

Aid watchdog demands Australia halt funding for intelligence training in Burma

AIDWATCH revealed today that Australian aid money is being used to train Burmese intelligence officers. AIDWATCH spokesperson, Kate Wheen said:

'Many of the senior police and intelligence officers who are currently involved in the Burmese Government crackdown against the pro-democracy movement were probably trained by the Australian Federal Police at a centre funded by the Australian aid program.'

In 2004-2005 AUSAID funded training 'for senior officials in the theory of counter terrorism recognition and collaboration for combating terrorism'. The project funded counter-terrorism workshops, later delivered to 600 government personnel in Burma.

Since 2004 the Australian Government has funded Burmese intelligence training through the 'Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation'. The Centre receives \$6 million a year from the Attorney Generals Department, funds attributed to the Australian Government aid effort.

The Centre plays an important role in training Burmese police and intelligence officers. In November 2006, for instance, 20 senior intelligence officers from the Burmese government were trained by three Australian Federal Police at the Centre.

Police intelligence training directly serves the military regime. In Burma there is no civil command: since 1995 the Police force in Burma has come under the control of the military, the Tatmadaw. Police intelligence and the 'Special Branch' is subordinate to regional military command structures.

Human rights groups such as the New York-based Human Rights Watch and the Brussels based International Crisis Group highlight the increased use of police intelligence against pro-democracy groups in Burma, especially since 2004. Intelligence and police training for the Burmese Government, paid for by Australian taxpayer, directly implicates the Australian Government in these human rights abuses.

Kate Wheen said: 'The Australian Government says it maintains an 'interaction' with the Burmese Government and that aid to Burma is 'primarily humanitarian'. This is not good enough. Australian intelligence training for the Burma Government shows what 'interaction' means in practice. All Australian Government aid to the Burmese Government and to its police force, must be stopped now. Our aid to Burma must be solely humanitarian and independent of the military government.'

Dr. James Goodman, Chair of AIDWATCH, added:

'The Burmese people desperately need humanitarian assistance, not police assistance. The United States and the European Union have both banned anything but humanitarian aid. In contrast the Australian Government still provides training for the regime's police force and intelligence agencies. It must cut these ties and fall into line with the international consensus. Australia should aid the Burmese people, not the Burmese military'.

For further detail see the AIDWATCH Backgrounder, 'The Australian Aid Program: Aiding the Burmese Intelligence' at www.aidwatch.org.au

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