



Glenda Jackson MP

Burmese Democratic Demonstrations 21st May 2007

It must have been about 91-92 that T. BAG – the Burma Action Group as it was then known, organised the delivery, by a large group of sympathisers, myself included, of a gigantic birthday card to the Burmese embassy here in London. The card was addressed to Aung San Suu Kyi, the democratically elected leader of her country, but then, as now, held under house arrest by the illegal, immoral and brutal military junta.

Our request to the embassy was that the card be delivered. Memory being what it is, I rather think the card was not accepted. Not even certain they opened the door! But what I do distinctly remember were the cameras being wielded from inside the embassy, assiduously snapping away.

Over the almost two decades since then, there have been and continue to be, a variety of vigils, fundraisers, theatre tributes and many, many debates here in Parliament. Plus EDMs (Early Day Motions) highlighting the brutal nature of the Burmese regime, calling for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and upon the international community to increase its actions to help the people of Burma.

So the scenes which have dominated our TV screens and newspaper front pages over the past week came as no surprise. The brutality of the military regime is endemic. Any Government which uses children to walk ahead of soldiers on jungle paths the regime fear may be land mined will have no compunction beating and shooting innocent unarmed Buddhist monks and nuns. Nor, as those who have survived testify, in torturing prisoners whose only crime is to have a desire for a democratically elected Government.

Calls, post the recent inhuman repression of peaceful protest, have come from around the world, urging more punitive action, extending and deepening for example the existing sanctions upon the junta. Attempts by the UN security council to formally discuss and condemn the actions of the present regime were vetoed by Russia, China and South Africa in January 2007. The visit of the UN Secretary General's special envoy seems to have produced nothing.

While China and India continue their support, both needing Burma's gas it is unlikely that an immediate change will be forthcoming. Nor will organisations such as the Burma Action Group change its commitment to the people of Burma. If we do nothing, nothing changes. If we continue to do something, then it just might.

Which is why this weekend saw the moving demonstration on behalf of all those who have died, not only recently, but over all the long years of repression. A rose petal for each lost life, floating on the Thames and a visit to Number 10 where the Prime Minister promised to continue to pressurise not only the Burmese junta to meet with the leaders of the democracy movement in Burma with out pre-conditions, but also the international community to increase and combine their efforts to bring about peaceful change.