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Good Governance in Burma

“Despite modern changes and globalized cultural blending, Myanmar people have been able to preserve their own lifestyles and activities that have existed since time immemorial. The people of Myanmar communicate in their own language, wear their own style of clothing including the longyi, relish their own style of food, pray in their own way, play their own games, celebrate their own festivals, receive treatment with their own traditional medicines, and perform their own rituals remaining as Myanmar as possible in every aspect. Many of the life styles and activities are unique to Myanmar people. For example, the Shin Pyu or novitiation ceremony, which allows a young boy to experience temporary monastic life, is a religious practice virtually nonexistent in other parts of the world. Although some of Myanmar's beliefs, superstitions, customs and lifestyles have gradually disappeared, many still remain and are cherished and highly valued by the majority of the people. (Myanmar.com)” Although this passage describing the Burmese lifestyle is accurate, it is missing key components to a complete description: the problems. It is true that the Burmese cultural is rich in tradition; however, these traditions are accompanied by an overwhelming fear of a government whose seemingly selfish actions have degraded the common people of Burma. When asked what improvement would ensure better quality of life in the country of Burma, a Burmese native replied, “Freedom and basic human rights.” This answer is not unique. Millions of people have been and continue to be negatively affected by the corrupt and cruel actions of their government. In the United States and many other countries, the people often depend on the government to ensure safety, freedom, basic human needs, and many other factors to improve quality of life. In Burma, the citizens live in fear of the government. They are not provided with the means to live a life without fear.

The nation of Burma has been in turmoil for decades over religious preferences. Recently, the anti-Muslim community has been generating brutal attacks on civilians and spreading propaganda to increase numbers of supporters. As a result of a long-since failing government, the persecution of Muslims has been allowed to continue without consequence or interference.

Central Iowa has recently received a large number of refugees from this southeast-Asian country. These refugees come in search of education, job opportunities, basic human rights, and the ability to maintain a financially stable family. Among these refugees, a woman who has asked to keep her named concealed due to a continued fear of the Burmese government has achieved these goals through bravery, hard work, and continued perseverance.

This woman fled Burma on foot; in a group she did not know, to meet her husband, with her 2-year-old son tied to her back. For 7 days, through forests in part of Thailand, she journeyed in constant fear of being discovered by the armed militants to reach the safety of Malaysia. She was resettled in Iowa in 2010 with her husband, young daughter, and son after being in Malaysia for 3

years. The rest of her family still resides in the Chin state of Burma on their family farm. Corn and many variations of beans are grown on such farms. The typical family size in rural areas is 5-6 people per household, although her family consisted of 8 people. This woman's family owned a goat that they would milk every day for fresh milk. The slash and burn method is used in creating a field suitable for farming. Rice makes up about 75% of the Burmese diet. Rice is served with meat or fish, soup, salad and vegetables. During the meals, all the dishes are laid out on the dining table and served together so that diners can make their own choices and combinations. The most common method is to cook meat or fish in oil, seasoned with pounded onion, garlic, ginger, turmeric, chili and spices, and simmer until all or most of the water evaporates.

Often in rural areas, children complete primary school up until the 5th grade before leaving to begin work as their family's farm hand. This lack of basic education is frightening. How can people create a living if they are not educated past the 5th grade, and are forced to work from a young age due to financial crisis within families?

Access to healthcare is limited. Burma is a struggling country mainly due to the failing government. The government represses its citizens financially and by restricting access to necessities resulting in a poorer quality of life.

Access to equipment is the largest barrier to improving agricultural productivity. Most farming for families is done by hand and is expected of children at a young age. The unpredictable and high tax the government imposes prevents families from making a profit off of their goods.

Every family is required to fill out a household registration card. The household registration cards become proof of identity. The government needs jobs (mainly manual labor) so people are recruited. These jobs don't pay sufficiently and little to no profit is generated. If one does not show up to such a job, he must face fines. Recruiting citizens for labor jobs within the country is defined as forced labor. Burma is well known for this.

In rural communities where the nearest cities are miles away, people from urban areas bring clothing to sell or barter with farmers in exchange for food and certain types of meat. As a result of the distances between rural and urban centers, markets are not easily accessible. No access to markets results in farm families lacking vital nutrition, leaving families to barter their goods in hope of obtaining the foods necessary to support a nutritious diet.

As a result of government corruption and unaccountability, families are unable to make a living. The high taxes in place by the government create oppression in the economy. The people of Burma often live in fear of the government and rebel groups that invade villages.

Many areas, especially ethnic minority regions, have high military presence. As a result of this, civilians are forced to support members of the military. Some of their common demands are providing the military by cooking for them, or doing construction. In the last year, civilians in the

minority regions have been forced by the Burmese army to transport supplies, build roads, and clear roads of landmines by driving their vehicles in front of the military's convoys.

