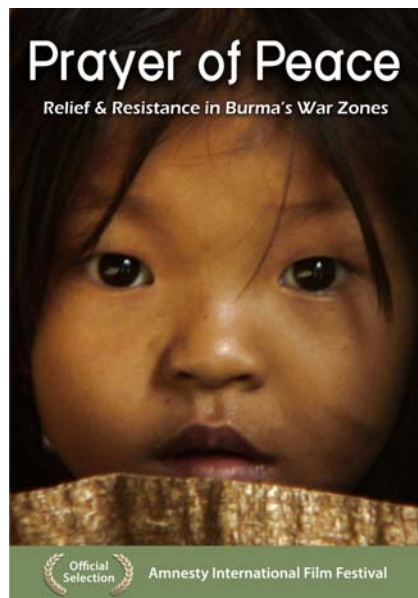




# Prayer of Peace

## Relief and Resistance in Burma's War Zones

### Guidebook



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## **BACKGROUND on BURMA**

Britain conquered Burma over a period of 62 years (1824-1886) and incorporated it into its Indian Empire. Burma was administered as a province of India until 1937 when it became a separate, self-governing colony; independence from the Commonwealth was attained in 1948. Gen. NE WIN dominated the government from 1962 to 1988, first as military ruler, then as self-appointed president, and later as political kingpin. Despite multiparty legislative elections in 1990 that resulted in the main opposition party - the National League for Democracy (NLD) - winning a landslide victory, the ruling junta refused to hand over power. NLD leader and Nobel Peace Prize recipient AUNG SAN SUU KYI, who was under house arrest from 1989 to 1995 and 2000 to 2002, was imprisoned in May 2003 and subsequently transferred to house arrest. After Burma's ruling junta in August 2007 unexpectedly increased fuel prices, tens of thousands of Burmese marched in protest, led by pro-democracy activists and Buddhist monks. In late September 2007, the government brutally suppressed the protests, killing at least 13 people and arresting thousands for participating in the demonstrations. Since then, the regime has continued to raid homes and monasteries and arrest persons suspected of participating in the pro-democracy protests. The junta appointed Labor Minister AUNG KYI in October 2007 as liaison to AUNG SAN SUU KYI, who remains under house arrest and virtually incommunicado with her party and supporters.

### **GEOGRAPHY:**

Location:

Southeastern Asia, bordering the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal, between Bangladesh and Thailand

Geographic coordinates:

22 00 N, 98 00 E

Map references:

Southeast Asia

Area:

*total:* 678,500 sq km

*land:* 657,740 sq km

*water:* 20,760 sq km

Area - comparative:

slightly smaller than Texas

Land boundaries:

*total:* 5,876 km

*border countries:* Bangladesh 193 km, China 2,185 km, India 1,463 km, Laos 235 km, Thailand 1,800 km

## **PEOPLE:**

Population: 47,758,181

Ethnic groups:

Burman 68%, Shan 9%, Karen 7%, Rakhine 4%, Chinese 3%, Indian 2%, Mon 2%, other 5%

Religions:

Buddhist 89%, Christian 4% (Baptist 3%, Roman Catholic 1%), Muslim 4%, animist 1%, other 2%

Languages:

Burmese, minority ethnic groups have their own languages

## **ECONOMY:**

Burma, a resource-rich country, suffers from pervasive government controls, inefficient economic policies, and rural poverty. The junta took steps in the early 1990s to liberalize the economy after decades of failure under the "Burmese Way to Socialism," but those efforts stalled, and some of the liberalization measures were rescinded. Despite Burma's increasing oil and gas revenue, socio-economic conditions have deteriorated due to the regime's mismanagement of the economy. Lacking monetary or fiscal stability, the economy suffers from serious macroeconomic imbalances - including rising inflation, fiscal deficits, multiple official exchange rates that overvalue the Burmese kyat, a distorted interest rate regime, unreliable statistics, and an inability to reconcile national accounts to determine a realistic GDP figure. Most overseas development assistance ceased after the junta began to suppress the democracy movement in 1988 and subsequently refused to honor the results of the 1990 legislative elections. In response to the government of Burma's attack in May 2003 on AUNG SAN SUU KYI and her convoy, the US imposed new economic sanctions in August 2003 including a ban on imports of Burmese products and a ban on provision of financial services by US persons. Further, a poor investment climate hampers attracting outside investment slowing the inflow of foreign exchange. The most productive sectors will continue to be in extractive industries, especially oil and gas, mining, and timber with the latter especially causing environmental degradation. Other areas, such as manufacturing and services, are struggling with inadequate infrastructure, unpredictable import/export policies, deteriorating health and education systems, and endemic corruption. A major banking crisis in

