their relevance for the situation in Burma. The participants listened to outlines on local development strategies in countries in the region (Indonesia, Philippines and Cambodia) and discussed the possibilities for Burma.

Although several participants expressed some scepticism about the possibility of introducing decentralisation in the continuing harsh reality of Burma, participants also were keen to expand the scope of this theme and make use of lessons learned in the region to convince officeholders in regional parliament that developing strategies for local governance and development could be a productive way forward.

Building on the outcome of the research and the discussions, developing local governance and

development strategies, as well as identifying workable strategies how to initiate local participatory governance, will continue to be part of BCN's program in the coming years.

ETHNIC CRISIS PROJECT

'Addressing the Ethnic Crises in Burma' is a joint project by BCN and TNI (Transnational Institute). The project gives a voice to ethnic minority groups in Burma who have been ignored and isolated in the international discourse on the country. By building coalitions with like-minded organisations, the project aims to enlarge support for a Burma policy that is pragmatic, engaged and based on reality. The project stimulates strategic thinking on how to respond to the challenges of the elections of 2010 and the period beyond that, formulates practical and concrete policy options, and defines concrete benchmarks on progress which national and international actors can support.

Within the context of this project two strategy seminars were held, one in February and one in November. Both meetings were held in Thailand to enable ethnic NGOs and political organisations to meet with those working from the border. These meetings assess developments in Burma, define priorities for lobby and publications and provide a space for actors from the different ethnic communities to meet and exchange views. The strategy seminars are informal and aim at confidence building between different ethnic actors from NGO, political and armed formations, based inside and outside Burma. The Burmese participants highly appreciate this space to talk to each other, exchange ideas and set agendas together with international Burma experts.

Bangkok, February - In the first meeting 9 people from inside Burma, organised by Shalom, participated, as well as 5 from the border areas and 7 international people working on Burma. The meeting discussed the outcome of the elections, tried to analyse why in certain areas ethnic political parties had been more successful than in other areas, discussed the visions of the UNFCC and other ethnic formations and defined the speaking points for advocacy and topics for the publications in 2011.

Chiang Mai, November - The second strategy seminar was shifted to Chiang Mai due to the flooding in Bangkok. This meeting was held just before the first peace-talks between the KNU and the Thein Sein government took place. KNU representatives at the meeting asked for advice from the other participants.

Other items addressed were the functioning of ethnic political parties in national and regional parliaments, the fighting in Kachin State, the new government and reforms so far, China-Burma policy and the need to look at peace as an all-Burma population

issue, not just as an issue for the different ethnic groups only. Burmese need to be involved. An assessment of the project so far was carried out as well as plans for a next phase were developed.

SEMINAR, MAY 13, 2011.

Ethnic Communities in Post-Election Myanmar, Quaker House, New York

A seminar was held on the ethnic conflict in New York. Discussed topics included the escalation of the ethnic conflict due to breakdown of cease fire agreements; the position of the ethnic parties after the 2010 elections; possibilities for negotiations and the sanctions policy of the international community.

Participants included: Researcher for TNI's Drugs & Democracy Programme and BCN/ TNI's Ethnic Crisis in Burma Project; Second Secretary - Canada; First Secretary, Political Affairs - Canada; First Secretary -EU; First Secretary - France; Counsellor - Indonesia; Second Secretary - Lao PDR; First Secretary - Norway; Ambassador Deputy Permanent Representative - Thailand; Political Advisor - US Mission)

BCN-TNI POLICY BRIEFINGS AND REPORTS

Burma Policy Briefing 5: *Ethnic Politics in Burma: The Time for Solutions*, February 2011 (briefing - 16 pages)

Following the shake-up of Burmese politics last year, the country's military leaders now face the challenge of introducing a new system while ethnic tensions and exclusions remain. Burma remains a land in ethnic crisis and political transition. In 2010 the military State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) laid out the landscape for a new era of parliamentary government. In 2011 the authorities face the challenge of introducing the new political system. Ethnic divisions and political exclusions, however, are emerging in national politics, threatening a new cycle of impasse and conflict. Ethnic peace and political inclusion are essential if Burma is to overcome its post-colonial legacy of state failure. Since independence from Great Britain in 1948, political and ethnic strife have continued through all eras of government. The social and humanitarian consequences have been immense. Burma is one of the world's poorest countries, with population displacement, drug-related problems and infectious disease rates disturbingly high in the ethnic borderlands. A critical moment is approaching. A new political system is being introduced, and progressive decisions can yet be made. But uncertainty is increasing. Will the new government be the SPDC in new guise or will it be a platform from which ethnic peace and multi-party democracy can truly spread? The stakes could not be higher. The decisions made by Burma's leaders in the coming year could well decide the country's future for a generation.

Burma Policy Briefing 6: *Burma's new government: prospects for Governance and Peace in Ethnic States*

May 2011 (briefing – 8 pages)

Two months after a new government took over the reins of power in Burma, it is too early to make any definitive assessment of the prospects for improved governance and peace in ethnic areas. Initial signs give some reason for optimism, but the difficulty of overcoming sixty years of conflict and strongly-felt grievances and deep suspicions should not be underestimated.

The economic and geostrategic realities are changing fast, and they will have a fundamental impact – positive and negative – on Burma's borderlands. But unless ethnic communities are able to have much greater say in the governance of their affairs, and begin to see tangible benefits from the massive development projects in their areas, peace and broad-based development will remain elusive.

The new decentralized governance structures have the potential to make a positive contribution, but it is as yet unclear if they can evolve into sufficiently powerful and genuinely representative bodies to satisfy ethnic nationality aspirations.

Negotiations with armed groups and an improved future for long-marginalized ethnic populations are the only way to sustainable peace.

Burma Policy Report: *Burma's Longest War: Anatomy of the Karen Conflict,*

Ashley South, March 2011 (53 pages)

As Burma enters a period of political transition, the role of the Karen ethnic communities will be critical in responding to the political and economic challenges that will shape their future. An in-depth history and analysis of the Karen's complex relationship with the Burmese state and central government. Political grievances among Karen and other ethnic nationality communities, which have driven over half a century of armed conflict in Burma/Myanmar, remain unresolved. As the country enters a period of transition following the November 2010 elections and formation of a new government, the Karen political landscape is undergoing its most significant changes in a generation. There is a pressing need for Karen social and political actors to demonstrate their relevance to the new political and economic agendas in Burma, and in particular to articulate positions regarding the major economic and infrastructure development projects to be implemented in the coming years. The country's best-known insurgent organization, the Karen National Union (KNU), is in crisis, having lost control of its once extensive 'liberated zones', and lacks a political agenda relevant to all Karen communities. Meanwhile the government's demand that ceasefire groups, such as the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, transform into Border Guard Forces under direct Burma Army

control throws into question the future of various armed groups that have split from the KNU since the 1990s. In this context, Thailand-Burma border areas have seen an upsurge in fighting since late 2010. Nevertheless, the long-term prospect is one of the decline of insurgency as a viable political or military strategy.

