

BURMA — HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Motion

HANSARD 19 MAY 2010

DR M.D. NAHAN (Riverton) [6.47 pm]: I stand to support this motion, in part standing in for the member for Morley, who is ill and is not here today and would want to support this. Again, as with the member for Armadale, as a state politician I approached with some reluctance getting involved in complex international issues, not only because of our area of expertise and responsibility, but also because of the delicacy of the issue.

Nonetheless, as the member for Armadale said, there are valid reasons for making comments on this. In particular, there are a large number of refugees from Burma who now call Western Australia home. This is an issue of burning concern to them, with some strong validity. The second issue is the nature of the regime and junta in Burma.

It is particularly callous and inconsiderate of its own people. Nothing shows this more than the cyclone that occurred in May 2008 when over 140 000 people were killed or missing. The United Nations, non-government organisations and other people around the world gave immediate offers of aid, which were largely refused. Eventually, due to international outrage, when the aid was allowed into the country it was restricted and too late, and many tens of thousands of people died needlessly. It showed the nature of the regime.

The concern here is that of course back in 1990, due to international pressure, the regime did allow a fair and open election to some great extent. When the election turned against the regime and the National League for Democracy led by Aung San Suu Kyi got more than 85 per cent of the vote, she was not allowed to take over and she has spent 14 of the past 16 years under house arrest. Since then the regime has accumulated over 2000 political prisoners. The central point is that the regime is not only not considering moving towards democracy, but also inconsiderate of the torture and wellbeing of its own people.

Therefore, it is for people from outside to assist in putting pressure where we can on the junta for it to recognise that it has to be part of humanity. The issue out here now is that the Burmese regime has called another election for this year. It is purposely designed to be rigged to prevent the National League for Democracy from gaining hold and to prevent Aung San Suu Kyi from winning another election.

It is also meant to lock in the power of the regime where 200 seats of the Parliament are specifically restricted to military people. The election is also in a very diverse country of more than 130 ethnic communities and is designed to sustain control not only of the military, but also of the central government over the regions. Therefore, it is important for us to say that this should not be allowed.

I might add, though, that this is not a new regime. The policies since independence of the Burmese government has been basically isolationism, or militarism, and of restricting trade and openness to outside forces. I think it will be a longstanding battle but one that we have to express and participate in.

I would like to end with a statement from Aung San Suu Kyi. When she was asked, after 16 years of house arrest or imprisonment whether she had hope, she said, "I do not hope; I persevere" That is what we must do. I therefore stand in support of this motion.