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## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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19 February 2008

**MMR102755.E**

Myanmar (Burma): Treatment of people associated with sympathizers or members of the National League for Democracy (NLD)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Several sources report that the military regime in Myanmar (Burma) commonly detains the friends or family members - particularly female family members - of activists in order to induce the activists to surrender to authorities (AI 2007; DVB 25 Oct. 2007; Rights & Democracy 6 Feb. 2008; WLB Nov. 2007). For example, the Women's League of Burma (WLB) and Amnesty International (AI) report that when security forces were unable to track down and arrest a politically active poet, they instead arrested his wife (WLB Nov. 2007, 4; AI Nov. 2007). WLB is "an umbrella organisation comprising 12 women's organisations of different ethnic backgrounds from Burma" (WLB Nov. 2007). AI has provided other examples such as when the authorities unlawfully detained the owner of a house where an activist who evaded arrest had hidden (Nov. 2007). In another case the elderly mother and mother-in-law of an activist were detained (ibid.; WLB Nov. 2007, 4).

In 7 February 2008 correspondence with the Research Directorate, a former political prisoner and student leader in Myanmar (Burma) added that the regime targets the supporters of National League for Democracy (NLD) members in various other ways as well (7 Feb. 2008). Information he provided is contained in the following paragraph.

The Former Political Prisoner said that family members of NLD activists are punished by the military regime in many different ways. He said that family members who are teachers or civil servants could lose their jobs, be transferred to remote areas, or find themselves unable to ever win a promotion. Lawyers and private teachers can lose their licenses. Medical doctors can be prevented from practising. Students can be issued failing grades or be expelled from school. He said the regime can try to ensure that business-owners are no longer successful.

The Asia Regional Officer for the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development (Rights & Democracy) provided information to the Research Directorate in a 6 February 2008 telephone interview. Rights & Democracy is a non-partisan Canadian organization that encourages and supports "the universal values of human rights and the promotion of democratic institutions and practices around the world" (Rights & Democracy n.d.). Comments from the Officer, whose work has focussed on Myanmar (Burma) for the past 13 years and who has travelled to the country are contained in the following paragraphs.

The Officer corroborated that it is a common and well-known tactic of the military regime in Myanmar (Burma) to target supporters or family members of NLD members. She suggested that while NLD members might be willing to sacrifice themselves for the cause of democracy, they may nonetheless refrain from political dissent if they believe their family or friends will be targeted. The Officer stated that friends or relatives of NLD members or sympathizers would be targeted even if they were completely apolitical themselves. The Officer added that friends or supporters of NLD members would be threatened or persecuted even if the NLD member

was outside the country. If the NLD member or supporter spoke out against the regime, any friends or relatives within the country could be subject to harm.

The Executive Director of the Ottawa-based non-governmental organization Canadian Friends of Burma (CFOB) similarly stated in a telephone interview that someone who had a family member in the NLD could be targeted by the military regime (CFOB 28 Jan. 2008). CFOB is an Ottawa-based non-governmental organization (NGO) that supports the Myanmar (Burma) pro-democracy movement and maintains links with exiles from the country (CFOB n.d.).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

#### References

Amnesty International (AI). November 2007. "Myanmar Briefing Paper: No Return to 'Normal'." (ASA 16/037/2007) <<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA16/037/2007>> [Accessed 14 Feb. 2008]

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Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB). 25 October 2007. "Activists Urge UN to Protect Women in Burma." <<http://english.dvb.no/news.php?id=613>> [Accessed 12 Feb. 2008]

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Women's League of Burma (WLB). November 2007. *Courage to Resist: Women Human Rights Defenders of Burma*. <<http://www.womenofburma.org/Report/courage-to-resist.pdf>> [Accessed 13 Feb. 2008]

#### Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** Representatives from the All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF), the Irish Centre for Human Rights, *The Irrawaddy*, and the Open Society Institute (OSI) were unable to respond to requests for information within the time constraints of this Response.

**Publications including:** *Nations of the World, Political Handbook of the World 2007*.

**Internet sites, including:** All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF), Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), BurmaNet News, Freedom House, International Labour Organization (ILO), *The Irrawaddy*, Mizzima News, Radio Free Asia, Seafarers' Union of Burma (SUB), United States (US) Campaign for Burma.

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