Equitable solutions to Burma's social, political and economic problems must involve settling long-standing conflicts between ethnic communities and the state. While Aung San Suu Kyi, the popular leader of the country's democracy movement, seems to recognize this fact, the military government, which holds most real power in the country, has sought to suppress and assimilate minority communities. It is yet to be seen whether Karen and other ethnic nationality representatives elected in November 2010 will be able to find the political space within which to exercise some influence on local or national politics. In the meantime, civil society networks operating within and between Karen and other ethnic nationality communities represent vehicles for positive, incremental change, at least at local levels.

Burma Policy Briefing 7: Conflict or Peace? Ethnic Unrest Intensifies in Burma,
7 June 2011 (briefing – 8 pages)

The breakdown in the ceasefire of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) with the central government represents a major failure in national politics and threatens to escalate to serious humanitarian crisis if not immediately addressed. Over 11,000 refugees have been displaced and dozens of casualties reported during two weeks of fighting between government forces and the KIO. Thousands of troops have been mobilized, bridges destroyed and communications disrupted, bringing hardship to communities across northeast Burma/Myanmar. There is now a real potential for ethnic conflict to further spread. In recent months, ceasefires have broken down with Karen and Shan opposition forces, and the ceasefire of the New Mon State Party (NMSP) in south Burma is under threat. Tensions between the government and United Wa State Army (UWSA) also continue. It is essential that peace talks are initiated and grievances addressed so that ethnic conflict in Burma does not spiral into a new generation of militarized violence and human rights abuse. To date, no transparent or inclusive process of peace talks has been established. Burma remains a land in political transition, and the Kachin crisis signifies the first major challenge to the new government, under President ex-Gen. Thein Sein, that assumed power in March 2011. But no clear or coherent policy has emerged among government authorities to address the causes behind the KIO and other ethnic struggles. Different ministers, military officers and representatives in the new system of legislatures are competing to set policy. For its part, the KIO accuses generals of the national armed forces, known as the Tatmadaw, of continuing a long-term strategy to marginalize and repress ethnic minority groups.

Burma Policy Report: *Civil society gaining ground. Opportunities for change and development in Burma.* Tom Kramer, November 2011 (report - 53 pages)

Despite decades of military rule and civil war, Burma has a dynamic and diverse civil society. There are a wide variety of informal groups and formal organizations, reflecting ethnic and cultural diversity. Social organizing has a long history in Burma. Into the 21st century, faith-based organizations have played an important role in the continuation of civil society. Local organizations have adopted different strategies towards authoritarian government. While some prefer to work under the radar, a growing number are engaging with the government. Local organizations are not just using the available space, they are also actively enlarging and creating new space in culture, daily life and society.

Civil society in Burma has grown significantly during the past two decades. In ethnic nationality regions, the main impetus for this development was a series of cease-fire agreements in the 1990s between the military government and armed ethnic opposition groups. Civil society in Burma further developed to fill the gap created by the lack of government services. New threats to natural resources and the environment in Burma's border regions further stimulated their growth. Until recently, few international actors developed a strategy to support civil society in the country. While this new interest is a positive development, it raises a number of questions about how these relationships can be developed to ensure that they are mutually beneficial and do not only serve the donor or program needs of international organizations.

These publications are distributed mainly in electronic form to a large number of policy makers, NGOs, academics and journalists working on Burma in Asia, Europe and the United States and have been quoted in several newspapers. They are also sent to a wide range of actors in Burma, including armed opposition groups (with and without a cease-fire), members of political parties, local organisations, local media and to representatives of the government and some Myanmar Embassies. Especially the paper on the Karen conflict has generated debate, with both outspoken praise and angry reactions. The paper also caused the widening gap between BCN's activities and other Burma (European) campaign and lobby groups to become more clear.

The Burma Briefing papers are available at the special project website of this TNI-BCN project (<http://www.tni.org/work-area/burma-project>). The website also features background information on the project, other BCN-TNI publications on Burma, and links to relevant organisations and publications.

ADVOCACY AND LOBBY

End of March – beginning April – lobby in Europe.

A three person delegation, consisting of Ja Nan Lahtaw, (Assistant Director, Shalom Foundation); Myint Zaw, (journalist and Program Officer, Juu Foundation) and Naw Suzanna Hla Hla Soe (Director of Karen Women's Action Group) visited Sweden, Norway, Netherlands, Belgium and Czech Republic to inform policymakers on the situation in Burma after the elections of November 2010, with special attention to the ethnic situation.

The delegation had high level meetings in Sweden and Norway (with members of parliament, policymakers at the ministries of Foreign Affairs and funding organizations). They also met with the Burma Committee staff and board in both countries.

In Brussels the delegation participated in a seminar along Chatham House rules at the European Institute for Asian Studies, co-organized with the Euro Burma Office.

In the Czech Republic, meetings were held with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and members of parliament.

In the Netherlands the delegates participated in a Round Table meeting (see below), had a meeting with representatives from several political parties, as well as with the head of the Asia Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

June 12 – 16: Lobby tour China

Lobby in Asia is done in cooperation with Center for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) in Phnom Penh and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) in Beijing. They co-organise the lobby/advocacy for ethnic representatives from Burma.

Three days after violent conflict broke out in Kachin State on June 9, a three person lobby team (director CPCS and two Shalom representatives from Kachin state and Yangon) arrived in Beijing. For this reason, the advocacy tour focused primarily on the conflict in Kachin State, with particular emphasis on raising awareness among Chinese on how Chinese infrastructure projects in the region are impacting the conflict. Over the course of two and a half days, the advocacy team met with a wide range of government officials and policy advisors, academics, local NGOs, members of the local media and the director of an influential international think tank. After observing very inaccurate reporting in the Chinese media on the situation in Kachin, the team also held a private briefing for a team of Chinese journalist representing four major newspapers.

The advocacy trip offered members of Burma civil society the opportunity to present concerns to a full range of stakeholders in China, including the Chinese financial institutions backing controversial infrastructure projects in the country's conflict zones. They also had the opportunity to brief a senior Chinese diplomat on the situation in Kachin state and the course of action that China might take to mediate the conflict and restore peace and stability in the China-Burma border area.

Copies of the BCN/TNI publications were received by: senior officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), the China Export – Import Bank, the China Development Bank, and the International Department of the Chinese Communist Party; a wide range of local NGOs based in Beijing, Chengdu and Kunming; members of the Chinese media; policy advisors representing six of China's largest and most influential policy advisory institutes; and researchers and students from several Chinese Universities. AFSC in Beijing will continue to use the publications as an advocacy tool to raise the awareness of a broader range of Chinese groups. AFSC staff will also distribute publications in Kunming, Shanghai, Xiamen, and Guangzhou in the future. The Chinese Mission to the United Nations in New York received copies in July 2011 during the lobby effort there.

