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Burma

European Parliament resolution of 22 May 2008 on the tragic situation in Burma

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Burma,
 - having regard to the conclusions of the extraordinary meeting of the General Affairs and External Relations Council of 13 May 2008 on the humanitarian situation in Burma/Myanmar,
 - having regard to UN General Assembly Resolution 60/1 of 24 October 2005 on the World Summit Outcome, paragraph 139 of which endorsed the possibility of collective cohesive action against individual states where "national authorities are manifestly failing to protect their populations from genocide, war crime, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity",
 - having regard to Rule 103(4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas on 2 and 3 May 2008 cyclone Nargis severely struck southern regions of Burma, including the country's main city Rangoon and the Irrawaddy Delta region, home to nearly half of the population of Burma,
- B. whereas the Burmese state media report 77 738 dead so far, with 55 917 missing, while independent observers and international aid agencies put the toll at at least 100 000 dead; whereas the UN estimates that between 1,6 and 2,5 million people were severely affected and urgently needed aid,
- C. whereas the ruling State Peace and Development Council ignored warnings and was exceptionally slow in reacting to the emergency and accepting foreign assistance: to date it has permitted only very limited deliveries of international humanitarian aid into the country, insisting that they must be distributed by the military, and has been delaying the issuance of visas to UN and other disaster relief and logistics experts,
- D. whereas humanitarian law dictates that delivery of humanitarian assistance must be neutral and independent,
- E. whereas the junta pressed ahead with the referendum on 10 May 2008, despite the plight of tens of thousands of people left stricken by the devastating cyclone, with the exception of the worst-hit districts, where it has been postponed until 24 May 2008, in spite of the call for its cancellation or postponement by the UN Under-Secretary -General for Humanitarian Affairs,
- F. whereas the Burmese Government has been blocking international aid efforts, with total disregarding for the fact that the lack of clean water, food and medical care is likely to cause infectious diseases, significantly increasing the number of victims,
- G. whereas ethnic nationalities, notably the Karen – who have already suffered from inordinate discrimination and deprivation – have been severely affected in the Delta area,

- H. whereas the operating environment for the provision of humanitarian aid has already been severely restricted since the issue of new guidelines by the Burmese Government in February 2006, resulting in complicated travel and monitoring procedures for foreign staff,
- I. whereas, two days after the cyclone, the Commission disbursed EUR 2 million to help meet the basic needs of the survivors in the disaster zone; whereas the current level of pledged EU aid amounts to EUR 17 million and could be raised to more than EUR 30 million if the Burmese leadership allowed international aid,
- J. whereas the Member of the Commission responsible for Development was not allowed to travel to the worst affected areas and his pledges for aid workers to be given better access to the Irrawaddy Delta have been ignored,
- K. whereas several governments, including those of EU Member States, have called for the principle of 'responsibility to protect', established by the UN to rescue the victims of genocide and crimes against humanity, to be applied in the case of Burma,
1. Expresses its sincere condolences to and solidarity with the people of Burma and the numerous victims; expresses its sorrow for all those who are suffering the consequences of the disaster;
 2. Strongly condemns the unacceptably slow response to this grave humanitarian crisis by the Burmese authorities, which have put preservation of their own power before the survival of their citizens;
 3. Calls on the Burmese Government in the most strenuous terms to put its people's lives first and open cyclone-affected areas to international humanitarian aid operations, to immediately grant visas to aid workers, to allow UN and international humanitarian agencies to distribute the aid directly to those in need and to allow nearby countries to deliver aid by air and sea to the victims who cannot be reached quickly in any other way;
 4. Deplores the distorted priorities of the regime in pushing ahead with its so-called referendum on the sham constitution, and rejects the implausible outcome at a time when a large part of the country has been devastated and millions are suffering from what has been aptly described as a natural disaster turned into a man-made catastrophe;
 5. Reiterates that the sovereignty of a nation cannot be allowed to override the human rights of its people, as enshrined in the UN principle of 'responsibility to protect'; calls on the Government of the United Kingdom, which holds the May Presidency of the UN Security Council, to take urgent action to put the situation in Burma on the agenda of the Security Council, and calls on the Council to examine whether aid shipments to Burma can be authorised even without the consent of the Burmese military junta;
 6. Welcomes the agreement, reached at the summit meeting of ASEAN, India and China in Singapore on 19 May 2008, to allow the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to coordinate international relief efforts, as well as the decision to hold an international pledging conference in cooperation with the UN in Rangoon on 25 May 2008 in order to pool aid for the victims;
 7. Calls in this regard for a special fund to be set up as a matter of urgency under the auspices of the UN to facilitate the effective distribution of aid in the country;

8. Urges the Governments of China and India to use their influence with the Burmese authorities in order to open Burma for immediate access by all possible humanitarian relief;
9. Stresses the urgent nature of the assistance to be delivered to the suffering population as the weather conditions in the affected are worsening owing to the beginning of the Monsoon, which poses an additional threat to destitute survivors; considers it important to ensure that affected farmers receive assistance to be able to plant a new crop of rice in time so as to avoid another disaster;
10. Expresses support for the efforts of the EU, the UN, individual countries and other international and non-governmental organisations to obtain access for humanitarian aid workers and stresses that, without the full cooperation of the Burmese authorities, there is a substantial threat of an even greater tragedy; sets great hopes on the forthcoming mission of the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, who has been invited for talks with the Burmese authorities; urges the UN Secretary-General to use his influence with the Burmese authorities in order to open Burma for immediate access by all possible humanitarian relief;
11. Takes the view that, if the Burmese authorities continue to prevent aid from reaching those in danger, they should be held accountable for crimes against humanity before the ICC; calls on the EU Member States to press for a UN Security Council resolution referring the case to the Prosecutor of the ICC for investigation and prosecution;
12. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the EU Special Envoy for Burma, the Burmese State Peace and Development Council, the governments of the ASEAN and ASEM Member States, the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus, Ms Aung San Suu Kyi, the NLD, the UN Secretary-General, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN Human Rights Special Rapporteur for Burma.