2003 shuttered the country's 20 private banks and disrupted the economy. As of 2007, the largest private banks operated under tight restrictions limiting the private sector's access to formal credit. Moreover, the September 2007 crackdown on pro- democracy demonstrators, including thousands of monks, further strained the economy as the tourism industry, which directly employs about 500,000 people, suffered dramatic declines in foreign visitor levels. In November 2007, the European Union announced new sanctions banning investment and trade in Burmese gems, timber and precious stones, while the United States expanded its sanctions list to include more Burmese government and military officials and their family members, as well as prominent regime business cronies, their family members, and associated companies. Official statistics are inaccurate.

Source – CIA Factbook – April 2008



# Karen Districts



©Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), 2005

Scale: 1 cm to 22 km  
1 in. to 35 miles

## LINKS

**Karen Human Rights Group** - [www.khrg.org](http://www.khrg.org)

An independent organization documenting the human rights situation in Burma with specific focus on the Karen.

**U.S. Campaign for Burma** - <http://uscampaignforburma.org/>

Organization that spreads news and creates awareness on the ongoing conflict in Burma.

**Free Burma Coalition** - <http://www.freeburmacoalition.org/>

Good source of links and news on Burma.

**Human Rights Watch Asia** - <http://www.hrw.org/doc/?t=asia&c=burma>

Organization's official page on Burma with news updates

**Free Burma Rangers** - <http://www.freeburmarangers.org/>

Official site of group that aids Karen refugees as show in the film.

**Amnesty International** - <http://www.amnesty.org/>

Official site of human rights awareness group.

## **LESSON/CLASS ACTIVITY:**

Time to complete: 60 minutes

Materials needed: Prayer of Peace DVD

### **Part One:**

Watch the film "Prayer of Peace". If needed, also watch the short film "This is My Home" for more background on Burma.

### **Part Two:**

Discussion Questions

1. The Karen are classified by the United Nations as an "internally displaced people". Define what that means.
2. Since the civil war in 1948, the Karen have been fighting against the military rulers in Burma. Despite continued worldwide condemnation of the government, it stays in power. Discuss the factors that contribute to the ongoing rule. Should the U.S and other western countries do more to intervene? Or is this an issue that other Asian countries must handle themselves?
3. Many Karen and other ethnic groups in the country are killed and/or displaced from their homes in a process that has been called "burmization". Many human rights advocates describe this as a form of genocide. Define the term "genocide" and discuss how the term "burmization" does or does not match the criteria for genocide.
4. Human rights abuses in other countries such as Rwanda and Darfur (Sudan) have received intense worldwide focus. Despite the decades long struggle in Burma, no resolution appears in sight. Is this due to the strong military presence that the other countries mention lack? Are there other factors, i.e. economic, geopolitical, etc. in play?
5. With China being a supporter of the military government in Burma, many have called for a boycott of the upcoming summer Olympics in Beijing. Would a boycott by participating countries be effective or not?
6. Aung San Sui Kyi is the Noble Peace Prize winner and pro-democracy activist currently under house arrest in Burma after she was prevented from assuming the role of Prime Minister when her party won the 1990 elections in that country. An advocate of non-violent protests, she has adopted many of Mahatma Gandhi's techniques. Discuss how her efforts mirror those of Gandhi, the Dalai Lama, and others who use non-violent means as a form of protest. Are these tactics effective or not especially when dealing with a strong military presence?

National Standards Correlation:

**[NSS-G.K-12.1](#) THE WORLD IN SPATIAL TERMS**

**[NSS-G.K-12.2](#) PLACES AND REGIONS**

**Source:** The U.S. National Geography Standards

**<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/standards/matrix.html>**