OUTCOMES

- Increased Openness to Civil Society Engagement: a wide range of government officials expressed growing openness to engage with civil society from Burma on social and environmental concerns. Most significantly, China's two largest development banks, the Export Import Bank (EXIM) and the China Development Bank (CDB) both met with the advocacy delegation. The CDB opened its doors to the delegation by arranging for them to offer a workshop to senior bank officials and the Bank's advisory team. Both EXIM and CDB expressed a strong interest in more targeted workshops in the future. The CDB advisory team has also indicated that it would like AFSC to provide input on the internal report based on the contents of the workshop for submission to senior bank management.
- New Partners in Chinese Civil Society: While grassroots organizations in China have been actively advocating for Chinese communities in the face of development projects, they have done little with respect to overseas issues. Through this lobby, Chinese civil society gained a better understanding of China's movement overseas, and further built connections with organizations in Burma that will be critical as they begin to develop programs to respond to cross-border challenges.
- Stronger Understanding of Burma in Beijing: In the past, Yunnan based policy advisors would regularly exploit their contacts and access in Burma to promote self-

interested and often destructive projects in, undercutting Beijing's policy interests. Because of the knowledge gap in Beijing, the implications of projects were often not fully understood. The advocacy efforts in Beijing have helped to empower researchers and open new research initiatives that are beginning to question Yunnan's deepening push into Burma, and advocate for a return to primacy of the central government's foreign policy goal of maintaining peace and stability in the border region.

July 4 – July 14, 2011. Lobby tour US

A Burmese delegation consisting of three representatives of Burmese civil society and a the Northeast Asia Quaker International Affairs Representative, AFSC Asia Region, visited New York and had meetings with a wide variety of policymakers, diplomats and representatives.

Planning for this delegation's visit began in the spring 2011. In June 2011, hostilities broke out in northern Myanmar between the Burmese military and Kachin forces. These events shaped the focus of messaging and recommendations identified by the delegation.

The delegation was working with Shalom Foundation, Burma Center Netherlands and Transnational Institute. Prior to meetings with diplomats and representatives, delegation members spent time working with Quakers United Nations Office (QUNO) staff and consulting with colleagues in New York in order to develop talking points.

SUMMARY OF TOPICS AND THEMES RAISED BY THE DELEGATION

Topics that were raised by the delegation during this visit include: national politics – elections of November 2010 and post election landscape; International community: need to seek out ways to strengthen the civilian/reform-minded wing of the government, and look for opportunities to work at the local level.

Conflict on the border and its root causes – conflict spread from Karen state, to Shan and Kachin states with major hostilities breaking out with Kachin Independence Army in June. Need to address the ethnic grievances. Role of China on three levels: state, province and border area.

Diversity of Key Relevant Stakeholders and their Role in Reconciliation – International community has focused on limited range of actors in Burma, particularly Government and Aung San Suu Kyi. However, great diversity of key actors exists and these actors need to be engaged (new political parties, elected parliamentary representatives, ethnic armed groups, civil society organizations). Need for capacity building.

Recommendations were formulated in a meeting on Current Realities in Burma - Perspectives from Inside on 7 July. They include:

- . Ensure that actions do not strengthen actors who want to return to the status quo.
- . Strengthen democratic institutions and practices.
- . Work bilaterally, through regional initiatives, and in multilateral settings, to encourage efforts to promote dialogue and peace building, including immediate cease-fires in Burma.
- . Extend support for refugees in light of new fighting.
- . Encourage foreign businesses to halt construction of large-scale infrastructure projects, undertake full environmental assessments and provide compensation to local populations, in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of their investments.
- . Support civil society's role in promoting dialogue and reconciliation that is inclusive of all key stakeholders and embraces the multiplicity of perspectives that exist.
- . Increase small grant funds administered by embassies for Community Based Organization.

LOOKING FORWARD

Burma's isolation has resulted in the population having limited access to international debate and analysis. The international discourse on Burma has long been dominated by opposition groups based outside Burma and therefore have easier access to international media and advocacy. Though recent developments will result in more aid and cooperation, communication about the country continues to be politicized. The risk of endangering people by too much or too open information still exists. In the past, this has caused a reluctance in sharing information coming directly from the people of Burma, and in turn has caused ongoing polarization on how circumstances inside the country are presented. In recent years BCN has developed into an organization that strives to nuance the discussion on Burma by promoting 'voices from inside Burma'. People and organizations inside Burma, despite the still existing difficulties and dangers, are increasingly finding ways to raise their voices internationally. Now that the country is opening up, and rejoining the international community, some of the setbacks and dangers that guided BCN's program might be solved, but the need for a nuanced and well informed discussion remains and might even grow in the near future.

In order to make sure that the voices from inside Burma are not only the voices of those within easy reach of the organizations and (international) media, BCN will continue to train and capacitate Burmese to develop advocacy and lobby skills to present their experiences and views to the international community. Furthermore, many people from civil society organizations feel it is difficult to claim to represent fellow Burmese when speaking to the outside world. Therefore, building a representative structure and the expertise to effectively make a wide variety of voices from inside Burma heard outside, has been central in 2011 and will be in 2012.



Shwedagon pagoda Yangon – on the full moon day that saw the first political prisoners released (13 October 2011)

LISTENING TO VOICES FROM INSIDE BURMA

Building Capacity and Experiences on Lobbying and Advocacy for Myanmar.

To make sure that voices from inside Burma are heard and taken seriously, BCN has, together with a number of other organizations in a process led by Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, prioritized sharing experiences and views of people from inside Burma. Building on and expanding the work done over the past few years, a planning meeting for this program was organized in Cambodia in December 2010. The general purpose is to capture the perspectives of a broad spectrum of people in Burma on priority issues they themselves identify, and to share these views with the international community.

This will ensure that the voices of the people of Burma can resound in domestic and international policy to secure genuine political and social transformation; and to guarantee that civil society initiatives will lead to strengthening local capacity for conflict transformation, development and humanitarian progress.

A pool of competent advocates who can articulate major issues affecting Burma regionally, nationally and internationally will be created from key social networks, civil society and religious organizations.

The main three layers of the program, to be developed further in the coming years, are:

- organizing and training civil society persons across ethnic, religious and geographical groups in Burma on information gathering, sharing and translating it to advocacy and lobby;
- documenting and publishing the information and perspectives gathered;
- and organizing advocacy and lobby visits for Burmese to decision makers in Asia, Europe and the USA, return visits by policy makers to Burma, and reflection meetings to share experiences and formulate ideas.

