

UN Huffs and Puffs, but Where's the Action?

With great fanfare, the UN sent its under secretary-general for political affairs, Ibrahim Gambari, to Burma last month to talk democracy with the generals and to visit NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who was released for an hour from house arrest to attend the meeting.

At the same time as Gambari's visit and his meeting with Suu Kyi were attracting international media headlines, thousands of ethnic Karen were being battered by the Burmese army in eastern Burma. Villages have been locked down, homes burnt, crops destroyed and more than 2,000 displaced people have had to make the arduous hike to the Thai-Burmese border to find shelter and respite from the attacks.

The last man sent by the UN to Burma, special envoy Razali Ismail, made dozens of trips there and achieved nothing. Burma still has political prisoners, Aung San Suu Kyi is still under arrest, forced labor is still practiced, illicit drugs are being produced and trafficked, health care is virtually non-existent and HIV rates continue to spiral. The UN's record of success in Burma is miserable, and this isn't the first time a UN visit to Burma has knocked the military onslaught on the Karen off the front pages.

In May, 2002, for instance, Razali visited Burma shortly after a Burmese army attack in Dooplaya District, Karen State, in which 12 people, including six children, died.

The independent Karen Human Rights Group estimated at the time that as many as 10,000 villagers were forced from their homes by the army, 1,000 of them fleeing to Thailand. Yet Razali's visit dominated the news from Burma.

The concern of many Burmese and ethnic opposition groups is that in its attempts to look as if it is getting serious about Burma, the world body ends up doing nothing. Seventeen years of UN ineffectiveness have not, however, caused the Burmese people to lose their hope that some relief from their oppressors might yet emerge.

Unfortunately, all the talk in the world won't achieve anything while big profits are to be made from Burma's natural resources. China, Russia and India are three major players with the power to influence the regime and encourage a loosening of its iron grip, but all three have recently signed highly lucrative energy deals with Burma.

Meanwhile, the UN continues to huff and to puff about what it might or might not do in Burma. Last month, the UN human rights envoy for Burma, Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, urged the Burmese regime to "urgently" stop military operations against civilians in northern and eastern Karen State. The military operations not only continued but increased in scale. Burma is a military state at war with its own people, and the generals are determined to have all Burmese citizens under its control. So it's hardly surprising that following Gambari's meeting with the generals the Karen people are bracing themselves for further attacks and making for the safety of the Thai border.

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To accompany June 2006 Issue of Irrawaddy Magazine

Selected article: *Editorial: UN Huffs and Puffs, but Where's the Action?*, page 2

Activities to do Before Reading

Activity 1

Editorial and Title

- a) Who writes the editorial, and what is that person's job? What are that person's duties?
- b) The title of this editorial is 'The UN Huffs and Puffs, but Where's the Action?' What does this mean?

Activity 2

Background Information

- a) This article talks about three UN workers: Ibrahim Gambiari, Razali Ismail and Paulo Sergio Pinheiro. Match these people with their job titles.

Ibrahim Gambari

Razali Ismail

Paulo Sergio Pinheiro

UN Special Envoy

UN Human Rights Envoy for Burma

UN Undersecretary General for Political Affairs

- b) Have you heard about these people before? What do you know about them? Read the extra information, and match the person with the description.

i.



_____ is a Nigerian professor and diplomat. After an impressive academic career, he became Nigeria's representative to the UN from 1990-1999. Now he works directly for the UN. He started at the UN as Undersecretary General and Special Adviser on Africa. He was appointed to his current post in 2005.

ii.



_____ is a Malaysian diplomat. He worked in Malaysian consulates and embassies in India, France and the UK, before he became ambassador to Poland, then India. He was Malaysian ambassador to the UN in 1989 and 1990. At the same time, he was the chairman of the United Nations Security Council. From 1996 to 1997, he was the President of the United Nations General Assembly. Now, he has another UN job.

iii.



_____ comes from Brazil. He is a university professor of international studies. He was Brazil's Secretary of State for Human Rights before he moved to the UN. He has two UN positions - he is also a member of the UN Sub-Commission for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights.

Activities to do During Reading

Activity 3

Match the summaries

Match these summaries with the paragraphs in the article.

- A:** Despite the UN asking Burma to stop, operations against the Karen are increasing. Karen people expect more attacks.
- B:** The UN Undersecretary General for political affairs went to Burma and met Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.
- C:** International pressure for change is difficult, because some countries make a lot of money from Burma.
- D:** While the UN under-secretary general for political affairs was in Burma, the military attacked the Karen. Many Karen fled to Thailand.
- E:** Many Burmese people think the UN is trying to look tough, but isn't actually doing anything. However, they still hope the situation in Burma will improve.
- F:** The UN's special envoy has achieved nothing, and the situation in Burma gets worse and worse.
- G:** Although many Karen people were attacked, the media only reported a UN visit to Burma.
- H:** In the past, the UN visited Burma soon after the Burmese army attacked a Karen village.

