



Canada and Burma: 2010 Highlights

By Canadian Friends of Burma – 31st December, 2010

In 2010, the Canadian Friends of Burma (CFOB) has successfully mobilized Canadians in support of democracy and human rights in Burma. The most notable achievements - among others – this year have been a five-year extension of Canadian humanitarian assistance to Burmese refugees and community-based organizations working in Burma’s neighboring countries including Thailand, and support for a UN ‘commission of inquiry’ into ‘crimes against humanity’ and ‘war crimes’ in Burma. These important accomplishments, along with others to be outlined below, would not have been possible without support of thousands of Canadians – from Prime Minister to Ministers, opposition leaders to their political staffers, and MPs, Senators and their assistants.

Burma supporters across Canada are, of course, the driving force of those outcomes. And it is also very important to acknowledge the role of Canadian civil society organizations (CVOs), especially the major financial support provided by Rights and Democracy, Inter Pares, Canadian Autoworkers Union (CAW), Canadian Communication, Energy and Paper-workers Union (CEP), and other individual for the work of Canadian Friends of Burma in the year 2010, as well as almost two-decade tireless campaign work for free Burma. The People of Burma and its rightful leader Daw Aung San San Suu Kyi will definitely appreciate your support in the struggle for freedom, democracy and human rights in Burma and will duly acknowledge one day. Since Burma’s struggle for fundamental rights and democratic freedoms is still ongoing and even more important in the coming year 2011, your continuous support in both moral and material terms is still essential and therefore earnestly sought.

Highlights in December:



Hon. Larry Bagnell, chair of PFOB, hosted Mrs. Lucida Phillips on Parliament Hill Dec. 2, 2010 – photo: CFOB



Mrs. Lucida Phillips met MPs, Senators and political staffers on Parliament Hill Dec. 2 – Photo: CFOB

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's sister-in-law visit

In early December, CFOB was able to welcome Mrs. Lucinda Phillips, sister-in-law of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, in Ottawa. Parliamentary Friends of Burma (PFOB) and Canadian Friends of Burma (CFOB) arranged a number of meetings for her with Canadian politicians including Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon and CIDA Minister Bev Oda, as well as key Burma supporters including founders of Canadian Friends of Burma and key partner organizations working on Burma. Mrs. Phillips relayed a [message](#) from Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in which the democracy leader and the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize winner thanks Canada for conferring her with Honorary Canadian Citizenship, bringing over 4000 Burmese refugees to Canada and providing emergency assistance to cyclone victims in Burma.)

Invitation of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to Canada

Another important event on the last days of this year is that Prime Minister Stephen Harper extended an invitation to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to come to Canada. In the [statement](#) issued on Dec. 27, he said, “I am pleased to announce that the Government of Canada has invited Aung San Suu Kyi to Canada to personally accept her honorary Canadian citizenship. We recognize that Aung San Suu Kyi's immediate priority since her release from house arrest is to focus her energies on consultations and dialogue within Burma, before embarking on international travel. We hope, however, that she will be able at the appropriate time to accept our invitation.”



A possibility of inviting her to Canada was discussed within the Burmese activist community in Canada after she was released on Nov. 13. The New Democratic Party leader Jack Layton and Hon. Larry Bagnell, Yukon MP (Lib.) and chair of PFOB, publically led the effort in requesting the government to extend the invitation to her. When her sister-in-law Lucinda Phillips was on Parliament Hill on Dec. 2, NDP leader queried this possibility in the House and Government House Leader John Baird responded by saying that the government would look into that possibility. As mentioned above, Prime Minister Stephen Harper eventually responded to that call by formally inviting her to Canada. In a message delivered on Dec. 2, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi not only thanked Canada for its support for Burma, but also clearly indicated, “I look forward very much to the day that conditions in Burma will allow me to be free to visit Canada myself and thank the Canadian people in person.”