BCN has actively participated in developing and executing the *Building Capacity and Experiences on Lobbying and Advocacy for Myanmar* program. An advocacy training was organized in 2011 highlighting the basics of advocacy and developing advocacy skills, thus creating understanding of the Burma policies internationally.

The program consists of three phases: a skills training, a lobby and advocacy practical experience (between October 2011 to February 2012) and an evaluation and planning meeting (early 2012).

The Phase 1, 7-day training (*Advocacy basics, strategies and techniques*) was focused on the following areas: analysis of current situation in Burma; input from resource persons on: advocacy strategies; facts and figures on UN, EU, China, ASEAN, media and sharing of their personal experiences in advocacy work; forming teams and preparation for advocacy trips. A resource person from BCN discussed the EU and its decision making process.

21 Trainees from different ethnic and religious backgrounds participated in the training. BCN nominated 11 of them. There was a good gender balance: 11 men and 10 women.

The trainees were divided into 6 teams who would visit one of the following countries: China; Thailand; Jakarta; Manila; Malaysia and India. Teams are to be accompanied by a person experienced in advocacy during their visits.

Day 1: Introduction of each participant, overview and schedule of the training and discussion on expectations of the trainees. In small groups participants analyzed the current situation in Burma and identified key actors for and against transformation inside and outside of Burma. The day ended with talk on 'advocacy and its basic elements'.

Day 2: Introduction on framework examining advocacy campaigns at different levels followed by practice on how to use the tool to set up, evaluate and follow up of advocacy effort. Followed by a presentation on 'European Union Policy on Burma' and an exchange on lobbying experiences in Europe as well as an analysis of, and a lively discussion on, the power structure and power dynamics within Burma.

Day 3: A day long session on 'Advocacy Strategies and Techniques with United Nations', with practical examples, exercises and developing concise advocacy messages.

Day 4: The morning session was focused on China, its decision making structure and Burmese perceptions on China. In the afternoon there was a presentation on ASEAN. After the presentation, the composition of teams for the actual advocacy visits –(phase 2 of the advocacy training program) was announced. Each team then discussed specific issues related to the country they would visit, target audiences and focus of their advocacy.

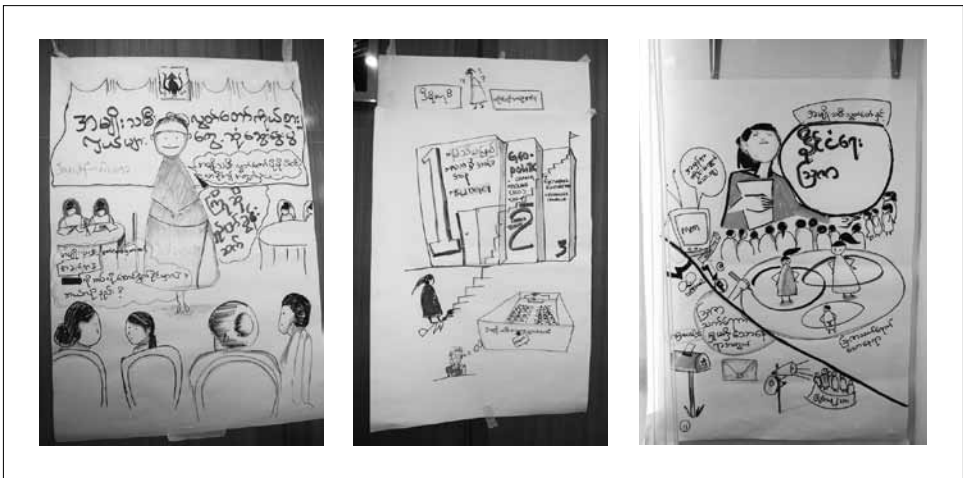
Day 5: In the morning session four teams presented their initial report on their advocacy. Following that, all teams were asked to further develop their plans for the next day. The afternoon was spent on the importance of media in advocacy campaigns, and advice on how to deal with media. Participants practiced interview skills in pairs.

Day 6 & 7: after a session on advocacy planning, developing strategy and the need of talking point to be concise and complete, each team continued to work on their advocacy plan, concluded with a second round of presentations. The training was concluded with a last theoretical session on the advocacy circle, followed by a closing ceremony.

The participants highly valued the sharing of theory and practice of advocacy as well as the group process that developed during the intensive week long experience. The resource persons were considered well qualified and helpful, horizons were broadened and insights in the process of advocacy deepened.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

Burmese women seem to be expanding their political involvement. BCN promotes emancipation, participation and empowerment of Burmese women through all its programs. During BCN's democracy trainings in 2010, it became obvious that most political actors are men. It was impossible to secure equal participation of women in the trainings. Discussions with Burmese partners about this situation inspired a small group of women from civil society organizations to start networking among women leaders to address the issue of participation of women in politics.



Visual record of Women's workshop

Seminar for female parliamentarians: *Engaging Women: Strategy for Increasing Women's Participation in Myanmar Politics and Nation Building*, 14-16 January 2012

As part its post-election program, BCN together with the Yangon based partner organization Phan Tee Eain (PTE) organized a seminar targeting female members of central parliaments. PTE invested time and effort in contacting and networking with female MP's in Naypidaw from October 2011. The seminar was planned to be held in December 2011, but had to be postponed several time due to the schedules of the parliamentary sessions. Finally it could go forward on January 14 to 16th 2012.

In the 2010 elections, only 3.7 % of candidates contesting a seat in one of the parliaments were women. Now 4.2% of the seats in the lower house are occupied by women, 3.6% in the upper house, and 3.6% in the State and Regional parliaments. In government, just two women are vice ministers. Many societal and cultural barriers obstruct participation of women in politics, as women are expected to look after their children once they are married. Therefore, many female politicians are either unmarried, without children or elderly. Advocacy, information sharing and training is needed to increase women's political participation.

The seminar was primarily a female MP's advocacy dialogue to develop future strategies to increase women's participation in decision making processes.

