

the results of the 1990 elections and will continue to push for the full restoration of the civil and political rights of the people of Burma.

Instead of more releases of prisoners, as pledged, arrests of political activists continued in late 2002 and early 2003. Between August 2002 and March 2003, the government detained approximately 60 activists for peaceably promoting democracy and freedom. While most of these activists were released within days of their arrest, there were reports that several were beaten or otherwise abused while in detention. In addition, one detainee died (apparently as a result of a lack of medical attention), while others were convicted and sent to prison for periods of seven years or more. However, the aggregate number of political prisoners and security detainees has decreased by dozens at least in the period covered by this report.

The regime has allowed the United Nations High Commission on Refugees to maintain a presence in northern Rakhine State, providing support and protection services to more than 230,000 Rohingya Muslims who have returned from Bangladesh. After nearly a decade, however, some 22,000 Rohingya refugees still remain in two refugee camps in Bangladesh and another estimated 200,000 Rohingya live illegally in southernmost Bangladesh. In spite of ongoing repatriation efforts, for the last few years repatriations to Burma have not kept up with the camp birthrates and restrictions on movement in Burma have made life exceedingly difficult for this population. There are concerns that members of this disenfranchised population have been recruited by terrorist organizations.

Furthermore, more than 132,000 other Burmese ethnic minority displaced persons live in several refugee camps along the border in Thailand, and an estimated two million Burmese, both ethnic minorities and ethnic Burmans, live illegally in Thailand; many of these are economic migrants rather than political refugees. The tens of thousands of Burmese and ethnic minorities living illegally in the countries surrounding Burma are willing to endure an often perilous existence because they believe it is even more dangerous to return to Burma.

Forced labor also remained an issue of serious concern to the international community, despite some (still relatively ineffective) government efforts to control the practice. In June 2000, the International Labor Conference concluded that the Government of Burma had not taken effective action to deal with the use of forced labor in the country and, for the first time in the history of the International Labor Organization (ILO), it called on all ILO members to review their policies to ensure that those policies did not support forced labor. The ILO Governing Body implemented this decision in November 2000. The United States strongly supported this decision.

Over the past 18 months, the Government of Burma has slowly begun to work with the ILO on procedural measures to address the problem. In September 2001, it allowed an ILO High Level Team to visit Burma to assess the situation. That team concluded that the GOB had made an "obvious, but uneven" effort to curtail the use of forced labor, but that forced labor persisted, particularly in areas where the Burma Army was waging active military campaigns against insurgent forces. The team recommended that the ILO establish a presence in Burma, a step that was finally completed in October 2002 with the opening of an ILO Liaison Office in Rangoon. In August 2002, the ILO began field visits to sites along the Thai/Burmese border that have been identified by Amnesty International and other organizations as "hot spots" for forced labor and Burmese Army abuse of ethnic minorities. The ILO Liaison Officer has also attempted to engage the GOB in discussions to develop a "viable plan of action" to eliminate forced labor as demanded by the ILO Governing Body in November 2002, but so far these efforts have been unsuccessful. While the GOB has made some procedural concessions to ILO demands, the GOB has still not prosecuted any individual for use of forced labor, and there is abundant evidence that the centuries-old tradition of forced labor in Burma continues. As a result, the ILO has continued to press for an effective investigative