Political Prisoners highlighted in International Human Rights Day

CFOB helped highlight the situation of more than 2,200 political prisoners in Burma at an event organized by Amnesty International Canada on Dec. 10. A CFOB representative was a speaker at an evening event held at its Head Office in Ottawa. The event was as part of a nation-wide campaign under the name of “Write for Rights” and chose a dozen of political prisoners including two from Burma – Zargana and Su Su Nway. Zargana is an Honorary Member of PEN Canada and Su Su Nway received Canada’s 2007 John Humphary Freedom Award bestowed by Rights and Democracy.

Highlights in November:

Leading Burmese activist visit and action against Burma’s sham elections



Dr. Naing Aung (left), General Secretary of Forum for Democracy in Burma (FDB), along with Tin Maung Htoo (CFOB), meeting with CUSO/VSO staffs in Ottawa - Nov. 4 Photo: CUSO/VSO

Dr. Naing Aung, a leading Burmese democracy activist and Secretary General of Thai-Burma border-based Forum for Democracy in Burma (FDB), visited to Canada in early November. His visit took place in the final days leading up to Burma’s general election on Nov. 7 and was intended to build international resistance against the elections which is neither free nor fair. On Nov. 4, Dr. Naing Aung took part in the press conference held on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, along with MPs from all political parties including Bob Rae (Liberals), Paul Dewar (NDP), Jean Dorion (Bloc Québécois) and Brue Stanton (Conservative). Rights and Democracy’s President Gérard Latulippe also joined the press conference. With the coordination of local groups, CFOB mobilized action in Ottawa, Saskatoon, Calgary and Vancouver. Please see related news reports on each action below:

Ottawa: [Protesters demand human rights, end of military regime in Burma](#)

Saskatoon: [City residents call for freedom in Myanmar](#)

Vancouver: [Don't buy into junta's 'Orwellian game', election protesters told](#)

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon also expressed Canada's concerns on the elections taking place under oppressive conditions in a [statement](#) issued in the eve of the elections. He further issued another [statement](#) on Nov. 8, saying "Canada is deeply disappointed that the regime did not live up to its own commitment to hold a free and fair election. We are also concerned by reports of outbreaks of violence in border areas in the aftermath of the election."

Dr. Naing Aung who was in Ottawa during the elections period also gave a briefing about the elections to foreign affairs officials on Nov. 8. During his advocacy trip, he also met Members of Parliament and Burmese activist community. He was interviewed by a number of media including CBC radio, CFRU 93.3 and CKCU-91.1. Please see below a list of events he participated:

Nov. 3 – doing a presentation at CUSO-VSO office

Nov. 4 - meeting with PFOB members; a press conference on Burma's Elections on Parliament Hill

Nov. 5 – giving a speech at Ottawa's One World Film Festival where a short Burma film "The Border: Misery and Hope" was screened

Nov. 6 - participating in an Ottawa demonstration against sham elections in Burma

Nov. 8 – meeting with Canadian foreign affairs officials by presenting an election briefer

Nov. 9 – taking part in Burma Awareness Night at Brock University in St. Catherine

Canadians joined in the celebration on the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi



**A gathering for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and in protest of Burma's sham elections
Human Rights Monument in Ottawa - Nov. 6 Photo: The Impression**

The most excited moment this year, of course, is the release of Burmese democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi on Nov. 13. Canadians and Burmese-Canadian across Canada joined the celebration of this news including Canadian Prime Minister Stephan Harper. Mr. Harper issued a [statement](#), calling her "an unwavering champion of peace, democracy and respect for human rights in Burma." A few days after her release, CFOB helped arrange interview opportunity for Canadian media to get

heard of her voices in Canada. CBC 'The Current' program broadcast an [interview](#) with her on Nov. 16 and Canada's national weekly magazine Maclean's also run an [interview](#) with her on Dec. 20.

Canada's Support for Cyclone Giri Victims in Burma

At the end of Nov. 30, Hon. Beverley J. Oda, Minister of International Cooperation, announced that Canada would provide humanitarian support to help the Burmese people affected by Cyclone Giri hit western part of Burma on October 22. Canada's support in the amount of \$500,000 will be administered by Save the Children Canada and Médecins Sans Frontières Canada (MSF). "[Canada's assistance will provide emergency shelter and health services, as well as access to drinkable water,](#)" said minister Oda in the [announcement](#). Hon. Larry Bagnell, chair of PFOB, requested Canada's immediate assistance as soon as the latest wave of cyclone struck western part of Burma.