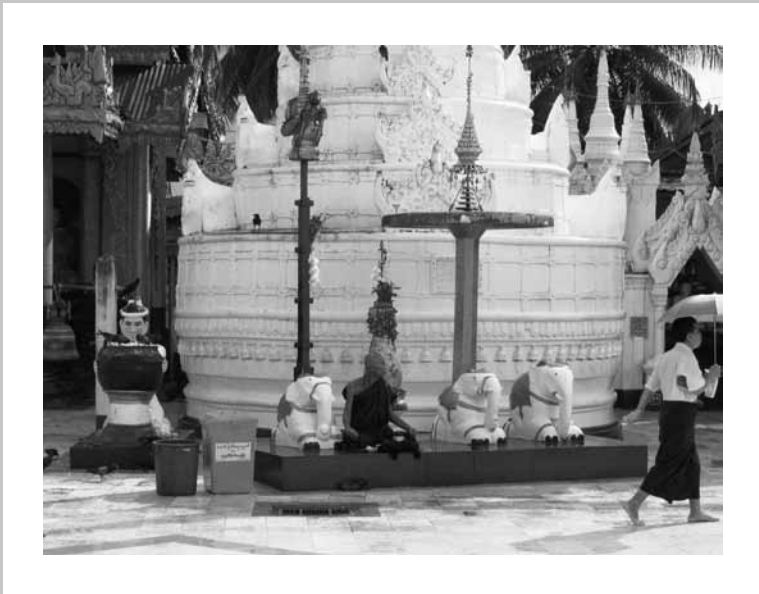
21 participants attended the seminar. Among them were 10 MP's, one from the Upper House, five from the Lower House and four from Regional or State Hluttaws. Two were from the National Democratic Force (NDF), three from Shan National Democratic Party (SNDP), two from Democratic Party Myanmar (DPM), and one each from All Mon Democratic Party (AMDP), Rakhine National Democratic Party (RNDP) and Kachin Democracy and Unity Party (KDUP). Speakers, resource persons and other participants were from academia, NGOs, government and UN agencies.

The seminar was regarded by participants as very successful. A network of women MP's was initiated, with a mission to raise the number of female legislators to 30%, and to likewise increase numbers in decision making positions in government and departments. The network will focus on capacity building for politically active women, promote female leadership, strengthen ties with women from civil society organizations and strengthen political networks both nationally and internationally. As a first step the MP's initiated a Women's Caucus in parliament, which should include all women MP's.

Together the participants developed an action plan. Right after the seminar a well attended press conference was held. The participations showed a great deal of satisfaction with the seminar in their evaluations. The objectives and expectations were met. They were pleased by the open atmosphere and free discussion.



Yangon Central Station



Shwedagon Pagoda

FIELD TRIPS BY STAFF MEMBERS

As BCN works demand driven and in close contact with its Burmese partners, field visits of staff members are an integral part of planning as well as executing its programs.

February - BCN staff member project officer civil society Hans Roel Nieuwenhuijse travelled to Thailand and Burma to meet with BCN's of the election and voter education program and other contacts to consult them for input in BCN's post election training and capacity building program. During his field visit he was able to talk extensively with partners, trainees and potential trainees and brought back the materials on which BCN builds its program and curriculum. When he decided to leave BCN, he coached the new staff members on the results of his visit and details of meetings and plans made.

July - Upon joining BCN's staff, program officer Jeroen Overweel travelled to Bangkok and Yangon.

In Bangkok, Jeroen was joint by BCN's treasurer Michel Steketee, (who was in Thailand on unrelated business). They had meetings with the Danish and Dutch Embassies in Bangkok, as well as Vahu Foundation, an organization closely cooperating with BCN's Burmese partner Myanmar Egress.

Although Jeroen arrived before the great changes started after Suu Kyi met president Thein Sein in August, Jeroen met with optimism everywhere, as civil society was invited by the new government to discussions on a range of topics. People felt their opinion mattered, which was something very new, as the military government never cared much for what civilians had to say.

The main purpose of Jeroen's visit was to connect with BCN's partner organizations and follow up on former discussions on the post election program. Other topics discussed were the first 100 days of the new government, media and censorship, proceedings of (local) government and parliaments, decentralization and ethnic representation, Suu Kyi and the NLD and the political participation of women.

Jeroen also met with international NGO's based in Yangon to find out about their activities and policies.

October - After the advocacy training attended by her as a resource person, new program coordinator Saskia Kunst met up with BCN's chair of the board Maaïke van der Werf in Bangkok on the way to Yangon to spend a hectic week of meetings

and discussions. As they arrived just after some political prisoners were released, expectations of more releases were high, as well as hopes for change now that Aung San Suu Kyi and the president had met and expressed confidence in the process of change taking place.

Saskia and Maaike met with all the main partners of BCN in Burma, developed some new contacts as a follow up of the Cambodian training and spoke to representatives of several ethnic and democratic political parties to further develop the post election program. An indicator of the changes that had occurred is a relative short period of time was that they could have lively discussions with partners and contacts on politics, development and the way forward to an inclusive and peaceful democratic society in public places.

OTHER LOBBY EFFORTS IN 2011

Letter to Secretary General of the UN

February 1 - a letter was send to Mr. Ban Ki Moon Secretary-General of the United Nations, with copies to Mr. Vijay Nambiar, Chef de Cabinet; Mr. Kim Won-soo, Deputy Chef de Cabinet; Mr. Nicholas Haysom, Director for Political Affairs, and Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, asking the General Secretary to continue his Good Offices to ensure a sustained channel for dialogue; supporting his mission to engage in a way that prioritizes the needs and aspirations of the people of Myanmar, and support civil society.

The letter was signed by several international NGO's, as well as the Burma Center Netherlands.

On February 8, the letter was answered by the Secretary general in a courteous way, stating he would take careful notice of the points of concern made in the letter.

Letter to EU Commission

March 16 - Letter to Vice President of EU Commission and EU High Representative for External Affairs, with copies to Foreign Ministers of the EU Member States.

In the letter, international organizations working on Burma (including BCN) stated their views on the matter of sanctions at the time when the EU reviewed its Common Position, and made recommendations as to how to adapt the Common Position to the needs of Burma, especially with regard to investments and economic development and constructive engagement.

Round Table

April 1 - BCN organised a Round Table for Dutch NGO's working in Burma. Members of the lobby and advocacy delegation (see above) took part in the meeting, sharing their insight views on developments in Burma.

The Round Table meeting is a Chatham house rules meeting. Participants at this Round Table were: Amnesty International, Oxfam Novib, ICCO, The Best Friend, Freevoice, Press Now, ZOA Refugee Care, Stichting Vluchteling, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Chair of BCN.

October 5 – Using the visit to the Netherlands of Mr. Paul Sein Twa of the Kesan Foundation, and coinciding with the launch of the book *Burma's Environment: People, problems, policies*, this round table was held in the OxfamNovib offices in The Hague. As the meeting took place just after the government announced they would halt the construction of the Myitsone dam, the implications of this decision were discussed.

Participants were: Kesan, Oxfam/Novib, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ZOA Refugee care, and BCN.

Foreign minister meet

April 11 - A delegation of representatives of BCN met with the minister of Foreign Affairs to talk about the current situation in Burma.

Joint statement

June 19 – Burma Center Netherlands co-drafted and signed, together with several international NGO's working on Burma, a joint statement: "Civil Society Organizations Call for Dialogue and Urgent International Engagement to Support Non-Military Solutions in Northern Myanmar", as a reaction to the threat of escalation of conflict in Northern Burma.

