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# International Humanitarian Assistance to Myanmar

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Philosophy  
in  
Development Studies

at Massey University, Palmerston North,  
New Zealand

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2008

## ABSTRACT

Myanmar is a country with many complex political and humanitarian issues. While it is rich in natural resources, it remains one of the poorest and most undemocratic countries in Asia. It has a history of ethnic and political division and many of the antagonists are still to find lasting reconciliation. Myanmar has been controlled by military juntas and former army generals since a coup in 1962. The focus of the regime is security and the preservation of its position as the ruling elite, at the expense of democracy and the humanitarian needs of the general population. The international response to the humanitarian plight of the Myanmar people has been mixed and the provision of international aid to Myanmar has become a highly contentious issue.

This thesis seeks to critically examine international aid to Myanmar so as to determine whether under present conditions humanitarian assistance should, and can, be effectively provided to the country. In doing so recent theories relating to humanitarian assistance and intervention are reviewed and the historical and political circumstances that have influenced the humanitarian situation in Myanmar are explored. A description of the current humanitarian situation and levels of international assistance is provided, and donor, practitioner and activist perspectives on international assistance are determined.

The results of this study show that Myanmar has serious humanitarian needs. Despite being a difficult environment in which to operate, with complex political problems, it is still possible to conduct effective programmes in the country. Existing programmes do not reach all those in need, nor do current programmes address many of the core problems. International assistance does help fill the gap left largely unattended by the junta. Any lasting political solution requires the participation of all stakeholders in the country, especially the military. As the junta is unlikely to relinquish political control, regardless of pressure levelled against the senior generals, the need for ongoing international aid remains obvious. When all the considerations about providing aid to Myanmar are taken into account, it is apparent from this research that the conditions are serious enough to justify that there is a humanitarian imperative to help, and that there are sound opportunities to do so.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In completing this thesis I have had the assistance of many people who I would like to acknowledge and thank.

I would like to thank the people who participated in my research and allowed me to privately interview them. They all took time out of their busy days to talk to me and their involvement was critical to this study. I particularly want to acknowledge the work of the people directly involved in providing humanitarian assistance inside Myanmar and whose efforts are helping to improve the lives of the people there.

The staff at the Development Studies Institute at Massey University deserve a particular mention, especially Dr Katherine McKinnon whose direction and supervision helped me get the thesis on course and steered me over many an academic hurdle. Special thanks also to my other supervisor Dr Rochelle Stewart-Withers whose encouragement, guidance and support was crucial to the project's completion. As a distance student I would also like to acknowledge the excellent online and lending facility provided by the Massey University Library.

I want to thank my partner Carol whose support has been steadfast. Carol has been a constant, unwavering and vital source of advice and assistance throughout all my studies.

Finally, I would like to recognise the people of Myanmar who continue to suffer from the faults of others. While my aim was to analyse the complexities of providing humanitarian assistance in the difficult environment that is Myanmar I also hope I show that the need for international humanitarian assistance in the country is immediate, that aid can be delivered effectively, and should be made available in considerably greater amounts than is currently being given.

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## ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMS AND GLOSSARY

### Abbreviations and Acronyms

3-D Fund	Three Diseases Fund
AFPFL	Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League
AFP	Agence France Presse
ALTSEAN Burma	Alternative Asian Network on Burma
AP	Associated Press
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ATS	Amphetamine-type Substances
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
BCP	Burma Communist Party
CBO	Community-Based Organisations
DCD	Development Co-operation Directorate (OECD)
DFID	Department for International Development (United Kingdom)
ECHO	European Office for Humanitarian Aid
EU	European Union
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
FTUB	Federation of Trade Unions-Burma
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INGO	International Non-Government Organisation
KNU	Karen National Union
NLD	National League for Democracy
NUP	National Unity Party
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSI	Open Society Institute

MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NCGUB	National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
TBBC	Thailand Burma Border Consortium
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Assistance
USDA	Union Solidarity and Development Association
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation

**Glossary**

*Sangha* The order of Buddhist monks

*Tatmadaw* The Myanmar armed forces