Highlights in October: Burma VJ Monks' visit



Burma VJ monks and political staffers on Parliament Hill after a meeting with PFOB hosted by Ottawa-Centertown MP Paul Dewar on Oct. 15 - Photo: CFOB

In October, CFOB brought two Burmese Buddhist monks who played a leading role in the **2007 Saffron Revolution**, to Ottawa to hear their first-hand accounts. Accompanied by U Kawida, the abbot of Burmese Buddhist Temple in Toronto, the two monks, U Pyinya Zawta and U Agga Nya Na, met with officials from Foreign Affairs Canada (FAC) and members of Parliamentary Friends of Burma (PFOB) on October 15, 2010.

U Pyinya Zawta is a founding member in Exile of the All Burma Monks' Alliance that led the monks against the military junta in 2007 in Burma was imprisoned for ten years for his pro-democracy activities in Burma. He is the commanding voice behind the scenes in the documentary film, *Burma VJ: Reporting from a Closed Country*.

U Agga Nya Na is one of the monks who experienced the Saffron Revolution in 2007 first-hand. After more than 1 month in hiding, he escaped to Thailand where he testified to a delegation from the United States Congress and the Ambassador from the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok about the violent crackdown by the military regime on the peaceful protest.

When the monks were in Canada, the following meetings, events and activities were arranged by CFOB with the coordination of various organizations:

- Oct. 15 noon - meeting with Foreign Affairs officials;
- Oct. 15 afternoon - attending a meeting hosted by PFOB and its vice-chair Paul Dewar;
- Oct. 16 morning - attending Burma VJ screening and discussion with Religious Society of Friends;
- Oct. 16 noon- meeting with Ottawa Burmese Community;
- Oct. 17 - meeting with Toronto Burmese Community;
- Oct. 18 - participating in Burma VJ screening at University of Toronto

Burma VJ Screening in Ottawa



In the evening of Oct. 26, Academy Award Nominee Burma VJ: Reporting from a closed country was screened at Bytowne Cinema, in Ottawa. Amnesty International Canada sponsored the screening with the attendance of around three hundreds audience. CFOB's representative was invited to talk about the political situation in Burma at the event held afterward at Don Cherry's sports Grill. The screening of documentary such as Burma VJ is the best tool of public education and awareness on Burma and the ongoing struggle for Democracy in Burma.

Burma VJ Screening in Regina

International Studies Speaker Series

The struggle for democracy in Burma

Film: **Burma VJ** (nominated for Academy Award for best documentary)



Speaker **Tin Maung Htoo**, director,
Canadian Friends of Burma

Wednesday, Oct. 27, 7:30 pm
University of Regina, CL 112

University of Regina | SCIC | AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

University of Regina and Regina Amnesty International hosted a Burma event at the Regina University along with a screening of Burma VJ: Reporting from a closed country – the documentary on the 2007 Saffron Revolution in Burma. CFOB's representative was invited to Regina from Ottawa to talk about the struggle for democracy in Burma and to give a lecture to students who are studying international relations. A dinner reception was also hosted by Regina Friends of Burma CFOB's representative was interviewed live by local CBC radio and a news report was also published on local newspaper "Shedding light on human rights issues"

<http://www.leaderpost.com/news/Shedding+light+human+rights+issues/3720611/story.html>

Highlights in September and August:

Canada's support on UN's commission of inquiry on Burma

One of the biggest campaign successes this year within two months of September and August is Canada's support on a UN Commission of Inquiry on 'crimes against humanity' and 'war crimes' in Burma. CFOB effectively mobilized the public support, putting out an action alert across Canada. In response to that mounting call from both domestic and international community, Canada pledged to support the commission on Burma.

"Canada supports both the UN Special Rapporteur's work on human rights abuses in Burma, and the idea of a UN Commission of Inquiry into human rights abuses by the Burmese regime," said the Minister Lawrence Cannon in a videotaped message sent to CFOB on Sept. 3. "We will work with our allies in the international community to develop a common approach to support the recommendations that the Rapporteur will present to an upcoming session of the UN General Assembly," he added.