(Dutch translation: <http://burmacentrum.nl/nieuws/actueel/nieuws/persbericht-bcn-kachin-staat> / English on the joint BCN/TNI website <http://www.tni.org/work-area/burma-project>)

Letter to US secretary of State, Mrs Hillary Rodham Clinton

November 28 – As Mrs. Clinton prepared for her visit to Burma in December, a letter, signed by BCN and several of its international partners, was send to her to request deeper engagement of the US government with the people and government of Burma at this critical period of time in Burma. Especially the need for support for an inclusive

peace building agenda and the resolution of the long-standing conflicts through political, rather than military means, was addressed.

In the letter, Mrs. Clinton was asked to start a dialogue with the government, local civil society actors, Aung San Suu Kyi, ethnic nationalities committees, and local business on political pathways that will lead to the reduction of military presence and the over-reliance on military force.

The signatories also took the opportunity to thank Mrs. Clinton for the appointment of Ambassador Derek Mitchell as the Special Representative and Policy Coordinator for Burma and requested more staff resources to be provided to his office. The importance of engagement with a broad range of civil society groups was also stressed.

Meeting with Committee on Foreign Affairs (vaste kamercommissie Buitenlandse Zaken)

December 22 – BCN was invited to present an update on the situation in Burma in an hour long meeting with some MP's from the committee on Foreign Affairs of the lower house. Suggestions on policy development towards Burma were discussed. As a result of the meeting, the Committee submitted written questions to the government on sanctions policies and GSP status.

NETWORKS

In September 2011 BCN decided, albeit with a heavy heart, to leave the Euro Burma Network. EBN was started in the 1990s to coordinate lobby and campaign efforts of the different Burma groups in Europe.

BCN was one of the founding members. Over the years, campaigns have proven to be more successful, when they were synchronized in the European context, thus creating a *raison d'être* for a network to coordinate campaign efforts. However, in the run up to the elections, as BCN chose to support (ethnic) political parties willing to take part in the elections, relations became strained.

BCN's choice to support the newly formed democratic and ethnic parties and their objective of widening the democratic space that was beginning to open in the country through trainings and seminars, programs of voter education and monitoring, diverged considerably from the main outlook of EBN members. The majority of the EBN members wanted exclusively to follow the NLD line and promoted boycotting the elections as the NLD had decided to do so.

After the elections, BCN continued to support the nascent parties on the basis of its opinion that democracy would (eventually) come to Burma through working for change within the system. The events of the latter half of 2011 and the beginning months of 2012 have proven that (some of) the assumptions of BCN and its partners in Burma were not unfounded. However, through this process of divergence of perceptions as well as activities, it was no longer productive for BCN to stay inside the Euro Burma Network.

As BCN believes in building networks and cooperating towards a common goal, new networks are being set up, with likeminded partners in Europe and further afield.

SERVICE AND INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

Media

BCN briefs journalists and media persons regularly. Especially in the second half of 2011, when Burma figured relatively frequent in the media due to the changes taking place, BCN served media persons with background information and analyses of the situation.

Website

BCN has a website that functions as a means of communications with the general public on Burma issues. The site includes historical and other background information, news and analyses. It has a press section, a page in English, and theme oriented sections. <http://www.burmacentrum.nl>

Events and debates

BCN staff members regularly contribute to events and debates either by briefing the organizers or by delivering a speech or attending Q&A sessions. For example: a presentation was given on occasion of the Buddhist Film Festival Europe – after screening of film: Burma Soldier (2 October) on current situation in Burma, and a speech was delivered for a fundraiser for Shan Women students in Thailand.

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Board

The restructuring process of BCN in 2011, also affected the Board. Upon the leaving of the director, one of the members of the Board was appointed as interim program coordinator to secure the continuity of the organization as well as restructure it. As of the end of 2011, the new organization setup is still under construction, but the shift from a hierarchical frame with a director and project officers towards a team consisting of program officers and a program coordinator has been made. Due to the rapid changes taking place in Burma, keeping pace with the transition and rolling out BCN's well received and evaluated programs has become the main focus of the organization.

As a vacancy occurred half 2011, one Board member decided to apply for the job of program officer, and was accepted by the Board, leading to him stepping down from the Board.

Therefore 2011 has started with a board of 5, but ended with a Board of 3 members.

Staff

Beginning 2011, BCN's office was staffed by a director (0,8 fte) and 2 project officers civil society (0,2 and 0,6 fte). In April, the director's contract ended and was not renewed. As BCN had continued its process of restructuring, it was no longer feasible to have a 0,8 fte director, therefore, an Interim Program Coordinator was appointed for 0,6 fte. BCN has made a shift from a campaign organization to a more project oriented organization a few years ago, but never came around to adapting the structure of the organization to this shift. The Interim Program Coordinator was given the task to adapt the structure of the organization in such a way as to best support the work of the organization.

One of the project officers civil society decided that it was time for a career shift and left BCN, much to the regret of all. Another staff member was hired from July 1, serving as program officer, for 06 fte, working together on an equal footing with the program coordinator and the other (0,2 fte) program officer.

Volunteers

Due to the changing focus of the organization towards projects in Burma and high level lobbying, as well as the limitedness of time for this small organization to cover all its main areas, BCN decided not to work with many volunteers. However, some dedicated and qualified volunteers continue to actively support activities of BCN and their contribution is much appreciated.



Construction site in Yangon



NLD office in Yangon – October 2011

FINANCIAL REPORT

Message from the board regarding BCN's 2011 financial report

The board is satisfied that BCN has secured sufficient funding for its post-election program, focusing on further capacity building of political and civil society actors, which special attention given to political participation of women, empowerment of ethnic people and local development mechanisms.

The pre-election program led to an increase of turnover in 2010, which could not be sustained in 2011. Unforeseen changes in the staff caused a delay in fundraising efforts. The approval of the post-election program gave a boost to BCN's activities. A small amount of this funding contributes to the result of 2011, the bulk of its activities are to be implemented in 2012.

The financial crisis has also influenced BCN's donors, and effected core funding for the organization. OxfamNovib's contribution in 2011 will be the last contribution to BCN's corefunding. ICCO's contribution will be phased out in 2012. Cafod's contribution remained the same, but needs to be applied for every year. Core funding is meant to support awareness raising and lobby and advocacy efforts in The Netherlands and Europe, as well as to meet expenses to operate an office. The decline in core funding reflects the shift in focus towards projects in Burma.

Due to the unexpectedly rapid pace of change in Burma, BCN postponed the Burma Policy Conference for European policy and decision makers, initially planned for November 2011. Instead, the conference took place in February 2012, so as to guarantee a more comprehensive contribution to the debate. The result of the conference would have contributed to a positive balance in 2011.