Activity 4**Vocabulary: Crossword**

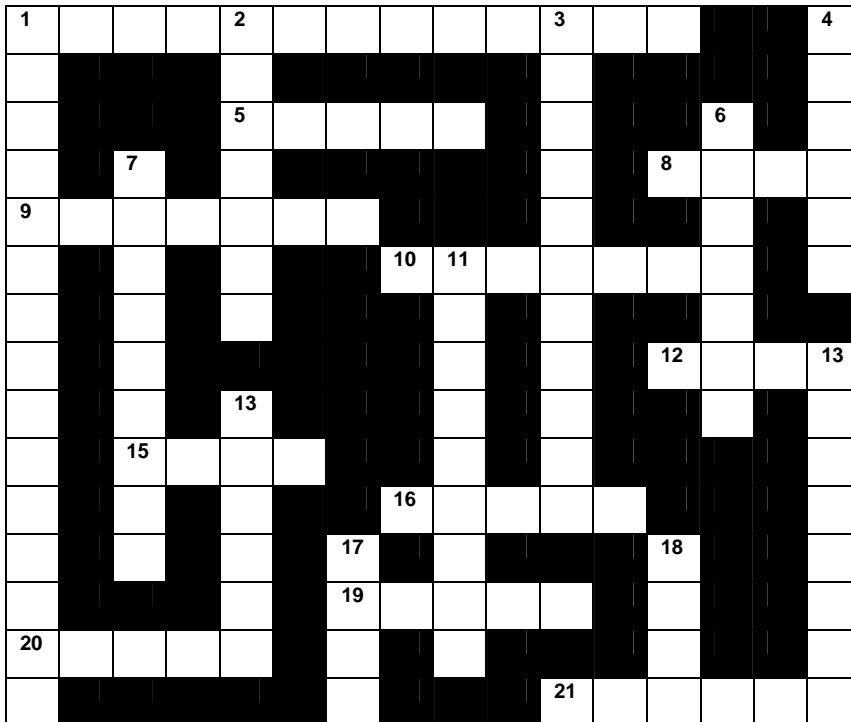
All the answers to this crossword are in the article. They may be different parts of speech to the article.

Across

1. throughout many countries (*paragraph 2*)
5. work; people working (*paragraph 3*)
8. agreement to cooperate or trade (*paragraph 7*)
9. a lot of publicity (*paragraph 1*)
10. illegal (*paragraph 3*)
12. want something good to happen (*paragraph 6*)
15. military (*paragraph 4*)
16. part of a country (*paragraph 8*)
19. official representative (*paragraph 3*)
20. size (*paragraph 8*)
21. unelected government (*paragraph 7*)

Down

1. not being useful or helpful (*paragraph 6*)
2. to let someone out of prison (*paragraph 1*)
3. is not there, is not real (*paragraph 3*)
4. wellness, medicine (*paragraph 3*)
6. completely ruin, break (*paragraph 2*)
7. gently persuade (*paragraph 7*)
11. makes a lot of profit (*paragraph 7*)
13. guess using available information (*paragraph 5*)
17. media, information (*paragraph 5*)
18. an illegal thing people use for pleasure (*paragraph 3*)



Activity 5**Idioms and Phrasal Verbs**

Here are some idioms, phrases and phrasal verbs from the article. Students locate the idiom in the text, and choose the best synonym or definition for the underlined words.

1. ...UN visit to Burma has knocked the onslaught on the Karen off the front page. (paragraph 3)
 - a. punched
 - b. beaten
 - c. removed
 - d. dealt with

2. ...HIV rates continue to spiral. (paragraph 3)
 - a. go around and around
 - b. get higher and higher
 - c. get smaller and smaller
 - d. go up and down

3. China, Russia and India are three major players (paragraph 7)
 - a. large countries
 - b. good sports teams
 - c. continents near Burma
 - d. important participants

4.it's hardly surprising that Karen people are bracing themselves for further attacks (paragraph 8)
 - a. getting ready
 - b. unhappy about
 - c. expecting
 - d. fighting

Activity 6**What's the Editor's Opinion?**

What does the editor think of this situation? Do you think the editor agrees or disagrees with these statements?

1. The UN has helped Burma a lot.
2. The UN often speaks out about the Karen situation.
3. The UN should take stronger action on Burma.
4. The media reports UN visits to Burma more than the Karen situation.
5. The Burmese government is trying to help the Burmese people.
6. China, Russia and India are not interested in changing the regime.

Activity 7**Chronological Order**

Put these events in chronological order:

- Sergio Pinheiro urged Burma's government to stop military attacks on civilians
- Razali visits Burma in May 2002
- Ibrahim Gambari meets Daw Aung San Suu Kyi
- The Burmese army attacked and killed villagers in Dooplaya, Karen State

Activity 8**Passive Verb Forms**

This editorial uses 10 passive verb forms.

a) Read through the article and underline all the examples of passive verb forms.

e.g. ...Aung San Suu Kyi, who was released for an hour from house arrest...

b) Change these passive forms into active forms. If they don't know the subject, use 'someone' or 'some people'

e.g. ...The Burmese government released Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest...

Activity 9**Word Families**

Here are some words from the article. Complete the chart, by adding other parts of the word families.

Noun	verb	adjective	adverb	person
Visit		X	X	
	X	political		
		X	X	prisoner
		special		X
Health	X		X	X
	estimate		X	
Opposition			X	
	achieve	X	X	
Energy				X
		surprising		X

Activities to do After Reading

Activity 10

Teach Each Other: Karen IDPs

Work in groups. Your teacher will give you a section from the article on page 18/19 – ‘Rising Waters’. This article gives more information about the situation for Karen people fleeing from the Burmese army.

In groups, read your section of the article. Tell your class what is in your article – you can do this in English or another language, but don’t translate the article, and don’t read the English. You must use your own words!

Activity 11

Opinions and Solutions

- a) What do you think the UN should do about Burma? Discuss ideas in your class.
- b) If you think the UN should take some action on Burma, write them a letter. In your letter, outline:
 - Who you are
 - Why the UN should take action on Burma
 - What action the UN should take

If you like, send these letters to the UN:

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