All three opposition parties: Liberals Party of Canada, New Democrat Party (NDP) and Bloc Quebecois – supported the call, urging the Conservative government to support it. Moreover, 82 MPs and Senators also endorsed such call. And a number of Canadian civil society organizations including labor unions and Burmese dissident communities in Canada also requested the government to support this initiative. Please see news articles and statements below:

- [Canada throws support behind Burma inquiry](#)
- [Silence on Burma inquiry raises eyebrows](#)
- [Liberals call on the government to support a UN Commission of Inquiry in Burma](#)
- [New Democrats call for UN commission of inquiry on Burma](#)
- BQ Presses Harper to Get Involved in Ending the Crimes Against the Burmese People
- [NUPGE presses Ottawa on Burma rights campaign](#)
- [Canada backs UN inquiry into crimes in Burma](#)

CFOB team attendance at RSM in Thailand



A photo-op after the Regional Strategic Meeting in Mae Sod, Thailand

In Sept. 2010, representatives from Canadian Friends of Burma (CFOB) attended Joint Regional Strategic Meeting (RSM) on the Thai- Burma border. RSM is a broad-based network consists of major Burma campaign and solidarity groups from Asia-Pacific region. CFOB is part of that network since its inception and usually attends its annual Regional Strategic Meeting (RSM) hosted by Alternative ASEAN (ALTSEAN – Burma) and Burma Partnership (BP). RSM reviews global Burma campaigns, refine the regional advocacy and campaign strategy, share key messages, talking points and other advocacy resources, and develop joint calendar for action and contingency planning processes. This year conference welcomes 54 Burma and solidarity groups from 20 countries around the world. And the two major focuses were the 2010 elections and a UN “commission of inquiry’ into gross human rights violations in Burma.

While in Mae Sod, CFOB team visited to Umpiem Refugee Camp, two and half hours away from the south Mae Sod and met with post-ten students and some former political prisoners. CFOB team also visited to another post-ten school run by Canadian charity ‘Project Umbrella Burma’ near Mae Hla Refugee Camp, located at the north of Mae Sod and two and half hours away from the town. CFOB team also met former political prisoners in Mae Sod and visited to a few dissident and community-based organization offices including Assistance Association for Political Prisoners – Burma (AAPP). Moreover, CFOB team was invited to a reception hosted by Canadian ambassador in Chaing Mai on Sept. 15 and arranged to meet with some other campaign organizations based in Chaing Mai. CFOB staff also met with Canadian Embassy staffs in Bangkok before coming back to Canada.

Highlights in June:

June was the month of world attention falling on Canada as it was hosting G8 and G20 Summits. Leaders gathered in Muskoka, Canada also discussed about Burma’s political issue and made the following statement in the G8 Declaration. “We urge the Government of [Burma] to take the steps necessary to allow for free and fair elections. Full and inclusive democratic participation is essential to this. We urge the Government to release without delay all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, and engage the democratic opposition and representatives of ethnic groups in a substantive dialogue on the way forward to national reconciliation.”

And June is also the month in which Burmese democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was born and her birthday ceremony were held around the world including in Canada. Canadian ambassador Ron Hoffman attended a birthday celebration on Thai-Burma border and gave a speech in which he said: “Today we reaffirm our commitment to carry this collective struggle forward. The Government of Canada will do its part to ensure that Canadian actions match our words.”

Canada urged to probe Ivanhoe over ‘arms-for-copper’ deal

Also in this month CFOB learned Vancouver-based Ivanhoe Mines’ 50% asset in Burma was acquired by a Chinese armed-manufacturer Norinco, according to a press release posted on the company’s website. Therefore, CFOB called on the Government of Canada to investigate on the report. Please see detailed reports on the issue below:

- [Canada urged to probe Ivanhoe over ‘arms-for-copper’ deal](#)
- [Chinese arms maker's copper mine deal raises queries over Canadian](#)
- [Critics decry Norinco outlay on Ivanhoe’s Burmese mine](#)

CFOB urges EDC not to support Ivanhoe Mines

Also in this month, the Canadian Friends of Burma (CFOB) expressed its concerns by reports that Export Development Canada (EDC), a Crown corporation, intends to give as much as half a billion dollars in public subsidies to Ivanhoe Mines and its Chairman Robert Friedland for a controversial mining project in Mongolia. Later, EDC ensured CFOB that it would not lend such support without going through a screening process based on its corporate social responsibility code of conduct.