Though 2011 was closed with a slight deficit, the board is confident that BCN will continue to contribute to the process of transformation in Burma through its well executed and received programs. The prolonged support of key donors for the post-election and ethnic conflict programs is a great encouragement. The board of BCN would like to take this opportunity to thank its international donors for their continued support and cooperation in these dire financial times.

BALANCE SHEET

	<u>31-12-11</u>	<u>31-12-10</u>
	Euro	Euro
<u>FIXED ASSETS</u>		
Tangible fixed assets	165	346
<u>CURRENT ASSETS</u>		
Grants receivable	-	10.341
Amounts receivable	2.219	2.685
Pre-paid costs	-	3.796
	2.219	16.822
<u>CASH</u>	116.724	166.147
Current assets	<u>118.943</u>	<u>182.969</u>
<u>CURRENT LIABILITIES</u>		
Grants prepaid	41.710	52.322
Salaries staff	7.841	10.739
Other amounts owed	10.888	41.562
Current liabilities	<u>60.439</u>	<u>104.623</u>
Current assets less liabilities	58.504	78.346
Total assets less current liabilities	<u>58.669</u>	<u>78.692</u>
<u>RESERVES</u>		
ALLOCATED RESERVES		
Continuity reserve	58.669	78.692
GENERAL RESERVE	-	-
	<u>58.669</u>	<u>78.692</u>

RECORD OF RECEIPTS AND EXPENDITURE

	2011	Budget 2011	2010
	Euro	Euro	Euro
<u>RECEIPTS</u>			
Grants	143.672	223.600	447.589
Other receipts	9.997	10.000	12.522
Total receipts	<u>153.669</u>	<u>233.600</u>	<u>460.111</u>
<u>EXPENDITURE</u>			
Personnel expenses	113.852	116.750	120.664
Organisation costs	34.311	35.000	34.953
Activity costs	25.529	78.250	286.487
Total expenditure	<u>173.692</u>	<u>230.000</u>	<u>442.104</u>
<u>RESULT</u>	<u>(20.023)</u>	<u>3.600</u>	<u>18.007</u>

ALLOCATION OF THE RESULT

Dotation from or to Continuity reserve	(20.023)	-	18.007
To general reserve	-	-	-

EXPLANATORY NOTES TO THE BALANCE SHEET AND THE RECORD OF RECEIPTS AND EXPENDITURE

ACCOUNTING PRINCIPLES APPLIED TO THE VALUATION AND DETERMINATION OF THE RESULT

Assets and liabilities are stated at face value unless indicated otherwise. Assets and liabilities denominated in foreign currencies are translated into Euro at the year-end exchange rate. Transactions in foreign currencies are translated at the exchange rate in effect at the time of the transaction.

Grants are recognized as income in the statement of income and expenditure in proportions of the progress of the project as well as project expenditure. Income and expenditure are recorded in the period to which they relate.

A possible positive result is destined to an allocated reserve for the purpose of continuity of the organization. The allocated reserve for continuity is restricted to a maximum for covering half a year of salary and organization costs. The allocation every year is a decision of the board.

SURVEY TANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS

The tangible fixed assets are stated at the acquisition cost, less straight-line depreciation. The depreciation is calculated on the basis of acquisition cost less residual value and the estimated useful life of the related asset. The estimated useful life of the mentioned office equipment is 3 years.

	Year of acquisition	Acquisition value	Bookvalue 31-12-10	Depreciation 2011	Bookvalue 31-12-11
Office equipment					
Dell server	Febr-07	4.460	-	-	-
2 Notebooks Fujitsu	June-07	1.444	-	-	-
Nettop + monitor	Nov-09	542	346	181	165
		6.446	346	181	165

EXPLANATORY NOTES TO THE BALANCE SHEET

	<u>31-12-11</u>	<u>31-12-10</u>
	Euro	Euro
<u>CURRENT ASSETS</u>		
Grants receivable		
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	-	10.341
	<u>-</u>	<u>10.341</u>
Other amounts receivable		
Interest	1.447	2.685
Miscellaneous	772	
	<u>2.219</u>	<u>2.685</u>
Pre-paid costs		
Insurances	-	3.796
	<u>-</u>	<u>3.796</u>
<u>CASH</u>		
Fortis bank	-	35
Fortis Kwartaaldeposito	-	12
ING	1.241	2.288
ABN-AMRO Bank	1.098	733
ASN Bank	21.450	87.081
ASN Deposito	-	50.000
Triodos Bank	8.107	4.661
Triodos Rendement	84.352	21.055
Chipknip	30	-
Petty cash	1	1
Foreign cash	<u>445</u>	<u>281</u>
	116.724	166.147

The amounts on bank accounts are immediately payable, except for the money on the deposit accounts. The Fortis Kwartaaldeposito has a term of three months, the ASN deposit account has a term of one year.

EXPLANATORY NOTES TO THE BALANCE SHEET

	31-12-11	31-12-10
	Euro	Euro
<u>CURRENT LIABILITIES</u>		
Grants prepaid		
Oxfam Novib	-	45.000
BCN sponsor	41.710	7.322
	<u>41.710</u>	<u>52.322</u>
Salaries staff		
Wage taxes	2.986	3.383
Social security	809	1.683
Pantar salary contribution	-	580
Holiday pay	4.046	5.093
	<u>7.841</u>	<u>10.739</u>
Other amounts owed		
Auditor	5.500	5.500
Bookkeeping	3.627	1.919
Tax Office	1.375	-
Burmese partner	-	27.132
Burmese partner	-	3.819
Office costs	386	927
Transnational Institute	-	2.231
Travelcosts	-	34
	<u>10.888</u>	<u>41.562</u>
<u>RESERVES</u>		
Continuity reserve on January 1 2010 / 2009	78.692	60.685
General reserve on January 1 2010 / 2009	-	-
Result 2010 / 2009	(20.023)	18.007
	<u>58.669</u>	<u>78.692</u>
<u>ALLOCATION OF THE GENERAL RESERVE</u>		
Continuity reserve	78.692	60.685
Dotation from or to the Continuity reserve	(20.023)	18.007
Allocated reserve	<u>58.669</u>	<u>78.692</u>
Remaining General reserve	-	-

EXPLANATORY NOTES TO THE RECORD OF RECEIPTS AND EXPENDITURE

RECEIPTS	2011	Budget 2011	2010
	Euro	Euro	Euro
Grants			
Algemene Spaarbank Nederland	-	-	2.500
CAFOD	11.600	11.600	11.953
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	-	-	113.841
ICCO	30.000	40.000	40.000
Stichting Pelgrimshoeve	-	-	1.200
Oxfam Novib	45.000	45.000	33.000
BCN sponsor	30.739	100.000	210.936
Transnational Institute	26.333	27.000	27.159
UK Embassy Rangoon	-	-	-
ZOA	-	-	7.000
Total Grants	<u>143.672</u>	<u>223.600</u>	<u>447.589</u>

For many years BCN received core funding from ICCO, OxfamNovib and Cafod to support its information dissemination and advocacy work and its lobby activities. Unfortunately, OxfamNovib and ICCO have been confronted with heavy cuts in their own budgets, and decided to phase out core funding for BCN. OxfamNovib's support ended in 2011, ICCO will extend its funding with one more year to 2012. In 2012 Cafod supports BCN for the same as in 2011.