The ethnic areas have not yet benefited from dramatic reforms that have begun in the capital city of Rangoon. Some of the recent reforms include releasing of political prisoners, and loosening of media controls. However, many of the ethnic people remain wary of the changes occurring in Rangoon. The international community, including the US, must welcome these initial changes this government has made to benefit their people. But at the same time, we need to recognize that people living in these ethnic areas are still awaiting the chance to see some of the changes that have benefited only those living in urban areas.

The Burmese government does not provide nearly enough medical services to its people. People who live rurally don't have the necessary access to medical attention because the government misused the funds that were supposed to be aimed towards these issues. 80.3% of children are immunized for the measles. In order to stop the virus, this coverage must be over 90%. Skilled health personnel attend only 67.9% of births in rural areas. Morbidity rates are higher in rural areas due to disease and lack of access to medical care.

According to a native of the Chin state in Burma, local projects to help the problem of food scarcity are corrupt as well. The World Food program sets a price for foods based on the incomes of the people. The woman claims that the wealthy pay to be at the front of the line, and resell the food at raised prices. In order to solve food scarcity, the program needs to be altered. Instead of allowing the wealthy to profit off of goods that are meant to be benefiting the poor, there needs to be guidelines set in place. These guidelines could include a maximum income requirement that would eliminate the wealthy from receiving the food.

To address the problem of failing governance in Burma, drastic reforms must be made in addition to the recent ones already affecting urban civilians. Continued support from the US and other countries is necessary to help build a democracy in Burma to eliminate corruption. Job creation is desperately needed. Developing a work force with rules and regulations such as having fair wages is key. Implementing vocational training for students in high school would be beneficial to building their knowledge and skills to enter the work force. The creation of a better transportation system to link rural areas to cities would benefit the economy. This transportation system could be anything from low fare shuttles to trains. The building and maintenance of such systems create jobs and the money collected could help fund the government, as opposed to the government having to take money and resources from the civilians. A standard tax rate needs to be imposed to prevent unpredictable and unreasonable taxes from being an obstacle to making a living. A bill of rights could be created, ensuring every citizen at least basic human rights. Finding a way to improve the government corruption would ensure that citizens of Burma could not only sustain, but also be able to profit from their goods and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

For the government to rebuild trust with the minority groups after so many years of abuse, they must hold perpetrators of human rights violations accountable for their actions. Human rights violations must be ended, including forced labor.

Action must be taken. The people of Burma have never known basic rights and need to be recognized as people worthy of freedom and equality. The political injustice that has reigned among these people has gone on for far too long. Through drastic reforms, these issues of bad governance can be solved. Burma is capable of producing mass amounts of good due to the naturally fertile soil and work ethic of the people. This however is unable to happen until the government makes changes that are in the interest of the civilians. In addition, each family must take part in these changes. The people that have been repressed for so long need to find their voices and peacefully speak out against the unjust treatment they have received for decades. They need to reach out and continue to vocalize their cries for help. The international community needs to be receiving these cries for help, and intervene. Ruling a nation by inciting fear among the people should not be stood for any longer. We have the power to ensure a better quality of life for these people. Whether we start with one family at a time or create programs to benefit thousands of families, we can make a difference in this shaken country. "Freedom and basic human rights" is something every citizen in the United States takes for granted. To solve the problems in Burma, we must extend our helping hands to our fellow humans to help provide them with the liberties we enjoy every day.

The process of fixing this nation will not be short and easy. It will be long and strenuous process. The first step would be removal of the military regime and replacing it with a more democratic system. This could take quite a length of time simply because how rooted the military regime is in Myanmar.

With the military assistance from China and India the government can continue to oppress and dehumanize entire ethnic groups. The only thing that can stop this is if we make them sign an agreement to stop providing military assistance to the government because if not then it will be hard to choke out the government out. We can provide diplomatic assistance and communications; we could also supply a legitimate infrastructure, which would in the future greatly help with humanitarian aid and with education and creating jobs. This could create a pathway for the people to better themselves and in the future be able to better their country.

The people will, because of their past, have a natural distrust of their country which is to be expected after years of abuse and harm. A program that provides government funded aid would do wonders to build trust between citizens and the new democratic government.

The ability to receive contraceptives and sexual protection would help them to be able to prevent pregnancies from climbing which is a necessity in pushing the country on the right track to becoming a self-sustaining and solid country.

The changes that we have to start won't be easy but they're necessary. The country is in dire need of assistance due to the atrocities to fellow human beings being done in Myanmar. People are being raped by their government because they choose to believe their own religions. They are denied basic human rights because they pray to a different god or none at all.

I could write a novel on the specifics of such a plan but on its more basic level we simply need to provide the people the things they need to better themselves. To quote the famous saying “Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day, teach a man to fish and he will eat for a lifetime.” In other words, we need to teach these people to fish, so to say. We provide the tools to better themselves and they will because it is in human nature to strive for something better. The government should be tried and persecuted for their crimes to their citizens and to humanity.

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