Protection of former political prisoners on Thai-Burma border

As well, in June, CFOB staff met with a few dozen of former Burmese political prisoners in Mae Sod and two refugee camps – Upheim and Nupo located along Thai-Burma border. During this fact-finding mission, CFOB learned a great deal of current and former political prisoners' situation and their immediate need. CFOB was also able to raise the issue with Canadian ambassador and embassy staffs in Bangkok. In 2009, CFOB played important role in garnering unprecedented public support for the release of political prisoners in Burma with more than 30,000 signatures.

Highlight in April-May: Research trip to Thailand

A CFOB staff conducted a feasibility study in Thailand and along Thai-Burma border for implementation “Burmese Diaspora Volunteering Program” sponsored by CUSO-VSO. The new programme is aimed at recruiting experienced and skilled volunteers from the diaspora communities in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom, to strengthen the work with its partner organizations on the Thai-Burma border, to help build links between the programme and the diaspora communities and to facilitate mutual support and effective advocacy on issues faced by the Burmese people. With the coordination of CUSO-VSO in Ottawa and VSO Thailand-Burma Program in Bangkok, the study was carried out in April and May, 2010 on the Thai-Burma border including Chaing Mai, Mae Saraing, Mae Hong Song, and Mae Sot. The field research mainly included interviews and meetings with more than 30 VSO partner organizations, most of which are CFOB's partner organizations and volunteers around the world, as well as potential partner organizations.

Highlight in March: Third Burma Forum Canada held



A photo-op with MP Black Kelly (Con.), sitting with Bo Hla Tint (NCGUB) on left side and Harn Yawngshwe (EBO) on right side, after making an announcement of continuation of assistance for another five-year for Burma at Sandman Hotel, Saskatoon March. 6 - Photo: CFOB

Canadian Friends of Burma (CFOB) sponsored the 3rd Burma Forum Canada that held in Saskatoon from March 6 to 7, 2010. More than 50 Burmese dissidents and representatives from Burma's Diaspora communities across Canada attended, as well as representatives from the National Coalition Government of Union of Burma (NCGUB), Ethnic Nationalities Council (ENC), and Euro-Burma Office (ENC). The significance of the Forum is that it became a staging ground for the Government of Canada to make a major announcement related to the continuation of Burma Border Project. Moreover, the Forum's "Saskatoon Declaration" becomes an important policy recommendation to the Government of Canada related to Burma.

CFOB regards the Burmese Diaspora community as important component of our solidarity work for Burma and wants to keep them active in our advocacy work. With this intent, CFOB is always looking for an opportunity to strengthen the role of Burmese Diaspora community in Canada. And holding 3rd Forum was of course a great opportunity for us to fulfil that role. CFOB provided a considerable amount of time and energy for the preparation and organizing of this Forum.

This Forum is one of the biggest gatherings for Burmese Diaspora community with the representatives from such city as Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Thunder Bay, Winnipeg, Calgary, Lightbridge, and Vancouver. The Forum, set up in the summer of 2004 with Burmese origin activists across Canada, is a policy consultation place for Burmese Diaspora communities in Canada.

And it is the third time in six years for Burmese activists in Canada to come together to discuss pressing issues of Burma. They discussed about Canada, U.S. and EU foreign policies towards Burma and the role of the United Nations in the restoration of democracy in Burma. They also touched on the upcoming 2010 elections and the role of ethnic nationalities.

The Canadian Friends of Burma (CFOB) is federally incorporated, national non-governmental organization working for democracy and human rights in Burma. Contact: Suite 206, 145 Spruce St., Ottawa, K1R 6P1; Tel: 613.237.8056; Email: cfob@cfob.org; Web: www.cfob.org