The support of the sponsor for projects in Burma is important for BCN. This sponsor's contract for the post election program is for 1,5 years, but due to a delay in the approval process, this program contributed less to the result of 2011 than expected.

OTHER RECEIPTS

Sales of publications	97	-	673
Donations	2.541	3.500	3.412
Compensations	2.425	1.000	990
Interest	1.705	2.000	3.439
Miscellaneous	3.229	3.500	4.008
Total other revenues	<u>9.997</u>	<u>10.000</u>	<u>12.522</u>

EXPLANATORY NOTES TO THE RECORD OF RECEIPTS AND EXPENDITURE

	2011	Budget 2011	2010
	Euro	Euro	Euro
<u>PERSONNEL EXPENSES</u>			
Salaries			
Salaries	85.728	87.500	94.027
Social security	13.778	14.000	13.989
Pension contribution	3.099	3.500	4.356
Allowance for expenses	409	400	375
Insurance sick-leave/Arbo	9.124	9.000	9.169
	<u>112.138</u>	<u>114.400</u>	<u>121.916</u>
Salary contribution WWB	-	-	(4.186)
Sick leave pay	(219)	-	-
	<u>(219)</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>(4.186)</u>
Staff costs			
Travel costs	525	600	624
Volunteer costs	1.176	750	384
Miscellaneous	232	1.000	1.926
	<u>1.933</u>	<u>2.350</u>	<u>2.934</u>
Personnel expenses	<u>113.852</u>	<u>116.750</u>	<u>120.664</u>
<u>ORGANISATION COSTS</u>			
Office accommodation			
Rent and energy	15.225	16.000	15.008
Cleaning, furnishing and insurances	190	200	1.395
Equipment	1.500	1.000	729
	<u>16.915</u>	<u>17.200</u>	<u>17.132</u>
General costs			
Accounting	7.906	7.800	7.672
Auditing	5.500	6.000	5.994
Miscellaneous	3.990	4.000	4.340
	<u>17.396</u>	<u>17.800</u>	<u>18.006</u>
Overhead contribution WWB	-	-	(185)
Total organisation costs	<u>34.311</u>	<u>35.000</u>	<u>34.953</u>

EXPLANATORY NOTES TO THE RECORD OF RECEIPTS AND EXPENDITURE

	Budget		2010
	2011	2011	
	Euro	Euro	Euro
<u>ACTIVITY COSTS</u>			
Office costs	638	800	936
Communication	2.564	2.500	2.804
Website	174	200	2.119
Travel and accommodation abroad	10.474	10.000	11.233
Travel and accommodation Netherlands	209	200	224
Travel and accommodation guests	450	500	1.819
Accommodation conferences and meetings	-	23.750	2.850
Other conference and meeting costs	-	-	416
External consultancy	-	-	3.080
Publications and publicity	-	-	1.175
Transfer to cooperating organization	8.784	-	-
Electoral and political training Burma	1.935	40.000	259.155
Miscellaneous	301	300	676
Total activity costs	<u>25.529</u>	<u>78.250</u>	<u>286.487</u>

Activity expenses in 2011 were less than expected, since a planned Burma Policy Conference for European policy makers was postponed to February 2012. Furthermore, the approval of the post-election program for political and civil society actors in Burma was delayed. As a consequence, in 2011 BCN spent less money in Burma than expected. The total amount for this program is € 240.000,- and runs into 2013. It will contribute largely to BCN's result in 2012, and reflects BCN's policy to focus on project support in Burma.

Note on staff, volunteers and board

Paid staff End of 2011:
 2 x 0,6FTE
 1 x 0,2FTE

The highest salary paid is 34.500 Euro for 0,6 FTE in 2011.

BCN 's Board members work unsalaried.

INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT

To: the board of Stichting Burma Centrum Nederland, Amsterdam.

Report on the financial statements

We have audited the accompanying financial statements of Stichting Burma Centrum Nederland, Amsterdam, which comprise the balance sheet as at 31 December 2011, the profit and loss account for the year then ended and the notes, comprising a summary of the accounting policies and other explanatory information.

Management's responsibility

Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of these financial statements and for the preparation of the management board report, both in accordance with the Guidelines for annual reporting of the Dutch Accounting Standard Board, especially Guideline 640 "Not-for-profit organizations". Furthermore management is responsible for such internal control as it determines is necessary to enable the preparation of the financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

Auditor's responsibility

Our responsibility is to express an opinion on these financial statements based on our audit. We conducted our audit in accordance with Dutch law, including the Dutch Standards on Auditing. This requires that we comply with ethical requirements and plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements are free from material misstatement. An audit involves performing procedures to obtain audit evidence about the amounts and disclosures in the financial statements. The procedures selected depend on the auditor's judgment, including the assessment of the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error.

In making those risk assessments, the auditor considers internal control relevant to the entity's preparation and fair presentation of the financial statements in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the entity's internal control. An audit also includes evaluating the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates made by management, as well as evaluating the overall presentation of the financial statements.

We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our audit opinion.

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drs. P.A.J.M. Bonants
drs. R.W.J. Bruijnoge
SENIOR ORGANISATIEADVISEUR
drs. P.W.A. Kasteleyn, RC

Opinion with respect to the financial statements

In our opinion, the financial statements give a true and fair view of the financial position of Stichting Burma Centrum Nederland as at December 31, 2011 and of its result for the year then ended in accordance with the Guidelines for annual reporting of the Dutch Accounting Standard Board, especially Guideline 640 "Not-for-profit organizations".

Amsterdam, 3 April 2012

Dubois & Co. Registeraccountants



G. Visser

COLOPHON

BCN annual report 2011

BOARD

Maaïke van der Werf, Chair

Michel Steketee, Treasurer

Sandra Bakker, Secretary

Saskia Kunst, Member (till April 1st)

Jeroen Overweel, Member (till April 1st)

STAFF

Lydia Stilma, Director (until April)

Saskia Kunst, Program coordinator (ad interim) (from April)

Hans-Roel Nieuwenhuijse, project officer civil society (till June)

Jeroen Overweel, program officer (from July)

Pietje Vervest, program officer

This Annual Report is written and compiled by Saskia Kunst

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Burma Centrum Nederland

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