

Using International Law in the Struggle for Democracy and Women's Participation in Burma

The effort to achieve peace, security and democracy in Burma (called Myanmar by the current government) is an on-going battle against a repressive and brutal military regime. Burma is presently controlled by the SPDC, a military regime that took over Burma by force and refused to turn over power to the National Democratic League, the democratically elected government led by Nobel Peace Prize Winner Aung San Sui Kyi. A major part of the effort to achieve peace, security and democracy in Burma (Myanmar) is the struggle by the women of Burma to change strongly-held ideas about women's role in society, including the belief that women do not belong in political leadership and should be subordinate to men. Within this movement, the Global Justice Center advises the Women's League of Burma on how to use international law to ensure the inclusion of women in all aspects of the democracy-building process. In addition, the Global Justice Center looks for new and creative ways to use international law to address the widespread rape of ethnic women by the military. Global Justice Center activities with the Women's League of Burma include:

- Leading a three-day training in northern Thailand upon invitation by the WLB, "Seminar on the Importance of a Gender Perspective in the Constitution Drafting Process" (See other side)
- Traveling to Thailand where two GJC law student interns spent the summer with the WLB, undertaking projects such as teaching a course on women's political participation internationally and drafting a paper on international law and women's involvement in Constitution Drafting
- Conducting multiple trainings on human rights and international law on the Thai/Burma border
- Researching the history of the Burmese legal system and political participation of women and compiling the first timeline of women's political participation in Burma
- Hosting women from Burma in New York for advocacy at the United Nations
- Conducting training on new legal tools to advocate for women's rights, such as Security Council Resolution 1325
- Advising the WLB on how international justice mechanisms can be used to address the widespread rape of ethnic women in Burma, carried out with impunity by the Burmese military

Only When Women Create the Constitution can the Constitution Create Democracy

Seminar on the Importance of Gender Perspective in the Constitution Drafting Process

As the democratically elected government operating in exile undertakes to draft a new constitution for Burma to contrast the constitution being drafted by the SPDC, one of the challenges facing the Women's League of Burma is ensuring women's involvement in the constitution-drafting process, and then pushing for a constitution that follows international law and protects women's rights. The three-day training by the Global Justice Center focused on application of international law to both the process and the product of constitution drafting. This is an opportunity to ensure women's voices are heard in a democratic process that will contrast the militaristic and totalitarian methods of the SPDC. The Global Justice Center works with the WLB on how international law can be used to ensure that women are adequately represented from the outset, and that the resulting Constitution is one that will promote and protect women's rights, ensuring that women's rights are an integral part of the Democratic Burma.

By educating both the members of the WLB and Burma Lawyer's Council on CEDAW and other international human rights law and conventions, the GJC is providing women activists with the knowledge and resources they need to participate effectively in the constitution drafting process while at the same time advising politically active men on how to enforce international law, creating a democracy with international legitimacy. As a direct result of the GJC's intensive, hands-on trainings, WLB members successfully advocated for the inclusion of a 30% quota for women in the Draft Constitution for a Democratic Burma, presented at the 2006 Constitutional Convention in Thailand.

